

Holes Study Guide

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Plot Summary

This novel is set in modern times and focuses on the current circumstances of Stanley Yelnats, an unfortunate, unlucky young man who is sent to Camp Green Lake for a crime he didn't commit. Stanley's family is poor and believes themselves to be under the curse of Stanley's "no-good-dirty-rotten-pig-stealing-great-grandfather." The curse has been extended through multiple generations and began because the great grandfather, Elya Yelnats, did not keep his promise to Madame Zeroni who helped him. Stanley comes to America, where he marries Sarah Miller, and though they work hard, they are "always at the wrong place at the wrong time." The one Yelnats who was successful, Stanley Yelnats the I, (Stanley's great grandfather) was robbed of his fortune by Kissing Kate Barlow, an outlaw who stole everything he had. Since then, the family has been poor. Stanley's father is an inventor who is trying to find a way to recycle used tennis shoes. Stanley's supposed crime was that he stole a pair of tennis shoes from Clyde "Sweet Feet" Livingston, a famous baseball player who had donated the shoes to an auction to benefit poor boys and girls. In fact, Stanley did not steal the shoes, but happened to be walking under an underpass when they fell down on him, only to be accused of the crime. Being from a poor family, they were unable to do much to fight the charges and Stanley opts to attend Camp Green Lake instead of go to jail.

Most of the novel centers on Stanley's life at Camp Green Lake, which is not a pleasant place at all. No green and no water exists for miles around. The camp is in the middle of a huge desert, and instead of punishment, each "camper" must dig a hole five feet by five feet every day. The camp is run by Mr. Sir, and Mr. Pendanski, the two "counselors" who monitor the boys' activities. The two take orders from the Warden.

The modern-day story of Stanley's life is interwoven with the story of Camp Green Lake a hundred and ten years before, when it was a green, beautiful place and a thriving town. The story of Katherine Barlow and Sam the Onion Man is told, and the past history ties into the present-day predicament of Stanley Yelnats IV.

Everything is not as it seems. The warden is not a man, but a mean-spirited, vindictive woman who paints her fingernails with rattlesnake venom. The holes are being dug, not just for punishment for the boys, but because the warden is looking for treasure buried by Kissing Kate Barlow. The boys have their own power struggles and issues, and soon, Stanley, known as "Caveman" to the other boys, begins a friendship with Zero, an underweight boy that the others think is stupid, but who admits to Stanley that he can't read. Stanley agrees to help Zero learn to read if Zero (who is an excellent hole-digger) will help dig Stanley's hole for an hour every day.

When problems arise, Zero escapes from camp, and shortly after, Stanley too, leaves the relative safety of Camp Green Lake, and eventually finds Zero, near dead from exhaustion and exposure. Together, the two struggle to survive and find a stash of 100-year-old spiced peaches - reduced now to juice - for survival. After an enormous struggle, the boys aim for "God's Thumb," where Stanley's great-grandfather took refuge after he was robbed and left in the dessert. The climb is hard, and Zero is so



weak he cannot make it on his own power. Stanley carries him up to the top of the mountain where they find onions growing in abandoned fields. The boy's diet consists of onions and water for days before they sneak back down to the camp to dig in a hole that Stanley believes holds the treasure the warden is seeking.

Stanley and Zero find the buried treasure, but not before they are caught by the warden and her henchman. However even the evil warden is not as bad as the other threat that Zero and Stanley face - the dreaded yellow-spotted lizards. Amazingly, the lizards do not bite the boys because lizards don't like onions, and since that's all Stanley and Zero have eaten for days, they just don't appeal to the yellow-spotted lizards.

While Zero and Stanley have been gone from camp, a woman has come in search of Stanley. The woman uses her authority to release Zero, too, since Stanley won't go without him. The treasure that they have dug up has Stanley Yelnats' name on it, and it turns out that the treasure was his great grandfather's fortune, stolen by Kissing Kate Barlow.

Fortune turns in favor of the Yelnats. Stanley's dad has discovered a formula for eliminating foot odor and Clyde "Sweet Feet" is its principal endorser. Zero has admitted that he stole the shoes, only because he lived on his own and had to steal to get by. The change in fortune stems from the fact that Zero's name is actually Hector Zeroni, the great-great grandson of Madame Zeroni. The promise has finally been kept. A Yelnats carried a Zeroni to the top of the mountain, lifting the curse and changing the fortune of the Yelnats family.



Part 1: Chapters 1, 2, 3, and 4

Part 1: Chapters 1, 2, 3, and 4 Summary

Camp Green Lake is described and it's anything but what its name suggests. There's no water, no green, and it's filled with rattlesnakes, scorpions, and the dreaded, deadly, yellow-spotted lizards. Stanley Yelnats, whose name is spelled the same forwards as it is backwards, arrives by bus to this camp for boys who've committed a crime, only he is truly innocent. Unfortunately, his family is just too poor to defend him. Stanley's family is used to the bad luck which follows them, due to the curse his "no-good-dirty-rotten-pig-stealing-great-great-grandfather" caused. Stanley, however, tries to have a good attitude and pretend that this will be like a summer camp for rich kids.

Stanley's father is an inventor looking for ways to recycle old tennis shoes and Stanley comforts himself by remembering the song his father used to sing to him, "If only, if only..." The Yelnats family has never been lucky. When Stanley's great-grandfather made a fortune on the stock market and decided to come west, his fortune was stolen from him by the famous outlaw Kissing Kate Barlow.

Stanley is greeted at the camp by Mr. Sir, one of the two camp guardians. Mr. Sir is a scary guy with a rattlesnake tattoo and a mouth full of sunflower seeds. Mr. Sir outlines the rules of the camp to Stanley, explaining that he will have two sets of clothes - one to be worn while working and another set to be worn while resting. The "resting" set becomes his working clothes while the others are being washed. Stanley is to get up at 4:30 every morning and then work each day digging one hole that is five feet wide and five feet deep, the exact length of his shovel. Since the camp is in the middle of the desert with nothing around, there is no possibility for escape and there is no desire to run away because a person could die wandering the desert with no food or water. Mr. Sir also warns Stanley that he's going to be thirsty for the next eighteen months.

Part 1: Chapters 1, 2, 3, and 4 Analysis

The first section of the book describes the setting of Camp Green Lake, which is the complete opposite of the name. The name of the camp is important since it shows that not everything is as it seems to be. We know for a fact that Stanley is innocent even though he is being punished. Other examples of opposite meanings will show up in several places throughout the book.

The plot is based on ideas about Bad vs. Good, and Justice vs. Injustice. Camp Green Lake exists for "bad boys," on the theory that 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." However, what happens when a good, innocent boy like Stanley has to pay for a crime he didn't commit?

Other ideas about crime and punishment are shown simply by Stanley, who is from a poor family and couldn't fight the charges made against him. Since "punishment" is



doled out by those who are in power, the use and abuse of power is also an issue. Note that the Warden's cabin is between the only two trees and between the trees is a hammock that is forbidden to the boys. "The Warden owns the shade."

The yellow-spotted lizard is highlighted as the biggest danger at the camp, even greater than lying in the Warden's hammock. "If you get bitten by a yellow-spotted lizard...there's nothing anyone can do to you anymore," foreshadows upcoming events.



Part 1: Chapters 5, 6, and 7

Part 1: Chapters 5, 6, and 7 Summary

Stanley is assigned to Tent D and meets one of his group's counselors, Mr. Pendanski, who tells him that Mr. Sir isn't really as bad as he seems. It's just that he's grumpy since he stopped smoking. Mr. Pendanski explains to Stanley that "there's really one rule at Camp Green Lake: Don't upset the Warden." Mr. Pendanski seems good-hearted, always talking about rehabilitating the boys into "useful and hardworking members of society." Mr. Pendanski introduces Stanley to the other boys, Rex and Alan, known as X-Ray and Squid. Both of these boys ask what happened to Barf Bag, the boy who was in their tent before Stanley. Mr. Pendanski informs them that "Lewis" won't be returning since he's still in the hospital.

Stanley is introduced to the rest of the boys in his tent whose names are Jose, Theodore, and Ricky, but who only answer to their nicknames of Magnet, Armpit, and Zigzag. The last person Stanley meets is a boy with no last name or given name. The boy is only known by "Zero." The boys have nicknamed Mr. Pendanski "Mom."

When Stanley makes the mistake of asking "Theodore" where to fill his canteen, Theodore physically throws him to the ground and tells him that his name is Armpit.

Stanley begins to learn the harsh routine of camp - four-minute showers of only cold water, meals that tasted the same day after day, and sleeping in a smelly cot vacated by Barf Bag. When asked what he did to deserve camp, Stanley tells them that he stole tennis shoes belonging to Clyde Livingston, a baseball legend, only no one believes him. Even worse, Stanley's hero had been Clyde "Sweet Feet" Livingston, but after the trial, the baseball player thought Stanley had stolen his shoes that he'd donated to raise money for a homeless shelter, so his lifelong hero thought he was criminal.

Stanley thinks that his misfortune is due to "his no-good-dirty-rotten-pig-stealing-great-great-grandfather." Stanley's troubles included being humiliated by a much smaller kid at school named Derrick Dunne who was always picking on Stanley. When Derrick took Stanley's notebook and dropped it into the toilet in the boy's bathroom, Stanley retrieved his notes but missed the bus causing him to have to walk home. That's when the tennis shoes fell from the sky and hit Stanley in the head as he walked below an underpass. Since he thought that the shoes would be helpful to his inventor father, who is looking for a way to recycle sneakers, he keeps them and starts to run home, only to be arrested for the crime. The shoes had been donated by Clyde Livingston to help raise money for a homeless shelter and were valued at over five thousand dollars. Of course, no one believes his story and the judge finds Stanley guilty of the crime, offering him the option of Camp Green Lake or jail.

Stanley's family is poor and since he's never been to camp, they pretend that camp will be a fun place, but it's anything but fun. Stanley, who is overweight, struggles to dig his



first hole. Each boy has a five-foot long shovel, and has to dig a hole exactly five feet long and five feet deep. Work begins at 4:30 in the morning so that they can dig before the heat is unbearable.

The book shifts between Stanley's struggle to dig his first hole and the story of Stanley's great-great-grandfather named Elya Yelnats who was born in Latvia and at the age of 15, fell in love with a beautiful young woman named Myra Menke. Since Elya is poor, he is not able to compete with the well-off, older pig farmer named Igor Barkov, who has offered Myra's father a large fat pig for his daughter's hand in marriage.

Elya goes to a gypsy woman named Madame Zeroni for help. After warning Elya that the woman he seeks is too silly and shallow and not worthy of his efforts, Madame Zeroni helps Elya by giving him a piglet and instructing him to carry the pig up the mountain everyday to drink from the stream and to sing him a special song. Madame Zeroni explains that carrying the pig will make Elya stronger. After he takes the pig to Myra's father, then he must come back and carry Madame Zeroni, who has no left foot and is bound to a wheelchair, up the mountain to drink from the stream. If Elya does not carry out his part of the promise, he and the future generations of his family will be cursed.

Elya does as Madame Zeroni instructs, but stops taking the pig up the mountain the very last day and when he presents the pig to Myra's father, Elya's pig is exactly the same size as Igor's. Myra's father lets Myra decide which of the two men she will marry. Even though Elya professes great love AND a fat pig, and the pig farmer just offers the pig, Myra is indecisive. Seeing the stupidity of the woman, Elya leaves the country, forgetting about his promise to carry Madame Zeroni up the mountainside.

Stanley continues to dig his hole in spite of blisters, extreme thirst, and intense fatigue. Stanley listens to Mr. Sir tell him, "This isn't the Girl Scouts, is it?" and then watches him spit sunflower shells into his hole. Due to the fact that he'd put his piles of dirt too close to his hole, he had to move them, using double the effort that it would have taken if he had shoveled them farther away in the first place.

The story flips back to Elya Yelnats and his passage to America as a deckhand. Elya meets Sarah Miller, a woman who can work hard and share Elya's life, even though he seems almost "cursed." Sarah only asks that he sing the "pig lullaby" for her. When their son Stanley is born, she translates the song so that it rhymes and sings it every night to Stanley I.

The section ends as Stanley Yelnats IV finally completes his hole. Stanley's hands are bloody and he is trapped in his hole because he doesn't have the strength to pull himself out. Finally, after digging foot holes in the side so that he can climb out, Stanley follows the tradition of the other boys and uses his last bit of saliva to spit in his hole. Stanley declines the offer of a ride from Mr. Pendanski and walks home, feeling proud of his accomplishments.



Part 1: Chapters 5, 6, and 7 Analysis

The story of Elya Yelnats is inserted between the stories of Stanley Yelnats IV and offers a parallel. Madame Zeroni assigned the first Stanley the task of carrying a pig up the mountain every day and of letting him drink from the stream while Elya sang a song to him. Madame Zeroni knew that carrying a growing pig up the mountainside every day would make Elya stronger, both in body and character. The basic idea of Camp Green Lake is the same. Digging a hole everyday would make the boys physically strong and give them good character training in hard work, diligence, and persistence.

The story is not sugarcoated or overly sweet. It's apparent that this is not a nice place to be. Brute strength and violence are part of the boys' lives, as evidenced when Armpit knocks Stanley down for calling him "Theodore." Kids who don't look like other people are also bullied, as when Derrick Dunne picks on Stanley and throws his notebook in the toilet. It's also obvious that what Zigzag does is "weird" and that he does not look like the other kids.

A repeated theme in this novel is that things aren't always what they seem to be. Myra Menke is beautiful, but she is also shallow, dumb, and unable to appreciate love. Derrick Dunne is a bully, even though he appears to be a small, harmless kid.



Part 1: Chapters 8, 9, and 10

Part 1: Chapters 8, 9, and 10 Summary

Chapter 8 is devoted to a description of the yellow-spotted lizards. The chapter explains that up to twenty can live in one hole, that they eat the shells of sunflower seeds, and that the yellow spots aren't as obvious as the red around their eyes, their black teeth, or their white tongue. In fact, if you can see the yellow spots at all, you're probably already dead.

Chapter 9 focuses on Stanley's adjustment to life at Camp Green Lake, which isn't very pleasant. The boys have no recreation, since the "rec. hall," is really the "wreck room," where every piece of old equipment is broken. When Stanley comes into the room after digging his first hole, he trips over a kid he calls "The Lump." When "The Lump" moves threateningly toward Stanley, X-Ray and Armpit say, "Hey, you don't want to mess with The Caveman" and "The Caveman's cool." Stanley at first thinks that they're warning him to stay away from the Caveman, but then he realizes that the boys are referring to him and his new nickname, assigned to him because he had dug himself into his hole.

Stanley writes his mother a letter, again pretending that he's having a good time at this camp he jokingly refers to as "Camp Fun and Games," and as he's writing he sees Zero staring over his shoulder.

The following day is much like the first day, only digging his second hole is harder because his muscles are so sore and his hands are so blistered and bleeding. As he's digging, Stanley comes across a rock with a perfect fossil of a fish. Stanley is excited because he was told by Mr. Sir and Mr. Pendanski that if he ever found anything interesting while digging, he is supposed to report it and then he would win the rest of the day off.

Stanley reports his findings to Mr. Pendanski when he comes to deliver water. Stanley notices that the water line is always the same. X-Ray is always first, followed by Armpit, Squid, Zigzag, Magnet, and Zero. Stanley lines up behind Zero. Stanley shows Mr. Pendanski his "find," the cool rock with a fossilized fish, but he is disappointed to find out that the Warden is not interested in fossils and he will not get a day off. The boys, however, examine the rock, except for X-ray who can't see anything.

Part 1: Chapters 8, 9, and 10 Analysis

The focus on the deadly yellow-spotted lizards warns us that they will be important to the story and continued references to them throughout the novel foreshadow upcoming events.

The hierarchy of the boys - and the balance of power - is demonstrated in how the boys line up. X-Ray is the most powerful and Zero is last, until Stanley shows up and is put at



the end, demonstrating that he has the least power of anyone. Stanley does have some acceptance, however, since the boys have given him a nickname.

Nothing is as it seems. X-Ray, a name that sounds as if it could see anything, is almost completely blind and even with thick glasses, he can't see much.



Part 1: Chapters 11, 12, and 13

Part 1: Chapters 11, 12, and 13 Summary

Stanley is disappointed that Mr. Pendanski didn't find his "fish rock" interesting and goes back to digging where he is confronted by X-Ray. X-Ray, the leader of the group, tells him that he has bad eyesight and confides to him that no one knows his name is X-Ray because it's pig Latin for his real name, Rex.

X-Ray tells Stanley that he shouldn't be worried about a day off since he's only been there a few days. Instead, X-Ray thinks that Stanley should give him anything he finds, since he can't see it for himself and since he's been there the longest. Stanley agrees because he figures it's easier to survive if the leader of the group thinks you're a good guy.

Stanley fantasizes about becoming good friends with the boys in his tent and imagines them beating up Derrick Dunne, the bully from his old school.

Stanley again is the last one to finish digging his hole and returns to camp to find Mr. Pendanski holding a counseling session with the boys. Mr. Pedanski is asking about the boys what they want to do with their lives when they get out, talking about goal setting, and explaining that the boys had only themselves to blame for being at camp. Stanley tells him it was his "no-good-dirty-rotten-pig-stealing-great-grandfather," making the boys laugh and Stanley sees Zero smile for the first time. Mr. Pendanski tells Zero, "You're not completely worthless," when he asks him what he wants to do with his life. Zero tells him simply that he likes to dig holes.

During the next day's digging, Stanley finds a thin, gold tube etched with a heart and the letters K.B. inside the heart. Stanley thinks about a way not to give his findings to X-Ray and possibly going to the Warden directly, but since he's never seen the Warden and since the Warden wouldn't have found his first discovery, "interesting," he decides to keep his deal with X-Ray. When X-Ray says that he's going to show "Mom," (Mr. Pendanski) Stanley suggests that he wait until the next day. That way, he'll get a whole day off as a reward instead of just a half day. X-Ray sees the logic in what Stanley says. When they line up for water, X-Ray tells Stanley to move ahead of Zero.

Part 1: Chapters 11, 12, and 13 Analysis

Stanley begins to be more accepted as part of the group. Stanley acquires a nickname and strikes up a deal with X-Ray, who is the leader of the group. Even Camp Green Lake, which is an unpleasant place, provides Stanley with some comfort as he fantasizes about the boys in his tent beating up Derrick Dunne.

All groups have leaders and the boys of Tent D are no exception. Examples of power and the order of strength in the group are given in how they line up. It's also apparent



that power has nothing to do with size since X-Ray is the smallest and Caveman is the biggest. It is obvious that Zero has the least power since he is always at the end of the line and since Mr. Pendanski's comment of "You're not completely worthless" is an insult in disguise.

Power is also evident in the authority of the Warden to determine what is interesting and what is not, who gets a day off and who does not.



Part 1: Chapters 14, 15, and 16

Part 1: Chapters 14, 15, and 16 Summary

The next morning, Stanley tries to talk to X-Ray about the gold tube, but X-Ray ignores him and tells him to leave him alone. Once they're digging, though, X-Ray calls Mr. Pendanski over to his hole at a water break and shows him the tube sticking out of the dirt on his shovel. Mr. Pendanski comes back with the Warden to look at X-Ray's gold tube. Much to Stanley's surprise, the Warden is a tall, redheaded woman who lets X-Ray ride back to camp, take a double shower, and get clean clothes.

The Warden tells Mr. Pendanski to refill the boys' canteens, but he explains he just did that. The Warden calls upon Stanley to see if he had taken a drink, and while he tries not to make trouble for Mr. Pendanski by saying that he had plenty left, she asks him again if he had taken a drink. The Warden demonstrates that she wants her orders followed without question or comment and tells Pendanski that if he doesn't want to fill canteens, Caveman can do it while Mr. Pendanski digs the hole for Caveman.

The Warden pairs up the boys, with Caveman working with Zero, so that the dirt in the holes near where X-Ray was digging could be double sifted. The Warden knows the name of each boy and she appears to know that Zero is the fastest digger. When Stanley wonders about this, Zigzag informs him that the Warden watches them all the time with hidden microphones and cameras. Stanley figures that's why X-Ray wouldn't talk to him in the morning and he was afraid they'd be overheard. Since everyone has been pulled to the area where X-Ray was digging, Stanley memorizes exactly which of the hundreds of holes he was in when he found the gold tube.

X-Ray is energetic and triumphant that night when the other boys come back and he makes a place for the Caveman sitting next to him. The next day, everyone returns to the site and the boys again pair up, some digging, and some carting dirt away in wheelbarrows. The Warden watches them and tries to get them to dig faster, but nothing else is found.

That night, Stanley gets a letter from home and X-Ray tells everyone to leave him alone and let him have privacy, since it might be from his girlfriend. Zero watches Stanley read his letter, though, and when Stanley tries to explain to Zero that his mom said their apartment smelled almost as bad as the "old woman in the shoe," Zero has no idea what he's talking about. Zero has never heard any nursery rhymes.

Part 1: Chapters 14, 15, and 16 Analysis

Stanley's status in the group is increasing. X-Ray talks to him and makes him look better in the eyes of the others by saying he might have a girlfriend.

Stanley is apparently the only one getting letters from home and appreciates his mother telling him that she's proud of him for making the best of a bad situation. The reader begins to get insights into the lives of the other boys. Zero has never heard nursery rhymes. Squid can't believe that Stanley's mother writes to him.



Part 1: Chapters 17, 18, and 19

Part 1: Chapters 17, 18, and 19 Summary

The Warden loses interest in the digging project since nothing else has been found in the area where X-Ray supposedly found the gold tube. The Warden thinks that Squid and Armpit haven't been working hard enough because she comes to check on them while Armpit is on a bathroom break and she pokes him with her pitchfork. When the poking draws blood, she tells Mr. Pendanski that he's giving the boys too much water.

The boys have dug each of the three holes into one giant hole where they're all working together. Stanley is digging when Zigzag hits him on the side of the head with a shovel, giving him a big gash. Zigzag tells him that he isn't digging in the dirt that Stanley has already dug up. Mr. Sir bandages Stanley's wound with a torn piece of sunflower seed sack and tells him to go back to work. Zigzag again threatens Stanley and tells him that he can't put his dirt where Zigzag has to dig.

The camp routine gets back to normal and the boys are all taken to a different section of the camp where each one digs his own hole. Stanley notices that he's much stronger than when he came. Stanley's muscles don't hurt, his hands are tougher, and although he's still a slow digger, he's not much behind Magnet. Stanley continues to write his parents, pretending that Camp Green Lake is offering him "fun and games." Zero watches him write and when Stanley tells him he doesn't like it when he reads over his shoulder, Zero replies that he can't read and asks Stanley to teach him. Zero explains that he doesn't have to teach him to write since he has no one to write to, just to read, but Stanley says no.

Stanley finds Squid crying one night, but Squid denies anything is wrong. For the most part, Stanley keeps to himself because he recognizes that while he's getting along okay, the boys are dangerous. Stanley also thinks about race. Three of the boys are black, three are white, and one is Hispanic, but because they are all dirty, they all look the same anyway.

One day, Magnet steals a bag of sunflower seeds from Mr. Sir when he comes to deliver water. Magnet got his name because of how his fingers attract things. When the boys throw Stanley the bag of seeds, which he didn't even want, the seeds spill into his hole. Once again, Stanley is in the "wrong place at the wrong time," since the water truck comes back. Mr. Sir catches Stanley with the sack in his hole, but instead of telling on Magnet, he says he did it himself and he is taken back to camp.

Part 1: Chapters 17, 18, and 19 Analysis

The boys become more real as we see their character traits and qualities. Squid cries at night sometimes but doesn't want anyone to know. Zero can't read and Stanley is not sympathetic or helpful to Zero, refusing to teach him. Stanley also has taken the blame

for something Magnet did, probably because he knew it would be far worse to rat on the other boy than to take it on himself.

For the first time, the racial make-up of the group is discussed, but because they are all in the same place and have the same punishment - and because dirt and hard work make them all look the same - race is not a problem.



Part 1: Chapters 20, 21, and 22

Part 1: Chapters 20, 21, and 22 Summary

Mr. Sir takes Stanley to the Warden for stealing his sunflower seeds. The Warden asks Stanley to bring her the small make-up case from her dressing room. From the case, she takes a bottle of deep red nail polish and begins painting her nails, explaining that the nail polish has a secret ingredient of rattlesnake venom, which is poisonous when it's wet. When the Warden asks Mr. Sir if he thinks Caveman stole his seeds, he says that he thinks it was someone else and Stanley is just covering up. The Warden tells Mr. Sir that she doesn't care about his sunflower seeds and then she slaps Mr. Sir really hard with her wet fingernails, drawing blood, and allowing the poison to rush in. Mr. Sir screams and the Warden sends Stanley back to his hole, telling him that Mr. Sir won't die, "unfortunately for you."

Stanley compares himself to his great-grandfather who had been left in the desert by Kissing Kate Barlow, but had survived seventeen days and was rescued, insane, saying that he survived by finding refuge on "God's thumb." Stanley almost steps on a rattlesnake before returning to the holes where the other boys greet him. Stanley finds his hole has already been dug and assumes that the other boys have dug it for him, but it was only Zero who helped him. That night, Stanley asks Zero why he'd helped him and Zero admits it was because he knew that he didn't steal the seeds or the sneakers. Stanley thinks that Zero must be the one with X-Ray vision, but he offers to teach him to read as a thank-you. During their first session, Stanley realizes that Zero is very good at math since he figures out very quickly that you have to learn the shapes and sounds of 52 letters (a capital and small for all 26) and that he comes up with a system for how many letters to learn each day. Zero offers to dig a part of Stanley's hole every day, an hour of digging for an hour of Stanley's teaching. Zero tells Stanley that he's not stupid but doesn't like to answer questions.

Stanley realizes that the gold tube he found and gave to X-Ray is half a lipstick tube just like his mother and the warden have, and it dawns on him that the initials K.B. match the name Kate Barlow.

Part 1: Chapters 20, 21, and 22 Analysis

The character of the Warden is emphasized. The Warden is cruel and vindictive and she takes delight in harming others. The Warden's character and her position of authority tie in with the theme of justice and injustice in the book. Is it right that someone so mean is in charge of a camp where she has ultimate power and is supposed to be "reforming" these boys?



Part 1: Chapters 23, 24, 25, and 26

Part 1: Chapters 23, 24, 25, and 26 Summary

The story shifts back briefly to Camp Green Lake 110 years before when Katherine Barlow was the town's only schoolteacher, much loved by her students and praised for her spiced peaches. Trout Walker was the son of a rich family and was named Trout because his feet smelled like dead fish. Trout was after Katherine, but Katherine refused his attentions and made him mad.

The story flips back to modern times and we see Mr. Sir at breakfast the next morning with his face horribly swollen and discolored. Mr. Sir physically abuses the boy from another tent who asks what happened. Stanley doesn't say anything, but when Mr. Sir comes to fill the canteens that day, he pretends as if he's pouring water for Stanley, but he purposely pours it onto the ground. Stanley has no choice other than to thank Mr. Sir and continue working without water.

Once again, the story goes back to Camp Green Lake. We meet Sam, The Onion Man, a big strong man with a donkey named Mary Lou who is supposed to be 50 years old. Sam claims that Mary Lou has never been sick because she only eats onions. The local people go to Sam, as well as the town doctor, Dr. Hawthorne, for "cures" when they're sick, and Sam gives something made of onions. No one knows whether it's the onion medicine or the doctor's treatments that cure people. Katherine asks Sam to help make repairs on the schoolhouse in exchange for her famous spiced peaches and Sam does. The two like each other, but Sam is black and cannot go to school, he can only fix it. Katherine runs out of chores for Sam to do and is brokenhearted because she's afraid they won't see each other any more. They kiss, only to be discovered by Hattie Parker, a woman coming out of the general store, who says, "God will punish you!"

The news that Katherine Barlow kissed Sam, a black man, spreads through town. Trout Walker revs up the crowd who burns down the schoolhouse. Katherine runs to the sheriff's office for help, but the sheriff, who's been drinking whiskey, only wants Katherine to kiss him. When Kate refuses, the sheriff tells her he "always gets drunk before a hanging," and it's against the law for a black man to kiss a white woman. Katherine runs to find Sam. Sam tearfully leaves his faithful Mary Lou behind and gets Katherine into his boat. Trout Walker overtakes them in his new motorboat and Sam is killed in the water. Katherine is taken back to jail, finding that Mary Lou has been shot in the head. No rain has fallen on Camp Green Lake since that dreadful day. Shortly after Katherine is brought back, she kills the drunken sheriff, puts lipstick on, kisses him, and becomes the outlaw "Kissing Kate Barlow" for the next twenty years.



Part 1: Chapters 23, 24, 25, and 26 Analysis

Ideas about crime and punishment run throughout the novel. Katherine Barlow becomes an outlaw, but it's easy to understand her actions. Can you understand her shift from a good schoolteacher to a famous outlaw? The story about Camp Green Lake of the past parallels Camp Green Lake of the modern time, and is set up as a kind of parallel to make the reader question whether the boys who are serving time, like Katherine, had understandable causes for their problems.

Notice that Hattie Parker points to Katherine and Sam and says, "God will punish you!" The author means for the reader to deal with this question of punishment, because he promptly states, "You make the decision. Whom did God punish?" The whole idea of punishment ties in directly to the idea of justice.

The racial issues that Stanley says aren't present between the boys at Camp Green Lake of modern times are definitely a problem 110 years ago.

Camp Green Lake itself mirrors the bigger correctional system and puts into question how much authority any one person should have, and what happens if the person in charge is found to be corrupt?



Part 1: Chapters 27, 28, and 29

Part 1: Chapters 27, 28, and 29 Summary

Stanley continues working with less water than usual since Mr. Sir continues to pour his share of the water onto the ground. Mr. Pendanski, though, gives Stanley extra because he knows what is happening. Stanley's situation is improved because Zero is digging an hour every day for him, but this fact makes the other boys mad. The boys try to pull the race card, saying that it's always true that a black kid like Zero works for a white kid like Stanley. The group says that it doesn't matter that Stanley took the blame; it was his fault for spilling them. Mr. Sir finally fills Stanley's canteen, but he goes into the cab of the truck to do so, and Stanley never drinks from it, pouring it on the ground instead, because he's afraid of what Mr. Sir has done to it. Stanley teaches Zero to read and write every night for at least an hour, and Zero tells Stanley that his name isn't really Zero, even though that's what he's always been called. Zero's name is Hector Zeroni.

The story switches back to the long-ago Camp Green Lake. After 20 years, Kate Barlow came back because no one and nothing was left there. The town was all dried up. The only thing left were a couple of tiny oak trees and a cabin by the empty lake. One day, Trout Walker and his redheaded wife come back. Trout's wife is Linda Miller, a fourth grade student of Katherine's who had married Trout for his money, but who had seen everything go wrong when the town dried up. Trout and Linda threaten Kate to try to get her to show them where all the loot that she stole over the last twenty years is buried, but Kate refuses and tells them that no matter how much they dig over the next hundred years, they'll never find it.

Trout and Linda force Katherine outside at gunpoint and make her walk barefoot through the desert. A yellow-toothed lizard bites her ankle and Kate Barlow dies laughing without revealing where she buried her loot.

Part 1: Chapters 27, 28, and 29 Analysis

Mr. Sir is, like the Warden, mean and spiteful, and becomes an important issue in the book. Who is fit to delegate punishment? The character of the leaders of the camp, the Warden and Mr. Sir in particular, causes us to wonder how such corrupt people are placed in charge.

The yellow-spotted lizards' real power is obvious in that they really DO kill people. Kate Barlow was one of their victims.

The physical appearance of the characters in the story is important. Note that both Linda Miller Walker and the Warden have red hair. The history of Camp Green Lake ties into the present time, and the idea is that each action in the past has an impact on the present.



Part 2: Chapters 29 and 30

Part 2: Chapters 29 and 30 Summary

As the boys work, a storm blows up far away, and when the lightning strikes against the dark sky, Stanley catches a glimpse of a rock on top of the mountain that looks like a fist with a big thumb sticking out. Stanley then remembers his grandfather saying that "he took refuge on God's thumb" after being robbed by Kate Barlow and left in the desert.

Zigzag celebrates a birthday and Zero again proves his mathematical ability by figuring out the number of days Stanley has been at the camp, 46. Stanley is stronger and the holes aren't as hard to dig as he once felt they were, especially since Zero is digging an hour a day for him. Zigzag comes over and accuses Stanley of using Zero as a slave and taunts Stanley, asking him if Caveman will "let" Zigzag dig for him. When Mr. Pendanski delivers water, Zigzag mockingly offers Stanley his place in line since Stanley is supposedly so much better than all the rest of them. X-Ray, too, joins in the taunts and makes Stanley move up in line. Zigzag and Squid come to Stanley's hole and start a fight by pleading with Stanley to eat their cookies. When Stanley pushes the cookie away, Zigzag accuses him of pushing him. Mr. Pendanski has seen the whole thing and knows that Zigzag is causing trouble. Mr. Pendanski tells Stanley to hit Zigzag back. Stanley's not very good at fighting and Zigzag easily gets the best of Stanley, until Zero gets his arm around Zigzag's neck and all three roll around fighting.

Mr. Pendanski breaks up the fight by firing his pistol and causing the other counselors to come running. Mr. Pendanski calls it a "riot," and blames it on Zero who was choking Zigzag. When the Warden comes out to find out what happened, X-Ray tries to smooth things over saying that everyone just got a little hot. Zigzag takes the opportunity to say he just got hot because Caveman is sitting around doing nothing. When the Warden discovers that Zero is digging part of Caveman's holes in exchange for lessons in reading and writing, the Warden and Mr. Pendanski question Zero about letters and how to spell words. Zero hesitantly answers, but when asked about sounds he hasn't learned, he answers incorrectly, and Mr. Pendanski makes fun of him saying, "You might as well teach this shovel to read." The Warden and Mr. Pendanski tell Stanley that not only does he have to dig his own holes from now on, but that any kind of lessons are forbidden. Mr. Pendanski says that it causes Zero too much stress and that the only thing he'll ever be able to do is dig holes.

At the last insult, Zero swings his shovel and strikes Mr. Pendanski in the face before he backs away. Even though Zero had previously said that he liked digging holes, he now admits he hates digging holes. The Warden says not to shoot him since they don't need an investigation, the counselors figure that Zero will return since there's nowhere to run, and he'll run out of water and food. The boys are punished by having to dig seven holes a day instead of just their own.



Stanley is angry at everyone, but mostly at himself because he thinks he should have been teaching Zero for free, without requiring him to dig a part of his hole everyday. No one helps Stanley dig Zero's hole, so he has to dig two holes that day. Stanley thinks about how to approach the Warden to help Zero, but he can't figure anything out. Stanley waits another day when the Warden, Mr. Sir, and Mr. Pendanski ask him questions about Zero. When Stanley admits that Zero has no family, the Warden instructs the two counselors to destroy all of Zero's records and get into the state computers to erase any evidence that he was ever there.

Part 2: Chapters 29 and 30 Analysis

The unrest and violence of a juvenile detention center become real in this chapter as Zigzag acts on his bitterness and jealousy to cause trouble. Mr. Pendanski, the authority and counselor of the group, seems to be fair and compassionate most of the time, but for some reason he has a definite dislike and "attitude" toward Zero, making us wonder what it is that causes such feelings.

Is Mr. Pendanski prejudiced against Zero because of his name or because of his reluctance to answer his questions? What causes people to be cruel to another person?

Again, the themes of crime and punishment, justice and injustice are evident. Zero commits the crime of striking out against Mr. Pendanski, but only after being insulted and berated. Are such actions justifiable?

Another idea that's repeated is that things aren't always as they appear. Zero, who is good at digging holes, may not really like doing it. Mr. Pendanski, who appears kind and courteous, does not act that way to everyone. The authorities at the camp are not what they should be since they are not focusing on helping or rehabilitating the boys and are willing to let Zero die as long as they aren't found out.

The repetition of "taking refuge on God's thumb," is an element of foreshadowing important to future events.



Part 2: Chapters 32, 33, and 34

Part 2: Chapters 32, 33, and 34 Summary

A new boy comes to Group D, sentenced to camp because he stole a car. The boy's name is Brian, but everyone calls him Twitch because he fidgets a lot. Stanley keeps thinking about Zero and the fact that he should be trying to help him. That day, the power of suggestion starts to work because Stanley feels his own fingers start to twitch when the truck comes for the water break. Stanley jumps into the truck and floors it, listening to Twitch tell him to "put it into gear!" Stanley drives the truck, the first time he's ever driven, and goes straight into a hole. Stanley gets out and takes off running with his empty canteen.

Stanley keeps walking across the desert in the hopes of finding Zero. Stanley is amazed at the number of holes that exist and actually has to jump over some holes harboring lots of yellow-spotted lizards. Stanley is very thirsty but keeps walking and sees ahead of him a rock that looks like a fist with a thumb sticking up. Stanley is encouraged by the "thumbs-up" sign. Walking on the dried-up lakebed, he comes to an upside down boat with the words "Mary Lou" painted on it. As he stands there beside it, an arm reaches up and drags him down.

Part 2: Chapters 32, 33, and 34 Analysis

The "thumbs-up" sign is a symbol of encouragement and helps Stanley keep going. The sign also ties into the historic story of Stanley's great-grandfather and the connection between past and present.

Stanley feels guilty about his selfishness and refusal to teach Zero without pay, but probably also because he likes Zero and understands something about him. No one else knows that Zero can't read or write, so Stanley knows him more about him than anyone else. Zero's situation emphasizes the importance of education as he's labeled as a "zero" because people think he can't do anything. Learning how to read and write is so important to Zero that he's willing to work digging holes an extra hour every day - an especially big effort since we find out he hates digging holes.



Part 2: Chapters 35, 36, 37, and 38

Part 2: Chapters 35, 36, 37, and 38 Summary

Zero has been hiding underneath the boat when Stanley comes by. Stanley tries to get Zero to go back to camp to get food and water, but Zero refuses, offering Stanley some "sploosh" instead. Zero has found sixteen jars buried under the boat. The "sploosh" has been there probably a hundred years or more, and it's mushy and sweet, tasting a little like fruit. Stanley discovers that Zero has shared his last jar of "sploosh" with him and tells him they have to go back to get help. When he says that they'll let Zero go to the hospital like Barf Bag, Zero tells Stanley that Barf Bag intentionally stepped on a rattlesnake taking his shoes and socks off first.

Zero is very sick to his stomach from drinking all the sploosh. Stanley is worried and again tries to convince Zero to come back to camp, but Zero says he'd rather die first. When nothing else works, Stanley asks Zero if he sees anything on the mountain. Zero gives him the "thumbs-up" sign. The boys decide to head for the top of the mountain and pack up some empty jars and Zero's shovel before they start walking. Stanley warns Zero that he is not a lucky guy, but Zero thinks that heading for the mountain is the best plan. Zero says, "When you spend your whole life living in a hole, the only way you can go is up."

The sploosh is making Zero really sick, but he continues on, never complaining. No matter how many times he falls down and no matter how many times he groans from the pain, he continues to get up and keep walking. As they're walking, to keep Zero's mind off the pain, Stanley gives him words to spell. Stanley knows that however much pain he's having, Zero is much worse, and as long as he can keep going, so can Stanley. Stanley's main fear about dying is how hard it would be for his parents. Stanley knows that the Warden will not be able to get rid of him as easily as she did Zero since Stanley has a family who cares about what happens to him.

To help keep Zero going, Stanley gives him encouragement by saying there's probably an Italian restaurant on top of the mountain and they joke about what kind of food is waiting for them. The climbing gets harder and harder. Stanley pushes Zero up to rock ledges, and then Zero holds the shovel for Stanley to use as a handle to get up. Stanley is surprised at how much stronger he is than he used to be, but even with his increased strength, Zero has gashes in his hands from having to hold the shovel blade while Stanley got up to the rock ledge.

Zero is violently ill, throwing up all the sploosh, and then continues on concentrating on spelling words. Zero finally gives out. Stanley picks him up and keeps going, barely able to continue. There is a bad smell up there and even though he knows there's not much hope, he continues carrying Zero towards the thumb of the rock. However, he falls before he gets there and lands in a muddy gully. Stanley is able to dig a hole in the muddy ground and find dirty water to drink. Stanley gives Zero water and then finds an



onion buried in the mud. Stanley eats half and gives Zero the other half, telling him that it's a hot fudge sundae.

Part 2: Chapters 35, 36, 37, and 38 Analysis

In this section, we see the strength and friendship of both of these boys, an insight into the true worth of people. While Stanley may have been picked on at school, and while people thought Zero was dumb, neither perception is true. (Remember the continuing theme that "things aren't always what they're perceived to be.") Both boys demonstrate courage, loyalty, and strength in their willingness to help each other. Neither will give up nor complain. The boys both demonstrate intelligence and resourcefulness in planning to take the shovel and the glass jars to use as tools in case they need them.

There's a bond between the two boys who joke with each other about the possibility of restaurant food being on top of the mountain, and in doing so, they demonstrate that humor is a good survival strategy.

Climbing to the "thumbs-up" rock and finding water and food - even though it is an onion- provides a real-life example of "taking refuge on God's thumb," as Stanley's great-grandfather had once said.



Part 2: Chapters 39, 40, and 41

Part 2: Chapters 39, 40, and 41 Summary

Stanley and Zero are alive, but Zero is still very sick. Stanley thinks that maybe if he had the shovel and the glass jars that he left down the mountain when he picked up Zero that they could have more water, maybe even a little cleaner water. However, he doesn't have the strength to start out immediately and is afraid that Zero will die while he's gone. Zero begins to talk to Stanley, telling him that he is the one who took Clyde Livingston's tennis shoes. Stanley thinks Zero is delirious and as he drifts off to sleep, Stanley begins to sing the lullaby that his father always sang to him, "If only, if only, the woodpecker sighs....."

The boys are resting right below the giant tower of rock and as Stanley goes to examine it, he finds flowers. Stanley digs up one of the flowers, finds an onion, and realizes that they are in an onion field.

The story shifts back to the story of Camp Green Lake 110 years ago. The story tells of how Gladys Tennyson ran after Sam, the Onion Man, telling him that his onion tonic saved her daughter. Mrs. Tennyson was normally a very proper woman, but on that particular morning, she still had on her nightgown in her rush to tell Sam about what his medicine had done. Hattie Parker insults Mrs. Tennyson for going out in public dressed this way, but Mrs. Tennyson announces that her daughter had eaten bad meat and become deathly sick. Since Hattie Parker was the butcher's wife, she was embarrassed.

Going back to Stanley and Zero, we find that they are in the meadow of onions, resting and sleeping. The boys are drinking dirty water and eating as many onions as they want. The big rock tower gives them shade and keeps them cool. Zero is better, and since Stanley doesn't think that his friend is going to die, he goes back down to recover the shovel and jars. Stanley can't believe what a long, long way he carried Zero up, much farther than he had ever imagined.

As they continue to recover, they show their resourcefulness by washing their socks in the jars so they don't contaminate their drinking water, and Stanley has expanded the water hole. Zero and Stanley begin sharing a lot about their backgrounds. Zero's mother was once a girl scout, but at some point, he was left by himself. Zero lived on his own, only going to homeless shelters when the weather was bad. Zero slept outside and pretended he was a cub scout. Zero and his mother stole from other people, but Zero always just thought that they were taking what they needed, so when he needed a pair of shoes, he took Clyde Livingston's from the shelter, not knowing they were famous. Then he left them on top of a parked car so that he wouldn't get caught. Zero was arrested the next day when he stole a new pair of sneakers from a store.



Part 2: Chapters 39, 40, and 41 Analysis

This section provides insight into Zero's life and we find that he was a kid, living on the streets, abandoned by his mother, and was stealing just enough to get by. Zero didn't want to be a "ward of the state" even though he didn't know what it meant. What he doesn't know is that he is "a ward of the state."

Zero and Stanley's lives interconnect. Stanley is being punished for a crime Zero committed. Zero knows that Stanley didn't steal the shoes - just as Zero knew that Stanley didn't steal the sunflower seeds that he was blamed for, and this knowledge makes Zero befriend Stanley.

The legend of Elya Yelnats, Stanley's great, great grandfather ties into the present-day story. Elya was told to carry the piglet up the mountain every day, letting it drink from the stream, and singing it the "if only," song. This daily task made Elya much stronger since the pig got bigger every day and since it was a long way to the mountaintop. The idea is similar to the philosophy of Camp Green Lake. If you have to dig a hole every day, you will get stronger in both body and character. Stanley, like Elya, does get much stronger and more physically fit.



Part 2: Chapters 42, 43, and 44

Part 2: Chapters 42, 43, and 44 Summary

The boys continue to survive and get stronger on top of the mountain. Stanley even recognizes that for the first time in his life he is happy because he has a friend and he likes himself. Stanley begins to plan a trip back to Camp Green Lake to look for the treasure he believes Kissing Kate Barlow buried and which he thinks was located near the lipstick tube that he found in his hole. Stanley figures that he and Zero were destined to meet, and since they are going to be fugitives after escaping from camp, they might as well be rich ones.

As they make preparations to go back down the mountain, Zero tells Stanley about his childhood. Zero's family had a home at one time and Zero remembers his mother singing the same song that Stanley had sung. Stanley remembers that his mother's last letter had said they might be evicted because of the bad smell in their apartment, and he realizes that he could end up in a situation similar to Zero's.

The preparations continue with the boys packing onions and water and planning to leave at daylight so they could arrive back at Camp before dark. The boy's plan is to dig in the hole where Stanley found the lipstick tube and Zero will sneak into the kitchen and steal some food and water.

Making their way down the mountain, both boys make a show of being strong, refusing to drink any water before the other one, and finally, they agree to drink at the same time. Zero continues telling Stanley about his mother who just left one day and never came back. Zero's mother told him to wait in a certain place, and he had a stuffed animal, a giraffe named Jaffy, that he held onto for comfort while he waited. Zero waited more than a month for her at Laney Park, sleeping in the tunnel you crawl through on the playground. One mother saw him one day watching a kid's party, told him to go away, and he was so scared he left Jaffy. When Stanley asks if Zero ever found Jaffy, Zero admits that Jaffy wasn't real.

Zero is able to make sure they find the right way back to the correct hole by making a diagram and the boys arrive at camp, just out of sight of the daily activities. When the boys return to their tents, Zero and Stanley climb into holes to wait for darkness when they'll get into the right hole and start digging for treasure. The boys follow through with their plan. Stanley begins to dig while Zero goes to the kitchen and gets cereal and fresh water. Finally, after digging in the total darkness, the shovel hits something and Stanley and Zero pull out a big metal case. Just as they unearth it, a light comes into the hole and the Warden thanks them for their help.



Part 2: Chapters 42, 43, and 44 Analysis

This section of the book helps us see Zero in a very sympathetic light. Here's a young child who is waiting for his mother to return, but she never does. Zero waits a month, sleeping in a tunnel on a playground, with his only comfort an imaginary stuffed animal. Stanley sees that all families can suffer misfortunes and he thinks about his own parents' struggle to make enough money to keep their smelly apartment.

Stanley's strength and his ability to survive, coupled with his new friendship with Zero, give him happiness. Even though they're living on their own, existing on onions and muddy water, Stanley has a moment of sheer happiness.

The boys again demonstrate their resourcefulness and intelligence in making a plan, carrying it out, and getting safely back down to camp. The boys also find the treasure they've set out to find, only to be discovered by the Warden. Instead of being happy they are alive and have returned to Camp, the Warden sarcastically thanks them for their help.



Part 2: Chapters 45, 46, and 47

Part 2: Chapters 45, 46, and 47 Summary

Just as the Warden comes toward Stanley in his hole, she stops. The boys are surrounded by deadly yellow-spotted lizards. Stanley is actually standing in a lizard nest. The counselors begin talking about someone who is going to ask a lot of questions. The Warden doesn't care what happens as long as she has the suitcase. The leaders stand there, waiting for the boys to die from the lizard bites.

Mr. Pendanski says that maybe they should just shoot the lizards since the boys are going to die anyway and it won't matter since there are plenty of graves to dig them in. The group comes up with a story that Stanley was crazy and delirious and that's why he couldn't have been released. The counselors shout down to Stanley that he might like to know that he is innocent before he dies. Stanley's lawyer had come to camp to get him out. Stanley isn't really paying attention because he is thinking about his mother and playing with her in the snow since that's what he wants to be his last memory. Even with lizards swarming all around them, Zero gives Stanley the "thumbs-up" sign.

Zero and Stanley stand in the hole with the lizards for several more hours and all the while Zero is sounding out letters, finally asking Stanley if he spells his last name like he spells his first name, only backwards. Cars arrive, and a woman and man come to the side of the hole. The woman claims that she is Stanley's attorney. The Warden says that the boys snuck into her cabin and stole her suitcase before falling into the lizard's hole. The boys finally climb out of the hole, realizing the lizards are not going to bite them now since they haven't done it all night. The Warden rushes up to Zero hugging him and grabbing the suitcase, threatening to press more charges against Stanley for theft until Zero says that the suitcase belongs to Stanley. The name on the case does, indeed, spell Stanley Yelnats.

Part 2: Chapters 45, 46, and 47 Analysis

The foreshadowing of the yellow-spotted lizards is played out in full as the boys' lives are threatened by the deadly reptiles.

Stanley's efforts to teach Zero to read end up helping him and Zero is able to prove that he is not dumb, but actually capable of outsmarting the Warden. Since the Warden has accused Stanley of stealing this case from her cabin, it becomes obvious that she is the liar and thief, not him. After all, the case does have his name on it.



Part 2: Chapters 48 and 49

Part 2: Chapters 48 and 49 Summary

The woman who comes to the camp is Mrs. Morengo, Stanley's lawyer, and she is accompanied by a tall man who is the Attorney General of Texas. The Warden says that Stanley put her stuff into his case and that she has to check it before he leaves in case he's put drugs or weapons in it, but the lawyer declares that since Stanley has been released, he is not under the control of the Warden anymore and she rushes him away. However, Stanley won't go without Zero who is putting on a brave face and giving the "thumbs-up" sign. All the boys, except X-Ray, come out to greet Zero and Stanley, and even Zigzag apologizes to Stanley. Stanley refuses to budge without Zero, and when Ms. Morengo sees that Stanley really won't go home unless Zero can come too, she demands to see Zero's records. The Warden, having had them destroyed, can't produce any paperwork. When the Attorney General goes to find his records in the computerized files, he too, comes up empty. With no records of any kind, there is no authority to hold him in Camp and Zero leaves camp with Stanley and Ms. Morengo. The Warden is disgraced because she is not running the camp as it should be run.

Chapter 49 starts out with a brief look back to the original Camp Green Lake. The story is that rattlesnake hunters sought out Sam's onion juice because yellow-spotted lizards don't like it.

Stanley and Zero drive home with Ms. Morengo, a patent attorney for Stanley's dad's new product. The attorney had investigated Stanley's situation and was able to find witnesses who could claim that Stanley was in the boy's bathroom at 3:20. The witness was Derrick Dunne and some other girls also saw Stanley as he was coming out of the restroom carrying a wet notebook. The shoes were stolen at 3:15, so it couldn't have been Stanley. Stanley's father has found a product that eliminates food odor that smells a little like peaches. On the way home, for the first time in more than a hundred years, it begins to rain over the dry lakebed.

Part 2: Chapters 48 and 49 Analysis

The historical story of Camp Green Lake continues to affect the modern-day Camp Green Lake. When Kissing Kate Barlow buried treasure in the first Stanley Yelnat's case, no one could have imagined that his great-grandson, Stanley Yelnats IV, would find it. Warden Walker is the descendent of Linda Miller Walker, the wife of "Trout." The onion juice that Sam developed must have really worked because those hungry, dangerous, yellow-toothed lizards had no interest in Stanley and Zero, who had eaten nothing but onions for weeks.

Stanley and Zero have a strong friendship. Stanley refuses to leave without Zero and Zero encourages Stanley when he's being released by giving the thumb's-up sign. The



loyalty between them produces rewards. When Stanley won't leave without Zero, the Warden and her staff are caught for destroying records - an act which frees Zero from their power.

The theme of "justice" has been an important one throughout the book. Here, the good guys win. Stanley and Zero's fortunes are turned for the better all because Stanley Yelnats carried Hector Zeroni up the mountain and erased Elya Yelnats' forgotten promise to carry Madame Zeroni up the mountain, let her drink from the stream, and sing her the lullaby.



Part 3: Chapter 50

Part 3: Chapter 50 Summary

The scene is Stanley's house and there's a large party going on. Stanley and Hector are there with lots of adults who are watching the Super Bowl. At a commercial break, everyone stops to watch Clyde "Sweet Feet" Livingston on camera as he slides into base and is pronounced, "Safe." Clyde tells the audience that he used to have smelly feet, but now, thanks to a great new product made from natural ingredients that fight fungus and bacteria, he truly does have Sweet Feet. The product, invented by Stanley's father the day after Stanley carried Zero up the mountain, is called Sploosh, and smells a little like peaches. The best part is that Clyde and his wife are actually friends with Stanley's family and they sit on his sofa. Clyde even tells Stanley to cover his wife's mouth when she continues to talk about how REALLY bad Clyde's feet smelled before "Sploosh."

The suitcases contain the fortune of the first Stanley Yelnats, about \$20,000 in jewels and almost two million dollars in stocks and deeds and notes. Each boy got about a million dollars. Stanley bought his family a home with a laboratory in the basement and Hector found his mother with the help of the private detectives he was able to hire. Everyone is there at the Super Bowl party, and the last line of the book is of Hector's mother, who admittedly is worn-looking and tired, humming the same song that Stanley sang, only with the slightly different words that she had learned from her Latvian ancestors, starting with Madame Zeroni.

Part 3: Chapter 50 Analysis

All the wrongs of the past are corrected. Hector and Stanley have made a better life for themselves, having overcome some tremendous obstacles. There is hope for Hector and his mother who are once again united and can now live together.



Characters

Stanley Yelnats IV

Stanley Yelnats is the fourth of a long line of men named Stanley Yelnats, a name that is spelled the same backwards as it is forward. Stanley is an overweight, middle-school boy from a poor but loving family, who is teased and ridiculed by his classmates. As Stanley walks under an underpass, a pair of fancy tennis shoes drops down on him, and since Stanley knows this pair of shoes would be helpful to his dad, he takes them home, only to be accused of stealing them from a famous baseball player who had donated them to a charity auction. Stanley, innocent but without means to defend himself, takes the Court-appointed punishment of going to Camp Green Lake. Stanley's life at the camp and the relationships with the other boys, results in a stronger body, and, for the first time in his life, a true friendship with a boy named Zero.

Stanley works hard to avoid trouble, "makes the best of a bad situation," and in so doing, develops different kinds of relationships with each of the boys in Group D at camp. Stanley gains physical strength from digging, and uses his mental powers to figure out different approaches to problems. Stanley is steadfast and never gives up, always encouraging Zero at the worst times, and actually rescuing Zero from Camp because he is loyal to him and won't leave him there. The hard work and positive attitude that Stanley has contributes to the turn-around of the family's luck.

Mrs. Bell

Stanley's math teacher at the middle school who unintentionally embarrassed him by using him to illustrate the principles of ratios. Stanley and the lightest kid in the class were utilized to demonstrate the 3 to 1 ratio....Stanley being three times heavier than the lightest kid in class.

Stanley Yelnats III

Stanley Yelnats III is Stanley's father, a well-meaning inventor who "never has any luck," and struggles to support his family with his bumbling explorations into "tennis-shoe recycling." Miraculously, he keeps a positive attitude always saying, "I learn from failure."

Stanley Yelnats I

Stanley's great grandfather who made a fortune in the stock market, only to have it stolen on his way West when it was taken from the stagecoach by the bandit Kissing Kate Barlow.



Kissing Kate Barlow

The woman bandit known for kissing her victims who stole Stanley Yelnat I's fortune.

Mr. Sir

Mr. Sir is one of the two adult chaperones at Camp Green Lake. Mr. Sir has a tattoo of a rattlesnake on his arm, is constantly chewing on sunflower seeds - a habit he started when he quit smoking, and frequently reminds the boys that Camp Green Lake is "not for Girl Scouts." Mr. Sir is not kind or caring about the boys. The man does his job, delivers water when necessary, and monitors the activities of the boys, but he has a mean streak, clearly demonstrated when he denies Stanley water because of what the warden has done to Mr. Sir.

Mr. Pendanski

Younger than Mr. Sir, he has a thick black beard and a balding head. Mr. Pendanski takes the role of "counselor," hoping to rehabilitate the boys and make them productive members of society. Mr. Pendanski tries to teach the boys manners, gives them encouragement, and makes a point of calling the boys by their given names instead of by their nicknames. The boys call Mr. Pendanski, "Mom," but like the Warden, Mr. Pendanski isn't as nice as he seems. Mr. Pendanski makes derogatory comments about Zero and humiliates him, trying to blame him for the "riot."

Squid / Alan

A white kid in Stanley's Work Group D, who Stanley finds crying and tries to comfort one night. Squid also asks Stanley to contact his mother and tell her that "Alan" is sorry.

X-ray / Rex

Another boy in Work Group D, X-Ray wears thick glasses, often covered with dirt. The name X-Ray is really pig Latin for his real name, Rex, and is an almost cruel nickname since X-Ray is nearly blind and can't see anything. Even so, X-Ray is the most powerful in the hierarchy of boys, always the first in line and the one who makes decisions. One of the three black boys.

Barf Bag

The boy who had Stanley's cot before Stanley arrived. Since the cot smelled like old, sour milk, the meaning of the nickname "Barf Bag" became evident to Stanley.



Magnet / Jose

A boy in Work Group D who is appropriately called "Magnet" because he has sticky fingers and steals objects, like Mr. Sir's bag of sunflower seeds.

Theodore / Armpit

Besides Stanley, he's the biggest boy in Work Group D; he is always willing to do whatever X-Ray says. One of the three black boys.

Zigzag / Ricky

Another fellow member of Work Group D who has frizzy, wild blond hair and a huge head sitting on a long skinny neck.

Zero / Hector

Zero is the boy in Work Group D who always finishes digging his hole first. Everyone calls him "Zero" because they think he is dumb and can do nothing. However, Zero simply can't read because he never got to go to school because his mother left him at home one day, and he had to fend for himself. Zero asks Stanley to teach him to read in exchange for an hour of hole digging every day. One of the three black boys.

Clyde "Sweet Feet" Livingston

A famous baseball player who donates a pair of beautiful tennis shoes to an auction to raise money for poor children. These are the same shoes that fall on Stanley's head and which get him accused of robbery. The shoes don't smell very good, illustrating that the nickname "Sweet Feet" is the exact opposite of reality.

Derrick Dunne

A school bully who picked on Stanley. Derrick is much smaller than Stanley and so even when Stanley complained to the teachers, they didn't believe that Derrick could have been a menace to a big kid like Stanley. Derrick stole Stanley's notebook from him and threw it into the toilet the day that Stanley was arrested for the tennis-shoe theft. Stanley had missed the bus while getting his notebook out of the toilet and had to walk home.



Elya Yelnats

The first in a long line of male Yelnats that began in Latvia, Elya is responsible for the curse on the family because he did not fulfill his promise to Madame Zeroni and carry her up the mountain to drink from the stream after he had fattened his pig.

Myra Menke

The beautiful but empty-headed young woman in Latvia who Elya wants to court. Myra is the reason Elya wants a fattened pig. Myra, however, isn't smart enough to recognize that he loves her, and that this emotion is worth more than the pig, and should have been enough to win her hand against the older pig farmer who offered no love, just a pig.

Igor Barkov

Igor is the 57-year-old pig farmer with fat cheeks who is also courting Myra Menke and against whom Elya Yelnats has to compete.

Madame Zeroni

An old, wheel chair bound woman who had lost her left foot. Madame Zeroni was an Egyptian woman who gave advice and was friends with Elya Yelnats. The woman tells Elya that "Myra's head is as empty as a flowerpot," but at Stanley's insistence, she gives him advice on how to get a fat pig to compete with Igor Barkov's in return for a promise. The old woman asks Elya, after he has fattened the pig she gives to him, to carry her up the mountain to drink out of the stream while he sings her a song. Madame Zeroni tells Elya that if he doesn't fulfill his promise to her, he and all his descendents will be "doomed for all eternity."

Sarah Miller

A strong, hard-working, practical girl who marries Elya when he arrives in the United States. Sarah is smart and can do chores like milking and plowing. Sarah and Elya love talking and laughing together, even though bad luck always strikes them.

The Lump

The Lump was a big, tough guy who pokes Stanley in the "wreck" room after Stanley trips over his leg. Armpit and X-Ray tell the Lump he shouldn't mess with the Caveman because he's "one tough dude."



Caveman

The nickname the other boys give to Stanley after he digs his first hole but finds he is trapped there because he doesn't have the strength to pull himself out.

The Warden

A tall, red-haired, freckle-faced woman who paints her fingernails with dark red nail polish made from rattlesnake venom. The Warden's words are nice, but her actions are not and she demands complete, unquestioning obedience from Mr. Sir and Mr. Pendanski using all kinds of subtle threats and intimidation to get it.

Katherine Barlow / Kissing Kate Barlow

The only school teacher in the Camp Green Lake of 110 years ago when it was a large, beautiful town. Kate was loved by her students and famous for her spiced peaches. Kate falls in love with Sam, the Onion Man, and tries to escape the town that has burned the schoolhouse and threatened to lynch Sam. After the tragedy of Sam and Mary Lou's death, Katherine shoots the sheriff, grants his wish for a kiss, and becomes one of the most feared outlaws in the West, Kissing Kate Barlow. Twenty years later, she returns to the dried-up town and is accosted by Trout and Linda Walker who want the treasure she has stolen. The couple makes her walk through the desert, and when a lizard bites her, she dies without telling where she buried the treasure.

Trout (Charles) Walker

The richest young man in the county who wanted Katherine Barlow to marry him. Charles Walker was called "Trout" because he had smelly feet from a foot fungus. Trout was not smart and wouldn't try to learn, and was angry when Katherine refused to go with him on a boat ride.

Dr. Hawthorne

The doctor of the Camp Green Lake of the 1800's. Dr. Hawthorne happily allowed Sam to recommend onion medicines to his patients and was never sure whether it was his medicine or Sam's that helped cure the illness. Dr. Hawthorne believed enough in Sam's medicines that he used an onion ointment on his baldhead.

Sam, the Onion Man

The black man who raised onions and made the onions into all kinds of medicines. The townspeople came to him as much as to Dr. Hawthorne for "cures," and believed that his onions were the cause of their good health. Sam and Dr. Hawthorne always worked



together and credit each other for any improvements in health. Sam works to improve the school building for Katherine in exchange for her famous spiced peaches. Sam and Katherine fall in love and share a kiss on the street before they are discovered and persecuted.

Mary Lou

Sam's donkey that was reported to be fifty years old and to have survived that long in good health because she only ate onions. Mary Lou was shot by Trout Walker when he came after Sam and Kate.

Hattie Parker

A woman from the Camp Green Lake of 110 years ago who sees Sam and Katherine kissing and says, "God will punish you!"

Sheriff

Chief Law officer of the old-time, thriving Camp Green Lake, he drinks whiskey and tries to force Katherine into kissing him. Eventually, Katherine gets her revenge on him by killing him and giving him a kiss after he is dead.

Linda Miller

A redheaded woman who had been a young student of Katherine Barlow's and who eventually married Trout Walker for his money. Linda is responsible for the death of Kate Barlow.

Twitch

The boy sent to Group D at Camp Green Lake to replace Zero. The boy is called Twitch because he fidgets a lot - particularly when he gets around cars and was sent to Camp Green Lake for auto theft.

Gladys Tennyson

The woman from the old Camp Green Lake who runs out in her nightclothes to tell Sam, the Onion Man, that his medicine cured her daughter who was sick from eating bad meat.



Ms. Morengo

Stanley's attorney who comes to release him from camp.

Attorney General

A tall man who accompanies Ms. Morengo to camp to provide the necessary paperwork and authorization to release Stanley.



Objects/Places

Camp Fun and Games

Stanley's mocking name for Camp Green Lake. Since he'd never been to camp before, he had imagined what he'd get to do, and he pretends like he is having fun in the letters to his parents.

Camp Green Lake

Camp Green Lake is the name of the rehabilitation facility set up in the middle of the Texas desert where boys who have gotten into trouble are given the punishment of digging a hole every day.

Fortune

Stanley Yelnats the 1st was a rich man before he moved west and was robbed by Kissing Kate Barlow. Stanley Yelnats IV discovers the fortune buried in a metal case that bears the name of Stanley Yelnats. The fortune consists of \$20,000 worth of jewels, and almost two million dollars worth of stocks, bonds, notes, and other old financial documents.

God's Thumb

When Stanley's great-grandfather was rescued from the desert, he had been there 17 days and was insane, but he said he survived by taking refuge on God's Thumb. Stanley catches a glimpse of a rock formation in the desert and realizes that this is "God's Thumb," so he and Zero head there in the hopes of finding refuge.

Green Lake, the town

A hundred and ten years before Camp Green Lake existed, a beautiful, thriving town named "Green Lake" was situated on the edge of the lake. The town is the setting for the sad story of Katherine Barlow and Sam, the Onion man.

Group D

The group of boys that Stanley lives and works with. In addition to Stanley, at various times the group consists of X-Ray, Armpit, Squid, Zigzag, Magnet, Zero, and Twitch.



Holes

The punishment for each boy is to dig one hole, exactly five feet deep and five feet wide, each day. The land around Camp Green Lake is filled with holes - everywhere you look.

Hot Fudge Sundae

How Stanley encourages Zero to keep going up the mountain, pretending that when they get there, food will be waiting. When Stanley gets Zero to the top and they have collapsed, Stanley finds an onion and gives Zero a bite, telling him it's a hot fudge sundae.

Jaffy

The name of the imaginary giraffe that Zero thinks about when he's waiting for his mother. Zero stays a month in a public park by himself waiting, sleeping in the tunnel on the playground.

Letters

Stanley writes letters home to his parents, always putting on a brave face and pretending that the activities at Camp Green Lake are fun. Stanley's mother writes back telling him they're proud of him for making the best of a bad situation and explaining the events at home, including the fact that the landlord was considering evicting them because of the bad smell in their apartment.

Lipstick Tube

Stanley finds a gold tube engraved with the initials K.B. as he's digging. Stanley gives it to X-Ray to use as a way to get the day off. However, Stanley figures out that the gold tube is half of an old lipstick tube owned by Kissing Kate Barlow and he goes back to dig for the treasure where he first found the tube.

Mary Lou

The name of Sam's old boat (named after his beloved donkey), which is left in the dry lakebed and turned upside down. Zero gets under it and uses it for shelter and it's there that he finds the jars of old Sploosh.



Onions

Sam, the Onion Man who lived at Green Lake 110 years before the Camp was established, was the grower and seller of the town's onions. Sam believed that onions would cure any physical problem, and the townspeople always bought Sam's onion concoctions to use with Dr. Hawthorne's cures. Onions also deter yellow-spotted lizards.

Pig

Madame Zeroni agrees to help Elya Yelnats compete against Igor Barkov, a pig farmer, for the love of Myra Menke. Madame Zeroni gives Elya a piglet that Elya must carry up the mountain every day to let it drink from the stream. Elya is supposed to sing a song to it, too. When Elya breaks his promise to come back and carry Madame Zeroni up the mountain, his family is "cursed," and Elya gets the blame for the Yelnats' family's problems. Elya becomes known to Stanley as his "no-good- dirty-rotten-pig-stealing-great-great-grandfather."

Pig Lullaby

The song that Elya Yelnats was supposed to sing to the pig he carried up the mountain every day as it drank from the stream. The song is sung by Stanley's father to him, and later, the song in a slightly different form is sung by Zero's mother.

First song Stanley's father sings to him:

"'If only, if only,' the woodpecker sighs

'The bark on the trees was just a little bit softer.'

While the wolf waits below, hungry and lonely,

He cries to the moo-oo-oon,

'If only, if only.'"

Translated by Sarah Miller Yelnats to:

"'If only, if only,' the woodpecker sighs,

'The bark on the trees was as soft as the skies,'

While the wolf waits below, hungry and lonely

Crying to the moo-oo-oon,

'If only, if only.'"



Schoolhouse

Sweet Miss Katherine Barlow who everyone loved taught Green Lake's schoolhouse. Miss Barlow asked Sam to fix up the schoolhouse, making repairs and improvements. During this time, Katherine and Sam fall in love and kiss, but the town finds out, and in anger, burn the schoolhouse down.

Shovels

Every day, each boy has his own shovel to dig with, and a hole is big enough when a shovel can be laid flat across the bottom of the hole and stand up on its blade and have the top of the handle at the top of the hole. (A shovel is exactly 5 feet long although X-Ray always insists on a certain shovel that he thinks is a fraction of an inch smaller than the others.)

Sploosh

Old jars filled with something faintly fruity that Zero finds hidden under the remains of a boat. Zero opens these, drinks, and shares the content with Stanley, as they try to survive in the desert. At the end of the book, Sploosh is also the name of the product that Stanley's father invents to eliminate foot odor.

Sunflower Seeds

Mr. Sir constantly eats sunflower seeds. It's a habit he picked up when he stopped smoking. Sunflower seeds are important to the story because yellow-spotted lizards eat the shells. When Magnet steals Mr. Sir's bag of sunflower seeds and Stanley drops the seeds into the hole, this causes a lot of lizards to live near the area where Stanley goes to dig for the fortune later.

"Sweet Feet" Livingston's Tennis Shoes

Tennis shoes donated by Clyde Livingston, the famous baseball player, to a homeless shelter to raise money. Stolen by Zero, and then dropped on Stanley, who was accused of the crime.

Yellow-Spotted Lizards

A lizard, six to ten inches in length, with eleven yellow spots on a yellow green body. The lizard has black teeth, a white tongue, and the skin around its yellow eyes is red. Known for living in holes, the "yellow-spotted lizard" congregates in large groups and possesses a deadly poisonous venom. "If you've ever been close enough to see the



yellow spots, you're probably dead." The lizards can jump out of holes with their strong legs and love to eat sunflower seed shells.

Water Trucks

The two counselors of Group D, Mr. Pendanski and Mr. Sir alternate trips to the digging site, driving a truck filled with water to fill the boys' canteens.

Wreck Room

The boys' name for the "rec room" at Camp Green Lake, which is a "wreck" because everything is broken.



Themes

Justice

Louis Sachar's novel *Holes* deals with the issue of justice. This theme is present on several levels. First, there's the idea that in order for justice to happen, people must be punished for their crimes. That's why all the boys are sent to Camp Green Lake....to do time for their crime. It's possible that what happens at Camp Green Lake is a comment on the justice system in America. People who make mistakes have the chance to make amends, but doing so is hard and is not done under pleasant circumstances.

Rehabilitation is part of the overall picture, and that's the intent of the Camp. Here, bad boys are rehabilitated into "good" ones by hard work, which builds strong character and strong body.

Justice is sometimes corrupted. This is what happens when bad people like The Warden and Mr. Sir are placed in authority over those who have no power. At Camp Green Lake, there is not a system of checks and balances, and the Warden can eliminate the records of Zero and not be concerned about his safety or well-being. It's also frustrating to see Stanley's innocence and know that he lost his case in court simply because his family was poor and couldn't afford a lawyer.

On an even bigger scale, justice is an issue. When Katherine Barlow falls in love with Sam the Onion Man, who happens to be black, they kiss and are seen by Hattie Parker who tells them, "God will punish you!" The author, Louis Sachar, immediately asks the reader to decide for himself who is being punished by pointing out that after Sam and Mary Lou are killed and Katherine is jailed, not one drop of rain has fallen on Camp Green Lake in more than a hundred years. The town itself dries up. Kate and Sam were punished by the townspeople, but the idea is that townspeople were punished by God.

The wrongs of the past are connected to the present, and it isn't until Stanley and Zero retrieve the treasure and right the wrongs of Kissing Kate Barlow that rain begins to fall again.

Prejudice

On occasion, the author mentions the race of the boys. There are three black boys, three white boys, and one Hispanic boy. However, the issue of race isn't very prevalent at modern day Camp Green Lake. It is only when Zero (who is black), offers to dig Stanley's hole for an hour a day, that the other boys start pulling the race card, saying that Stanley is using Zero as a slave and thinks he's much better than the rest of them.

However, several glaring examples of prejudice and racial problems exist. First, in the Camp Green Lake of 110 years before, Sam, the Onion Man can't be educated in Miss Katherine's school. Sam can only work to repair it and he certainly cannot fall in love



with a white woman, much less openly kiss her. It's a sin punishable by death. The attitudes of the town people reflect the ignorance of prejudice. The man they had sought out for cures and who they had genuinely liked, is quickly killed. The prejudice of the town even causes them to destroy the schoolhouse that had been such a place of learning and joy. The prejudice against Sam and Katherine change the character of Katherine from a sweet schoolteacher to an outlaw as she tries to get her own justice on the people.

Another example of prejudice is not based on race, but on perception. Mr. Pendanski, who isn't openly unkind or unfair to anyone else, has it in for Zero. Mr. Pedanski insults and humiliates him, openly saying that he's stupid, he can't do anything but dig holes, and that he'll never amount to anything. This pre-judgment seems really harsh once we know Zero's story. Zero doesn't know much because he has had to raise himself and never had the chance to go to school. Zero's story is a lesson that judging someone just by their looks is often unfair and unjust.

Destiny and Curses

The lullaby that Madame Zeroni teaches to Elya Yelnats starts out with the words, "if only, if only...." That phrase and the entire song tie into the issue of destiny. It's common to think, "if only this had been different...." or, "if only that hadn't happened, I never would have been in this situation," and this common thought is an important question in the book. Would the Yelnats' family have better luck if their ancestor hadn't stolen Madame Zeroni's pig and broken his promise? The reader is left to decide whether lives are molded by curses, by destiny, or by free choice and hard work. Stanley's mother always denies the curse, but the curse has become an excuse. Has that excuse actually kept them from succeeding?

Stanley struggles with the question of destiny. When the shoes fall from the sky, he says, "It wasn't destiny. It was his no-good-dirty-rotten-pig-stealing-great-great-grandfather." However later, on the mountaintop with Hector, knowing that Zero had stolen the shoes, he believes that destiny is affecting his life. "When the shoes first fell from the sky, he remembered thinking that destiny had struck him. Now, he thought so again. It was more than coincidence. It had to be destiny."

Words like, "what if," "destiny," "curses," and "luck" are important, and the reader will need to decide at the end of the book exactly what it is that changes the direction of Stanley and his family.

Style

Point of View

Holes is a story told in the third-person point of view. That means that the voice telling the story sees everything and knows all the action. It's as if they are watching and narrating everything from above. This viewpoint is helpful because we can see all the action of the boys, the Warden, and the camp counselors. Neither Stanley nor Hector is telling the story through their own viewpoint. (Notice that no one says, "I grabbed my shovel and started digging my hole for the day.")

The third-person point of view is often referred to as the omniscient point of view, meaning that the narrator of the story sees everything. This is especially apparent in the telling of the story of Camp Green Lake during Sam and Katherine's time. A character in the modern-day story simply couldn't know this information, and it's important to recognize that Stanley and Zero don't know this background information either. One of the things that makes reading this book so much fun is seeing how the pieces of the old and the new story fit together - an advantage that Stanley doesn't have.

Setting

The primary setting of the story is Camp Green Lake. The majority of the novel takes part at the modern-day camp, a place beside a dry and barren lakebed. The camp is in the middle of the desert where nothing exists except dust, rattlesnakes, scorpions, and lizards, and where it hasn't rained for more than 100 years. The only two trees and shade on the whole place are owned by the Warden and forbidden to anyone else.

The present-day Camp Green Lake is a sharp contrast to the place that existed 110 years ago. Then it was a beautiful, thriving community settled on the shores of a sparkling lake. The town began to deteriorate when the townspeople committed a wrong, killing Sam, the onion man, and his faithful donkey, Mary Lou, and arresting Katherine Barlow.

The other setting occurs at the end of the book when we see a Super-Bowl Party taking place at Stanley's new home. There are lots of adults around, with great food including champagne for the grown-ups and ice-cream sundaes for the boys. It's prosperous and pleasant, a definite contrast from the home of Stanley's description, smelly and drab with the family being on the edge of eviction.

Language and Meaning

The language of the book is simple and easy to understand. The boys talk as boys of their age would talk, including assigning each other nicknames. Nothing is hard to understand about the vocabulary or speech. However, it is important to note that an



undercurrent of cruelty comes through in the language of the Warden and the two counselors. The Warden may speak softly and make it sound nice, but her intent is anything but pleasant. The Warden doesn't scream or cuss, but her meanness is clear when she scratches Mr. Sir's face with her rattlesnake-nail polish and says softly, "I don't especially care about your sunflower seeds." Mr. Sir's language reflects his idea that the boys should have to work really hard by adding a sarcastic phrase, "this isn't the Girl Scouts, you know." Mr. Pendanski doesn't even mask his feelings about Zero and uses hurtful words saying, "You might as well teach this shovel to read."

Structure

There are fifty chapters in *Holes*. Part I of the book is entitled, "You Are Entering Camp Green Lake," and consists of twenty-nine chapters. The story floats between three ideas - Stanley's predicament and experiences at the camp, the descriptions and stories about the yellow-spotted lizards, and the story of Camp Green Lake from 110 years before.

The second part of the book is entitled "The Last Hole," and extends from chapter 30 to Chapter 49. Again, the book switches between old history and new history, and the reader begins to see the connections between them. The stories about the lizards, the onions, Stanley's great-grandfather, Kissing Kate Barlow, and Madame Zeroni all are tied together.

The final part of the novel consists of just one chapter, Chapter 50. This chapter is called, "Filling in the Holes." Here, the author explains all the little details that bring us to the final Super Bowl Party, details like how much the treasure was worth, what Zero and Stanley did with their money, and how Clyde Livingston came to be sitting in Stanley's living room. The final chapter ties everything together and leaves the reader with a sense of completion.



Quotes

"The town shriveled and dried up along with the lake, and the people who lived there."
Chapter 1, page 3.

"He'd just been in the wrong place at the wrong time." Chapter 2, page 7.

"It was all because of his no-good-dirty-rotten-pig-stealing great-great-grandfather!"
Chapter 2, page 7.

"'If only, if only,' the woodpecker sighs..." Chapter 2, page 8.

"You're not in the Girl Scouts anymore." Chapter 4, page 13.

"A lot of people don't believe in curses." Chapter 8, page 41.

"Even you, Zero. You're not completely worthless." Chapter 12, page 58.

"Stanley moved up one place in line." Chapter 13, page 63.

"It seemed like no matter how much water he drank, he was always thirsty." Chapter 18,
page 82.

"On the lake, they were all the same reddish brown color - the color of dirt." Chapter 19,
page 84.

"When asked how he had lived so long, he said he 'found refuge on God's thumb.'"
Chapter 21, page 93.

"If anybody had x-ray vision, it was Zero." Chapter 22, page 96.

"Doc Hawthorne was almost completely bald, and in the morning his head often smelled
like onions." Chapter 25, page 109.

"She pointed her quivering finger in their direction and whispered, 'God will punish you!'"
Chapter 25, page 111.

"You, and your children, and their children, can dig for the next hundred years and you'll
never find it." Chapter 28, page 122.

"You might as well teach this shovel to read! It's got more brains than Zero." Chapter 30,
page 137.

"I can make it so it would be very difficult for anyone to ever find a record of him. Like I
said, though, no one will ever look. No one cares about Hector Zeroni." Chapter 31,
page 144.

"Vacancies don't last long at Camp Green Lake." Chapter 32, page 145.



"What worried him most, however, wasn't that it was too late. What really ate at his insides was the fear that it *wasn't* too late." Chapter 32, page 146.

"As long as Zero could keep going, he could too." Chapter 37, page 168.

"If I had just kept those old smelly sneakers, then neither of us would be here right now." Chapter 41, page 186.

"In a few years, Camp Green Lake will become a Girl Scout Camp." Chapter 50, page 229.



Topics for Discussion

Using specific examples from the book, discuss the issue of bullying. Why was Stanley picked on by other kids? What should have been done about it? What was the teacher's responsibility when it was reported? Is Stanley's problem similar to situations that you've seen?

The theory of the camp is that digging holes strengthens bodies and builds character. Using examples from the book show whether you agree with this theory. Did this kind of approach work on every boy? Which ones did it work on? Which ones did it not affect? Are there any negative results from this kind of punishment?

Talk about Stanley's friendship with Hector. What created the bonds? Why were they drawn together? Why didn't Stanley have the same kind of friendship with any of the other boys in Group D?

Compare and contrast the characters of the two counselors, Mr. Sir and Mr. Pendanski. How were they alike? How were they different? Which of the two do you think would be a better counselor for the boys? Why?

Most of the characters in the book use nicknames. Explain the significance of each of the names and whether or not they give insight into the character of the boy they describe.

Camp Green Lake is the place where kids are sent for rehabilitation. What similarities do you see between it and a jail or prison? Is the punishment given to the boys similar to punishment given to grown adults in a prison?

Stanley arrives at Camp Green Lake an overweight, kid resigned to his fate. Discuss the changes in his character throughout the book.

Much of the book focuses on the curse applied to the Yelnats family when Stanley's great-great grandfather didn't keep his promises. What explanation do you give for the Yelnats' family's long history of bad luck, or being "at the wrong place at the wrong time?"

The boys in the camp have an obvious hierarchy, or order of power. Discuss this chain of command. Why was X-Ray the leader? What factors determined the positions of Armpit, Squid, Zigzag, Magnet, Zero, and Stanley? What significance does a boy's place in the water line or food line have?

Discuss Stanley's relationship with his parents. How does this relationship affect his character? Do you see any obvious connections between his parents' attitudes and Stanley's attitudes?

Since one of the main themes of the book is that of "justice," give specific examples of "justice" that occurs in the book.