

Holes

SECTION

1

About the book

First published in 1998, *Holes* is a rite-of-passage novel combined with a detective story, quest and treasure hunt, written by a significant author from another culture. The structure is complex, using flashback and foreshadowing. It interweaves three separate stories which are separated by four generations and more than a hundred years, but linked through theme and symbolic action. Thus it is a text that can be used to meet many of the objectives of the PNS renewed Literacy Framework. The film of the book was released in 2003.

Stanley Yelnats is the fifth generation of his family to be affected by the curse put on his great-great-grandfather, Elya Yelnats. Elya, despondent with the sudden realisation that the girl he thought he loved was vacuous and empty-headed, forgot his bargain with the gypsy who had helped him woo her – and was subsequently cursed by her. All families have traditions, family jokes and their own special phrases, and while Stanley's parents claim not to believe in curses, it comes in handy to have a mantra when things go wrong. They can blame Stanley's no-good-dirty-rotten-pig-stealing-great-great-grandfather.

Stanley at the outset is very much a victim: overweight, bullied at school, friendless, accepting the curse of the Yelnats. His great grandfather had made a fortune on the stock market, but lost it when his stagecoach was robbed by Kissin' Kate Barlow en route from New York to California. Stanley's father is an unsuccessful inventor, filling their apartment with the smell of burning rubber as he seeks to invent a way to recycle old sneakers. Stanley is convicted

of a crime he did not commit, and sentenced to 18 months at a correction camp. Naivety pervades the household: Stanley doesn't need a lawyer, he simply needs to tell the truth in court; Camp Green Lake will be like the summer camp the Yelnats have never been able to afford.

The book successfully interweaves the stories of Elya Yelnats, the inhabitants of the town of Green Lake 110 years previously and the present-day inhabitants of Camp Green Lake. It has a universal appeal, while the writing style and short chapters facilitate understanding, hooking the reader into the text.

About the author

Louis Sachar was born in 1954 in New York. Helping out at a local elementary school while at university generated many of the ideas for his first book, *Sideways Stories from Wayside School*. He qualified as a lawyer, and combined part-time legal work with writing until his books became established. Sachar's *Wayside School* series, aimed at nine- to twelve-year-olds and his *Marvin Redpost* books for younger readers, are immensely popular in the USA, making good use of his quirky sense of humour. *Small Steps*, a sequel to *Holes* which focuses on the life of Armpit after the disbanding of Camp Green Lake, was published in 2006.

Facts and figures

Holes has won numerous awards, including the National Book Award for Young People's Literature in 1998 and the Newbery Medal in 1999.

The screen adaptation of *Holes* was written by Louis Sachar. The film version was released by Disney in 2003 and is available on DVD.

PAGE

3