

Yet despite these hardships, Zero shows that he, like Stanley, can still be hopeful, even under the worst circumstances. “When you spend your whole life living in a hole,” he said, “the only way you can go is up.”

Thinking about the characters

- Why is Stanley nicknamed “Caveman”? How does his character change over the course of the book?
- How does Zero’s character change?
- What are the “signatures” of the other characters? What do they tell you about them?
- Do the characters in the past seem as real or complex to you as those in the present? Why or why not?

Opinion: What Have Other People Thought About *Holes*?



Everybody digs this book!

Holes is the winner of the 1999 Newbery Medal. Of all the children's books published each year in the United States, only one book earns this prize. The Newbery Medal honors the finest contributions to American literature for children, and the children's librarians of the American Library Association choose each year's winner. A Newbery book displays a bronze medal on its cover, a visible symbol of its literary excellence that has a huge impact on book sales. Newbery authors are flooded with invitations to read and sign their books. After winning the award, Louis Sachar found himself very much in demand. The Newbery Medal is just one of a dozen honors that *Holes* has earned. Look inside the front cover of your book for a list of all the awards.

During the spring of 2002, all the kids in Seattle, Washington, had their noses buried in *Holes*, the first book chosen for a new citywide reading program called "What If All Kids Read the Same Book?" This program is a version of the nationally known adult reading program that encourages everyone in one city to read and discuss the same book. Sachar's novel was translated into Hebrew and Chinese and converted into Braille, a system of reading for the blind, for the program. The judges who selected *Holes* decided that the book, which was already popular with

children and adults, would appeal to a whole range of readers and encourage a lot of worthwhile discussion.

Stanley Yelnats, folk hero?

Boston Globe-Horn Book Award judge Maria B. Salvadore, one of the judges who selected *Holes* as a winner from thousands of submissions, has called Stanley Yelnats an “unlikely but likable folk hero.” A folk hero is usually an ordinary person who accomplishes something extraordinary to help or inspire other people. Some real-life American folk heroes you may have heard of include Johnny Appleseed, Sojourner Truth, and Woody Guthrie. Paul Bunyan and Pecos Bill are some fictional folk heroes you may be familiar with.

Putting the pieces together

In the *New York Times Book Review*, Betsy Hearne called *Holes* “a smart jigsaw puzzle of a novel,” and praised the book’s intricate plot in which different truths are revealed to the reader and to Stanley, but not always at the same time. As Hearne pointed out, “Every revelation of the past ups the ante of the present.”

Bringing *Holes* to the stage and screen

Spotlight on Stanley! *Holes* is a story in which nothing is quite what it seems, so what better place to explore the deceptive nature of appearances than in a theater? The Seattle Children’s Theatre staged the book as a play, based on a script written by Louis Sachar, which opened in April 2002 to favorable reviews.

Much-loved books are often adapted for the screen, and *Holes* is no exception. A movie version of the novel came out in April 2003 starring Shia LaBeouf as Stanley, Khleo Thomas as Zero, Sigourney Weaver as the Warden, and Patricia Arquette as Kissin' Kate Barlow. Louis Sachar wrote the screenplay for the film.

Survivor: The Texas desert

When the film version of *Holes* came out, Sachar's publisher issued a companion book: *Stanley Yelnats's Survival Guide to Camp Green Lake*. Be sure to read it before you plan a camping trip in the Texas desert.

Thinking about what others think about *Holes*

- Do you think *Holes* deserved to win the Newbery Medal? Have you read other Newbery Medal-winning books? How do they compare?
- Do you think *Holes* was a good choice for a citywide reading program? What other books that you've read might make good candidates for this program?
- Would you agree that Stanley qualifies as a folk hero? What might make him an "unlikely" hero?
- Can you identify specific moments in the plot of *Holes* in which something we learn about the past changes the meaning of what is happening in the present?

Glossary



Here are some words used in *Holes*. Some may be new to you or used in new ways.

authenticated proved that something is real and genuine

custody control exercised by a person or an authority; the legal right to look after a child

defective imperfect or flawed

delirious confused and babbling

delirium a kind of mental disturbance, often accompanied by hallucinations

despicable deserving to be disliked

grotesque very strange or ugly

hallucinations imagined things that aren't really there; delusions

incarcerated imprisoned; locked up

initiate to introduce or start something new

jurisdiction authority or control

legitimate lawful

mirage an optical effect that makes you think you see something in the distance, like water, that is not really there