*Holes*

Louis Sachar, [*Holes*](http://www.amazon.com/Holes-Louis-Sachar/dp/0440414806) (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998)

Summary:

“There is no lake at Camp Green Lake.” Louis Sachar, former lawyer and author of *There’s a Boy in the Girls’ Bathroom* and the *Wayside* books, begins the Newbery Medal and National Book Award-winning *Holes* with a helpful key to the book’s interpretation: setting is everything. Also, that this tale is full of irony. Stanley Yelnats and his family are cursed, thanks to their “no-good-dirty-rotten-pig-stealing-great-great-grandfather.” With typical lack of luck, Stanley is falsely accused of a crime: stealing baseball shoes from the athlete Clyde “Sweet Feet” Livingston. Instead of jail, Stanley is given the option of going to a juvenile detention center called Camp Green Lake. Sachar, in less than two hundred fifty pages, creates characters and coincidences Dickensian in scope and absurdity while carefully weaving together three interrelated plots in three settings: 18th-century Latvia, the American old west, and present-day Texas. With all the puzzle pieces neatly fitting together by the conclusion, the novel shows characters redeemed through agency, or, making choices for themselves. Sort of.

Themes, Symbols, & Motifs:

* Lizards & Onions. These symbols are opposing forces, representing the destructive and healing forces of nature, respectively.
* Differences. The novel highlights (and occasionally resolves) its characters’ alienating differences: Stanley’s weight, Zero’s illiteracy, Sam’s race, Kate’s killings, and Clyde Livingston’s feet.
* Luck, Destiny, & Fate. “Stanley felt like he was holding destiny’s shoes.” Was he? Stanley has agency, but at other times choices are mystically made *for* the characters. These three quite different aspects of the book all interact constantly.
* Cyclicality. Much in the novel is cyclical, circular, or repeated, from the Yelnats family name to the digging of cylindrical holes five feet wide and deep to the plot of the story itself, with its historical repetitions.
* Authority. Rarely do readers see a positive example of authority, but instances of its abuse, from Group D to the running of the camp, abound.
* Holes. This is a story not only of the holes and their historical significance for the Walkers and the Yelnatses but also of the figurative holes in the lives of the characters.

Discussion Questions:

1. How is each of the campers’ nicknames in Group D significant? Consider also Mom, the Warden, Trout Walker, Mr. Sir, and Kissin’ Kate.
2. Who is related to whom in the book? Consider especially the Yelnats, Zeroni, and Walker families.
3. How do Stanley and Zero unknowingly break the curse while on Big/God’s Thumb?
4. Which character changes the most?
5. If Miss Katherine can become Kissin’ Kate Barlow, can we blame the Warden for who she is?
6. Discuss the similarities between carrying the pig and digging holes.
7. What does the book’s natural environment reflect about the plot or characters?
8. Discuss the mentions of God in Chapters 6, 26, and 29, especially with regard to punishment.
9. “You will have to fill in the holes yourself.” What does the author’s statement in the last chapter mean, or imply about the book’s goal?