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Sample MonkeyNotes

Note: this sample contains only excerpts and does not represent the full contents of the booknote. This will give you an idea of the format and content.

Holes

by

Louis Sachar

1998



MonkeyNotes Study Guide by Donna L. Cassie

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KEY LITERARY ELEMENTS

SETTING

The novel takes place at a boys' juvenile detention center situated in the dried up bed of a fictional lake in Texas. Most of the story is set in contemporary time, around the end of the 1990's. There are flashbacks to the town of Green Lake, which existed one hundred ten years earlier before the lake dried up. (Note: There is an actual Green Lake, one of the largest lakes in Texas, southwest of Port Lavaca, but.....)

CHARACTER LIST

Major Characters

Stanley Yelnats – He is the fifteen-year-old main character, the protagonist of the novel. His family has a history of bad luck, and accordingly, Stanley is wrongfully convicted of stealing, and is sent to the detention center, Camp Green Lake. He arrives there an overweight boy with low self-esteem, but.....

Zero (Hector Zeroni) – He is a quiet, strong willed boy who is at the detention center with Stanley. He is good at digging. The other campers and the counselors think he is too stupid to do.....

Minor Characters

Mr. Sir – He is the mean, antagonistic counselor at Camp Green Lake. He is cruel and sarcastic, always reminding the boys that they are not at a "Girl Scout Camp."

Mr. Pendanski – He seems the nicer of the counselors at first, but he turns out to be mean spirited. He regularly taunts and berates Zero, and jokes that the holes could be graves for Stanley and Zero.

The Warden – She is the embodiment of cruel authority. She runs Camp Green Lake with rewards and threats, showing no concern for the suffering of others. She is the granddaughter of

X-Ray, Squid, Magnet, Armpit, Zigzag – These are the other boys at the camp. They have established an arbitrary hierarchy for the boys in Group D, with X-Ray at the top, and Zero at.....

Elya Yelnats – He is Stanley's "no-good-dirty-rotten-pig-stealing-great-great-grandfather". The story flashes back to his village in Latvia where, at the age of fifteen, Elya accidentally breaks a

Madame Zeroni – She is the one-footed gypsy who gave Elya Yelnats a pig with which to win the hand of his love. When Elya broke his promise to carry her up the mountain to drink where the.....

CONFLICT

Protagonist – The protagonist is Stanley, around whose ordeals the story centers. *Holes* is about how he overcomes his problems, both those created inside of him and the ones.....

Antagonist – The antagonist is not an individual person, but the severe conditions and.....

Climax – When the other boys see that Zero is digging part of Stanley's holes the stress.....

Outcome – Stanley finds Zero and their friendship is proven as they survive together on

SHORT PLOT/CHAPTER SUMMARY (Synopsis)

Camp Green Lake is a boys' juvenile detention center in Texas. There is no lake there. The boys spend each day digging five-foot holes in the dried up lakebed. Stanley Yelnats, a boy who always seems to be in the wrong place at the wrong time, is sent there for stealing a pair of used sneakers that had belonged to

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a famous baseball player. The sneakers had actually fallen from an overpass and landed on top of Stanley's head. Stanley believes his bad luck is because of a curse placed on his family after his great-great-grandfather, Elya Yelnats, stole a pig from a gypsy, Madame Zeroni.

When Elya Yelnats was fifteen he was in love with an empty headed girl. Madame Zeroni gave Elya a piglet to raise so that he could win the girl's hand by gifting her father with a fatted pig. In return, Elya promised to carry Madame Zeroni up a mountain to drink "where the water runs uphill". When the girl chooses not to marry Elya, he is so distraught that he catches a boat to America, forgetting his promise to Madame Zeroni. The Yelnats family has had bad luck ever since.

At Camp Green Lake Stanley is given the nickname "Caveman", indicating that for the first.....

THEMES

The predominant theme is how fate and history impact everyday life. From the moment "destiny's shoes" land on Stanley we are shown that situations and events have been falling into place for over.....

MOOD

There is a mood of hardship and confusion in *Holes*. The characters are often struggling with issues of which they do not have full knowledge. Stanley does not know where the sneakers came from.....

BACKGROUND INFORMATION - BIOGRAPHY

Louis Sachar was born on March 20, 1954 in East Meadow, New York. When he was nine years old he moved to Tustin, California. He stayed in California and attended the University of California at Berkeley. While he was in college he helped out at Hillside Elementary School, which inspired his first book, *Sideways Stories from Wayside School*. The book was approved for publication the week he started law at Hastings College of Law in San Francisco. He graduated law school in 1980 and.....

CHAPTER SUMMARIES WITH NOTES

Part One – You Are Entering Camp Green Lake

CHAPTER 1

Summary

The scene of the ominous Camp Green Lake is set. It is a desert, not a lake at all. There is no shade except over the Warden's hammock. "The Warden owns the shade." There are rattlesnakes and scorpions that occupy holes dug by the campers. But most disturbing are the deadly yellow-spotted lizards. If one bites you, "There is nothing anyone can do to you anymore."

Notes

"There is no lake at Camp Green Lake." The opening sentence of the story immediately sets a dark mood, and then the hazards of nature are described. With this first irony of the novel, the reader senses that Camp Green Lake is indeed a dismal place. In two short pages the anxiety builds to hopelessness and the reader wonders why anyone would go to Camp Green Lake.

CHAPTER 2

Summary

The reason "campers" go to Camp Green Lake is made clear. It is a detention center for boys. As punishment each boy must dig a hole every day in the desert heat. Supposedly their labor will turn a "bad boy" into a "good boy." Stanley Yelnats, a fifteen-year-old boy from a poor family, chose Camp Green Lake over going to jail. He thought it would be like a summer camp, something he had never before had the opportunity to experience.

Notes

The protagonist, Stanley Yelnats, is introduced in this brief (9 sentences) chapter and the reader is let in on the second bit of irony: Camp Green Lake is not a camp. Though concise, this chapter introduces the pacing method the author uses throughout the novel. He gives the reader partial answers or small hints each step of the way, but at the same time plants new questions in the reader's mind.

CHAPTER 3

Summary

Stanley rides the unairconditioned bus to Camp Green Lake handcuffed to the armrest. The bus driver and a guard with a rifle are the only other people on the bus. Stanley tries to pretend that he is going to Camp Fun and Games, a place he had imagined while playing with his stuffed animals when he was younger.

At home Stanley had been friendless and ridiculed, even by his teachers who unwittingly could embarrass him about his weight – like the time when Mrs. Bell's lesson on ratios found Stanley three times heavier than another boy.

Stanley is a good kid and is actually innocent of the crime for which he is being sent to Camp Green Lake. As is the joke in his family, Stanley blames his misfortune on his no-good-dirty-rotten-pig-stealing-great-great-grandfather. His great –great-grandfather had reportedly stolen a pig from a one-legged gypsy and brought a curse down upon the family forever.

As Stanley remembers his family, he remembers a song his father had sung to him:

*“If only, if only,” the woodpecker sighs,
“The bark on the tree 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.”*

Stanley's father was Stanley Yelnats III, making the Stanley in the novel Stanley Yelnats IV. The family liked the palindromic effect of naming their only sons Stanley. Stanley's father was an unsuccessful inventor, looking for a use for old sneakers. Stanley's great-grandfather, Stanley Yelnats I, made money in the stock market, but was robbed of everything and left stranded in the desert by the outlaw Kissin' Kate Barlow. Unfortunately all of the Stanleys to date had bad luck, though they always remained hopeful.

Upon arriving at Camp Green Lake, Stanley notes, “hardly anything was green.”

Notes

Here we learn that Stanley is not popular, was wrongfully convicted, and seems to be following the pattern of bad luck set by the Stanley Yelnatses before him. Three stories within the main story are introduced, each seeming to echo the failure and wishful thinking of Stanley's father's song. Just enough information is given for the reader to wonder how Stanley's family history will play into Stanley's current predicament. At the chapter's end, the third and last irony of the misnomer, “Camp Green Lake” is observed through Stanley's eyes.....

OVERALL ANALYSES

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Stanley Yelnats – Stanley, the protagonist of the novel, is a friendless, self-conscious, overweight fifteen-year-old. He has constant bad luck that he blames on a curse that was brought upon the family by his great-great-grandfather. Stanley is wrongfully accused of stealing a pair of sneakers and.....

Zero – Zero is a quiet, dark-skinned boy with a wide-mouthed smile. He was homeless before being sent to Camp Green Lake. The counselors and other inmates there feel that Zero is stupid and

PLOT STRUCTURE ANALYSIS

The present day parts of the story are narrated like an adventure. The historic parts are narrated like a folk tale. However when the parts come together, *Holes* turns into a puzzle, or mystery book. The reader is never quite given all of the details needed to solve the puzzle until the very end. Small pieces of Stanley's family history and the history of Green Lake are.....

THEMES - THEME ANALYSIS

Impact of Fate and History on Everyday Life – The events of the past one hundred fifty years have been setting the stage for a Yelnats and a Zeroni to be together again. Each time a Yelnats.....

Friendship – The value of loyal friendships is illustrated repeatedly in *Holes*. When Elya Yelnats betrays his friendship with Madame Zeroni, the trouble starts for the Yelnats family. When Stanley and.....

POINT OF VIEW

Stanley's story is told by an omniscient narrator that is able to move back and forth between the events at Camp Green Lake, the story of Elya Yelnats in Latvia, and the stories of pre-drought Green Lake. The combination of stories creates the feeling that fate is at work, molding Stanley's destiny. The historic scenes are.....

OTHER ELEMENTS

Significance of Names - Names have significance in *Holes*, the title itself describing many features of the novel. The boys dig holes at Camp Green Lake, there is a hole in

IMPORTANT QUOTATIONS - QUOTES AND ANALYSIS

[Page numbers are from the hardcover edition, eighth printing 1999.]

1) **“There is no lake at Camp Green Lake.”** (p. 3)

This is the opening line of the novel. It immediately sets a mood of hardship and confusion and starts right in with the irony that permeates the novel.

2) **“If only, if only,” the woodpecker sighs,
“The bark on the tree 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.”** (p. 8)

This is Stanley's father's song, one of three versions of the pig lullaby Madame Zeroni taught Elya Yelnats. The wishful thinking, defeated attitude of the song is fitting for a family that has experienced hardship and bad luck – especially for a family that.....

SYMBOLISM / MOTIFS

Onions - Sam's onions are a symbol of everything good. Significantly, they grow where the "water runs uphill." Whenever the narrative flashes back to a tale about the onions there is.....

IMPORTANT / KEY FACTS SUMMARY

Title/Author – *Holes* by Louis Sachar

Setting – Camp Green Lake juvenile detention center in Texas in the late 1990's; with flashbacks to Green Lake one hundred years ago and to Latvia in the mid-1800's.....

STUDY QUESTIONS - MULTIPLE CHOICE QUIZ

1. On what did Stanley's family blame their bad luck?
A. laziness B. a curse C. poverty
2. How did Stanley's great-grandfather lose his fortune?
A. gambling B. he was robbed C. in the stock market.....

Answers:

1. B
2. B.....

ESSAY TOPIC IDEAS

1. Why is the book called *Holes*?
2. What was the hole in Stanley's life when he first went to Camp Green Lake? How was it filled in?
3. Discuss the significance of the nicknames of the boys at Camp Green Lake.
4. How did Stanley's memories of Derrick Dunne help him survive his second day of digging?.....

END OF SAMPLE MONKEYNOTES EXCERPTS

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