



HOLES KNOWLEDGE ORGANISER

Context – *Holes* was written by Louis Sachar and was published in 1998.

Louis Sachar – Louis Sachar was born in New York in 1954. When he was nine, his family moved to Southern California. At college, he gained credits for working in a school, and it is from these experiences that many of his ideas for children's stories appear to have emerged. *Holes* is Sachar's most successful book, and has won numerous awards. Sachar is not entirely sure where the inspiration for the book came from, although he does recollect memories of swelteringly hot summers that he spent in Texas in his earlier years.



Texas – The majority of *Holes* is set in the fictional town of Green Lake in Texas. Texas is a southern state in the USA, which is the 2nd largest state by both population and area. Texas has a diverse geographical landscape, including large desert areas. The temperature here can regularly exceed 40 degrees Celsius, which explains the difficulty that Stanley and the other boys have in trying to dig holes near the detention centre in the heat of the day! Although dangerous snakes live in the Texas deserts, there are no real yellow-spotted lizards!



Racism – Although the town of Green Lake does not actually exist, the racism described 110 years into its past (the story of Sam) is consistent with the patterns of racial segregation in force across the southern states of America at the time. From the late 17th Century, slavery was rife across the southern states. Whilst slavery was abolished in the mid-19th century, the Jim Crow laws meant that black people were separated from (and treated 'beneath') white people in almost all walks of life. Thankfully, these laws have now been abolished.



Latvia – Latvia is a small country in north-eastern Europe, and is described as one of the three 'Baltic States' (countries near the Baltic sea). In *Holes*, Elya Yelnats leaves Latvia in order to become a citizen in the United States. Many real-life Latvians did emigrate to the United States to escape hardships, particularly around 1905 (to escape a brutal regime) and after the Second World War in 1950 (to escape the Soviet regime). In the present day, there are around 94,000 Americans of Latvian descent in the USA.



Main Characters – Consider what Sachar intended through his characterisation of each of the below...

Stanley Yelnats – Stanley is the lead protagonist in *Holes*, although at the beginning of the text his hero-style role seems unlikely! Stanley is an overweight boy at school who is teased and who does not have many friends. He also seems to have terrible luck, which he blames on a curse placed on his great, great, grandfather. Although Stanley does not have much self-confidence, he tries to remain optimistic. Throughout the novel, Stanley develops both physical and emotional strength.

Zero – Zero's real name is Hector Zeroni, although he has been nicknamed Zero for much of his life. He has also spent a good deal of his life homeless, and his lack of a formal education has left him unable to read or write. Zero initially seems like a strange, silent character, however as Stanley befriends him it becomes clear that not only is he smart, but he is incredibly loyal and brave. Although they are unaware for most of the text, Stanley and Zero's lives are closely linked.

Quote: "It was all because of his no-good-dirty-rotten-pig-stealing-great-great-grandfather!" (p7)

Quote: "It's too late, he told himself. Zero couldn't have survived. But what if it wasn't too late?" (Ch.32)

The Warden – The Warden is in charge of Camp Green Lake, and is the symbol of cruel authority. She uses her wide-ranging power to scare those around her into doing what she wants, and her motives are ultimately selfish (she gets the boys to dig the holes in order to find her the treasure). She has hidden cameras that she uses to spy on the boys, and has a rattlesnake nail polish that she uses to attack anyone who displeases her. She is a descendant of Trout Walker, although this is not revealed until the end of the text.

Kate Barlow – Katherine Barlow is characterised as a sweet and intelligent young woman who taught in the Green Lake school house 110 years prior to it becoming Camp Green Lake. She falls in love with Sam, who sells onions in the town, largely due to his kindness and intelligence. The rest of the town-folk do not take kindly to this romance, as Kate is white and Sam is black – and Sam is killed. Hell-bent on vengeance, Katherine becomes Kissin' Kate Barlow, a feared outlaw, who kills her victims, applies makeup, and kisses them.

Quote: "The Warden stared hard at him. "Excuse me," she said. Her voice was soft. (p66)

Quote: "Kate Barlow died laughing." (p123)

Themes – A theme is an idea or message that runs throughout a text.








Fate – Stanley begins the text by believing that fate has destined him to be unlucky (due to the curse placed on his great-great-grandfather by Madame Zeroni). It seems to be fate that lands him at Camp Green Lake, and the same rotten fate that means that his father's inventions are never successful. However, it can be argued that it is fate that brings Stanley and Zero together, fate that leads Stanley to find the lipstick container, and fate that leads them towards the top of God's Thumb. At numerous places in the text, fate intervenes to decide events.



Friendship – Friendship is another predominant theme in *Holes*. Before Stanley attends Camp Green Lake, he doesn't have any friends. He is overweight and is teased by others. After a few weeks at Camp Green Lake, Stanley realises that his work has helped him to develop muscles, which gains him respect amongst the other boys (who label him 'Caveman'). Stanley and Zero form a close friendship, with Stanley teaching Zero to read and write. The two become loyal to one another, and it is this bond that aids them in their fight for survival.



Chapter-by-Chapter Summary – Alongside key quotations.

Chapters 1-3	The story opens with Camp Green Lake being described, as a harsh, dry place with scorpions, snakes, and yellow-spotted lizards. Stanley Yelnats is sent to Camp Green Lake for a crime he did not commit. He imagines it being like a summer camp. He hopes to make friends there. He curses his family's bad luck, which has run in the family for generations.	"During the summer the daytime temperature hovers around ninety-five degrees in the shade"
Chapters 4-6	Stanley is struck by the heat. He meets Mr Sir. Each day, he has to dig a hole 5 feet by 5 feet. He explains that there is nowhere to run away to. He is assigned Mr Pendanski as a counsellor. Pendanski is kind to Stanley, but rude about Zero. Each of the boys have nicknames. Stanley is thrown to the floor when he calls 'Armpit' by his birth name.	"If it makes you feel better to call me Mom, Theodore, go ahead and call me Mom." 
Chapters 6-7	Stanley finds the conditions at the camp difficult. He reflects on the day that he got wrongfully arrested, for stealing Clyde Livingston's (a sports star's) sneakers. Stanley has a hard time digging his first hole. He thinks of the tale of his great-great-grandfather, Elya Yelnats, who betrayed Madame Zeroni and landed the family with the curse of bad luck.	"Every day you will carry the pig up the mountain. It will get a little bigger, but you will get a little stronger." 
Chapters 8-12	The dangerous yellow-spotted lizards are described. Stanley goes to the wreck room, where everything is broken, and writes a letter to his mother. Stanley finds a fish fossil in his second hole, but Mr Pendanski says it is not what the Warden is looking for. X-Ray tells him to give anything else he finds to him. Stanley wonders why X-Ray is the leader.	"This was the one place in camp where the boys could enjoy themselves, and what'd they do? They wrecked it." 
Chapters 13-16	Stanley finds a lipstick case with KB on, and gives it to X-Ray. The Warden comes and gives X-Ray the day off. Stanley realises that the boys are digging the holes because the Warden is looking for something.	"The next time I tell you to do something, I expect you to do it without questioning my authority."
Chapters 17-19	The Warden grows impatient and jabs Armpit with a pitchfork. Zigzag hits Stanley with a shovel behind the ear. Stanley is getting quicker at digging. Zero asks Stanley to teach him to read and write. Stanley takes the blame for Magnet stealing Mr Sir's sunflower seeds.	"You don't have to teach me to write...just to read. I don't have anybody to write to." 
Chapters 20-24	Mr Sir takes Stanley to the Warden, but she strikes Mr Sir with her venomous nail polish. Zero digs Stanley's hole and Stanley begins to teach him to read. Stanley gets no water from Mr Sir. Green Lake is described 110 years before, with Katherine Barlow as a popular teacher.	"Stanley watched the water splatter on the dirt, where it was quickly absorbed by the thirsty ground."
Chapters 25-29	110 years before, Katherine and Sam (the onion man) fall in love. Sam is then killed by the townspeople. Katherine becomes the outlaw Kissin' Kate Barlow, before she is killed by the desperate Trout Walker. In the present day, Stanley thinks he sees 'God's thumb' on the horizon.	"Kate smiled. There was nothing they could do to her anymore. "Start digging," she said." 
Chapters 30-35	In a row about digging Stanley's holes, Zero strikes Mr Pendanski with a shovel and runs away. No one cares about Zero except Stanley, who steals and crashes the water truck to find him. He runs away and finds Zero under a boat. Zero and Stanley drink Sploosh, which makes Zero ill.	"For him, at least, it would be over. For his parents, the pain would never end." 
Chapters 36-43	Zero passes out and so Stanley has to carry him up God's thumb, where they find water and onions. Zero admits he stole the sneakers and apologises to Stanley. They return to camp to try find the treasure.	"It occurred to him that he couldn't remember the last time he felt happiness."
Chapters 44-50	They find a suitcase but the Warden emerges. Stanley and Zero realise they are in a lizard's nest. As the lizards leave Stanley's lawyer turns up. The suitcase of treasure is revealed to belong to Stanley and Zero. The camp is shut down and Stanley invents a miracle foot cream.	"The reader probably cares more about the change in Stanley's character and self-confidence." 

Sachar's Language Devices

Sub-Plot of Kissin' Kate Barlow

Metaphors	"He dug the hole into his memory."	She is a popular teacher Katherine Barlow teaches at the Green Lake school. She is loved by all and is a kind-hearted soul. She gives evening classes, and avoids the advances of Trout Walker.	She falls in love with Sam Sam helps her out with her renovating the school house and they fall in love. The townspeople don't like this (Sam is black) so they kill him. Kate is devastated.	Kate the Outlaw She becomes a feared outlaw, who loots people, including one of Stanley's ancestors. She is killed by a yellow-spotted lizard.
Similes	"The bus wasn't air conditioned, and the hot, heavy air was almost as stifling as the handcuffs"			
Varied Verbs	"He looked at the guard who sat slumped in his seat."			
Personification	"The rain stopped, and the lake said good bye."			