

Holes

by Louis Sachar

Teacher's Guide

Written By Kathy Sammis

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**CLASSROOM
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Synopsis

PART ONE: YOU ARE ENTERING CAMP GREEN LAKE

Chapter 1

In stark, simple sentences, the author introduces us to the novel's setting: Camp Green Lake. The lake, and its town, dried up years ago. Green Lake is now a dry, desolate, shadeless wasteland that bakes during the summer under a relentless, scorching sun. Hazards on the lake include scorpions, rattlesnakes, and fatally venomous yellow-spotted lizards.

Chapter 2

Camp Green Lake is a Texas detention facility for bad boys. Its rehabilitation philosophy is: If you take a bad boy and make him dig a hole every day in the hot sun, it will turn him into a good boy. Stanley Yelnats' choice was jail or the camp; Stanley and his parents chose the camp.

Chapter 3

Stanley is innocent of the crime he's been convicted of, but that's not surprising. The Yelnats family has been plagued by bad luck for generations, the fault of Stanley's no-good-dirty-rotten-pig-stealing-great-great-grandfather, who (along with all his descendants) was cursed by a Gypsy for stealing her pig. Stanley's great-grandfather, the first Stanley Yelnats, lost his entire fortune to the stagecoach-robbing outlaw Kissin' Kate Barlow, who also left this Stanley stranded in the middle of the desert. Our Stanley's father, the third Stanley Yelnats, is an inventor whose experiments never quite succeed; his current project is finding a use for old sneakers, so the Yelnats' tiny, cramped apartment always smells of burning rubber and foot odor. *(This plethora of seemingly unrelated detail contains diverse plot strands that continue to unfold and ultimately completely intertwine as this intricately plotted novel progresses.)*

Chapter 4

Stanley arrives at Camp Green Lake, meets the stern guard Mr. Sir, and learns that each camper must dig a hole five feet deep and five feet across every day, starting before dawn. The camp has the only water for a hundred miles, so no one can run away and survive.

Chapter 5

Stanley joins tent D, supervised by the seemingly sympathetic counselor Mr. Pendanski, and meets some of his tent-mates/work group, who always call each other by their nicknames. It is a multiethnic group, made up of black teens Rex/X-Ray, Theodore/Armpit, and Zero (no one seems to know his real name; he is treated like a dumb zero); white teens Alan/Squid and Ricky/Zigzag; and Hispanic José/Magnet.

Chapter 6

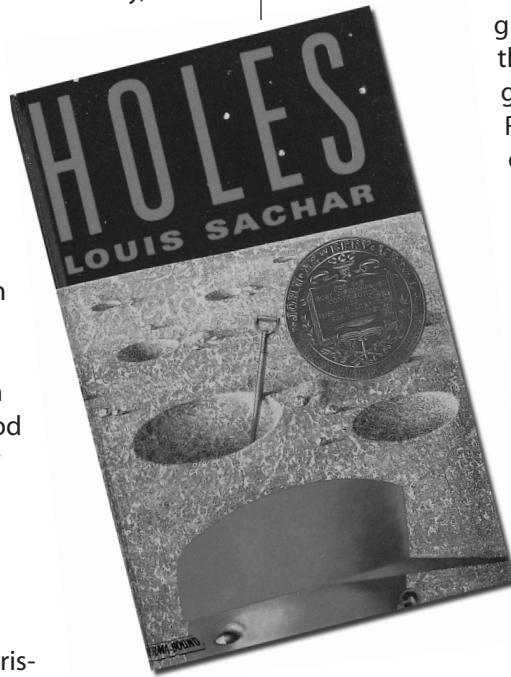
Water at the camp, for drinking and showering, is doled out sparingly.

In a flashback (which the novel is full of), we learn that overweight Stanley was tormented at school by a little bully named Derrick Dunne, who one day grabbed Stanley's notebook and threw it in the toilet. By the time Stanley

retrieved his notebook, he had missed his bus and had to walk home, when a pair of smelly sneakers fell onto his head from a freeway overpass. A suspicious police officer stopped Stanley a few minutes later; the sneakers had been donated to a local homeless shelter for a fund-raising auction by baseball star Clyde "Sweet Feet" Livingston, Stanley's hero, and the sneakers were just stolen from the shelter. Stanley's parents could not afford a lawyer, and the judge did not believe Stanley's story that the sneakers fell on him from the sky.

Chapter 7

Stanley struggles through his first, excruciating hole-digging day in the suffocating heat, developing bloody blisters and finishing last of his group (small Zero is the



quickest hole-digger). We also learn about Elya Yelnats of Latvia, Stanley's great-great-grandfather. Elya's village friend, the old Gypsy Madame Zeroni, devised a way for Elya to win the hand of Myra Menke, which involved carrying a piglet up a mountain every day and singing a special lullaby while the pig drank from the mountain-top stream. After Elya gives the grown pig to Myra's father, he must then carry Madame Zeroni up the mountain and sing her the lullaby while she drinks from the stream; if Elya fails in this, he and his descendants will be cursed forever. Elya fails to carry the pig up the mountain on the final day, becomes disgusted with the empty-headed Myra's indecision about her suitors, and sails away from the village as a deckhand on a boat bound for America—without taking Madame Zeroni up the mountain. The Yelnats' curse begins.

Chapter 8

The deadly (and fictitious) yellow-spotted lizards like to live in groups in holes, from which they can leap to attack their prey. Among their preferred foods are the shells of sunflower seeds.

Chapter 9

In a show of camaraderie, Stanley's tentmates award him a nickname: the Caveman. Zero, who seldom speaks, stares intently over Stanley's shoulder as Stanley writes a falsely cheerful letter to his mother; Zero asks Stanley if the stolen sneakers had red X's on them.

Chapter 10

Mr. Pendanski had told the boys that if they find anything "interesting or unusual" while digging, they should report it right away; if the Warden likes what is found, that digger will get the rest of the day off. So Stanley is happy to find a fossil while digging his second hole, but the Warden is not interested in fossils.

Chapter 11

Stanley agrees to give anything else he finds to X-Ray, leader of his group; X-Ray says he has poor vision and more deserves a day off because he's been in the camp longer. Stanley realizes his nickname makes him part of the group and imagines each of the other group members beating up Derrick Dunne.

Chapter 12

While giving an encouraging talk to the members of his group, Mr. Pendanski asks the boys what they want to do with their lives and tells them each they're in the camp because of their own behavior. Stanley says he's in the camp because of his no-good-dirty-rotten-pig-steal-

ing-great-great-grandfather provoking howls from his tentmates; Zero states he likes digging holes.

Chapter 13

Weeks pass, during which Stanley toughens up physically. One day, he finds something interesting again: a small gold tube, engraved on one end with the initials KB. As agreed, Stanley gives the tube to X-Ray.

Chapter 14

The next day X-ray pretends to find the tube. His find draws the attention of the Warden—who turns out to be a tall, intimidating, red-headed woman—to X-Ray's hole.

Chapter 15

The Warden organizes the tent D boys into digging teams to excavate thoroughly the area all around X-Ray's hole. Stanley realizes they are looking for something and marks in his memory the spot where he had actually found the gold tube.

Chapter 16

Stanley receives a letter from his mother which makes him laugh; Zero doesn't get the joke as he's unfamiliar with the *The Little Old Lady Who Lived in a Shoe* nursery rhyme.

Chapter 17

The team digging continues, watched by an increasingly impatient Warden, but nothing else interesting turns up. Stanley has a confrontation with Zigzag.

Chapter 18

The boys go to another section of lake and resume digging individual five-foot holes. Zero watches Stanley write a letter and then asks Stanley to teach him how to read (not write; Zero has no one to write to). Stanley declines.

Chapter 19

Magnet steals Mr. Sir's bag of sunflower seeds, which accidentally spills into Stanley's hole just as Mr. Sir arrives. Stanley confesses that he stole the bag and ate all the seeds himself. Mr. Sir does not believe this, and he drives Stanley over to the Warden's cabin to report the incident.

Chapter 20

The Warden is annoyed with Mr. Sir and scratches him with her freshly applied nail polish containing her secret ingredient—rattlesnake venom. Mr. Sir writhes in pain, but she states he will not die.

Chapter 21

Stanley returns to the hole-digging area and discovers that Zero has nearly finished his hole for him.

Chapter 22

Back at camp, when Stanley asks Zero why had helped him, Zero responds, "You didn't steal the sunflower seeds," then adds, "You didn't steal the sneakers." In return, Stanley starts teaching a happy Zero to read. Zero insists he will dig part of Stanley's hole every day so Stanley will have spare energy for the teaching. Later that night, Stanley realizes that the gold tube engraved KB is half of a lipstick case and wonders if it could have belonged to Kissin' Kate Barlow.

Chapter 23

One hundred and ten years ago, Green Lake was large and beautiful, and the town was thriving. Miss Katherine Barlow, the schoolteacher, always won a special prize at the Fourth of July picnic for her fabulous spiced peaches. Miss Katherine turned down the attentions of empty-headed, spoiled Trout Walker, son of Green Lake's richest man. (Trout got his nickname because his two feet smelled like dead fish; he had the same incurable foot fungus that would later afflict Sweet Feet Livingston.)

Chapter 24

At breakfast, a boy asks Mr. Sir what had happened to his swollen face, and Mr. Sir grabs the boy by the throat with his head hanging over the oatmeal pot. Later that day, Mr. Sir taunts Stanley by not refilling his canteen.

Chapter 25

Sam the onion man had an onion field on the west side of the lake, and he brought batches of onions across the lake in his rowboat several times a week to sell in town from the back of his wagon pulled by his donkey, Mary Lou. Sam called the onion "nature's magic vegetable" and said a person could live on nothing but raw onions; townspeople came to him for a variety of effective onion medicinals. Miss Katherine and Sam fell in love; Hattie Parker sees them kiss and knows God will punish them.

Chapter 26

After word of their kiss gets around the town, the townspeople set out to hang Sam, because he was black and Miss Katherine was white. The two lovers try to escape across the lake in Sam's boat, but Trout Walker rams and sinks them. Sam dies, and Katherine Barlow is forcibly rescued. Since then, not one drop of rain has

fallen on Green Lake. Three days after Sam's death, Miss Katherine shoots the sheriff, who had tried to force a kiss out of her; she then applies a fresh coat of red lipstick and kisses the dead sheriff. She becomes Kissin' Kate Barlow was one of the West's most feared outlaws for the next twenty years.

Chapter 27

Mr. Sir's face remains horribly swollen for several days from the rattlesnake venom, and during this time Mr. Sir deprives Stanley of water during hole-digging. Zero is a fast learner, so Stanley soon teaches him to write his own name. This prompts Zero to tell Stanley his real name: Hector—Hector Zeroni.

Chapter 28

After twenty years, Kate Barlow returned to Green Lake, which had become a ghost town on a ghost lake. One morning, Trout Walker and his red-headed wife Linda suddenly kicked in the door of Kate's cabin and demanded that she tell them where she had hidden her loot. As the Walkers force Kate to walk around the desert barefoot, a yellow-spotted lizard bites her. Kate dies laughing without revealing the hiding place and tells them to dig for it.

PART TWO: THE LAST HOLE**Chapter 29**

One stifling day, the boys watch a lightning storm in the mountains far off to the west. Stanley notices an unusual rock formation on top of one of the mountains; it looks like a giant fist with the thumb sticking straight up. Stanley's great-grandfather, stranded in the desert by Kissin' Kate Barlow without food or water, had said deliriously of his survival, "I found refuge on God's thumb." No one had ever known what he meant.

Chapter 30

Zigzag, jealous that Zero digs part of Stanley's hole every day, attacks Stanley, and Zero attacks Zigzag. The Warden arrives and finds out what is going on; she declares no more teaching by Stanley and no more hole digging (for Stanley) by Zero. Mr. Pendanski repeatedly mocks Zero for his apparent stupidity, and Zero responds by saying he is not digging any more holes and smashing Mr. Pendanski in the head with his shovel. Zero edges away and disappears farther and farther out into the lake. The Warden allows him to go, figuring he will die out on the lake or come back begging for water.

Chapter 31

Stanley wrestles with the idea of going after Zero, and hopes his friend might be able to find refuge on God's Thumb, as his great-grandfather had (if this is the same place). The Warden orders that Zero's files be deleted; the boy has no one who will inquire about him.

Chapter 32

Three days later, Stanley impulsively steals Mr. Sir's truck and bolts away from the hole-digging crew to search for Zero. He drives into one of the holes and takes off on foot carrying an empty canteen.

Chapter 33

Stanley wanders the desert, checking inside the numerous holes, and forcing himself not to admit what he was looking for. When he finds a plastic bag containing a single sunflower seed, he has his lunch.

Chapter 34

Stanley walks across the lake for hours toward Big (or God's) Thumb, and then spots a large object on the lake and heads for it. It is an upside-down boat with the faded name Mary Lou painted on the back. When he hears a noise coming from the remains of the boat, he calls to it and it answers as a dark hand and an orange sleeve appears.

Chapter 35

Underneath is Zero. He has been surviving on the contents of glass jars he found buried under the boat; he calls the sweet peach-like nectar "sploosh." Zero briefly has an abdominal cramp. Stanley points out the mountain in the distance with its fist-shaped outcropping.

Chapter 36

Zero refuses to go back to the camp, so he and Stanley head toward Big Thumb; Zero has another cramp. Stanley keeps Zero walking by spelling words for him to say. The boys reach and climb the cliffs that arise from the lake's west edge and torturously wend their way up the even steeper mountainside.

Chapter 37

The pair zigzags up the mountain; Zero finally collapses, unable to continue.

Chapter 38

Stanley impossibly carries Zero the rest of the steep way up the mountain, to the very foot of God's (Big) Thumb. They stumble and fall into a muddy gully that, scooped out, provides precious water; they also find and share an onion.

Chapter 39

A very sick Zero tells Stanley he had taken the sneakers from the homeless shelter and apologizes; Stanley lulls Zero to sleep with the family lullaby.

Chapter 40

The boys rest and eat onions and drink dirty water. In a flashback, a thankful mother buys healing onions from Sam and shares her extra onions with Mary Lou. Stanley walks much further than he expected to retrieve the shovel and empty jars.

Chapter 41

The boys exist on a diet of onions and water, and Zero gets better. He tells Stanley his story: He and his mother were homeless, and they would take things as they needed them. Then Zero's mother disappeared. Zero sometimes stayed at the homeless shelter, and when he saw the smelly old pair of sneakers on display, he took them because he needed a pair of shoes; of course, he could not read the sign telling how special these old shoes were. He wore the shoes out of the shelter, but worried about the big fuss people were making about the sneakers being gone, so he took them off outside and put them on top of a parked car.

Chapter 42

While staring up at the sky, Stanley considers the role of fate in his own and Zero's life, how in some ways, he'd been lucky. He thinks about their needs for the future, especially new identities and money. Remembering the golden tube he'd found, he asks Zero if he wants to dig one more hole.

Chapter 43

Stanley decides he and Zero will return to Camp Green Lake, get water, dig for one night in the hole where he found the KB lipstick in hopes of finding Kate Barlow's buried treasure, and then move on. The return trek is much easier because the boys have a good supply of water and plenty of onions to eat.

Chapter 44

Back at Camp Green Lake, Stanley finds the lipstick-tube hole and starts digging. He finds and then extracts a metal suitcase of some sort. As Stanley hands the treasure up to Zero, the Warden shines a flashlight on the two boys.

Chapter 45

The Warden and the counselors surround the boys. Zero sits on the ground, the suitcase on his lap. Stanley

stands in the hole. Suddenly, the Warden and the counselors back away. Yellow-spotted lizards start emerging, crawling on the suitcase and on Zero; Stanley is standing in a nest of lizards, which start crawling all over him. The boys freeze. The Warden is pleased, saying soon they will have a body to give that “woman” and she remembers how, in her childhood, her parents had forced her to join them here on the dry lake every weekend and holiday, digging holes.

Chapter 46

The Warden concocts a story for all the counselors to stick with, to tell “that woman” and “the A.G.” who will both be arriving sometime soon: Stanley ran away in the night and fell in a lizard-filled hole, and so died. Zero’s body will be secretly buried. The crawling lizards do not molest Stanley or Zero.

Chapter 47

The sun rises, cars approach, and a tall man and a short Hispanic woman approach Stanley’s hole. The woman is Stanley’s lawyer, and the man is the state Attorney General. The Warden claims that Stanley and Zero crept into her cabin the night before and stole her suitcase; the lawyer and A.G. want to know why the Warden did not release Stanley to them the day before in compliance with a court order. As the sun gets higher, the lizards retreat into the shade of the hole, and Stanley is finally able to climb out. The Warden tries to snatch the suitcase from Zero, who insists that it belongs to Stanley: “It’s got his name on it,” Zero points out. “See. Stanley Yelnats.”

Chapter 48

The Warden is forced to release Stanley and his suitcase, but Stanley will not leave without Zero. When the Warden and Mr. Pendanski are unable to find Zero’s file—because they earlier deliberately deleted it—the A.G. also releases Zero.

Chapter 49

Sam the onion man used to provide rattlesnake hunters with bottles of pure onion juice to drink, explaining that yellow-spotted lizards do not like blood with onion juice in it.

On the drive home, Ms. Morengo the lawyer explains more to Stanley. She is Mr. Yelnats’ patent attorney, and she did some investigating for Stanley. The Derrick Dunne notebook-in-toilet-bowl incident with Stanley occurred at school after Sweet Feet’s sneakers were taken from the shelter, so Stanley is clearly innocent of

the theft. Stanley’s father has at last invented a successful product: a peach-smelling powder that eliminates foot odor. Behind the car, the first drop of rain in over a hundred years falls into Green Lake.

PART THREE: FILLING IN THE HOLES

Chapter 50

Mr. Yelnats invented the foot odor cure the day after Stanley, the great-great-grandson of Elya Yelnats, carried Zero, the great-great-great-grandson of Madame Zeroni, up the mountain. The contents of Stanley Yelnats’ suitcase—stock certificates, deeds of trust, promissory notes—net Stanley and Zero each nearly a million dollars. Clyde Livingston later becomes an advertising spokesperson for Mr. Yelnats’ foot odor product, which has the trademarked name of Sploosh. Hector finds his mother, who croons her grandmother’s lullaby, which is a variation of the Yelnats family lullaby.

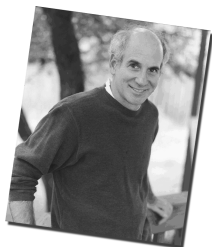
Timeline

1800s	Elya Yelnats leaves Latvia for America and incurs Madame Zeroni’s curse.
c. 1890	Trout Walker kills Sam the onion man; Miss Katherine the schoolteacher becomes Kissin’ Kate Barlow the outlaw; rain stops falling on Green Lake.
c. 1900	Kissin’ Kate Barlow robs Stanley Yelnats I, strands him in the desert.
c. 1910	Kissin’ Kate Barlow dies of a yellow-spotted lizard bite without revealing the location of her buried treasure to the Walkers.
present time	Stanley is convicted of stealing sneakers, is sentenced to Camp Green Lake.
May 24	Stanley arrives at Camp Green Lake.
May 25	Stanley finds a fossil in his hole.
weeks later	Stanley finds a gold tube in his hole.
next 10 days	Stanley and tentmates dig holes in teams looking for more gold for the Warden.
soon after	Mr. Sir reports sunflower seed theft, Warden scratches him with rattlesnake venom.
July 8	Zero runs away from camp.
July 12	Stanley goes after Zero; they reach the mountaintop.
July 13	Mr. Yelnats invents his cure for foot odor.
c. 10 days later	Stanley and Zero return to Camp Green Lake.

- that night** Stanley finds the buried suitcase; the Warden and counselors find Stanley and Zero.
- next morning** Ms. Morengo and the Attorney General arrive, get Stanley and Zero released from Camp Green Lake; rain starts to fall on the lake again.

Author Sketch

Louis Sachar (pronounced Sack-er) was born in 1954 in East Meadow, New York, and moved with his family at age nine to Tustin, California, orange-growing country. He was a good student with a special affinity for math, but he only began to love reading during his high school years. He majored in economics at the University of California at Berkeley while also taking creative writing courses. When he dropped a Russian course at the beginning of a semester, he needed another course to make up those credits. On impulse, he took a credit-earning job as a teacher's aide at a local grammar school, an experience that gave Sachar the material for his first novel, a collection of short stories about different kids in an elementary school. The book was accepted for publication just as Sachar began studies at the University of California law school. He became an attorney in San Francisco in 1981 and then split his time between practicing law and writing children's books, ultimately choosing his writing career over his law career. Sachar married a Texas teacher, Carla Askew, in 1985; they have a daughter, Sherre. In 1991, the Sachars moved from San Francisco to Austin, Texas, and have remained there, even though Louis hates hot weather.



Critic's Corner

Sachar drew on his intense dislike of the long, dreadfully hot Texas summers to imagine the setting and basic situation of Camp Green Lake for *Holes*. "The characters and plot grew out of that place," he explained in his Newbery acceptance speech. As indicated by the Newbery Medal, a National Book Award, and a *Boston Globe-Horn Book Award* for *Holes*, critics were very impressed with Sachar's intricate plotting and skillful, seamless blending of past and present, gritty realism, folklore, tall tale, legend, mystery, suspense, and comedy. *Horn Book* gave the novel a featured review, commenting, "Sachar is masterful at bringing his realistic story and tall-tale motifs together, using a simple declarative style

that is all the more poignant, and funny, for its understatement, its willingness to stay out of the way. We haven't seen a book with this much plot, so suspensefully and expertly deployed, in too long a time. *School Library Journal* called Sachar's skillful braiding of diverse plot and genre elements "a brilliant achievement." *Holes* is a young adult novel; Sachar is better known among his legions of fans for his witty, appealing books for somewhat younger readers, including the Wayside School series aimed at older elementary readers and his Marvin Redpost chapter books.

Other Works by Louis Sachar

- The Boy Who Lost His Face* (1989)
- Dogs Don't Tell Jokes* (1991)
- Johnny's in the Basement* (1981)
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- Marvin Redpost: Alone in His Teacher's House* (1994)
- Marvin Redpost: Class President* (1999)
- Marvin Redpost: Is He a Girl?* (1993)
- Marvin Redpost: Kidnapped at Birth?* (1992)
- Marvin Redpost: Super Fast, Out of Control!* (2000)
- Marvin Redpost: Why Pick on Me?* (1993)
- Monkey Soup* (1992)
- More Sideways Arithmetic from Wayside School* (1994)
- Sideways Arithmetic from Wayside School* (1989)
- Sideways Stories from Wayside School* (1978)
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- Small Steps* (2006)
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- Stanley Yelnats' Survival Guide to Camp Green Lake* (2003)
- There's a Boy in the Girls' Bathroom* (1987)
- Wayside School Gets a Little Stranger* (1995)
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"The John Newbery Medal"

www.ala.org/alsc/newbery.html

"Louis Sachar" (Authors and Illustrators Index)

www.randomhouse.com/teachers/rc/rc_ab_lsa.html

General Objectives

1. To examine the concept and actual practice of running "boot camps" for juvenile offenders and consider when the exercise of authority over young offenders may cross over into abuse of power.
2. To become familiar with aspects of life in Texas and the Old West a century ago.
3. To learn about typical elements of folklore, legend, oral storytelling, and realism in literature.
4. To discuss the concept of fate and the interconnectedness of past and present.
5. To consider the ways in which bonds of friendship and love develop and provide strength to individuals.
6. To think about factors that might inspire a person to persevere in the face of hardships and continue to work toward a goal in spite of difficult hindrances.

Specific Objectives

1. To understand why Camp Green Lake functions the way it does and identify the Warden's hidden agenda for her "camps."
2. To identify elements of realism, mystery, adventure, comedy, folklore/legend, and the oral storytelling tradition in the novel.
3. To trace the links from Elya Yelnats through Stanley Yelnats I, Stanley Yelnats III, and Stanley Yelnats IV and the involvement of the Zeroni family in these events and the Yelnats' "destiny."
4. To analyze how and why Stanley and Zero devel-

- op their strong bond of friendship, and the consequences of this bond for each boy.
5. To recognize the ways in which his experiences at Camp Green Lake change Stanley and lift the family curse.
6. To understand why and how Green Lake is cursed, and why and how this curse is finally lifted.
7. To clarify why Stanley has been sent to Camp Green Lake, why this is unfair, and what really happened on the day Sweet Feet's sneakers disappeared from the shelter.
8. To trace the recurring motifs as they run through the novel, such as spicy peaches, yellow-spotted lizards, smelly feet, rattlesnakes, God's Thumb, onions, family lullabies, bad luck, sunflower seeds, red hair, and Girl Scouts.

Literary Terms and Applications

To enhance students' appreciation and understanding of the novel, present them with these terms.

Coming-of-Age Novel: a work of fiction in which the main character moves into and/or through adolescence and develops at least the beginnings of maturity. In this novel, Stanley arrives at Camp Green Lake as an insecure, fearful, overweight boy who will not stand up to bullies. The hard physical labor at the camp gives Stanley a fit, muscular body and also transforms him into a young man with perceived self-worth able to persevere in the face of difficult challenges, defy unfairly wielded authority, and take decisive action on his own.

Epilogue: a concluding section of a book that briefly outlines the characters' subsequent fates. While not labeled as such, Part III of this novel, which consists solely of Chapter 50, is an epilogue that tells us what happened to Camp Green Lake after Stanley and Zero left, what treasure the buried suitcase yielded and how this affected Stanley's and Zero's lives, and what happened with Mr. Yelnats' foot-odor-destroying invention.

Flashback: a scene inserted into a film, play, or work of fiction showing events that happened earlier, also known as *analepsis*. The flashback device allows an author to fill in background information about characters and events, explaining things that happened before the time when the work opens. In this novel, the author uses a dazzling array of flashbacks to weave together the life experiences and fates of a wild variety of characters, past and present.

Folkloric Devices: elements of folklore in a literary work, including repetition of theme and phrases, family tales and songs passed down through generations, a curse motif, a “visible” storyteller, and a legendary hero or outlaw. This novel contains many uses of these elements.

Palindrome: a word, phrase, or sentence that spells the same backward and forward, like the name Stanley Yelnats. A well-known sentence palindrome comes from an imaginary scene in the Garden of Eden as Adam introduces himself to Eve: “Madam, I’m Adam.” Students should enjoy making up their own palindromes, as suggested in one of the Language Arts activities in the Across the Curriculum section of this guide.

The Importance of Setting

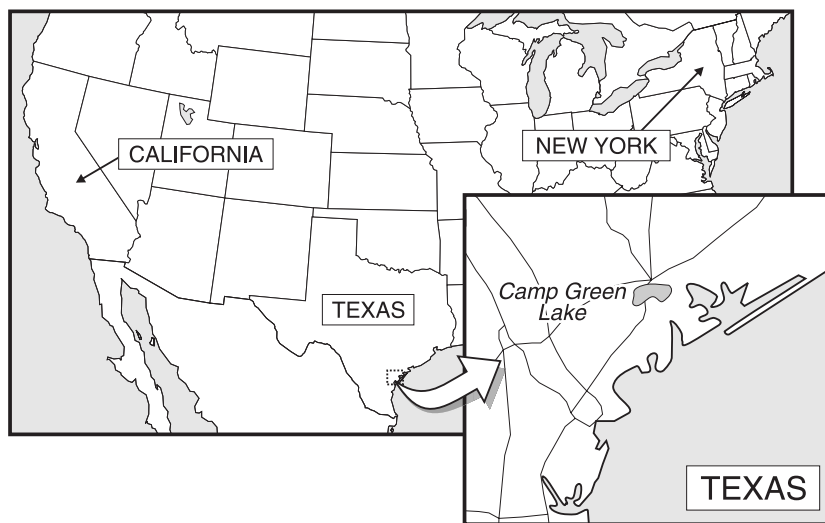
Most of the novel’s present-day action takes place at Camp Green Lake, a detention facility for youthful offenders set on dry Green Lake, a desolate, arid, shadeless wasteland that bakes during the endless Texas summer under a relentless, scorching sun. Not a drop of water has fallen on Green Lake for over a century; the campers’ numerous holes make the lake bed look like a moonscape. The camp’s only shade comes from two old oak trees next to the Warden’s cabin; the Warden “owns” this shade. The boys live, eat, and spend their off hours in rundown tents and old buildings; they spend their work days out on the dry lake bed digging five-foot holes and hoping to avoid the venomous scorpions and rattlesnakes and the deadly yellow-spotted lizards. When Stanley catches up with the runaway Zero, the two boys make their way to the base of Big Thumb, or God’s Thumb, a rocky formation on top of a mountain to the west of Green Lake; they recuperate there in a field of wild onions, a place where Stanley Yelnats I found refuge nearly a century earlier. Minor present-day settings include Stanley’s school, which he leaves late one afternoon after fishing his notebook out of the toilet; the homeless shelter from which Sweet Feet Livingston’s smelly sneakers are stolen and the nearby street; the Yelnats family apartment, full of the odor of burning rubber and smelly feet; the courtroom where Stanley is unjustly convicted; and the new Yelnats home after the family’s dramatic reversal of fortune.

Flashbacks to a century ago place us in a radically different Green Lake: full of clear cool water, it is the largest lake in Texas and sparkles in the sun like a giant emerald, its shores lined with beautiful peach trees. The town of Green Lake on the lake’s east shore is lively and thriving, full of shops and boasting a one-room schoolhouse that Sam the onion man fixes up for Miss Katherine, the schoolteacher. The lovers’ tragedy of Sam’s murder brings a curse down on Green Lake, lake and town, which begin to dry up until they reach their present-day desolation. Flashbacks to Stanley’s great-great-grandfather Elya put us in a small Latvian village alongside a mountain; when Elya sails from this village headed to America without fulfilling his promise to Madame Zeroni, the Yelnats’ family curse begins.

Cross-Curricular Sources

Novels

Frank Bonham, *Durango Street*
Brock Cole, *The Goats*
Robert Cormier, *I Am the Cheese*
Nancy Farmer, *The Ear, the Eye and the Arm*
Sid Fleischman, *By the Great Horn Spoon*, *Jim Ugly*, and *The Whipping Boy*
Elmer Kelton, *Cloudy in the West*
Annette Curtis Klause, *Alien Secrets*
E.L. Konigsburg, *From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler* and *The View from Saturday*
Robert Lipsyte, *One Fat Summer*
Chris Lynch, *Slot Machine*
Gary Paulsen, *Canyons*
Charles Portis, *True Grit*
Adam Rapp, *The Buffalo Tree*



Ellen Raskin, *The Westing Game*
 S. L. Rottman, *Hero*
 Ouida Sebestyn, *Words by Heart*
 Charles Sheffield and Jerry Pournelle, *Higher Education*
 Gordon Swarthout, *Bless the Beasts and Children*
 Robb White, *Deathwatch*

Nonfiction

Nathan Aaseng, *Poisonous Creatures*
 Jim Arnosky, *All About Rattlesnakes*
 Bruce Berger, *The Telling Distance: Conversations with the American Desert*
 Thomas J. Billitter, *The Gault Case: Legal Rights for Young People*
 Janet Bode and Stan Mack, *Hard Time: A Real Life Look at Juvenile Crime and Violence*
 Carmen Bredeson, *Texas* (Celebrate the States Series)
 Dennis Brindell Fradin, *Texas* (From Sea to Shining Sea Series)
 Carson Creagh, ed. *Reptiles*
 Eyewitness Books, *Desert*
 Eric S. Grace, *Snakes* (Sierra Club Wildlife Library)
 Ann Heinrichs, *Texas* (America the Beautiful Series)
 Richard A. Lawrence, *School Crime and Juvenile Justice*
 James A. MacMahon, *Deserts*
 Chris Mattison, *Lizards of the World*
 Colin McCarthy, *Reptile*
 Sandra Nunez and Trish Marx, *And Justice For All: The Legal Rights of Young People*
 Stewart Ross, *Bandits and Outlaws*
 Manny Rubio, *Rattlesnake: Portrait of a Predator*
 Claudia Schnieper, *Lizards*
 Trevor Smith, *Amazing Lizards*
 Gail B. Stewart, *Teens in Prison: The Other America*
 Time-Life Editors, *The Old West Series* (see especially *The Gunfighters, The Texans, and The Women*)
 Charles A. Wills, *A Historical Album of Texas*

Computer Software (CD-ROM)

Amphibians and Reptiles (Junior Nature Guides Series) (Integrated Communications & Entertainment)
Exploring Land Habitats (Steck-Vaughn)
Eyewitness Encyclopedia of Nature (Eyewitness Series) (Dorling Kindersley)
Go West! The Homesteader's Challenge (Steck-Vaughn)
Sonoran Desert: A Multimedia Field Trip to the Cactus Desert of Arizona (Warwick Interactive)
The World of Reptiles (Zoo Guides Series) (REMedia)

Internet

"American International Rattlesnake Museum"
www.rattlesnakes.com/
 "The American West: A Celebration of the Human Spirit"

www.AmericanWest.com
 "Desert Life in the American Southwest"
www.desertusa.com/life.html
 "Discussion Area: Juvenile Boot Camps"
www.researchpaper.com/forums/Social_Issues/messages/1511.html
 "Dry Lakes of the Mojave Desert"
aeve.com/digitaldesert/drylakes/index.html
 "Girl Scouts of the U.S.,"
www.gsusa.org
 "Herp-edia: The Online Herptile Encyclopedia"
www.herp-edia.com/
 "Jim Janke's Old West"
www.janke.washcoll.edu/oldwest/oldwest.htm
 "Juvenile Boot Camps"
www.kci.org/publication/white_paper/boot_camp/

Videos

Animal Life in Action: Reptiles (Schlessinger Media/Library Video)
Desert Animals (Amazing Animals Series) (Partridge Films & DK Vision)
Desert Biomes: Essential and Endangered (Cochran Communications/Rainbow Educational Media)
Fossils/Erosion (Bill Nye the Science Guy Sampler V Series) (Buena Vista TV/KCTS/Disney Educational Products)
History of Texas Indians Series (SVE & Churchill Media)
Let the River Run: A Journey into Glen Canyon (Glen Canyon Institute)
 Charles A. Wills, *A Historical Album of Texas*
Old Texas and the Traildrivers (The American Pioneering Experience Series) (SVE & Churchill Media)
Rattlesnake (Unapix Entertainment)

Themes and Motifs

A study of the central issues and situations in *Holes* should include these aspects.

Themes

- interconnectedness of past and present
- friendship
- family
- love
- authority
- perseverance
- self-worth
- destiny
- luck

Motifs

- curses
- spicy peach preserves
- onions
- foot and body odor
- family lullaby
- yellow-spotted lizards
- rattlesnakes
- sunflower seeds and shells
- God’s or Big Thumb
- red hair
- climbing a mountain
- Girl Scouts

Meaning Study

Below are words, phrases, or sentences that have a particular meaning in the novel. Explain each as it relates to the book. Use the page numbers given in parentheses to reread the term in context if you wish.

1. “You’re not in the Girl Scouts anymore.”...“This isn’t a Girl Scout camp.” (Chap. 4, pp. 13-14)
(These are favorite recurring comments made by Mr. Sir to the “campers” under his authority. He mocks the boys by comparing them to Girl Scouts rather than to men, and emphasizes the harsh, disciplinary nature of Camp Green Lake by pointing out that it is not a pleasant Girl Scout camp. These comments turn out, ultimately, to have been ironic: after the Warden is forced to sell her family’s land when the Attorney General shuts down the camp, Camp Green Lake is resurrected as an actual Girl Scout camp.)
2. Out on the lake, rattlesnakes and scorpions find shade under rocks and in the holes dug by the campers. (Chap. 1, p. 3)
(A rattlesnake is a thick-bodied venomous snake that makes a warning rattling noise by shaking bony joints on the end of its tail. A scorpion is an arachnid with a cylindrical body and biting mouth parts on a long beak. The bite of a rattlesnake and the sting of a scorpion can be fatal to their prey, but are not usually fatal to human beings. Both are common creatures of the desert, and the inmates of Camp Green Lake have to watch out for them, especially when they are out on the lake bed digging holes.)
3. But you don’t want to be bitten by a yellow-spotted lizard....You will die a slow and painful death. Always. (Chap. 1, p. 4)
(Actually, yellow-spotted lizards are a fictitious invention of author Louis Sachar, but he makes them seem so real, some

readers accept them as reality. Within the context of the novel, yellow-spotted lizards do exist, and their bite is always fatal; Kissin’ Kate Barlow is killed by one, and the presence of the lizards keeps the Warden and counselors from grabbing the suitcase from Zero and Stanley, who are both protected from the lizards by the quantity of onion juice in their blood.)

4. YOU ARE ENTERING CAMP GREEN LAKE JUVENILE CORRECTIONAL FACILITY (Chap. 4, p. 12)
(A juvenile correctional facility is a place where youthful offenders who have been convicted of a crime are incarcerated for a set length of time. Such facilities are supposed to have as their primary aim the rehabilitation of young criminals so they do not continue on to an adult criminal career. One type of juvenile correctional facility is the “boot camp,” run like a quasi-military basic training, to try to rehabilitate youthful offenders through strict discipline and rigorous physical training. Camp Green Lake is one of these boot camps.)
5. Zero said nothing. (Chap. 7, p. 37)
(This sentence is repeated many times in the course of the novel. Everyone at Camp Green Lake interprets Zero’s silence as stupidity. Mr. Pendanski is particularly insulting on this issue, saying things like “You know why his name’s Zero? Because there’s nothing inside his head.” Actually, Zero simply does not like to answer questions, so he does not speak. When Stanley starts to teach Zero how to read, the boys begin to get to know one another, and Stanley learns what no one else knows: Zero is perfectly smart although uneducated, a quick learner, and a natural whiz at math.)
6. Every summer Miss Katherine would pick bushels of peaches and preserve them... (Chap. 23, p. 101)
(Preserving is a method of canning/bottling or pickling food so it will not decompose and can be used in the future. Fruits, like peaches, are acid and so can be put into sealed bottles and processed in a boiling-water bath. Stored properly in a cool place, peach preserves can remain edible for many years—but probably not on the bed of a dry lake for nearly a hundred years under the scorching Texas sun. Nevertheless, Zero finds jars of Miss Katherine’s peach preserves under his boat refuge and drinks the fermented nectar to stay alive. However, he drinks so much of this “sploosh” that he gets very, very sick.)
7. Maybe the bacteria were only in the jars which opened easily... (Chap. 36, p. 163)
(Stanley’s right about this. If the seal on a jar of preserves is intact, the contents have remained bacteria-free [at least for a not-unreasonable length of time].)

8. "Satan," said Zero... "Sa-tan-lee." (Chap. 47, p. 211)
(This seems like an odd, incongruous thing for Zero to be saying. But on page 216 we realize that Zero on page 211 is struggling to sound out and read the words he's seeing that are printed on the suitcase: STANLEY YELNATS.)
9. ... the Texas Attorney General, the chief law enforcement officer for the state. (Chap. 48, p. 217)
(An Attorney General represents the government in court cases and serves as the government's principal legal adviser. The appearance of the Texas Attorney General at Camp Green Lake indicates that the Warden and her camp are in serious trouble with the state legal establishment.)
10. Ms. Morengo explained that she was a patent attorney. (Chap. 49, p. 224)
(Ms. Morengo is a lawyer helping Stanley's father secure a patent for one of his inventions. A patent is a legal writing that secures to an inventor the exclusive right to make, use, or sell his invention for a certain term of years. The fact that the impoverished Mr. Yelnats has secured the services of a patent attorney indicates that Mr. Yelnats has at long last come up with a successful, viable invention that qualifies for a patent.)

Comprehension Study

Answer the following questions in your own words. There is not always a right answer. Your judgment is important, and you should be ready to defend your answers by referring to passages in the book.

Questions 1-4 (Literal Level)

1. Why is Stanley at Camp Green Lake? Why is this unfair? Who really took Sweet Feet's sneakers, and why did they fall on Stanley's head?
(Stanley has been convicted of stealing a pair of sneakers that famed baseball player Clyde "Sweet Feet" Livingston donated to a homeless shelter for a fund-raising auction. The real thief was Hector "Zero" Zeroni, who took the smelly old sneakers because he needed a pair of shoes and figured no one would miss this ratty old pair; Hector could not read the sign by the shoes explaining how special they were. When Hector, wearing the shoes, saw how agitated everyone at the shelter was when they noticed the sneakers were gone, he got worried. He walked away from the shelter, took the sneakers off, and put them on top of a parked car. When the car pulled out and crossed a freeway overpass, the sneakers fell off and landed on Stanley, who was walking on the sidewalk below. For some reason, Stanley then started running and attracted the attention of a police officer, who recognized the stolen sneakers. Stanley's parents could not afford a lawyer, and when Stanley testified at his trial that the

sneakers "fell out of the sky" onto him, the judge did not believe him. The judge offered Stanley and his parents a choice of jail or Camp Green Lake, so the Yelnatses chose the camp.)

2. Why do the boys at Camp Green Lake dig holes every day? What is the Warden's real motivation for running Camp Green Lake?
(The official camp reason for having each "camper" dig a five-foot by five-foot hole every day in the blazing hot Texas sun is that this "builds character" and turns a bad boy into a good boy. The real reason for this activity, however, is to find Kate Barlow's hidden loot for the Warden. The Warden's family owned much of the land around Green Lake when it really was a lake, and her ancestors [probably grandparents] Trout and Linda Walker discovered the outlaw Kate Barlow occupying a cabin on the shore of the dried-up lake and tried to force her to reveal where she had hidden the money she had stolen over the years. Ever since, members of the Warden's family have been digging holes, looking for the treasure. Now the Warden has set up a youth detention facility so she can use convicted young offenders as, in effect, slave labor to carry on extensive hole-digging, with instructions that anything "interesting or unusual" that a digger finds be handed over to her.)
3. How did the Yelnats family curse begin? How has the curse affected Yelnatses since it started? How does Stanley lift the curse?
(Stanley's great-great-grandfather, Elya Yelnats, failed to carry his Gypsy friend, Madame Zeroni, up the mountain to drink from the stream while hearing him sing her a family lullaby, as he had promised to do in return for Madame Zeroni's help in Elya's attempts to gain the hand of Myra Menke in marriage. When Elya left for America without fulfilling his promise, Madame Zeroni, as she promised him, cursed Elya and all his descendants forever. Since then, Yelnatses have been plagued by bad luck. Stanley Yelnats I, our Stanley's great-grandfather, made a fortune but lost it all when the dreaded outlaw Kissin' Kate Barlow robbed the stagecoach he was traveling in, leaving him stranded in the desert without food or water.

Stanley Yelnats III, our Stanley's father, is a smart and persistent inventor whose inventions, however, never quite pan out—more bad luck. Stanley IV has the misfortune to be walking under the freeway overpass just as the sneakers fall and thus is arrested and convicted of theft, and sent to Camp Green Lake. This turns out to be a sort of destiny, however. Stanley and Zero form a bond of friendship so strong that Stanley carries his friend up a gruelingly long and steep mountain path to the foot of God's Thumb. There, Stanley provides Zero with mountaintop water and sings Zero the family lullaby—thus fulfilling for Madame Zeroni's great-great-great-grandson the promise that Stanley's great-great-grandfather had made to the Gypsy

woman. With the broken promise fulfilled, the curse is lifted, and the Yelnats family begins experiencing some very good luck indeed.)

4. How do Katherine Barlow's long-ago spiced peach preserves and Sam's love of onions resurface to play an important part in Stanley's and Zero's present-day lives?

(Miss Katherine paid Sam in peach preserves for fixing up the schoolhouse. Apparently Sam had some of the bottles of preserves in his rowboat when Trout Walker sank the boat in the middle of Green Lake. The preserves fell to the bottom of the lake, covered by the wreckage of the boat, and remained there, buried, until the present day, when Zero crawls into the shelter of the boat's shadow and finds them. The preserves are now a "warm, bubbly, mushy nectar, sweet and tangy," and this "sploosh" keeps Zero alive for days under the boat, until Stanley finds him.)

When the two boys finally reach the foot of God's Thumb, they discover they are in a field of onions, clearly the remains of Sam's onion fields that were "somewhere on the west side of Green Lake." Stanley and Zero avoid starvation and even thrive on a diet of straight onion for many days; consequently, they are completely saturated in onion when the yellow-spotted lizards crawl all over them. Since yellow-spotted lizards cannot stand human blood with onion juice in it, the animals do not attack Stanley or Zero. The onions thus save the boys from death both by starvation and by yellow-spotted lizard bite. Also, Zero's term for the peach preserves becomes the brand name for Mr. Yelnats' peach-smelling foot-odor cure: Sploosh.)

5. What part do smelly feet, yellow-spotted lizards, and God's Thumb play in this novel?

(Smelly feet give Trout Walker his nickname [his feet smell like dead fish], and the foot fungus that afflicts Trout also afflicts [a century later] Clyde "Sweet Feet" Livingston, who donates the smelly sneakers to the homeless shelter that get Stanley sent to Camp Green Lake. Also, Stanley's father's attempts to find a use for old sneakers fill the Yelnats apartment with foot odor and lead to Stanley III's discovery of a cure for foot odor that finally brings financial ease to the family.)

Yellow-spotted lizards move in to the Green Lake area when it becomes arid desert. One of these lizards kills Kate Barlow, which ends Trout and Linda Walker's hopes of forcing Kate to tell them the location of her hidden loot. When the Warden and counselors find Stanley, Zero, and the suitcase out at the hole, they cannot grab the suitcase because it and the boys are covered with lizards. The Warden waits so long for the lizards to bite Stanley and Zero that Ms. Morengo and the A.G. have time to arrive before anyone decides to shoot the boys instead of having the lizards kill them.)

When Kissin' Kate Barlow stranded Stanley Yelnats I on foot in the desert without food and water, Stanley survived by "finding refuge on God's thumb." No one, not even Stanley I, ever knew what that meant. But one day our Stanley notices a rock formation on top of one of the distant mountains that looks like a giant fist with the thumb sticking straight up. Stanley wonders if this could be the "God's Thumb" his great-grandfather spoke of. Later, Stanley and Zero do indeed find refuge—food, water, survival—at the base of this God's Thumb formation on the mountain.)

Questions 6-9 (Interpretive Level)

6. Describe the relationships among the tent D campers, and between these boys and the adults at the camp.

(The tent D boys are a multiethnic group who function with no apparent racial/ethnic tensions. X-Ray [Rex] is the leader of the group, although his eyesight is so poor he almost has to use X-ray vision to find anything. Zero [Hector Zeroni] seldom speaks, so everyone labels him as stupid; he is the goat of the bunch, even picked on by the seemingly empathetic counselor Mr. Pendanski. No one even inquires about Zero's real name. The boys share a sense of camaraderie—us-against-them—boosted by their use of special nicknames for each other. They accept Stanley willingly into their group, soon giving him his own nickname. The adults treat the youths harshly. The Warden is cold and frighteningly authoritarian. Mr. Sir always wears dark glasses and barks out orders. Mr. Pendanski pretends to be understanding, but he's just as ready as the others to enforce the camp's harsh rules, at gunpoint if needed. The campers, with no other choice, do as they are told.)

7. How and why do Stanley and Zero develop their strong bond of friendship? What is the consequence of this for each boy?

(The bond starts when Zero digs a lot of Stanley's hole for him on the day Mr. Sir takes Stanley to see the Warden about the stolen sunflower seeds. Zero's motivation for digging this time is because Stanley took the blame for stealing the seeds even though he did not do it, and because Zero realizes that Stanley has been sent to Camp Green Lake for stealing the sneakers that Zero actually stole. Then Stanley starts teaching Zero to read and discovers that Zero is not dumb at all; the boys get to know each other, and Zero starts digging part of Stanley's hole every day in return for the reading lessons. When Zero runs away from camp, Stanley wrestles for days with the strong feeling that he needs to go after his friend and help him survive—maybe by climbing to the top of God's Thumb, as Stanley's great-grandfather had. This sense of destiny pulls Stanley into action; he finds Zero and accomplishes the terribly difficult trek to God's Thumb with his friend. In doing so, Stanley breaks the curse of Madame Zeroni and discovers that he is capable of great physical and mental

accomplishment. Zero gains a friend, hope, a sense of self-worth, and even release from Camp Green Lake when Stanley refuses to leave without him.)

8. How do his experiences at Camp Green Lake change Stanley?

(Physically, Stanley arrives as a soft, overweight boy. In the course of his hard, daily physical labor, he becomes a muscular, fit young man capable of carrying his friend up a steep mountain path. Emotionally, Stanley arrives as a fearful, unsure child who will not stand up to any bully. His experiences transform Stanley into a person with perceived self-worth able to tackle physical challenges, defy unfairly wielded authority, and take decisive action on his own.)

9. Why and how is Green Lake cursed? Is this curse finally lifted, as the Yelnats family curse is? If so, why and how?

(The curse on Green Lake is a plot parallel to the Yelnats family curse. The townspeople of Green Lake killed Sam the onion man in the lake because he, a black man, had kissed the white Miss Katherine. From that moment on, not another drop of rain fell in Green Lake; God was not punishing Sam and Miss Katherine, as Hattie Parker exclaimed on seeing the kiss, but the people of Green Lake for their hateful actions. Without rain, the lake dried up completely and the town disappeared. When Stanley's and Zero's actions cause the authorities to discover what's really happening at Camp Green Lake, the Walker family hold on the Green Lake area is broken. The boys survived to accomplish this only because of sustenance from Miss Katherine's peach preserves and Sam's onions, finally achieving for the lovers a measure of justice against Trout Walker and his descendants. The curse of Green Lake is broken at last, signaled by rain that begins to fall into the empty lake as Stanley and Zero drive away with Ms. Morengo.)

Questions 10-11 (Critical Level)

10. In what ways does this novel combine elements of both realism and folklore/legend?

(The portions of the novel that deal with the operations of Camp Green Lake as a boot camp for youthful offenders, and the boys' experiences within this abusive boot-camp environment, are grittily realistic. This realism is leavened throughout the novel with elements of folklore and legend such as a Gypsy curse, a famed Old West outlaw, a mystical journey up a mountainside to God's Thumb, family songs and stories passed on from generation to generation, and a preordained sense of past and present intersecting.)

11. Identify various instances in the novel when the author/storyteller becomes "visible" by addressing the reader directly. Why do you think the author

does this?

(Examples will vary. Chapter 2, for example, begins "The reader is probably wondering: Why would anyone go to Camp Green Lake?" Chapter 8 gives the sense of the author speaking directly to the reader, giving information about yellow-spotted lizards, and not mentioning Stanley or the camp at all; in contrast, surrounding chapters present the story mainly from Stanley's point of view. One explanation of why the author uses this device is that it underscores the sense that this is a story being told in the oral storytelling tradition, which emphasizes the folklore/legend aspects of the novel.)

12. One characteristic of storytelling (especially traditional oral storytelling) is the repetition of certain phrases over and over again all through the story. What repeated phrases/sentences do you find in this novel relating to Zero, to Mr. Sir, and to Stanley? How do the other characters mistakenly interpret the phrase/sentence related to Zero? Why is the repeated phrase/sentence related to Mr. Sir ultimately ironic? What does the phrase/sentence related to Stanley emphasize? *(Zero: "Zero said nothing." The other characters—Zero's tent-mates, the Warden, the guards/counselors—all interpret Zero's silence as evidence that Zero is stupid. Actually, Zero is perfectly intelligent; he just does not like to answer questions. Mr. Sir: "This isn't a Girl Scout camp" and other remarks to the effect that the boys are not Girl Scouts here at Green Lake. Ironically, after the Attorney General shuts down the boot-camp version of Camp Green Lake and the Warden has to sell her family's land, Camp Green Lake does literally become a Girl Scout camp. Stanley: "Stanley dug his shovel into the dirt." The repetition of this sentence emphasizes the grinding, grueling, endless repetition of Stanley's hole-digging.)*

Questions 13-15 (Creative Level)

13. Write some more letters from Stanley to his mother describing his fictional (or real) activities at Camp Green Lake.
14. In several pages, describe the incident when Kissin' Kate Barlow robs Stanley Yelnats I and leaves him stranded in the desert.
15. Relate some of the incidents at Camp Green Lake from another character's point of view—for instance, the Warden's involvement after the discovery of the KB lipstick case, or Mr. Sir after being scratched by the rattlesnake venom nail polish, or Zigzag's growing resentment about Zero helping to dig Stanley's holes, or Zero's largely unspoken thoughts.

Across the Curriculum

Art

1. Create illustrations of some of the novel's characters, such as the Warden, Kissin' Kate Barlow, Mr. Sir (with and without his swollen face), and/or Stanley (on arrival at Camp Green Lake and at departure).
2. Draw a map or illustration, or create a scale model, of Camp Green Lake.
3. Show Green Lake (town and lake) when Miss Katherine was schoolteacher there and when Kissin' Kate Barlow returned twenty years later.
4. Create the packaging for the foot-odor-fighting product Sploosh.

Geography

1. Elya Yelnats is a native of Latvia. Locate Latvia on a map of Europe, and create an enlarged map of Latvia showing its prominent geographical features. Based on information in the novel, indicate a likely location for Elya's village.
2. Research and report on the use and allocation of scarce water resources in the U.S. Southwest.
3. Create an illustrated explanation/demonstration of the ecology of a dry lake bed or desert.

History and Social Studies

1. Research and report on the history of Gypsies in Europe, including modern times.
2. Write a colorful biography of an actual Old West outlaw. Was there ever a real outlaw who resembled Kissin' Kate Barlow?
3. Research and report on the history of lynching in the United States, and/or laws forbidding kissing, sexual relations of any kind, and marriage between blacks and whites.
4. Investigate the use of "boot camps" as detention facilities for youthful offenders. In class, discuss the question of whether the boot-camp approach is or is not effective in reversing criminal antisocial behavior in young people.

Health and Nutrition

1. Create an illustrated chart listing the various health and nutritional benefits of onions. You could include information on traditional onion folk remedies, noting whether each is safe and/or effective.
2. Demonstrate safe methods of canning food, especially peaches. Emphasize the hazards of bacteria in canned foods, both for fruits and for vegetables. Would it be possible for peach preserves to be edible one hundred years after being bottled?
3. Report on the use of leeches in medicine, both historically and in present times.
4. Demonstrate correct first-aid techniques to treat a wound like the one Stanley suffers when Zigzag's shovel hits him. Explain what's inadequate and dangerous about the way Mr. Sir treats the wound.

Language Arts

1. Stanley often refers to Elya Yelnats as his no-good-dirty-rotten-pig-stealing-great-great-grandfather. What's inaccurate about this description?
2. What characteristics link Linda Walker (Trout's wife) and the Warden? What characteristics link Trout Walker and Myra Menke? What characteristics link Trout Walker and Clyde Livingston?
3. The name Stanley Yelnats is a palindrome—it is the same spelled forwards and backwards. Make up other palindromes—names, phrases, even whole sentences. Share palindromes with classmates.
4. In class, discuss other Newbery Medal-winning books you have read, and generate a list of qualities you think help a book win the Newbery award. Then nominate a favorite book for the Newbery, citing the characteristics you think make it deserving of the award.

Mathematics

1. Show in chart form the costs of various types of athletic shoes. What characteristics seem to have the most effect on price?
2. Calculate the number of holes the tent D group digs during the time Stanley is at Camp Green Lake. How many holes has Stanley himself dug?

Music

1. Write a tune for the family lullaby, or find an existing tune—perhaps a folk song or lullaby—for the lullaby’s lyrics. Share and perform tunes with classmates.
2. Bring to class recordings of music that might have been played at the annual Green Lake Fourth of July picnic. How different is this music from what might be played at a town’s Fourth of July celebration today?

Science

1. Create an illustrated field guide to rattlesnakes or yellow-spotted lizards. Base your information about the fictitious yellow-spotted lizards on the characteristics of real lizards as well as characteristics mentioned in the novel for the imaginary lizards.
2. Research and report on the causes and treatments of various types of foot conditions that cause odor and itching. Pictures of the various conditions would add a lot of interest to your report.
3. On his trek across the dry lake bed, Stanley sees pools of water ahead of him, but they are only mirages. Explain in poster or multimedia form what causes the mirage phenomenon.
4. Explain why counting the seconds between seeing a lightning flash and hearing the subsequent thunder clap is or is not an effective way of estimating how far away the thunderstorm is.

Student Involvement Activities

1. With classmates, act out favorite scenes from the novel, such as the day Sweet Feet’s sneakers disappear from the shelter, or Stanley earns his Caveman nickname, or the Warden and counselors/guards surround Stanley and Zero at the hole.
2. With the landowner’s permission, try your hand at digging a hole. Mark out a circle five feet around and start to dig. How far do you get before you want to stop? How hard do you think it would be to dig an entire five-foot by five-foot hole?

3. Find out if there are any tales about buried treasure in your locality and share the legend with classmates.
4. Grow a patch of sunflowers, and share the seeds with friends, family, and classmates.
5. Make some actual spiced peach preserves. (If you have more than you and friends/family can eat at one serving, you can store what’s left over in jars in the refrigerator rather than preserve them in the water-bath canning method.)
6. Grow some onions, or cook up some special onion dishes.
7. Climb a steep hill or small mountain. Do you think you could carry a friend halfway up the steepest part, as Stanley did for Zero?
8. With friends, learn and practice speaking pig Latin. (In the novel, Rex becomes X-ray in pig Latin.)
9. Create a family tree for the Yelnats clan. You could do the same for Zero, filling in the many gaps in information from your imagination.

Alternate Assessment

1. Conduct a hearing that reviews Stanley’s conviction for stealing the sneakers, uses new evidence to reverse Stanley’s conviction and sentence, and tries the adults at Camp Green Lake on charges of child abuse and abuse of authority.
2. Tell in one smooth narration the story of Elya Yelnats, Stanley Yelnats I, Katherine Barlow/Kissin’ Kate Barlow, and/or the Trout Walker family down through the generations.
3. Trace one or more of these motifs through the novel: spicy peaches, onions, lullaby, smelly feet/shoes, yellow-spotted lizards, rattlesnakes, God’s (Big) Thumb, bad luck/curse, sunflower seeds, red hair, and Girl Scouts.
4. Identify elements of realism, legend/folklore, mystery, adventure, and comedy in the novel. Cite specific examples as part of your answer for each element.

Vocabulary

Match each underlined word with its meaning listed below. Write the letter of the meaning in the space next to the sentence number.

- | | | | |
|------------|----------------------|------------------------|-------------------|
| A. bizarre | F. gained speed | K. extremely large | P. start |
| B. shine | G. barren, lifeless | L. faulty, imperfect | Q. great fear |
| C. poison | H. unoccupied places | M. shelter, protection | R. side-by-side |
| D. fate | I. move in jerks | N. waste time | S. sad and lonely |
| E. weak | J. understand | O. deserving contempt | T. absurd |

- ___ 1. The judge called Stanley's crime despicable.
- ___ 2. "Vacancies don't last long at Camp Green Lake," the judge said.
- ___ 3. Stanley glanced helplessly at his shovel. It wasn't defective. He was defective.
- ___ 4. Madame Zeroni hated to see Elya so forlorn.
- ___ 5. "Why not let Myra decide?" suggested Elya. "That's preposterous!" exclaimed Igor.
- ___ 6. Stanley took a long, deep breath. He couldn't afford to dawdle. He was way behind the others, and the sun just kept getting hotter.
- ___ 7. Stanley looked out the window of the bus at the vast emptiness of the landscape.
- ___ 8. Stanley dug his shovel into the dirt. As he dumped it out, he thought he saw something glisten as it fell onto the dirt pile.
- ___ 9. The Warden stared at Mr. Sir a moment, then her gaze turned toward Stanley. He felt nothing but dread now.
- ___ 10. "Do you want to know my secret ingredient?" the Warden asked Stanley. "Rattlesnake venom."
- ___ 11. Walking across the desolate wasteland of the dry lake bed, Stanley thought about his great-grandfather, stranded out in the desert.
- ___ 12. "*I found refuge on God's thumb,*" Stanley's great-grandfather had supposedly said after Kate Barlow had robbed him and left him stranded in the desert.
- ___ 13. "I'll be walking past a real nice car, parked in a deserted area, and, you know, I'll just start twitching. If you think I twitch now, you should see me when I'm around a car."
- ___ 14. The truck lurched forward. Stanley jerked back against the seat and tightly gripped the wheel as the truck accelerated.
- ___ 15. Zero's frail body shook violently, and he threw up, emptying his stomach of the sploosh.
- ___ 16. It was crazy. It was all part of Stanley's crazy feeling of happiness. Or maybe it was destiny.
- ___ 17. No one even dared to look at Mr. Sir's grotesque, swollen face.
- ___ 18. Stanley and Zero climbed down into adjacent holes, and waited for the camp to fall asleep.
- ___ 19. "The Attorney General will most likely initiate an investigation."
- ___ 20. Stanley felt as if he was walking in a dream, not quite able to comprehend what was going on around him.

Comprehension Test A

Part I: Matching (30 points)

Read each character description. In the list below, find the character who matches the description. Write the letter of the character in the space next to the description number. Use each name only once.

- | | | |
|---------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| A. Stanley | F. Clyde Livingston | K. Mr. Pendanski |
| B. Zero | G. Kissin' Kate Barlow | L. Stanley Yelnats I |
| C. X-Ray | H. Elya Yelnats | M. Stanley Yelnats III |
| D. Mr. Sir | I. Madame Zeroni | N. Miss Katherine |
| E. the Warden | J. Sam | O. Trout Walker |

- ___ 1. One of the most feared outlaws in the West, killed by a yellow-spotted lizard.
- ___ 2. Tall red-headed woman who wears dark red nail polish and turquoise-studded cowboy boots.
- ___ 3. Carries a friend up a mountain and sings him a lullaby.
- ___ 4. A smart inventor whose experiments almost always fail.
- ___ 5. Wears sunglasses, even indoors, and is always spitting out sunflower seed shells.
- ___ 6. Family member who starts the curse and leaves Latvia to come to America.
- ___ 7. Schoolteacher in the lovely town of Green Lake who falls in love with Sam.
- ___ 8. Seemingly sympathetic camp counselor whose nickname is Mom.
- ___ 9. Gypsy woman with no left foot who puts a curse on the Yelnats family.
- ___ 10. Rex, leader of the tent D group of campers.
- ___ 11. Vegetable grower, vegetable seller, and handyman in the town of Green Lake.
- ___ 12. Madame Zeroni's great-great-great-grandson, who runs away from Camp Green Lake into the desert.
- ___ 13. Rich man who loses his fortune to a stagecoach-robbing outlaw who leaves him stranded in the desert.
- ___ 14. Baseball star who donates a pair of old sneakers for a charity auction.
- ___ 15. Arrogant, rich young man who rams Sam's rowboat with his own power boat.

Part II: Short Answer (20 points)

Write a one- or two-word answer to each of the following questions.

- 1. In what U.S. state is Camp Green Lake located? _____
- 2. What is Clyde Livingston's nickname? _____
- 3. What health/hygiene problem does Mr. Yelnats' invention Sploosh treat successfully? _____
- 4. What is Stanley's camp nickname? _____
- 5. What type of fruit is in Miss Katherine's famous spiced preserves? _____
- 6. What is the secret ingredient in the Warden's nail polish? _____
- 7. What is the name of both Sam's donkey and Sam's boat? _____
- 8. What is the main ingredient in Sam's medicinal ointments, lotions, syrups, and pastes? _____
- 9. What thing is Stanley falsely convicted of stealing? _____
- 10. What thing does Madame Zeroni tell Elya to carry up the mountain every day? _____

Comprehension Test A (Page 2)

Part III. Multiple Choice (20 points)

Underline the choice that correctly completes each of these sentences.

1. Each hole Stanley and the other campers dig every day has to be **(two, three, five, six)** feet wide and deep.
2. Stanley teaches Zero the skill of **(reading, writing, mental math, wilderness tracking)**.
3. Trout Walker got his nickname because of his **(love of fishing, smelly feet, popping-out eyes, fishy breath)**.
4. Zero steals Sweet Feet's sneakers from a **(baseball stadium, store display window, local playground, homeless shelter)**.
5. Mr. Sir often remarks that Camp Green Lake is not a **(fun and games, computer, Girl Scout, prison)** camp.
6. The Warden is a descendant of **(Trout Walker, Kissin' Kate Barlow, Madame Zeroni, Elya Yelnats)**.
7. Miss Katherine lived in the town beside the beautiful lake **(one hundred, fifty, twenty, ten)** years ago.
8. Stanley finds Kissin' Kate Barlow's **(nail polish bottle, shotgun shell, lipstick case, gold coin)**.
9. When Stanley sets out across the desert, he brings an empty **(knapsack, canteen, money pouch, shotgun)** with him.
10. Because he is jealous that Zero helps dig Stanley's holes, **(Zigzag, Squid, Onion, Trout)** picks a fight with Stanley.

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Explain the part that onions and yellow-spotted lizards play in the novel.
2. How did the Green Lake curse start? What was its effect? How was it broken?
3. Why does the buried suitcase that Stanley finds have Stanley's name printed on it? Why does the Warden not grab the suitcase away? Why do the yellow-spotted lizards not attack Stanley or Zero?

Comprehension Test B

Part I: Matching (30 points)

Read each quotation. In the list below, find the character who spoke the words. Write the letter of the character in the space next to the quotation number. You will use each name only once.

- | | | | | |
|------------|---------------------|------------------------|----------------------|-------------------|
| A. Stanley | D. Mr. Sir | G. Kissin' Kate Barlow | J. the Warden | M. Ms. Morengo |
| B. Zero | E. Sam | H. Elya Yelnats | K. Mr. Pendanski | N. Miss Katherine |
| C. X-Ray | F. Clyde Livingston | I. Madame Zeroni | L. Stanley Yelnats I | O. Trout Walker |

- ___ 1. "I want you to carry me up the mountain. I want to drink from the stream, and I want you to sing the song to me."
- ___ 2. "You've got exactly ten seconds to tell me where you've hidden your loot."
- ___ 3. "Say, listen, Stanley, if you find something else in your hole, give it to me, okay? If anybody gets a day off, it should be me. That's only fair, right?"
- ___ 4. "When I was little I'd watch my parents dig holes, every weekend and holiday. When I got bigger, I had to dig, too. Even on Christmas."
- ___ 5. "I found refuge on God's thumb."
- ___ 6. "I'm in love with Myra Menke. But Igor Barkov has offered to trade his fattest pig for her. I can't compete with that."
- ___ 7. "Oh, Sam, my heart is breaking."
- ___ 8. "This isn't a Girl Scout camp."
- ___ 9. "Stanley, as your lawyer, I advise you not to open your suitcase."
- ___ 10. "I can fix that."
- ___ 11. "Go ahead and kill me. But I sure hope you like to dig. You, and your children, and their children, can dig for the next hundred years and you'll never find it."
- ___ 12. "If you find anything interesting or unusual, you should report it either to me or Mr. Sir when we come around with the water truck."
- ___ 13. "My feet used to smell so bad that nobody would sit near me in the dugout."
- ___ 14. "When I saw the shoes on display in the shelter, I just reached in the glass case and took them."
- ___ 15. "Why can't I dig my own hole, but still teach Zero to read? What's wrong with that?"

Part II: Fill-In (20 points)

Write one or two words in each blank to make each statement true.

- Stanley calls his Latvian ancestor "my no-good-dirty-rotten-_____-
_____-great-great-grandfather."
- Stanley's father works hard to earn a living as a(n) _____.
- Rex is mostly known by his nickname of _____.
- Both Trout Walker and Sweet Feet Livingston suffer from a bad case of _____.
- The sign on the door of Camp Green Lake's recreation room reads "_____ Room."
- "_____" is the word Zero invents for the spicy peach nectar that he drinks from the glass bottles he finds in the lake bed.
- Sam called the _____ that he grew "the magic vegetable."
- Stanley and Zero climb up the base of a large rock formation Stanley calls God's, or Big, _____.
- Hector Zeroni's camp nickname is _____.
- Sam named his boat _____, after his much-loved donkey.

Comprehension Test B (Page 2)

Part III. Multiple Choice (20 points)

Underline the choice that correctly completes each of these sentences.

1. The bite of a (**rattlesnake, yellow-spotted lizard, scorpion, tarantula**) is always fatal in this novel.
2. Madame Zeroni tells Elya he must carry a (**donkey, tree, heavy suitcase, pig**) up a mountain every day.
3. The suitcase that Stanley digs up belonged/belongs to (**Stanley Yelnats I, Elya Yelnats, the Warden, Madame Zeroni**).
4. (**Smelly feet, Peach preserves, Onion juice, A family curse**) protect(s) Stanley and Zero from a yellow-spotted lizard attack.
5. Mr. Sir is constantly (**biting his nails, eating sunflower seeds, chewing gum, sucking on hard candy**) because he has recently quit smoking cigarettes.
6. Clyde "Sweet Feet" Livingston is a (**football, baseball, soccer, basketball**) star.
7. For generations, the Yelnats family has been plagued by (**many cases of cancer, low intelligence, a tendency toward criminal behavior, a curse**).
8. The Warden scratches Mr. Sir with her venomous (**nail polish, knife, whip, pitchfork**).
9. Both the Warden and Linda, Trout Walker's wife, have (**smelly feet, a love for onions, red hair, extrasensory perception**).
10. On the afternoon Zero steals the sneakers, Stanley has to stay late at school to (**serve detention, make up a test, try out for the baseball team, fish his notebook out of the toilet**).

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Explain the part that peaches and smelly feet play in the novel.
2. How and why did the Yelnats family curse start? What effect has it had on family members? How is the curse broken?
3. How does the present-day Green Lake differ from the Green Lake of one hundred years ago?

Answer Key

VOCABULARY

- | | | | |
|------|-------|-------|-------|
| 1. O | 6. N | 11. G | 16. D |
| 2. H | 7. K | 12. M | 17. A |
| 3. L | 8. B | 13. I | 18. R |
| 4. S | 9. Q | 14. F | 19. P |
| 5. T | 10. C | 15. E | 20. J |

COMPREHENSION TEST A

Part I: Matching (30 points)

- | | | |
|------|-------|-------|
| 1. G | 6. H | 11. J |
| 2. E | 7. N | 12. B |
| 3. A | 8. K | 13. L |
| 4. M | 9. I | 14. F |
| 5. D | 10. C | 15. O |

Part II: Short Answer (20 points)

- | | |
|---------------|------------------------|
| 1. Texas | 6. rattlesnake venom |
| 2. Sweet Feet | 7. Mary Lou |
| 3. foot odor | 8. onion |
| 4. Caveman | 9. smelly/old sneakers |
| 5. peaches | 10. pig |

Part III: Multiple Choice (20 points)

- | | |
|---------------------|------------------|
| 1. five | 6. Trout Walker |
| 2. reading | 7. one hundred |
| 3. smelly feet | 8. lipstick case |
| 4. homeless shelter | 9. canteen |
| 5. Girl Scout | 10. Zigzag |

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.

COMPREHENSION TEST B

Part I: Matching (30 points)

- | | | |
|------|-------|-------|
| 1. I | 6. H | 11. G |
| 2. O | 7. N | 12. K |
| 3. C | 8. D | 13. F |
| 4. J | 9. M | 14. B |
| 5. L | 10. E | 15. A |

Part II: Fill-In (20 points)

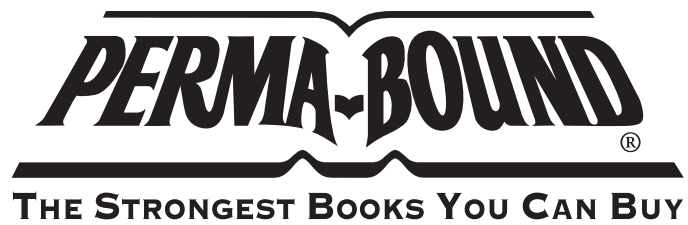
- | | |
|--------------------------|--------------|
| 1. pig-stealing | 6. Sploosh |
| 2. inventor | 7. onions |
| 3. X-Ray | 8. Thumb |
| 4. foot odor/smelly feet | 9. Zero |
| 5. Wreck | 10. Mary Lou |

Part III: Multiple Choice (20 points)

- | | |
|---------------------------|---|
| 1. yellow-spotted lizard | 6. baseball |
| 2. pig | 7. a curse |
| 3. Stanley Yelnats I | 8. nail polish |
| 4. Onion juice | 9. red hair |
| 5. eating sunflower seeds | 10. fish his notebook out of the toilet |

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.



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