NOVEL NOTES
6TH CLASS

REMEMBER:

Holes
Louis Sachar

TEACHER’S RESOURCES

READING ZONE
English Language Programme for Primary Schools

FOLENS
Novel Notes

Holes
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Stanley Yelnats is on his way to a camp for bold children. He is being punished for a crime he did not commit and blames his bad luck on his great-great-grandfather, Elya. Elya Yelnats broke a promise to the gypsy Madame Zeroni and she cursed his family for eternity. The curse seemed to pass down through the generations.

Camp Green Lake is hot and dry, it hasn’t rained there for a hundred years. The guard in charge is a cruel man named Mr Sir. He tells Stanley he will have to dig holes every day and warns that there is no point trying to run away. The camp counsellor, Mr Pendanski, says that the number one rule in camp is to not upset the warden.

As Stanley adjusts to his new life, he reflects on the bullying he endured at school and the crime he was wrongly accused of committing. One day, Stanley discovers a gold tube with the engraving ‘K.B’. Another boy, X-Ray, pretends the discovery was made in his hole, so he can have a day off. The warden makes all the boys dig in X-Ray’s area. Stanley realises the warden is looking for something specific and knows they are digging in the wrong place.

Stanley figures out that the gold tube he found was like a lipstick container he had seen before, in his mother’s cupboard. He realises the engraving ‘K.B’ might be ‘Kate Barlow’ and wonders if it belonged to the famous outlaw. Katherine Barlow was once a much-loved school teacher. The townspeople turned against her when she fell in love with Sam. In that time, it was against the law for a black man to kiss a white woman. Sam was killed because of it, and in retaliation Kate shot the sheriff and became an outlaw for twenty years.

As the story goes, when Kate finally returns to Green Lake, the land has dried up. A local man named Trout Walker tries to make her say where her treasure is buried. She refuses to tell him and is bitten by a deadly lizard before he can force her to. She dies happy, knowing that the Walker family will be digging the land in search of her treasure for generations.

When a fight breaks out in the camp one day, a boy named Zero loses his temper and runs away. Stanley tries to steal Mr Sir’s truck and search for his friend, but ends up in a hole. He escapes and sets off in the direction of a mountain. Stanley eventually finds Zero, who is very sick. He carries him up the mountain and they discover onions and muddy water. Stanley decides that they should sneak back to camp and dig up the hole where he found the lipstick tube, in case Kate’s loot is buried there.

The boys head back to camp and Zero tells Stanley that he was sent to the camp because he was homeless and his mother had disappeared. The boys spend all night digging and eventually they discover a suitcase. They are caught by the warden and guards and discover they are in a lizards’ nest. They stay very still and no one can touch them for fear of being bitten. The lizards don’t bite the boys because they do not like onion blood. The warden claims that Stanley stole her suitcase but Zero points out that it has his name on it.

A lawyer arrives with proof that Stanley is innocent of the crime he was charged with before coming to camp. She discovers the truth about Camp Green Lake and it is closed. Stanley and Zero leave with her and become millionaires.

At the end of the book, we learn that Zero is the great-great-grandson of Madame Zeroni, the gypsy. It seems the curse is finally broken.

Themes and issues addressed in this novel include bullying, abuse of power, superstition, fate and destiny, cruelty, social justice, friendship, family, history and racism.
Objectives

Louis Sachar is a famous children’s writer who has penned many well-known books. He was born in New York but moved to California during his childhood. While he was a good student, his love for reading did not kick in until he entered high school.

While at University, he became a teaching assistant. This classroom experience inspired him to write his first and subsequent books. In fact, many of the characters in Sideways Stories From Wayside School were based on children he met while he was a teaching assistant.

Sachar continued writing stories for children while studying and later practising law. He married Carla, an elementary school counsellor, in 1985. She is the inspiration behind the character Carla in There’s a Boy in the Girls’ Bathroom.

By 1989, due to increased sales, Sachar had reached a stage where he could focus solely on his writing and he gave up practising law.

Sachar now lives in Austin, Texas where he continues to write novels. His novel Holes has sold over 8 million copies worldwide and has been made into a major motion picture of the same name by Disney. Sachar has also won numerous awards for his work, Holes earned Sachar a National Book Award and the Newbery Medal.

Curriculum Objectives

The child should be enabled to: engage with an increasing range of narrative, expository and representational text; engage with books in group or in whole-class settings; use comprehension skills such as analysing, confirming, evaluating, synthesising and correlating to aid deduction, problem-solving and prediction; support arguments and opinions with evidence from the text; relate personal experience to the ideas and emotions conveyed in the text and appreciate issues in fiction.

Learning Outcomes

- Compare and contrast the book and the movie.
- Write a review.
- Write to the author.
- Interview a character.
- Write a poem.
- Participate in a class debate.
- Make a character profile.
- Rewrite a scene from another character’s perspective.
- Write an alternative ending for the book.
Cross-curricular Links

**Arts**
Class could re-enact a part of the book as a play. Children could design a ‘Wanted’ poster for the outlaw Kissin’ Kate Barlow.

**Gaeilge**
Weather plays an important role in the book. Discuss Irish words relating to weather as gaeilge.

**History**
The book touches on the theme of racism. Teach children about changing mindsets in America, e.g. how equality between people of different races evolved over time.

**Geography**
Discuss how people rely on natural environments and how changes in the weather and environment at Green Lake impacted the characters’ lives.

**Science**
Discuss evaporation of water by heat and relate it to how Green Lake dried up during the drought.

**SPHE**
The book touches on many issues relating to SPHE, e.g. myself and my family, my friends and other people, relating to others (resolving conflict), developing self-confidence, making decisions, taking care of my body and feelings and emotions.

Suggestions for Classroom Work

- Watch the Disney movie *Holes*. Compare and contrast the book with the movie.
- Write a book review and/or a film review.
- Write a letter to Louis Sachar containing your response to his book and any questions you have about it.
- Interview a character from the story about their experiences.
- Write a poem about the outlaw Kissin’ Kate Barlow.
- Have a class debate about who is the best villain in the story.
- Create a character profile for a main character in the book.
- Rewrite the scene where the boys find the suitcase in the hole from the point of view of the warden.
- Write an alternative ending for the book.
Web Links

Summary of Holes and interview with Louis Sachar from the author’s site:
http://www.louissachar.com/HolesBook.htm

Holes – the movie from the Disney website:
http://disneydvd.disney.go.com/disneys-holes.html

Comprehension questions and activities on the book:
http://www.resourceroom.net/comprehension/literature/holes/holescomp.asp

Pre-reading Activities

Oral Pre-reading Questions

Chapters 1, 2 & 3
Look at the front and back covers of the book. Where do you think the story takes place?

Chapter 4
Do you think Camp Green Lake is going to be like regular summer camp?

Chapter 5
Do you think Mr Sir is going to make life difficult for the campers?

Chapter 6
Do you think Stanley is going to make good friends at Camp Green Lake?

Chapter 7
Do you think the camp will improve Stanley’s character?

Chapters 8, 9 & 10
Do you think Elya’s descendants really are doomed for all eternity?

Chapters 11, 12 & 13
What do you think the boys are really digging for?

Chapters 14 & 15
What do you think the gold tube might be?

Chapters 16 & 17
Do you think Stanley will tell the warden that they’re digging in the wrong place?

Chapters 18 & 19
What do you think will happen if nothing turns up in the big hole?

Chapter 20
What do you think will happen to Stanley now?

Chapters 21 & 22
How do you think Mr Sir will treat Stanley from now on?

Chapter 23
Do you think Stanley and Zero’s deal is going to work out well?

Chapters 24 & 25
Do you think Trout Walker will take no for an answer?

Chapter 26
What do you think Hattie Parker is going to do now?

Chapter 27
Do you think Kate Barlow will get captured?

Chapter 28
Do you think Stanley and Zero are becoming good friends?

Chapter 29
Where do you think Kate’s treasure might be?
Chapter 30
What do you think will happen next?

Chapters 31 & 32
What do you think Zero should do next?
What would you do?

Chapters 33 & 34
Do you think Mr Sir is going to chase after Stanley?

Chapters 35 & 36
Who do you think is hiding under the boat?

Chapters 37 & 38
What do you think the boys will find on the mountain?

Chapters 39 & 40
Do you think the boys’ luck is about to change?

Chapter 41
Do you think Stanley will be angry with Zero for his confession?

Chapters 42 & 43
What do you think will happen next?

Chapters 44 & 45
Do you think the boys are going to get caught?

Chapters 46 & 47
Do you think the lizards will bite the boys?

Chapter 48 & 49
Do you think Stanley will be able to keep the suitcase?

Chapter 50
What, do you think, would be a good name for Stanley’s father’s invention?

Vocabulary
Introduce children to the differences between British and American English. Have children find some American words in the book and come up with their own equivalents. Children could post their findings on a word wall. Children should carry out dictionary work to find the meanings of more difficult words.

Comprehension Activity Sheets

Presented over the following pages are a selection of both lower and higher order questions for each section of this novel, which the teacher may choose from.
1. What happens to campers who get bitten by rattlesnakes?

2. Which creature has a deadly bite?

3. Why are people sent to Camp Green Lake?

4. What three items are in Stanley's backpack?

5. What is ‘Camp Fun and Games’?

6. Do you think Mrs Bell sounds like a good teacher? Why?

7. Write a description of the curse on Stanley's family.

8. The author says that a good inventor needs to have intelligence, perseverance and luck. Do you agree? Explain your answer.

9. Stanley's family remain hopeful despite their awful luck. Do you think it is important to have hope no matter what? Explain.
1. How long does Stanley spend on the bus?

2. Why does the man behind the desk eat so many sunflower seeds?

3. Why do the boys have to start digging so early?

4. How does Mr Sir know that none of the boys will try to run away?

5. What kind of a character do you think Mr Sir is, based on what you have read so far?

6. Stanley feels a little sorry for the guard and the bus driver. Do you feel sorry for them? Why? Why not?

7. If you were Stanley, how would you feel at the end of this chapter? Why?
1. What, according to Mr Pendanski, is the most important rule at Camp Green Lake?

2. Why does Stanley not proclaim his innocence to Mr Pendanski?

3. Why is Stanley concerned about his cot?

4. According to Mr Pendanski, how has Zero earned his nickname?

5. What nickname do the boys give to Mr Pendanski? Why do you think they picked this name for the counsellor?

6. Why do you think the boys prefer to be called by their nicknames at Camp Green Lake?

7. What sort of boy is Armpit, do you think? Why?
1. Why are the campers made to take four minute showers?

2. What crime is Stanley accused of committing?

3. Why had the sneakers been donated?

4. How much are the sneakers worth?

5. Why didn’t the teachers believe Derrick Dunne was picking on Stanley?

6. How does Stanley say he came by the sneakers?

7. Stanley feels like he is holding ‘destiny’s shoes’. Do you believe there is such a thing as destiny? Explain.

8. Based on what you have read so far, do you think Stanley has made the right choice in coming to Camp Green Lake? Why?

9. Why do you think that vacancies do not last long at Camp Green Lake?
Chapter 7

1. What do the boys have to do in order to get a day off?

2. How is Elya Yelnats different from the other boys in his village?

3. What does Madame Zeroni think of Myra Menke?

4. What promise does Elya make to Madame Zeroni?

5. Why does Elya not carry the pig on the day of Myra's birthday?

6. Why does Elya decide not to pick a number, do you think?

7. Do you think Elya really loves Myra? Why?

8. Do you think Elya moving to America is a good decision? Why?

9. Stanley feels proud of his first hole when it is finished. Do you think pride is an important feeling? Describe a time when you felt proud.
1. Why do yellow-spotted lizards live in holes?

2. Write a description of the ‘Wreck Room’.

3. Who is Caveman?

4. Do you think it is wise for Stanley to lie to his mother about camp? What would you do if you were in his situation and why?

5. What kind of rock does Stanley discover?

6. What do you think about Mr Pendanski’s reaction to Stanley’s find? Do you think it strange?

7. Do you believe in curses? Why?/Why not?

8. If you attended Camp Green Lake, what nickname would you choose for yourself and why?
1. Why does X-Ray feel entitled to take what the other boys find?

2. Why is Stanley surprised that X-Ray is the leader of the group?

3. What does Stanley daydream about as he digs his hole?

4. What job does Stanley want to do when he grows up?

5. Do you think Mr Pendanski is right when he tells Stanley that it is his own fault he ended up at Camp Green Lake? Why?

6. How does Mr Pendanski treat Zero? Is he kind or unkind towards him, in your opinion?

7. Write a description of Stanley's second find.

8. Stanley gives X-Ray a good idea. What is it?
1. How does X-Ray make it seem as though he finds the gold tube?

2. How does Stanley try to protect Mr Pendanski?

3. How does the warden threaten Mr Pendanski?

4. What changes does the warden make after X-Ray’s find?

5. Why does X-Ray not speak to Stanley about the tube at breakfast?

6. How does Stanley know they are not going to find anything?

7. What kind of a person is the warden, do you think? Why?

8. The boys believe they are being watched and listened to at all times. Do you think there is evidence to suggest that this is true? Explain.
1. What is unusual about Zigzag’s television viewing?

2. Why, according to Stanley, are the shovels locked up at night?

3. How does Stanley’s mother feel about his being at camp?

4. Why does Stanley’s apartment smell bad?

5. What is Stanley surprised to learn about Zero?

6. Does the warden sound like a reasonable person to you? Why?/Why not?

7. Describe how Stanley gets injured.
1. Why does Stanley write his letter in the tent?

2. Why do you think Zero watches Stanley write?

3. In what way has Stanley's heart hardened since coming to camp?

4. How do you feel about Zero in Chapter 18? Why?

5. Explain how Stanley is in the wrong place at the wrong time in Chapter 19.

6. Do you think it is fair for Stanley to take the blame for Magnet? Why?

7. What sort of boy do you think Magnet is? Why?
1. Why does Mr Sir not believe that Stanley stole the sunflower seeds?

2. Why does the warden send Stanley to the dressing room?

3. What is special about the warden's nail polish?

4. Do you think Stanley is brave or foolish for lying to the warden about who stole the seeds? Why?

5. What do you think the warden means when she tells Stanley it is unfortunate for him that Mr Sir did not die? How do you think this makes Stanley feel?

6. Do you think Mr Sir regrets telling the warden what has happened? Why?
1. How does Stanley relate to his great-grandfather’s experience?

2. How does Stanley’s grandfather explain his survival?

3. Why does Stanley decide not to tell the other boys what happened?

4. Why does it seem to Stanley as though Zero has X-Ray vision?

5. What does Stanley figure out about the gold tube?

6. Why do you think Stanley decides to teach Zero how to read? What does this tell you about Stanley?

7. Do you think Zero is really a stupid boy? Why do you think so?
1. What used to happen at the town picnic in Green Lake?

2. What was Katherine Barlow famous for at the time?

3. How did Clyde Livingston come to earn the nickname ‘Trout’?

4. Why did so many men attend Katherine Barlow’s classes?

5. Why did everyone expect Katherine Barlow to marry Trout?

6. Why was Trout surprised by Kate’s rejection?

7. What kind of a person do you think Kate Barlow was? Why?
1. Why does Mr Sir become so angry?

2. Why does Stanley concentrate extra hard on his work that day?

3. How does Mr Sir punish Stanley?

4. How does Sam explain the donkey’s old age?

5. What does Doc Hawthorn use Sam’s onions for?

6. How does Kate pay Sam for fixing the roof?

7. Why is Sam not allowed to attend classes?

8. How does Kate manage to spend more time with Sam?

9. What, do you think, does Hattie Parker mean when she says God will punish Kate and Sam?
1. Why do the children stop attending school in Green Lake?

2. How does the sheriff intend to punish Sam?

3. How do you think Kate Barlow feels when they burn the schoolhouse?

4. What sort of person do you think the sheriff is? Why?

5. Why is Trout’s boat able to catch up with Sam’s boat so easily?

6. Why do you think Katherine Barlow does not wish to be rescued?

7. What effect does the town’s mistreatment of Katherine have on her? Explain.
1. How do the other boys react when they realise Zero has been digging Stanley’s hole?

2. What kindness does Mr Pendanski show Stanley?

3. Why does Stanley sometimes hope that the warden is watching them?

4. Where does Mr Sir go after he fills Stanley’s canteen?

5. Would you take a drink from the canteen, if you were Stanley? Why?

6. What is the first word Stanley teaches Zero to write? Do you think this is an important word for Zero to learn? Why?

7. What is Zero’s real name?
1. How has Green Lake changed when Kate Barlow returns after twenty years?

2. Why does Kate tell Linda Walker that she is sorry?

3. Do you think Kate Barlow is afraid of Trout? Why?

4. What does Kate do with the stolen money?

5. Why does Kate die laughing?

6. Do you think Kate would ever have told Trout where her money was? Why?

7. Why do you think Kate Barlow has felt cold all her life?
Chapter 29

1. Why are the boys hoping for more rain?

2. What rock formation does Stanley see in the lightning?

3. How does Stanley's great-grandfather end up in the desert?

4. How long does Stanley's great-grandfather survive in the desert?

5. Where does Stanley's great-grandfather meet his future wife?

6. If you had to spend three weeks on a desert island, what four things would you take with you and why?
Chapter 30

1. Why does Zigzag ask for an extra carton of juice?

2. How does Stanley feel when Zero digs a hole for him?

3. How does Stanley react when the boys tease him?

4. How does Mr Pendanski tell Stanley he should teach Zigzag a lesson?

5. Why does the warden come out from her cabin?

6. Why does it seem as though Mr Pendanski has it in for Zero?

7. Why do you think Zero hits Mr Pendanski with the shovel?
1. How does Stanley feel after Zero disappears?

2. What are Stanley's worries when he considers making a deal with the warden?

3. Where is Zero living when he gets arrested?

4. Why do you think the warden wants to destroy Zero's records?

5. What special skill does Twitch claim to have?

6. Do you think Stanley cares about Zero? Why?

7. Do you agree that Stanley stealing the truck is ‘the stupidest thing he had ever done in his short and miserable life’? Why?

8. Do you think that it is a good idea for Stanley to run away after he crashes? Why?
1. Why does Stanley think he should only go halfway as far as he feels he can?

2. What is the difference between the holes at the camp and the holes outside the compound?

3. What does Stanley see when he looks into the first hole?

4. What does Stanley have for lunch?

5. Where does Stanley find encouragement while he walks?

6. What strange object does Stanley come across?

7. Where do you think the object has come from?
1. How has Zero survived in the desert?

2. How does Barf Bag end up in hospital?

3. Do you think Zero is right about not returning to camp? Why?

4. Why is the Big Thumb like chasing the moon?

5. Who do you think the boat is named after?

6. What does Stanley do to distract Zero from his pain?

7. What worries Stanley most about dying?

8. Do you think the boys make a good team? How does this help them, do you think?
1. What is Stanley worried will happen when they reach the Big Thumb?

2. Why does Stanley not want to stop and rest?

3. How does Stanley figure out that there is water close by?

4. Why do you think Stanley tells Zero he has ordered him a sundae?

5. How does Stanley discover the mud?

6. Do you think Stanley is a generous character? Why do you think so?

7. When Stanley is climbing, he thinks ‘only about each step and not the impossible task before him’. Do you think this helps Stanley to keep going? Why?
1. Why does Stanley need his shovel?

2. Why is Stanley afraid to leave Zero?

3. What confession does Zero make to Stanley?

4. Why is Mrs Tennyson grateful to Sam?

5. What kind of a man do you think Sam is? Why do you think so?

6. How does Mrs Tennyson repay Sam for saving her daughter?

7. Why do you think Stanley finds the climb so much harder this time?
Chapter 41

1. Why did Zero avoid going to the homeless shelter too often?

2. Why didn’t Zero realise he was stealing valuable shoes?

3. What did Zero do with the shoes when he got outside?

4. How would things have been different if Zero had kept the shoes?

5. How do you feel about Zero at the end of this chapter? Why?

6. How do you think Zero feels when he realises that Stanley was blamed for his crime? How would you feel if you were Zero?
1. How does Zero separate the water from the dirt?

2. Why had Stanley hated school?

3. Why do you think Stanley feels glad that Zero put the shoes on the car that day?

4. Why would Stanley have to spend his life as a fugitive?

5. How do both boys show their stubbornness on the way down?

6. Who, do you think, is Jaffy?

7. Do you think things might have turned out differently for Zero if the mother at Laney Park had been kind to him? How?

8. Stanley feels terror rush over him when he sees the compound. Describe a time when you were about to do something that really scared you.

9. The boys are taking a big risk going back to Camp. Do you think sometimes it is worth taking a risk? Why?
1. Why does Zero think it is a bad idea for Stanley to go and refill the jars?

2. Why does Stanley have to dig very carefully?

3. Describe how Stanley digs the suitcase out of the ground.

4. How do you think the boys feel when they hear the warden's voice?

5. Why does Stanley have to suppress a scream?

6. What do you think the warden means when she says 'won't be long now'?

7. Imagine you are the warden as a little girl. Write a diary entry describing your parents' obsession with digging and searching the ground.
1. Why does Mr Sir say that he will have nightmares for the rest of his life?

2. What does the warden plan to tell Stanley's parents?

3. Stanley thinks about a fond memory from his childhood to make himself feel better. Write about a memory that makes you feel happy.

4. Do you think the boys are right to keep still? What would you do in the same situation?

5. What does Zero figure out about Stanley's name?

6. What lie does the warden tell the lawyer about the suitcase?

7. What amazing discovery does Zero make about the suitcase?

8. Why, do you think, does the warden rush to hug the boys? Do you think she is really happy that they are alright? Why?
1. What does the warden say to try to get Stanley to open the suitcase?

2. What do you think will happen to Zero if he is left behind?

3. What favour does Squid ask of Stanley?

4. Why, do you think, can the Attorney General not find Stanley's file?

5. Why do the lizards not bite Stanley and Zero?

6. What has Stanley's father invented?

7. Do you think it is a coincidence that rain falls for the first time in one hundred years at the end of this chapter? Explain.

8. Would you like to have Stanley as your friend? Why?
1. Who do we discover is Zero’s great-great-grandmother?

2. What is Green Lake going to become in the future? Do you think this is ironic? Why?

3. What name does Stanley’s father use for his invention? Where do you think he got this idea?

4. Who, do you think, is the woman fluffing Zero’s hair at the end?

5. How has Stanley’s experience at Camp Green Lake changed him, do you think?

6. Do you like the ending of the book? Is there anything you would like to have turned out differently? Give reasons for your answer.

7. Imagine you are going to help the author come up with a sequel to this story. Write a summary of what is going to happen next.

8. Choose a scene from the book and rewrite it to include yourself. Describe how you interact with the other characters and how your actions change the story.
Comprehension Activity Sheet 1

Pupil’s name: ___________________________    Class: _______    Date: ___________________________

Title of book: ___________________________    Author: ___________________________    Illustrator: ___________________________

Setting (where the story took place): ______________________________________________

List the main characters:
1. ___________________________    2. ___________________________
3. ___________________________    4. ___________________________

Write about each of the following:

Your favourite character: ___________________________

The plot: ______________________________________

The climax: ____________________________________

The ending: ____________________________________

Write four adjectives to describe this book:
1. ___________________________    2. ___________________________    3. ___________________________    4. ___________________________

Did you like the book? Why/Why not?

___________________________________________

Grade the book (✔ Tick one)

Easy to read  ✔    Just right  ✔    A little difficult  ✔    Difficult  ✔

Rate the book out of ten: _______/10