



Holes

by Louis Sacher

2015 Edition Bloomsbury Publishing,
London (233 pages)

NOVEL STUDY GUIDE

Holes by Louis Sacher

SUMMARY

Stanley Yelnats, a boy who has bad luck due to a curse placed on his great- great-grandfather, is sent to Camp Green Lake, a juvenile detention camp, for a crime he did not commit. Stanley and the other boys at the camp are forced to dig large holes in the dirt every day. Stanley eventually realizes that they are digging these holes because the Warden is searching for something. As Stanley continues to dig holes and meet the other boys at the camp, the narrator intertwines three separate stories to reveal why Stanley's family has a curse and what the Warden is looking for. A story of friendship, adversity, perseverance, feelings and themes around authority, respect and segregation, Holes covers a huge range of topics relevant to work covered in SEL Programmes.

The book has 50 chapters, each between 1-10 pages long.

CHARACTER REVIEW

Stanley Yelnats

Zero

X-Ray

Squid

Magnet

Armpit

Zigzag

Warden

Kate Barlow

Sam

Charles Walker

Elya Yelnats

Madame Zeroni

Stanley Yelnats I

Mrs. Yelnats .

Mr. Yelnats

Mr. Sir

Mr. Pendanski

Clyde Livingston

Derrick Dunne

SEL THEMES IN THE BOOK

Feelings: Frustration, Anger, Sad, Lonely, Happy, Excited, Love, Fear, Embarrassed, Surprise, Guilty, Proud, Interested, Curious,

Respect and Authority

Perseverance

Ok/Not OK choices

Goal Setting/Problem solving/Making a plan

Responsibility

Stereotypes/ Racial Inequality

Friendship

Rules

Consequences



STUDY QUESTIONS

PART 1

Chapter 1,2,3

- **What two rules do the campers need to follow at Camp Green Lake? What would happen if they didn't?** 1. Campers are forbidden to lie in the hammock – they would get into trouble with the warden. 2. If you don't bother the scorpions and the rattlesnakes they won't bother you – you would be poisoned. Refer back to lesson on rules – following the rules keeps us safe, keeps us out of trouble, and helps us learn. Discuss the idea of the consequences of not following rules.
- **The book says “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.” – Do you agree? Discuss the idea if someone can be ‘bad’ or just make Not OK choices with their behaviour.**
- **How do you think Stanley felt on the bus?** Scared – guard had a gun, uneasy, lonely, regretting of his choices, sad etc.
- **Did Stanley enjoy school? Why/why not?** No – he was teased about his size by pupils and teachers and embarrassed in his maths lesson.
- **What caused Stanley to feel embarrassed?** His teacher used his weight as an example of ratio in a maths lesson to highlight he was overweight. Relate this back to experiences children may have had when they felt embarrassed themselves.
- **Stanley's father had lots of ‘perseverance’ – what does this mean and why is it important he possessed this quality?** He keeps trying and never gives up when things go wrong – he is an inventor so things don't always work first time. Discuss what the children need to persevere at in their lives.
- **Stanley's father said “I learn from failure”. When have you learnt from a failure? Discuss ch. own experiences of learning from failure and this could link to biographies studied in overcoming obstacles/perseverance.**

Chapter 4,5,6

- **Why did Stanley look surprised at ‘Mr Sir’? Was it a comfortable or uncomfortable surprise?** Mr Sir said breakfast was at 4.30 – it was an uncomfortable surprise that it was so early.
- **Mr Pendanski said he wanted Stanley to know that he respected him. What did he mean by this?** He explained that just because he's done bad things, it doesn't mean he is a bad kid.
- **How did Stanley assume the boys showed respect to each other?** By calling each other by their nicknames not their usual names as this was the name they had chosen to be known by.
- **How did Stanley feel knowing his hero thought he was a thief?** Upset, ashamed, guilty etc.
- **Stanley told the truth but said it might have been better if he had lied a little – Do you think it's sometimes better to lie than tell the truth? Discuss the idea of white lies or omission of information/ feeling private to spare feelings etc.**

Activity

- **Debate** – Is it always best to tell the whole truth?
- **Debate** – Does everyone deserve respect regardless of what they have done?
- **Literacy Activity** – Write about a time you have learnt from a failure and it has helped you grow.
- **Hotseating** – Hot seat Stanley and ask him about his experiences at school that led to his arrest and on his first day at Camp.



Chapter 7,8,9

- **How do you think Stanley felt when he couldn't break the ground with his shovel?** *Frustrated, angry, disappointed with himself etc.*
- **What have you learnt from the story of Elya and the little piglet?** *Sometimes with a task that seems impossible you need to work a little each day to grow stronger/better until you can finally reach your goal (however you may not want your goal when you get there!) Discuss the idea of goals and how we need to plan how to achieve them in small steps sometimes.*
- **Stanley's goal was to dig his hole but how did he fail to make a good plan?** *He firstly didn't mark out his hole properly to start out so he then had to re-dig to move the piles of dirt he had removed which added even more work.*
- **Why did Elya feel bad?** *He was annoyed or upset that Myra didn't love him and also felt bad for letting down Madame Zeroni who wanted to drink from the stream.*
- **How did Stanley feel when he had completed his hole?** *Proud. Discuss the idea that it says 'it was nothing to be proud of'. Why/why not?*

Chapter 10,11,12

- **How did Stanley approach the problem of digging his second hole better than his first?** *He saved more space around the hole for when his hole was deeper. He made sure to save some water until the truck came. He planned ahead more effectively.*
- **How did Stanley feel when he found the fossil?** *Hopeful, Optimistic, Excited*
- **How did Stanley feel once Mr Pendanski said the Warden would be interested in the fossil and why?** *Frustrated, annoyed, angry as he had hoped he could take the rest of the day off.*
- **Why did Stanley like being called 'Caveman'?** *It meant they accepted him into the group*
- **Mr Pendanski asked what the boys what they wanted to be when they were older – What do you want to be when you are older and why?** *Discuss children's aspirations for the future based on their interests.*
- **What advice did Mr Pendanski give the boys about their future?** *He said nothing in life is easy but that's no reason to give up. You'll be surprised what you can accomplish if you set your mind to it. You only have one life so you should try to make the most of it. Discuss this with your class. Do they agree?*
- **Who did Mr Pendanski say was responsible for the fact the boys were now digging holes?** *He said they were responsible for their situation and they were the only ones that could fix their lives.*

Activity

- **Art:** Ask the children to draw what they want to be/how they want to live when they are older and discuss what their plan is to get there.
- **Literacy:** Map the events and emotions Stanley felt at different parts of his first two days at camp.
- **Compliments:** Write a compliment list for Stanley to cheer him up after a difficult few days at camp

Chapter 13,14,15

- **How do you think Stanley felt when he discovered the gold tube?** *Curious, interested, excited*
- **Why did Stanley let X-Ray take the credit for the gold tube?** *He thought it was more important to be liked and respected in the group than get the day off and as a result he had moved up one position in the line.*
- **The Warden asked Mr Pendanski not to question her 'authority'. What does authority mean in this case?** *She is more important/ higher ranking / knows more so he cannot question her decisions and must do what she says.*



Chapter 16,17,18

- **What amazed Stanley?** *He was amazed X-Ray had never heard of the old lady who lived in the shoe or that he hadn't watched Sesame Street.*
- **How do you think the Warden was feeling when nothing more was found in the holes? How could you tell?** *Annoyed, frustrated, upset – she jabbed X – Ray with a pitchfork and said “You're giving these boys too much water”*
- **What made Stanley let out a short laugh?** *He was surprised that Zero didn't know how to read or write.*

Chapter 19,20,21

- **“On the lake they were all the same reddish, brown colour – the colour of dirt” – What do you think this means?** *Although they had different colour skin, which could be something that would divide them, they were all equal because they were all doing the same job covered in the dirt.*
- **Stanley was in the “wrong place at the wrong time” but he admitted to stealing the sunflower seeds. Why do you think he did this?** *He knew that Mr Sir wouldn't believe him and didn't want to start any more trouble blaming the others so he took responsibility even though it wasn't his fault. Discuss this idea of taking responsibility that isn't yours – would you do the same thing? What would the consequences be otherwise?*
- **Why did Warden say “Unfortunately for you”?** *Mr Sir would be in a lot of pain and therefore there might be negative consequences for Stanley eg. being punished as it was his actions that resulted in Mr Sir's pain.*
- **Why did Zero dig Stanley's hole for him?** *Stanley had taken the blame for the sunflower seeds and so Zero dug his hole for him to say thank you for not getting them into trouble.*

Activity

- **Drama:** Divide ch. into groups to act out the scene from stealing the sunflower seeds until Stanley's return to the hole. Think about how his emotions change in each scene from worried, terrified, to relieved.
- **Hotseating:** Hot Seat Stanley, The Warden, Zero, Mr Sir about the events of the sunflower seed stealing.

Chapter 22,23,24

- **How did Stanley repay Zero for digging his hole?** *He offered to teach him how to read.*
- **How do you think it would feel to not be able to read?** *Confusing, frustrating, isolating etc.*
- **How would you describe Katherine Barlow?** *Famous, talented chef, knowledgeable, full of life, confident*
- **How did Mr Sir react when one of the boys asked what happened to his face?** *He made a not OK choice, grabbed the boy by the throat and tried to choke him. Discuss how he should have used the 3 Steps to Calm Down and he hurt someone because he was angry and didn't stop to think.*
- **What was the consequence of Stanley getting on the wrong side of Mr Sir?** *Mr Sir poured Stanley's water on the ground rather than into his canteen so he would be thirsty.*

Chapter 25,26,27,28

- **Why do you think Katherine was surprised by Sam's interest in poetry?** *The story says Sam was a Negro so was not allowed to attend class and he is posed as a simpleton character so it*



would not be expected he would like poetry. Discuss stereotypes children may hold and what you would expect Sam to like doing.

- **Why do you think Hattie Parker said “God will punish you”?** Katherine was in love with a Negro man which would have been considered a sin and against the law in those times. Discuss famous figures in black rights eg. Martin Luther King, Rosa Parks and the idea of inequality.
- **How did Katherine feel differently to the other villagers about Sam?** She felt everyone was equal in the eyes of God and loved him no matter his race. The villagers were angry, withdrew from the school and wanted to hang Sam for daring to kiss a white woman.
- **Do you think it was fair or right that Katherine Barlow shot the sheriff?** Discuss the injustice of the sheriff killing Sam and how this was not right but despite this it was not right for Katherine to shoot the sheriff either.
- **Why did Stanley pour his drink on the floor?** He didn't trust Mr Sir not to have poisoned his drink.
- **Why did Kate die laughing?** She knew they would never find the loot and she knew she was going to die. She would rather die keeping her secret so Trout would never know where it was.

Activity

- **History:** Research figures such as Martin Luther King or explore inequalities faced during the apartheid. This could be linked into Black History Month work exploring key dates in changes in equality/slavery laws etc.
- **Literacy:** Write a diary entry from Zero's perspective exploring the development of his friendship with Stanley.

PART 2

Chapter 29,30,31

- **Why were the boys surprised when Mr Sir gave Zigzag extra juice? Was it a comfortable or uncomfortable surprise?** They didn't expect Mr Sir to be generous and didn't even know if it really was Zigzag's birthday – it was a comfortable surprise.
- **How do you think Stanley felt when the boys were teasing him and asking if they could dig his hole?** Uncomfortable, upset, confused as to what to do
- **Mr Pendanski told Stanley to “teach the bully a lesson” by hitting him. How did Stanley react to this suggestion? Do you think he should hit him?** He was astonished – Discuss here about Not OK choices and how hitting someone doesn't solve any problems.
- **What happened as a result of Stanley trying to hit Zigzag?** All the boys got involved and had a big fight and the Warden ended up being called and as a result Zero's lessons had to end. Then Zero was mad and hit Mr Pendanski with a shovel.
- **Why do you think Zero hit Mr Pendanski? Was it OK for him to hit him? What was the consequence?** Mr Pendanski had been laughing at him for not being able to read properly and being stupid. It was still not OK to hit him with the spade as he has hurt him and now he is being punished by not being allowed water and the other boys for having to do more work.
- **Who was Stanley angry at?** Mr Pendanski, The Warden, Zigzag, X-Ray and his great great grandfather but also at himself.
- **What do you think happened to Zero? How do you think he'd be feeling?** Ask ch. to use evidence to make their own predictions.

Chapter 32, 33, 34

- **What was making Stanley feel uncomfortable as he chatted to Twitch?** The thought of what



had happened to Zero and the fear that either it was too late or that it wasn't and he should be doing something to help him.

- **Stanley started to follow the 3 Steps for Calming Down when he saw the keys in the ignition of the truck. What did he not do? What was the consequence** *He stopped, took a deep breath but didn't think as there wasn't time and so decided to steal the truck. He nearly got away but then drove into a hole as he hadn't thought it through.*
- **What helped Stanley calm down as he escaped the camp?** *Walking helped calm him down and allowed him time to think.*
- **What plan did Stanley come up with once he was calm?** *He decided he'd have to return to camp but he'd go halfway as far as he thought he could before he became too weak and look for Zero, then return and make a deal with the Warden.*

Activity

- **Debate:** Is it OK to hit a bully?
- **Art:** Choose one of the main characters (Stanley, Warden, Zero, Zigzag etc) to draw based on what you know from the book and label them with adjectives to describe their personality.

Chapter 35,36,37

- **How did Stanley feel when he saw Zero?** *Relieved, happy, surprised, astounded etc.*
- **What problem did Stanley face?** *He had run out of water, energy and wanted to get Zero to come back to camp but he was refusing.*
- **How did Zero distract himself from his pain?** *He focussed his mind on spelling instead.*
- **How did Zero and Stanley help each other on the journey?** *They distracted each other and gave lifts up to get up the side of the mountain working together as a team. Discuss the idea of cooperation towards the shared goal.*
- **How did Stanley feel about reaching the Big Thumb?** *He felt hopeful there would be shade and water to keep them alive.*
- **Do you think digging holes helped the boys to get through the journey?** *The skills, strength, resilience and perseverance learnt digging holes could be drawn upon to keep going even when Zero could barely walk, was throwing up and both boys were dehydrated and tired.*

Chapter 38,39,40

- **How do you think Stanley felt when he saw the mud?** *Happy/ecstatic, relieved, hopeful for water*
- **Why do you think Zero has been helping Stanley all this time?** *He might have felt guilty as he was the one that stole the shoes and got Stanley into the camp in the first place.*
- **Why might Zero have felt better after telling Stanley?** *He had been holding onto the secret which might have been quite stressful and he could finally tell the truth.*
- **What feeling might Sam have that would stop him wanting any charity?** *He was too proud for charity but would accept food for Mary Lou.*

Activity

- **PE:** Play a cooperative game/set a challenge where teams must work together to overcome obstacles and get their whole team to one side.
- **Literacy:** Write a letter from Stanley home to his mum to tell her what has happened since he escaped



Chapter 41,42,43

- **What was Zero's mum most proud of?** *Selling the most girl scout cookies. Ask ch. what they are most proud of in all they have achieved.*
- **Stanley thought he had no reason to feel happiness. Do you agree?** *Discuss how even though he was stuck in the desert he had a good friend, he wasn't being forced into digging holes or being bullied and he was enjoying the nature around him. He now liked himself more than ever before.*
- **What changed Stanley's mood?** *He began to feel scared and worried about his parents and what they would be told/if they would be homeless.*
- **How did the adults and children at the party treat Zero differently?** *The children asked him to play and offered him cake but the adults told him to go away.*

Chapter 44,45,46

- **How did Stanley feel when he found the box?** *Excited, curious, interested, happy*
- **What changed his mood to fear?** *The arrival of the Warden and then the discovery of the lizards nest.*
- **What do you think Stanley was thinking when they discovered they were in a nest of lizards?** *He might have thought he was stuck, there was no escape and he was going to die.*
- **What do you think they all felt when Stanley and Zero were still alive?** *Surprised, shocked, confused*

Chapter 47, 48, 49, 50

- **How did the boys feel to see Stanley and Zero?** *Relieved, excited, happy*
- **"Not everybody is as nice as us" – Why did Stanley smile when he heard this?** *Because they are criminals and people think they are bad boys but actually they all look out for each other and only made Not OK choices.*
- **Why did the lizards not want to bite Stanley and Zero?** *Because they had eaten lots of onions and the lizards don't like onion blood.*
- **How do you think Stanley changed in character and self-confidence?** *Discuss his determination, perseverance, self-belief, happiness, friendship etc.*

Activity

- **Literacy:** Write a review of Holes – what were the best bits, favourite characters and would you recommend it to a new reader?
- **Art/Design/Literacy:** Design the new Camp Green Lake and make an advert to attract people to visit or create your own persuasive advert for "Sweet Feet"
- **Literacy:** Pick one of the following feelings: Frustration, Anger, Sad, Lonely, Happy, Excited, Love, Fear, Embarrassed, Surprise, Guilty, Proud, Interested, Curious and recall which character felt this way at which event.

