

HOLES

Student Mission & Response Journal

CENTRAL IDEA

How do injustices from the past get passed down to people who never caused them — and what does it actually take to make things right?

Novel: Holes by Louis Sachar

Setting: A juvenile detention camp in the Texas desert, with flashbacks across two earlier eras

Designed for: Advanced readers in grades 4–6, with adaptable supports

TEXT USE

Use a teacher-approved copy of the complete 50-chapter novel. This resource supplies original prompts and no reproduced passages.

Your Mission

Investigate three interwoven storylines like a detective tracing a debt across generations: Stanley's present at Camp Green Lake, Elya Yelnats's broken promise in the past, and the story of Sam and Katherine Barlow a century ago.

Driving question

What does it actually take to make right an injustice you didn't personally cause?

Reading Care

This book includes a killing motivated by racism, echoing real history, along with harsh and sometimes abusive conditions at a fictional juvenile detention camp. None of this is graphic, but it is serious. Ask for a preview or a different way to respond if you need one.

Use of the Novel

- Use a teacher-approved edition containing all 50 chapters across three parts.
- Cite chapters; add page numbers only when everyone uses the same edition.
- Do not copy long passages. Record brief location notes and paraphrase evidence.
- The culminating mission requires the complete novel.

Conceptual Questions

Curses & Causality

- Is the Yelnats family curse really supernatural, or a story the family tells to explain bad luck?
- What's the difference between folklore causality and real historical cause and effect?

Debts Across Generations

- What debt does each of the three storylines create, and who ends up responsible for repaying it?
- Is it fair that Stanley has to “fix” something Elya did generations earlier?

Justice & Injustice

- How is Stanley's wrongful conviction similar to and different from Sam's death?
- What actually breaks the cycle of injustice by the novel's end?

Friendship

- What does Stanley and Zero's friendship require of each of them?

Narrative Craft

- How does braiding three timelines together change how you experience the mystery?
- How does the mountain-climbing scene echo an earlier moment in the book?

Reading Route

Mission	Chapters	Title	Transfer Question
1	Chapters 1–8 (Part One)	Arrival and the Curse Begins	Why does Stanley's family cling to the story of a curse, rather than simply seeing his conviction as bad luck or injustice?
2	Chapters 9–16 (Part One)	Digging for Something	What changes once Stanley realizes the digging isn't really about “building character”?
3	Chapters 17–24 (Part One)	Two Stories Emerge	Why does Stanley's decision to teach Zero to read matter, given everything else going wrong at camp?
4	Chapters 25–32 (Part One into Part Two)	The Town That Was	What does the story of Sam and Katherine reveal about how a community's prejudice can destroy something good — and how does that history explain why the lake itself dried up?
5	Chapters 33–44 (Part Two)	Up the Mountain	Why does carrying Zero up the mountain matter so much more than any other act of kindness Stanley could have shown him?
6	Chapters 45–50 (Part Two into Part Three)	The Truth Comes Out	Is finding the treasure the most important thing that happens in the ending — or is something else more important?

Range alignment

The same six missions are used in the journal and facilitator guide, aligned with the novel's own three parts. Mission 6 ends with Chapter 50.

Edition Record

Publisher / year: _____ Format: _____

50 chapters / 3 parts confirmed: ☐ Yes ☐ No Page-number citations required: ☐ Yes ☐ No

People, Groups & Debts

Person / Group	Role to Track	Question
Stanley Yelnats IV	The novel's protagonist, wrongly convicted	What debt does he end up repaying, and how?
Zero / Hector Zeroni	Stanley's friend at camp, descendant of Madame Zeroni	What is he owed, and by whom?
Elya Yelnats	Stanley's great-great-grandfather	What promise does he break, and why does it matter generations later?
Madame Zeroni	A one-legged woman Elya makes a promise to	What does her curse actually demand?
Katherine Barlow / Kissin' Kate Barlow	A schoolteacher turned outlaw	What transforms her, and what does she never reveal?
Sam	An onion seller who loves Katherine	What does his death reveal about the town's real values?
The Warden	Runs Camp Green Lake, descendant of Trout Walker	What is she really searching for, and why?

Discussion Toolkit

Move	Ask Yourself
Claim	What do I think is really going on?
Evidence	Which action, detail, or line supports it?
Reasoning	How does the evidence lead to that meaning?
Perspective	How would a character from a different timeline describe this same idea?
Revision	What later evidence changes my claim?

- Separate folkloric “curse” causality from real historical cause and effect.
- Notice when a debt is repaid through action versus simply forgotten.
- Discuss Sam's death with the seriousness of real historical racial violence.

Mission 1: Arrival and the Curse Begins

CHAPTERS 1–8 (PART ONE)

Essential question

Why does Stanley's family cling to the story of a curse, rather than simply seeing his conviction as bad luck or injustice?

Notice

What debt, promise, or unresolved wrong does this section add to the story?

Evidence from the Chapters

Record two chapter references and paraphrase the relevant actions or craft choices.

Debt Ledger

Who owes what to whom in this section? Has anything been repaid yet?

Current Claim

Write a defensible answer to the essential question.

Complication

What evidence resists or limits your claim?

Craft Lens

The novel begins weaving between Stanley's present and Elya's past. What does starting this braid early let the reader start wondering about, before any connection is explained?

Mission 2: Digging for Something

CHAPTERS 9–16 (PART ONE)

Essential question

What changes once Stanley realizes the digging isn't really about “building character”?

Notice

What debt, promise, or unresolved wrong does this section add to the story?

Evidence from the Chapters

Record two chapter references and paraphrase the relevant actions or craft choices.

Debt Ledger

Who owes what to whom in this section? Has anything been repaid yet?

Current Claim

Write a defensible answer to the essential question.

Complication

What evidence resists or limits your claim?

Craft Lens

Readers begin suspecting the Warden's true motive before it's ever confirmed. Find the moment this suspicion becomes clearest, and explain how the text builds it without stating it directly.

Mission 3: Two Stories Emerge

CHAPTERS 17–24 (PART ONE)

Essential question

Why does Stanley's decision to teach Zero to read matter, given everything else going wrong at camp?

Notice

What debt, promise, or unresolved wrong does this section add to the story?

Evidence from the Chapters

Record two chapter references and paraphrase the relevant actions or craft choices.

Debt Ledger

Who owes what to whom in this section? Has anything been repaid yet?

Current Claim

Write a defensible answer to the essential question.

Complication

What evidence resists or limits your claim?

Craft Lens

The present-day camp story and the century-old Green Lake story begin to interweave more tightly here. What do you start to suspect connects them, and what specific detail makes you suspect it?

Mission 4: The Town That Was

CHAPTERS 25–32 (PART ONE INTO PART TWO)

Essential question

What does the story of Sam and Katherine reveal about how a community's prejudice can destroy something good — and how does that history explain why the lake itself dried up?

Notice

What debt, promise, or unresolved wrong does this section add to the story?

Evidence from the Chapters

Record two chapter references and paraphrase the relevant actions or craft choices.

Debt Ledger

Who owes what to whom in this section? Has anything been repaid yet?

Current Claim

Write a defensible answer to the essential question.

Complication

What evidence resists or limits your claim?

Craft Lens

The drought begins the same day Sam dies. How does the novel use this timing symbolically, and how is that different from claiming the drought was literally caused by the town's actions?

Mission 5: Up the Mountain

CHAPTERS 33–44 (PART TWO)

Essential question

Why does carrying Zero up the mountain matter so much more than any other act of kindness Stanley could have shown him?

Notice

What debt, promise, or unresolved wrong does this section add to the story?

Evidence from the Chapters

Record two chapter references and paraphrase the relevant actions or craft choices.

Debt Ledger

Who owes what to whom in this section? Has anything been repaid yet?

Current Claim

Write a defensible answer to the essential question.

Complication

What evidence resists or limits your claim?

Craft Lens

This scene directly mirrors Elya's broken promise to Madame Zeroni from generations earlier. Compare the two moments — what does Stanley do differently, and why does that difference matter?

Mission 6: The Truth Comes Out

CHAPTERS 45–50 (PART TWO INTO PART THREE)

Essential question

Is finding the treasure the most important thing that happens in the ending — or is something else more important?

Notice

What debt, promise, or unresolved wrong does this section add to the story?

Evidence from the Chapters

Record two chapter references and paraphrase the relevant actions or craft choices.

Debt Ledger

Who owes what to whom in this section? Has anything been repaid yet?

Current Claim

Write a defensible answer to the essential question.

Complication

What evidence resists or limits your claim?

Craft Lens

Three separate storylines — Stanley's, Elya's, and Kate and Sam's — converge in this ending. Choose one thread and trace exactly how it resolves, then explain how its resolution depends on the other two threads.

Debt Ledger: Whole-Book Pattern

Looking back across all six missions, what pattern do you see in how debts get created — and how (or whether) they get repaid?

Historical & Ethical Inquiry

Use the companion context packet. Choose one question that helps interpret — not replace — the story.

- What does real history tell us about racial violence in the era Sam and Katherine's story is set in?
- What do real juvenile detention facilities have in common with, or different from, Camp Green Lake?
- What does real wrongful-conviction research say about cases like Stanley's?
- What's real and what's exaggerated about the novel's onions and lizards?

Research Plan

Culminating Mission: The Debt Ledger Case

Complete-novel requirement

Read all 50 chapters before completing this mission.

Write an analysis of how each of the novel's three storylines creates a debt, and how each debt is (or isn't) finally repaid, using evidence from across the whole novel and at least one context source.

Required Evidence

- Novel evidence from at least four of the six missions, across all three timelines.
- At least one credible context source, with fact, inference, and judgment distinguished.
- A clear distinction between what the treasure resolves and what the friendship and truth resolve.
- A reflection on what this story can and cannot prove about real historical injustice.

Product Options

☐ Written case file ☐ Illustrated timeline of all three storylines ☐ Short podcast script ☐ Letter to a character ☐ Approved design

Culminating Planner

My claim about what actually repairs the injustice, in one sentence

Evidence plan (which missions, which moments, which timeline)

Context source plan

What the treasure alone does not fix

Student Rubric

Criterion	4 — Advanced	3 — Secure	2 — Developing	1 — Beginning
Interpretation	Nuanced, revisable	Clear and defensible	Broad or uneven	Summary / opinion
Novel Evidence	Precise across all three timelines	Relevant across timelines used	Uneven or incomplete	Little / inaccurate
Context Evidence	Credible sources deepen interpretation	Accurate and connected	Mostly background	Unverified / absent
Perspective-Taking	Explains multiple characters' views and their limits	Names more than one view	Names one view	Assumes one view is obvious
Communication	Audience-shaped and clear	Clear and appropriate	Sometimes unclear	Incomplete
Reflection	Specific revision and next question	Explains growth	General process	Completion only

Reflection & Access

How did your understanding of the curse change?

Which evidence most disrupted your first idea?

What remains unresolved?

What support helped you show your best thinking?

Useful supports: ☐ preview questions ☐ audio + text ☐ writing before speaking ☐ speech-to-text ☐ visual organizer ☐
compacted practice ☐ independent extension