



WALDEN MEDIA



WALT DISNEY PICTURES PRESENTS

# HOLES

PG

PARENTAL GUIDANCE  
RECOMMENDED  
MEDIUM LEVEL VIOLENCE,  
ADULT THEME

IN ASSOCIATION WITH WALDEN MEDIA

STUDYGUIDE WRITTEN BY CHRISTINE EVELY & SUE DAVIS



## INTRODUCTION

This guide has been developed and adapted using Walden Media's excellent study guide, which is available from [www.holes.com](http://www.holes.com), to accompany Walt Disney Pictures' new film entitled *Holes*—based on the award-winning book by Louis Sachar.

*Holes* tells the story of Stanley Yelnats (Shia LaBeouf), a young boy in the wrong place at the wrong time. His bad luck finds him sentenced to months of detention at Camp Green Lake for a crime he did not commit, where unwittingly this unusual hero has the chance to lift a 'curse' that has afflicted his family for generations.

Along with Squid, Armpit, ZigZag, Magnet, X-Ray and Zero, Stanley is forced by the warden (Sigourney Weaver), her henchmen Mr Sir (Jon

Voight) and Dr Pendanski (Tim Blake Nelson) to dig holes in order to build character. They have no idea why they are digging holes, and Stanley begins to wonder why the warden is so interested in anything 'special' found while digging.

Each boy living at Camp Green Lake has a hard-luck story, some involving poverty, homelessness and illiteracy. *Holes* cleverly explores these sensitive topics along with issues of family, destiny, race, bullying and

teenage alienation, without being condescending, through its strong and strangely humorous narrative. *Holes* offers messages about courage, loyalty, optimism and perseverance.

The author/screenwriter of *Holes* (Louis Sachar) and the director (Andy Davis) achieved a remarkable translation from book to screen. The film is likely to inspire kids to read the book and offers teachers an opportunity to engage kids in exploring the relevance of literacy to young people's lives in the twenty-first century.



RIGHT: THE WARDEN AND MR SIR



RIGHT: MR AND MRS YELNATS



RIGHT: PATRICIA ARQUETTE AS KISSIN' KATE BARLOW

BELOW: KLEO THOMAS AS ZERO



To view the trailer visit [www.holes.com](http://www.holes.com). Teachers can also download the guide developed by Walden Media for American classrooms. Many activities below have been adapted for Australian classrooms, however worksheets on the original guide may be useful in Australian classrooms.

### AUDIENCE

Themes and issues explored in *Holes* are most suited to upper primary and lower secondary school students. Older students could explore issues related to identity, friendship, peer relationships, power, justice and self determination. The film *Holes* also provides a powerful context for explorations of film as text.

### KEY LEARNING AREAS

*Holes* provides a focus for developing learning outcomes from levels 4 – 6 across Key Learning Areas including English, SOSE, Science, Health and The Arts.

### STUDENT LEARNING ACTIVITIES CHARACTERISATION

In *Holes* many characters are linked by events from the past and by members of previous generations. These links become more apparent and important as the film progresses and help it to reach a satisfying climax.

Louis Sachar discusses his writing on the Allen and Unwin web site. He writes, *People often ask me how I managed to tie everything together at the end, but that wasn't the hard part. I knew how everything was going to fit together. The hard part was laying out the strands throughout the story; of telling the story of Kate Barlow, and of Elya Yelnats, and Elya's son, without it getting in the way of Stanley's story. And then trying to make Stanley's story interesting, when all he does is dig holes, all day, every day. How many times did I write, 'He dug his shovel into the dirt'?* <http://www.allenandunwin.com/Teaching/trholes.asp>

- To explore characters and their relationships, list characters who appear in the film. Choose a main character first and write a descriptive statement to link them with another character, for example **Stanley** stands by **Zero** in many

ways; **Zero** becomes a close friend of **Stanley**.

- Characters may be linked to more than one character in this way. Discuss links made by students and compare differing ideas about relationships between characters.
- As a class discuss what is interesting about the name Stanley Yelnats. Why might this name have been selected? How is a name that can be read both forwards and backwards particularly relevant to this film story?
- What other reversals are evident in the film, e.g. in the development of a character, in relationships between characters or in events that occur?
- Stanley Yelnats is a palindrome. Have students define palindrome and then make a class list of other palindromes.

### FAMILY TREE



TIM BLAKE NELSON AS DR PEDANSKI

Stanley Yelnats the Fourth shares the name of his father, grandfather and great grandfather. Families in many cultures follow the tradition of naming a child after a member of a previous generation or giving a name with a particular meaning.

- Ask students to explore their family tree to discover significant family names in their families and why they are so important.
- Examine print and web based texts to find the meaning of each person's name. Ask students to design a personal crest to symbolize their name. Provide opportunities for students to share their ideas.

### CHARACTER WEB

A character sketch is a short piece of writing that tells something important about a person or fictional character.

- Using Trout Walker, demonstrate how to create a character web. Begin by writing the character name in the centre of the web, then record four character traits (e.g. rich, influential, conceited, hateful) in the oval shapes. For each trait encourage students to think of two scenes in the film when the character showed evidence of this trait. Record in the shape labelled 'proof'.
- Have students work in pairs to complete character webs for characters from *Holes*. Descriptions from [www.sparknotes.com/lit/holes/characters.html](http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/holes/characters.html) may be useful.

LEFT: SIGOURNEY WEAVER AS THE WARDEN

- Share character webs and use terms such as the following to explore and categorize characters: dynamic, static, round and flat.



STANLEY ARRIVES AT CAMP

it was, rather than in chronological order. In what ways did flashbacks enhance the story?

### CHARACTERS AND SETTING

Louis Sachar discusses his writing on the Allen and Unwin web site. He writes, *While every*

*other story I'd written had begun with a character, this story to me has always been about a place. Camp Green Lake – where there was no lake and hardly anything was green. I thought of the place first. The characters and plot grew out of that place.*

*But it was never my intention to write a grim story, I wanted it to be fun and adventurous. I had the idea of the boys in the book digging holes because I liked the thought that while they were ostensibly doing this to build character, the camp warden was really looking for buried treasure.*

*It happens every once in a while when you're writing that certain characters seem to leap off the page and take over the book, and that's what happened with the story of Kate and Sam. I expected to make Kissin' Kate a complete villain, but when I started writing about her I ended up making her someone else entirely; it surprised me. <http://www.allenandunwin.com/Teaching/trholes.asp>*

### CHAIN REACTIONS

*Holes* is a complicated story. It spans several generations of the Yelnats family, involves numerous seemingly unconnected events and endless days of digging! The tangled plot, including countless flashbacks, presents opportunities to teach complex literary and film skills. As students unravel various threads comprising the plot, they will better understand that narrative involves a causal chain of events.

At times Stanley's actions seem random and not relevant to the plot, however they are often central to the story and have important or dramatic consequences.

- As a class discuss how the story might have changed if Stanley or another character had acted differently. For example, if Stanley had not run with the sneakers, what might have happened? Would the hundred-year mystery have been solved if Zero had not been taught to read by Stanley? What could have happened when they found the treasure trunk if Zero had been unable to read? What might have happened if the boys had not eaten the onions?

Stanley Yelnats' family has a history of bad luck. So when Stanley is sent to Camp Green Lake for a crime he did not commit, it seems appropriate to blame the family curse and his 'no-good-dirty-rotten-pig-stealing-great-great-grandfather' as the cause of all the troubles.

- Students could view images of key events from *Holes* ([www.holes.com](http://www.holes.com)) to explore the cause and effect chain within the story. Describe the image viewed and then write a phrase or sentence for each image outlining the cause and effect of each event.
- Discuss why *Holes* might have been presented in the way



ZERO AFTER DIGGING A HOLE



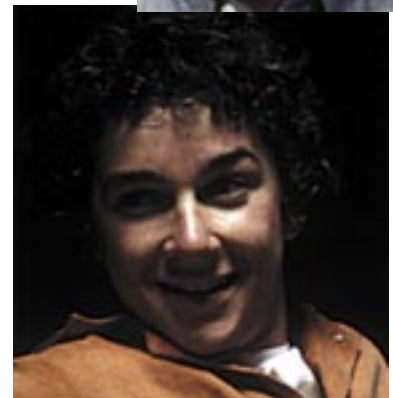
ABOVE: MR SIR IN A HOLE

LEFT: THE BOYS FROM CAMP GREEN LAKE



RIGHT: LOUIS SACHAR

BELOW: SHIA LABEOUF AS STANLEY YELNATS



BELOW: JON VOIGHT AS MR SIR



the story. Consider how it impacts on Stanley, Zero and the Warden.

## WATER CONSERVATION

In *Holes* Mr Sir talks of water as being the single most important resource they have at Camp Green Lake. It is water, or the lack of it, that keeps the boys trapped at the camp. Each day they must use their water rations wisely to have enough to last until they finish digging their holes. Extra shower rations are used to reward the boys if they find something 'interesting'. The boys' shower water is strictly measured (and cold). Stanley is left 'soaped up' after his first camp shower because he is used to long showers at home.

- Ask students to indicate which might use more water, a bath or a shower? (Baths generally use up to double the amount of water)

Fresh water is needed by all living things to survive but its availability is often taken for granted, especially by those who live in cities. Rainfall varies significantly across Australia in terms of frequency and volume. It also varies from year to year with droughts experienced in many areas. El Niño has been a cause of drought in Australia. El Niño is the extensive warming of the central and eastern Pacific Ocean that in turn causes major changes in weather patterns.

An underground spring provides the only water at Camp Green Lake.

- Ask students to explore how water is provided to your town, city or locality.
- A family of four with a dishwasher and washing machine use about 250,000 litres of water a year. Using this as a guideline, calculate the total number of family members for the class and discuss the quantity of water likely to be used by these people per year.
- List strategies to decrease the quantity of water used for dishes and washing clothes without affecting lifestyle too dramatically. Calculate how much water could be saved if each family used one to two litres less water per week.

Water use was minimal at Camp Green Lake, but this is not the case in most modern homes.

- Have students examine their daily water use. They could visit the

water wizard at <http://www.conservewater.melbournewater.com.au/> to calculate water use by their family. Web sites or a local water authority may assist students to gather information for various activities. (Sensitivity to individual and family circumstances is important during these activities.)

- Brainstorm strategies to decrease water consumption at home or school. Encourage students to select one or two (that are within their control) and to actively implement these strategies. Each day several students could report on progress in implementing strategies.
- Encourage students to share discoveries from web sites. EnhanceTV supports National Science Week and features water facts in the International Year of Fresh Water. Others provide information on water and its use, along with tips on saving water.

<http://www.enhancetv.com.au/articles/feature12.html>

<http://www.savewater.com.au/>

<http://www.citywestwater.com.au/>

Historical use of water, water purification, humans and water.

<http://www.education.melbournewater.com.au/>

Teaching resources and facts about water in Melbourne.

<http://www.stormwater.melbournewater.com.au/>

Stormwater and the community.

<http://www.drought.melbournewater.com.au/>

Drought, sustainability, climate change, global warming, El Niño.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR/ SCREENWRITER: LOUIS SACHAR

Louis Sachar was born in East Meadow, New York. He remembers how cool it was to visit his father's office on the 78th floor of the Empire State Building. When he was nine he moved to southern California and now lives in Texas. He married in 1985 and his wife, Carla, became the inspiration for the counsellor in his book *There's a Boy in the Girl's Bathroom*. Their daughter Sherre was born in 1987.

*Holes*, the book, is a bestseller in Australia, the UK and the USA. It

has won numerous awards including the Newbery Medal, School Library Journal Best Book of the Year and the National Book Award for Young People's Literature (USA). The film should inspire more young people to want to read about Stanley Yelnats.

- Look out for Louis Sachar's cameo appearance during the film *Holes*!

## TEACHING RESOURCES

[www.holes.com](http://www.holes.com) Trailer and Disney/Walden Media's Educator's Guide for American schools

<http://www.allenandunwin.com/Teaching/trholes.asp> Book related activities.

[www.acmi.net.au](http://www.acmi.net.au) Programs related to using screen texts in the classroom.

[www.metromagazine.com.au](http://www.metromagazine.com.au) Articles from teachers, lesson plans/units of work.

<http://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/csfc/index.htm> CSF outcomes, units of work.



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