

# HOLES

## Study Guide

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For the novel by  
Louis Sachar



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## Synopsis

Sentenced to a crime he did not commit, Stanley Yelnats is sent to Camp Green Lake, a juvenile detention camp. But there is no lake at Camp Green Lake; only a dried-up lake bed. Every morning, the boys at Camp Green Lake are sent out to the lake bed where they are made to dig a hole five feet deep and five feet wide. “You’re digging to build character,” the counselors tell Stanley.

As Stanley digs holes under the hot Texas sun, readers dig into Stanley’s family history and the tale of Stanley’s great-great-grandfather, Elya Yelnats. Elya’s desire to marry the beautiful (but empty-headed) Myra Menke puts him on the receiving end of a family curse when he fails to fulfill a promise made to Madame Zeroni. Though Stanley doesn’t really believe in the family curse, he is quick to blame his great-great-grandfather for all his bad luck. It feels good to be able to blame *someone*.

Readers also learn about the history of the town of Green Lake and the tragic incident that drove the town schoolteacher to become Kissin’ Kate Barlow, the notorious bandit who once robbed Stanley’s great-grandfather and left him in the desert to die.

As he continues to dig holes, Stanley begins to suspect that he and the other boys at Camp Green Lake are being made to look for something—something that the camp’s warden wants.

The mystery of the warden’s secret desire, the history of the town of Green Lake, and Stanley’s own family history all fit together like pieces of a puzzle as choices made in the past continue to have an effect on the present. Soon Stanley’s very life depends on events that happened over 100 years ago.

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### **Introducing the Characters:**

1. An author will usually begin a novel by introducing readers to the various characters, and in particular, to the novel's *protagonist*. The protagonist is a novel's main character. Who is the protagonist of *Holes*?

2. List five character traits that describe the protagonist of *Holes*.

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

3. Write a paragraph describing the novel's protagonist, using the character's name and the five character traits you listed in the previous exercise.
4. One of the ways we learn about a character is by comparing or contrasting that character with another character. Both Mr. Sir and Mr. Pendanski are counselors at Camp Green Lake. How are Mr. Sir and Mr. Pendanski different? (Consider the difference between the way each of the counselors treats Stanley.)
5. Which of the two counselors do you like better? Why?

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10. Stanley's mother tends to focus on his good luck instead of his bad luck. How was Stanley's great-grandfather lucky?
11. Which set of facts about Stanley's great-grandfather seems most important to you? His good luck or his bad luck?

#### **Dig Deeper:**

12. Describe Stanley's experiences at school. If you were Stanley, how would these experiences affect you?
13. What is *destiny*? How does destiny compare to the concept of "luck"?

When Clyde Livingston's sneakers fell from the sky, Stanley "felt like he was holding destiny's shoes." What does this tell us about how Stanley viewed the event?

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16. Isaiah 40:28–31 and Jeremiah 17:7–8 talk about having hope and trust in God. Read these verses. What promises for those who place their hope in God are found in these verses?
17. We often use the word *hope* as a synonym for *wish*. For example, people will say they *hope* the weather will be favorable. In the Bible, however, the word *hope* is often used as a synonym for *confidence*. To “have hope” means to wait confidently, with expectation. (Compare, for example, different translations of Jeremiah 17:7 and Isaiah 40:31 to see how the original Hebrew words are translated to convey the idea of hope as confidence and expectation.)

Read Romans 4:18–5:5. How does the idea of hope as *having confidence* affect your understanding of this passage? Write one or two paragraphs explaining your thoughts on these verses.

### **Optional Exercise:**

Stanley’s full name—Stanley Yelnats—is a *palindrome*. A palindrome is a word or phrase that reads the same forward as it does backward. The names “Bob” and “Anna” are both palindromes. Here are some other palindromes:

A nut for a jar of tuna.

Dennis sinned.

Don’t nod.

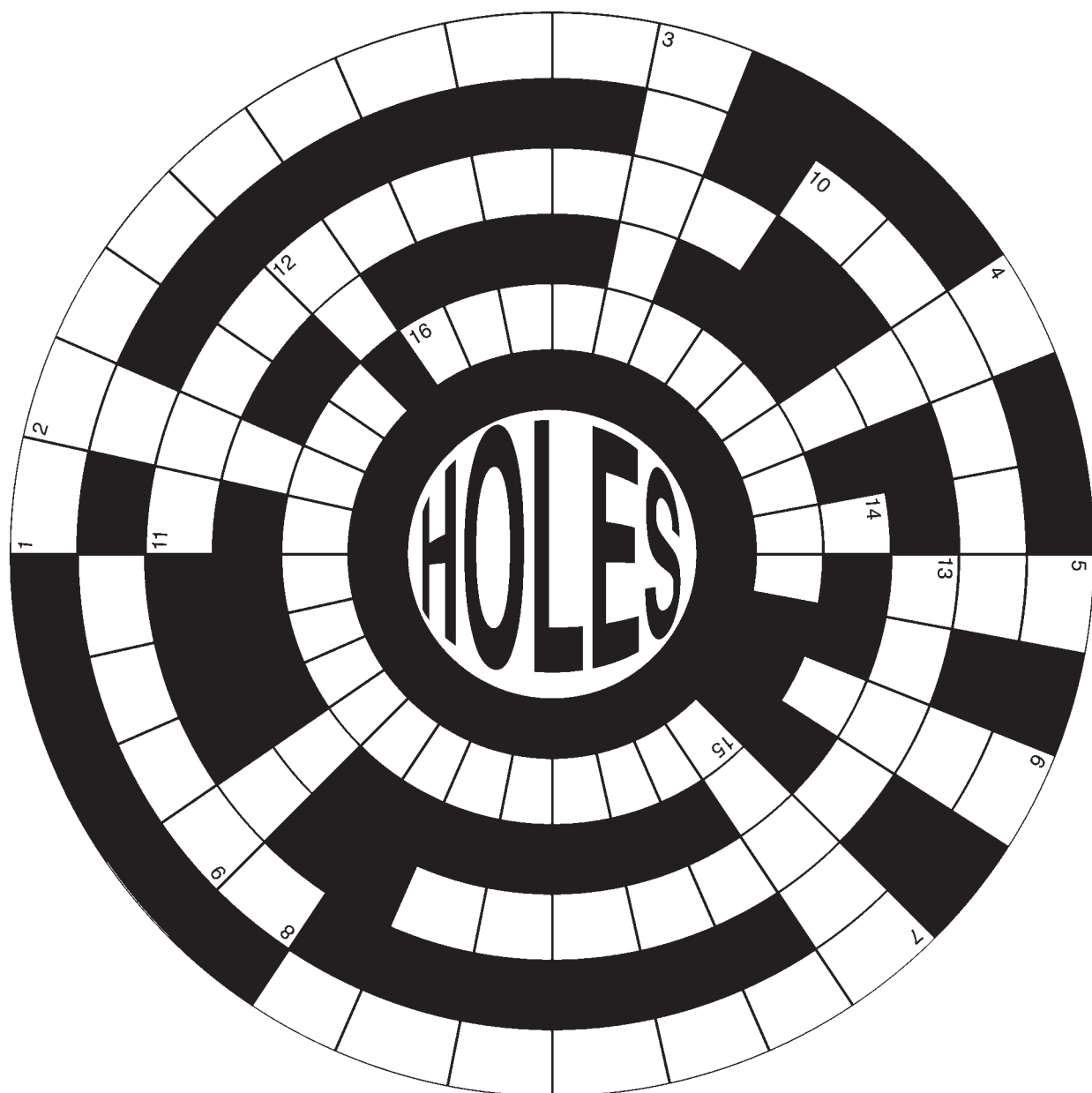
No lemons, no melon.

So many dynamos.

What would your name be if it was a palindrome structured like Stanley’s? (That is, if your last name were your first name backwards?) Try to compose some palindromes of your own.



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## *Holes Study Guide Answer Key*

### *Chapters 29–35*

#### *Vocabulary:*

1. affected by mental confusion or hallucinations; 2. withholding something; 3. weak or inferior; 4. a person or thing under guard, protection, or surveillance; 5. an illusion sometimes seen in a desert that may have the appearance of a pool of water; 6. with embarrassment or consciousness of a fault

#### *Questions:*

1. Stanley thinks he sees a distant mountain peak that looks like a giant fist with an upraised thumb.
2. By July 8th, Stanley has dug 44 holes. Stanley has grown a lot stronger since he'd arrived. His body has adjusted to the harsh conditions. He doesn't need as much water anymore.
3. The other boys start to resent Stanley because Zero is helping to dig Stanley's holes. Stanley justifies this to himself by reasoning that he needs to rest in order to teach Zero to read.
4. The Warden and Mr. Pendanski say that Zero is too stupid to learn to read, that it causes him stress, and that it makes his blood boil. They think that the stress of learning to read caused Zero to attack Zigzag.
5. She doesn't want an investigation at the camp.
6. She expects that without water Zero will have to either return to the camp or die of thirst.
7. The Warden orders all of Zero's records destroyed so that it appears he was never at Camp Green Lake.
8. A boy named Brian arrives to take Zero's place. His nickname is Twitch. He was sent to Camp Green Lake for stealing a car.
9. Stanley steals the water truck to try to find Zero. He drives the water truck straight into a hole.
10. Stanley finds Zero under an old boat, upside down, half-buried in the dirt. Zero had managed to stay alive by staying under the boat where it was cooler, and drinking "sploosh," a warm, bubbly, mushy nectar Zero found in 16 jars inside the boat.
11. The "sploosh" was preserved spiced peaches, made by Katherine Barlow and given to Sam in payment for the work he'd done.
12. Stanley thinks that if he tells the Warden where he found the gold tube, maybe she'll let them off.
13. Zero responds by holding out his fist and sticking his thumb up. This confirms that Stanley isn't alone in thinking that the mountain looks like a fist with an upraised thumb. Perhaps there's more to the legend of "God's Thumb" than the fevered imagination of Stanley's great-grandfather.

#### *Thinking About the Story:*

14. Chapter 29 opens with a change in the weather, "[f]or the worse." There is a storm in the distance, which carries a promise of rain—an extraordinary event for Camp Green Lake where it hasn't rained for 110 years. The change in the weather, occurring at the beginning of Part 2 of the novel, suggests that in the second part of the novel things will be changing for Stanley also. Probably "for the worse." Though the fact that a storm also means rain suggests that after things get worse for Stanley, things may also get better.
15. Answers will vary.
16. It isn't impossible that Zero might still be alive out there on the dry lake bed. Other instances of repetition include: "What if it wasn't too late?" and "empty, empty, empty."
17. Stanley is angry at himself for what happened to Zero. He knew that if he'd dug his own hole, he would still have been able to teach Zero to read, and the incident between Zero and Zigzag wouldn't have happened. This is the first time in the story where Stanley actually sees himself as responsible