

Holes

Written by Louis Sachar

STORY SUMMARY

Stanley and his family have been cursed with “bad luck” for several generations. It started with Stanley’s great-great-grandfather in Europe. Accusing him of stealing a pig from her, a gypsy woman put a curse on Stanley’s great-great-grandfather and his descendants. Bad luck is one thing, but being sent to prison camp because a pair of old sneakers falls out of the sky onto you is quite something else! But this is exactly what happened to Stanley Yelnats IV.

Camp Green Lake was in the middle of an empty desert. There had once been a town of Green Lake and, of course, the lake itself. But these had disappeared a long time ago. It was a perfect place for a detention camp. There was no sign of civilisation nearby. Fences were not needed, as escape would be foolish. The only water supply was at the camp. The desert was home to rattlesnakes, scorpions and deadly, poisonous lizards. As punishment, the Warden insisted that each boy dig a hole each day. The hole had to be five feet deep and five feet (1.5 metres) in any direction. Although she said that it was to build character, she had ulterior motives. The Warden was a vicious woman. She ruled with an iron fist and expected immediate obedience.

The boys all had prison names. Stanley was given the name of Caveman within a few days. Caveman tried to adapt to the heat, the poor food, the loss of family, the physical demands of digging and the fear. He found his first real friend in Zero, a fellow “camper”. When Zero ran away, Caveman knew that Zero would not be able to survive alone. Caveman ran away to help his friend.

A series of flashbacks ties the present to the past. Finally, the mystery is solved and the Yelnats’ luck seems to change for the better.



Pre-Reading Information

Onions

Red, yellow, white or green onions are grown and enjoyed all over the world. There are over five hundred different varieties! Onions are truly one of the world's most popular vegetables. Onions belong to the genus *Allium*. Other members are leeks, chives, garlic and scallions.

It is believed that onions were first used as a food in central Asia. By way of the ancient trade routes, the onion spread throughout the Roman Empire. The Romans named this flavourful bulb *unio*. Later, the word became *oinyon* in England in the Middle Ages.

Low in sodium, onions contain potassium, several B vitamins and vitamin C. The health properties of onions have been known for a long time. Onion juice was rubbed on the muscles of athletes in ancient Greece. These same athletes were encouraged to eat onions to improve their blood. During the Middle Ages, Europeans relied on onions to cure many ailments, including headaches, snakebites and even baldness.

Onions are easy to grow and cheap to buy. They store well and are available year round. "Know your onions" is an old expression meaning to be aware of how life works and how to get the most out of it.



Comprehension and Discussion Questions

Chapters Eight, Nine, Ten, Eleven and Twelve

Answer the following questions in complete sentence form. Give examples from the story to support your response.

1. Explain the pun used in naming the boys' recreation area.

2. Examine Stanley's incomplete letter to his mother. It was written in a positive tone. Which items in it were actually true? Which were not?

3. In what way did Stanley's interesting discovery turn out to be a disappointment? Were you surprised at Mr Pendanski's reaction?

4. Judge Mr Pendanski's statement to Stanley: "You're responsible for yourself. You messed up your life, and it's up to you to fix it. No one else is going to do it for you." Explain your reasons for agreeing or disagreeing with the statement.

5. Why was it surprising that X-Ray was the leader?

Spotlight Literary Skill

Flashback

Flashback is a literary technique in which the author interrupts the sequence of events to describe events that happened earlier. In *Holes*, Stanley experiences things in the present. The author frequently switches back in time, bringing in a character from the past. Of course, these characters from the past have an importance in the present.

Pretend that you are interviewing the grown-up Stanley Yelnats IV. What questions would you ask about his life since the story ended? Write a list of five questions. Then exchange with a classmate to create possible answers for each.

1. Question: _____

Answer: _____

2. Question: _____

Answer: _____

3. Question: _____

Answer: _____

4. Question: _____

Answer: _____

5. Question: _____

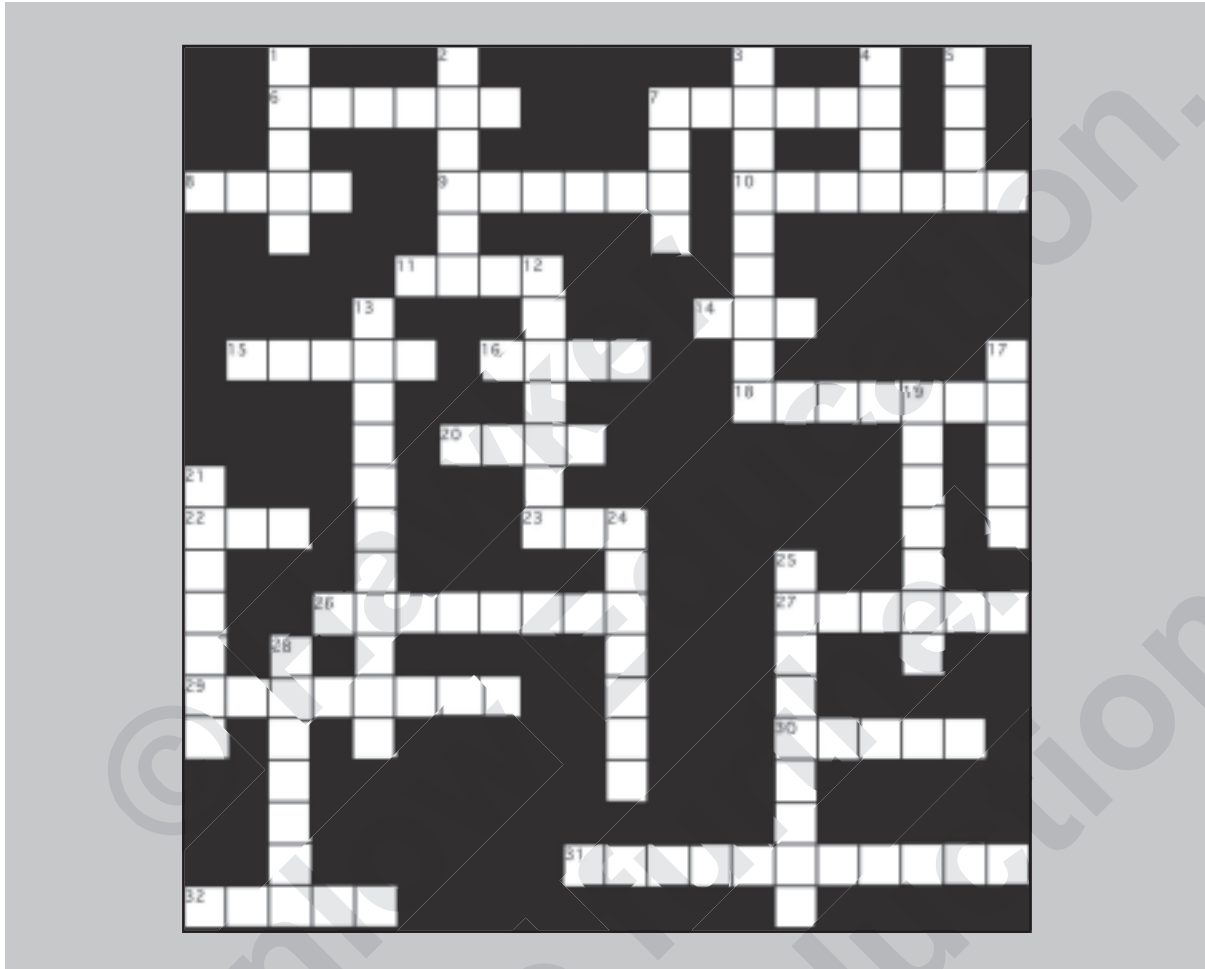
Answer: _____

Now use an example from the story to illustrate flashback. Explain how the flashback is important to the story of the grown-up Stanley.

Crossword Puzzle

Holes

See how much you remember about *Holes*. Have fun!



ACROSS

- Kate Barlow was one.
- Madame _____ put a curse on 16 Across and his descendants.
- Stanley chose Camp Green Lake instead of this.
- Zero's real first name.
- Stanley's nickname.
- The leader among the "campers".
- Mr Pendanski's nickname.
- Stanley's great-great-grandmother.
- Stanley's great-great-grandfather.
- A donkey.
- Zero wanted to learn to do this.
- What 16 Across supposedly stole.
- The onion man.
- Stanley's father was one.
- She was looking for treasure.
- Clyde Livingston's were stolen.
- Linda Walker's husband.
- What the guards at Camp Green Lake were called.
- He often said, "You're not in the Girl Scouts anymore."

DOWN

- Author's first name.
- Author's last name.
- The boys' recreation area.
- The holes measured ____ feet in all directions.
- She was beautiful but empty headed.
- He stole Clyde Livingston's sneakers.
- Stanley's last name.
- The Warden's nail polish contained venom from this animal.
- Derrick Dunne was one.
- Their bites were deadly.
- Zero found 16 jars of it.
- Stanley's lawyer.
- Clyde Livingston's nickname.
- Katherine Barlow was known for her spiced ones.