

Holes



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF LOUIS SACHAR

Louis Sachar was born in East Meadow, New York and lived in New York State until he was nine. His family then moved to California. He became interested in reading and literature in high school, though he attended University of California at Berkeley to study economics. While in school there, Sachar took a for-credit position as a teacher's aide at a local elementary school and loved it. This position and the kids he worked with inspired his first children's book, *Sideways Stories from Wayside School*, which was accepted by a publisher during his first week of law school. After completing his law degree, Sachar worked part-time in the legal field while he wrote; he finally left law in 1989 to write full-time. He married in 1985 and his daughter was born two years later. *Holes* has proven one of Sachar's most famous books; it won the prestigious Newbery Medal in 1999 and was adapted into a Disney movie in 2003. Sachar wrote the screenplay, and he and his family also appear in a cameo. He and his wife live in Texas.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

When Elya Yelnats immigrated to the United States, presumably in the mid-late 1800s, he was ahead of the curve—Latvian immigration to the United States didn't truly pick up until 1888, and a second wave of immigration took place in 1905. The events in Green Lake are deeply influenced by America's history of slavery, racism, and the racial animosity that persisted in the Reconstruction-era South. During the 1880s, when Sam is killed for kissing Miss Katherine, Texas was still deeply segregated. The state, along with much of the American south, enforced laws prohibiting marriage, sex, and cohabitation between interracial couples. This practice was ruled unconstitutional in the 1967 Supreme Court Case *Loving v. Virginia*. While it's unclear if Stanley was tried as an adult or a child for the theft of Clyde Livingston's shoes, at age fourteen, Stanley's case could've gone either way. However, because of the value of the shoes (\$5000), it's likely he was tried as an adult. Trying children and teens as adults often results in harsher sentences, which 18 months at Camp Green Lake arguably was. In the United States, there are few protections available to children and teens when facing the justice system, and in some states, it's legal to try children as young as eight as adults.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Sachar has been open about the fact that, stylistically, *Holes* was

inspired by Kurt Vonnegut's *Hocus Pocus* and William Goldman's *The Princess Bride*. Both books open with short, jumpy chapters, and Sachar was inspired by the over-the-top and bizarre setting and characters in *The Princess Bride*. In 2006, Sachar wrote a spinoff of and sequel to *Holes*, titled *Small Steps*. *Small Steps* picks up two years after the inmates are released and follows Armpit (Theodore) as X-Ray (Rex) ropes him into a ticket-scalping scheme. Other darkly comedic children's novels include Lemony Snicket's *A Series of Unfortunate Events* books. Finally, *Holes* is notable for a children's novel in that it does tackle childhood poverty and homelessness; another novel to do so is *Small as an Elephant* by Jennifer Richard Jacobson.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Holes
- **When Written:** 1997-98
- **Where Written:** Texas, USA
- **When Published:** 1998
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Children's/Young Adult Fiction; Adventure Novel
- **Setting:** Latvia, mid-1800s; Green Lake, TX 1880s; Camp Green Lake, late 1990s
- **Climax:** Ms. Morengo arrives, allowing Stanley and Hector to safely climb out of a hole with the mysterious suitcase and escape the Warden
- **Antagonist:** Trout Walker, the Warden, and the counselors
- **Point of View:** Third person omniscient

EXTRA CREDIT

Reading Should Be Fun. Sachar has said that he writes the kind of books he does (funny, with outlandish characters) with the intention of making reading enjoyable for young readers.

Sigourney Weaver. Sigourney Weaver, who plays the Warden in the film adaptation of *Holes*, initially expressed interest in working on the project due to the fact that her daughter loves the novel.



PLOT SUMMARY

There's no real camp or lake at Camp Green Lake. Though it was once the largest lake in Texas, it's been dry for the last 110 years. It's now a camp for "bad boys," where the boys dig holes every day. Stanley Yelnats is the only passenger on the bus to Camp Green Lake. He tries to pretend that he's going to an

actual summer camp and hopes he'll make friends, as he's the victim of terrible bullying at home due to being overweight. Stanley is innocent of his crime; he was convicted because of his no-good-dirty-rotten-pig-stealing-great-great-grandfather, who supposedly stole a pig and thereby cursed all of his descendants. No one in Stanley's family truly believes this, though things do go wrong a lot. Stanley steps off the bus and a man named Mr. Sir handles Stanley's intake. Stanley changes into an orange jumpsuit as Mr. Sir tells him he'll be required to dig a hole five feet deep and five feet across every day and that he should report anything interesting he finds to one of the counselors.

Stanley meets his counselor, Mr. Pendanski, and his fellow campers in Tent D. Though Mr. Pendanski uses their given names to introduce them, the boys introduce themselves as X-Ray, Squid, Magnet, Armpit, Zigzag, and Zero. Stanley takes his four-minute cold shower, eats dinner, and the other boys don't believe that Stanley is at camp for stealing the famous baseball player Clyde Livingston's shoes. The shoes fell from the sky onto Stanley as he was walking home from school and he ran with the smelly shoes to his father, feeling as though the shoes were the key to Stanley's father's latest invention. His parents had been too poor to hire a lawyer to defend Stanley.

As Stanley begins to dig his first hole, the narrator tells the story of Elya Yelnats, Stanley's great-great grandfather. At age fifteen in Latvia, Elya fell in love with Myra Menke. Myra's father, however, wanted Myra to marry Igor Barkov, a 57-year-old pig farmer. Elya went to his friend Madame Zeroni for help. She insisted that Myra was silly and spoiled, but she agreed to help Elya anyway. She gave Elya a runty piglet and instructed him to carry the piglet up the nearby mountain daily, where the pig was to drink from a stream while Elya sang a special song to it. After Myra's birthday, Elya was to then carry Madame Zeroni up the hill. If he didn't follow through, Madame Zeroni would curse his descendants for eternity. Elya did as he was told and both he and the pig grew big and strong. On the last day, however, Elya took a bath instead of carrying his pig up the hill. The pig weighed just as much as Igor's, so Myra's father allowed Myra to choose her husband. Myra refused to choose, so Elya got on a ship bound for America and didn't realize until later that he'd broken his promise to Madame Zeroni. The curse started to seem real in America, after Elya married and had the first Stanley.

In the present, Stanley finishes his first hole. He spends a few minutes in the rec room, which is called the Wreck Room, and realizes his tent mates have christened him the Caveman. He then writes a letter to Stanley's mother lying to her about the fun he's having at camp. He notices Zero reading over his shoulder. On the second day, Stanley finds a fossil of a fish, though Mr. Pendanski says that the Warden doesn't care about fossils. X-Ray, the leader of the group, tells Stanley that if he finds anything else, he needs to give it to him—he's been at

camp a year and hasn't found anything. Later that afternoon, Stanley joins a circle led by Mr. Pendanski. The boys discuss what they want to do when they get out, though nobody takes it seriously. Mr. Pendanski talks about personal responsibility and calls Zero stupid.

One afternoon, Stanley finds a gold tube in the dirt with "KB" inscribed in a heart on one end. He gives it to X-Ray and suggests he wait until the next day to "find" it. The next morning, Stanley tries to ask X-Ray about the tube at breakfast, but X-Ray won't talk about it. X-Ray "finds" the tube that morning and the Warden comes out to oversee the digging. The boys spend a week digging in one area, and Stanley realizes the Warden is looking for something.

One afternoon, Zero admits to Stanley that he can't read and asks Stanley to teach him. Stanley insists he doesn't know how to teach and doesn't have the energy. The following morning, as Mr. Sir fills canteens by the holes, Magnet steals Mr. Sir's sunflower seeds. The boys pass them around, but Stanley spills the bag in his hole right as Mr. Sir returns to look for them. Stanley takes the blame, and Mr. Sir takes Stanley to speak to the Warden. In the Warden's house, the Warden paints her nails with red polish that she makes with rattlesnake venom. She hits Mr. Sir hard for bothering her. When Stanley returns to his hole, he finds that Zero had been digging for him. That afternoon, Stanley thinks about the first Stanley, who was robbed by the outlaw Kissin' Kate Barlow and left in this very desert. He apparently found refuge on "**God's Thumb**," though he had no idea what that even meant after he was rescued. Later, Stanley offers to teach Zero to read. They agree that Zero will dig part of Stanley's holes in exchange for lessons.

The narrator goes back to the 1880s, when the town of Green Lake was actually a lakeside town. The local schoolteacher, Miss Katherine Barlow, was beloved by all, especially Charles "Trout" Walker. Trout Walker, however, was stupid and proud of it, as well as wealthy and entitled. He was enraged when Miss Katherine turned down his advances. Not long after, Sam, the onion man, offered to fix the dilapidated schoolhouse for Miss Katherine. Over the course of a few months, Sam made the schoolhouse beautiful. Finally, they kissed in the rain one night. One person saw them and the next day, a mob burned the schoolhouse, angry because Sam was black. The sheriff wouldn't help Katherine and instead, asked her for a kiss. Katherine and Sam tried to escape across the lake, but Trout Walker shot Sam and "rescued" Katherine. Three days later, Katherine shot the sheriff, kissed him, and spent the next twenty years as a feared outlaw. She returned to Green Lake when it was a ghost town, where Trout Walker and his wife, Linda, found her. They attempted to make her give up the location of her treasure, but a yellow-spotted lizard bit her and she died laughing, telling them to start digging.

Back in the present, Mr. Sir's face swells to the size of a melon. When he delivers water, he doesn't give Stanley any. Stanley

and Zero continue their reading lessons and Zero learns quickly, though the other boys mock Stanley and call him a slave master when Zero digs. Zero tells Stanley that his real name is Hector Zeroni. One morning, Stanley is able to see a rock formation in the distance that looks like a thumbs-up sign, and he wonders if it's God's Thumb. The next day, Mr. Pendanski arrives with lunch, Zigzag begins pushing Stanley and Mr. Pendanski encourages a fight. Zero rescues Stanley from Zigzag as Mr. Pendanski shoots his gun to call the Warden. Zigzag lets slip to the Warden the nature of Stanley and Zero's agreement. She insists the lessons need to stop and Mr. Pendanski insists that Zero is too stupid to learn anyway. Zero hits Mr. Pendanski across the face with a shovel and then walks into the desert. Stanley spends the next few days thinking that he should go after Zero. The Warden, Mr. Sir, and Mr. Pendanski speak to Stanley about Zero's whereabouts and say in front of him that they're going to destroy Zero's records. As a ward of the state, there's nobody to care about him.

On the day that Group D gets a new boy, Twitch, Stanley decides to steal the water truck and rescue Zero. He crashes the truck into a hole and continues on foot into the desert. He feels as though the thumbs-up sign is encouraging him. In the afternoon, he discovers Zero hiding in a tunnel under an old boat. He's been eating what he calls sploosh, which is fruit preserves of some sort. He shares his last jar with Stanley and then the two decide to head for God's Thumb. Zero begins experiencing painful episodes of stomach cramps, though he's able to walk all the way to the edge of the lakebed, climb up the cliffs on the other side, and then start up the mountain. At one point, Zero vomits and then collapses. Stanley leaves their shovel and their saved jars behind and begins to carry Zero up the hill. Close to the top, Stanley falls in a muddy gully and finds water and an onion. He gives some to Zero, and they spend the next two days recovering. Zero admits he stole Clyde Livingston's shoes from the homeless shelter, and Stanley sings him Elya's lullaby. As Zero improves, he tells Stanley about his mother. They used to live in a house, though they always had to steal. When Zero stole the shoes from the homeless shelter, he thought he was doing a better thing by stealing old shoes instead of new ones. Stanley and Zero decide to return to camp, try to dig up Kate Barlow's treasure where Stanley found the tube, and then escape.

As Stanley and Zero walk, they try not to drink water and Zero talks more about his mom. That night, they find the hole and begin digging. Stanley is surprised to discover a suitcase and is eventually able to wiggle it out. As he hands it to Zero, the Warden, Mr. Sir, and Mr. Pendanski arrive. The adults, however, back away horrified—the hole is a yellow-spotted lizard nest, and both boys are covered in lizards. Stanley and Zero are still alive hours later as the adults suggest shooting the boys to get the treasure. The Warden also runs through their story: Stanley was delusional, ran into a hole, and was killed by lizards.

Stanley is too preoccupied to listen when Mr. Sir tells Stanley's he's innocent and his lawyer came to pick him up yesterday.

Finally, they see a car coming. A young woman introduces herself as Ms. Morengo, Stanley's lawyer, and introduces the Texas Attorney General. The Warden attempts to tell them that Stanley tried to steal her suitcase, but her story doesn't add up. After a few minutes, Stanley is able to crawl out of the hole and helps Zero up. When the Warden tries to take the suitcase from Zero, he points out that it has Stanley's name on it. After getting paperwork in order, Ms. Morengo tries to lead Stanley away, but he refuses to go without Zero. Ms. Morengo and the Attorney General discover that Zero's records are missing, so Ms. Morengo takes Zero with her. In the car, she explains that Stanley's father invented something to cure foot odor and pretends she didn't hear Zero's confession that he stole Clyde Livingston's shoes. It begins to rain at Green Lake.

The narrator says that whether one believes in the curse or not, it's true that Stanley's father experienced his breakthrough on the day that Elya Yelnats's great-great grandson carried Madame Zeroni's great-great-great grandson up the mountain. Camp Green Lake is slated to become a **Girl Scout** camp, and Stanley and Zero each get about a million dollars from the contents of the suitcase. A year and a half later, Stanley and Hector are at a party to see the new commercial for Stanley's father's invention, which Clyde Livingston promotes. Hector sits with his mother, who sings a version of the lullaby that Madame Zeroni taught Elya.



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Stanley Yelnats – Stanley is the fourteen-year-old protagonist of the novel, who has been wrongfully imprisoned at a labor camp in Texas for stealing a famous athlete's sneakers. Before his wrongful conviction, Stanley was an overweight and extremely unhappy boy who suffered severe bullying, although he tends to be kind to others despite the cruelty he has experienced. His family has been unlucky for generations, which he believes to be the fault of the Yelnats family curse (though he also insists he doesn't actually believe in the curse). At Camp Green Lake, Stanley is forced to dig a huge hole every day and report anything interesting he finds to the Warden. He does his best to keep to himself and is soon given the nickname Caveman due to his size. As everyone seems selfish, cruel, and power-hungry, Stanley tries to stay on the good side of those in power including X-Ray, his unit's de-facto leader, to whom Stanley promises to give anything interesting he finds. This results in Stanley handing X-Ray a gold lipstick tube belonging to the bandit Kissin' Kate Barlow. Though Stanley remains interested in and concerned for the welfare of the boys at Camp Green Lake, his heart begins to harden after being

exposed to so much cruelty. For instance, Stanley at first goes along with Mr. Pendanski and the other boys in thinking that Zero is stupid and has nothing to offer; it's not until Zero shows Stanley unprecedented kindness that Stanley begins to take Zero seriously and treat him kindly in return. This culminates in Stanley trying to steal the water truck and go after Zero, who has run into the desert. When Stanley finds Zero, he carries the weak boy up the mountain, helps him drink, and sings him an old family lullaby—which appears to break the family curse. Stanley and Zero eventually return to Camp Green Lake, where they discover a suitcase full of valuable things and are rescued from the Warden and a yellow-spotted lizard's nest by Ms. Morengo, Stanley's lawyer. After this, Stanley demonstrates that he's learned the importance of kindness by refusing to leave camp without Zero.

Zero/Hector Zeroni – Zero is the smallest boy in Group D. He's black and is often scowling and angry-looking, though Stanley notices that when Zero smiles, his smile seems too big for his face. Zero is the only boy at Camp Green Lake who is referred to by his nickname by other campers and Mr. Pendanski alike; Mr. Pendanski is vocal about his belief that Zero is stupid and useless. This understandably makes Zero even angrier. None of the other boys like Zero much; he's consistently relegated to the last spot in line for water and the other boys join in Mr. Pendanski's jokes about Zero's worthlessness. He and Stanley become friends when Zero admits that he doesn't know how to read and asks Stanley to teach him. Stanley eventually learns that Zero is a very quick study and is skilled at performing mental math, despite having no formal education. In exchange for reading lessons, Zero digs part of Stanley's hole every day. After an altercation over this arrangement, Zero hits Mr. Pendanski across the face with a shovel and heads off into the desert alone. A day later, Stanley discovers that Zero is a ward of the state and thus, Mr. Pendanski and the Warden decide to destroy Zero's records and erase his entire existence. When Stanley goes out after Zero and finds him, Zero has been living under Sam's boat, eating Miss Katherine's peach preserves that he calls "sploosh." This makes him very ill. After carrying Zero to the top of **God's Thumb**, Stanley helps Zero drink and sings him his great-great grandfather's lullaby. As Zero recovers and as he and Stanley head back to camp, he tells Stanley about his mother. Zero also confesses that he stole Clyde Livingston's shoes; he thought it was better to steal old shoes than brand new ones. In the epilogue, the reader learns that Zero is actually Madame Zeroni's great-great-great grandson, and it broke the Yelnats family curse when Stanley carried Zero up the mountain. Zero uses his money from the first Stanley's suitcase to find his mother.

The Warden – The Warden, the novel's villain, owns and runs Camp Green Lake in the Texas desert. She's a tall, red-haired woman who is soft spoken but nasty: she knows that she's the most powerful person at camp and uses this to intimidate

anyone who challenges or bothers her, children and adults alike. When she feels as though Mr. Sir is wasting her time by bringing up his stolen sunflower seeds to her, she viciously hits him across the face with her rattlesnake venom-infused nail polish, leaving him in excruciating pain and with massive swelling on his face for days. Though it's never confirmed, the boys of Tent D tell Stanley that the Warden has hidden cameras and microphones around the camp to constantly spy on the teenage inmates. Stanley discovers relatively quickly that the Warden is looking for something specific in the desert. Through flashbacks, the reader learns that the Warden is Trout Walker's descendant and her family has owned the land around Green Lake for generations. When X-Ray "discovers" the lipstick tube from Kate Barlow, the Warden gets excited and proves a terrifying overseer when it becomes clear that she's not going to find what she's looking for. Later, when Zero walks off into the desert alone, the Warden shows just how cruel she is and how little she thinks of her charges: she asks Mr. Pendanski to erase Zero's records, implying that if Zero somehow doesn't die in the desert, he'll somehow die when he returns to camp. Days later, when Stanley and Zero do unearth the first Stanley's suitcase that Kate Barlow buried in the desert, the Warden engages in a standoff for more than twelve hours with the boys, who are surrounded by yellow-spotted lizards. She callously asks Zero why he isn't dead yet and when Ms. Morengo and the Attorney General arrive, she attempts to act as though she cares about the boys and about observing protocol, though her constantly changing story reveals she cares only about herself. After Stanley and Zero leave camp, the Warden is forced to sell Camp Green Lake.

Miss Katherine/Kissin' Kate Barlow – In 1880s Green Lake, Miss Katherine was the town's beloved schoolteacher. She was beautiful, charming, and an exceptional educator, and so she was beloved by children, parents, and her adult students alike. She also won a special prize at the Fourth of July picnic every year for her spiced peaches. The town expected her to marry Trout Walker, the wealthiest bachelor, but Miss Katherine turned down his advances. Miss Katherine was also friends with Sam, the African-American onion seller. He fixed the schoolhouse over the course of a semester, and at the end, Miss Katherine and Sam discovered that they'd fallen in love. They kissed in the rain one night not long after. Miss Katherine was distraught the next day when Trout Walker led a mob to torch the schoolhouse, and the sheriff refused to do anything about it. She was shocked and disgusted when the sheriff asked for a kiss, and she tried to help Sam escape. Trout Walker shot Sam and rescued her. Three days later, Miss Katherine killed the sheriff and kissed him. She spent the next twenty years as Kissin' Kate Barlow, one of the most feared outlaws in the west. During those twenty years, she attacked a stagecoach carrying the first Stanley Yelnats and stole his suitcase full of valuable bonds and promissory notes, which she buried in Green Lake (which was, by then, a ghost town). Trout Walker came for her

treasure twenty years after Sam's death and she died laughing after refusing to tell him where she buried the first Stanley's suitcase. In the present day, Zero survives in the desert by eating her canned spiced peaches, which survived for over 100 years in Sam's boat on the dried-up lake.

Elya Yelnats – Elya is referred to as Stanley's “no-good-dirty-rotten-pig-stealing-great-great-grandfather.” He's responsible for cursing the Yelnats family after he broke a promise to his friend Madame Zeroni. Elya is described as being a kind, if somewhat idealistic, teen; he's far more interested in spending time with Madame Zeroni than he is in mud wrestling, which is held up as the sport of desirable bachelors. At age fifteen in mid-1800s Latvia, Elya fell in love with a girl named Myra. To win her hand, Madame Zeroni told Elya to carry a runty piglet up a mountain every day. There, the piglet was to drink from a stream and Elya was to sing it a special song. On the day of Myra's birthday, Elya was then supposed to carry Madame Zeroni up the mountain. However, Elya neglected to carry the pig up the hill on the last day and because of this, the pig weighed exactly the same as Igor Barkov's pig. In his disappointment at losing his love's hand, Elya boarded a ship bound for America and broke his promise to Madame Zeroni. Elya was insistent that the curse was nonsense; he was sad only because he felt bad for breaking his promise, as he knew how much she wanted to drink from the stream. Though he never admits that the curse might be real, he does tell his wife, Sarah Miller, about the curse after lightning strikes his barn for a third time.

Madame Zeroni – In the present, Madame Zeroni is described as a “Gypsy woman;” in reality, Madame Zeroni was Egyptian. In mid-1800s Latvia, she was an elderly woman and was good friends with Elya Yelnats. When Elya approached her, sad that he was going to be unable to marry Myra Menke, Madame Zeroni initially cautioned that Myra wasn't worth the trouble. However, against her better judgment, she gave Elya a runty piglet and instructed him to carry the piglet up the nearby mountain every day. There, the piglet was supposed to drink from the stream as Elya sang a special song to the pig. This was supposed to make the pig bigger than Igor's pig, who was Elya's rival for Myra's hand. On the final day, Elya was to carry Madame Zeroni up the hill (she has only one foot and couldn't climb herself) and sing her the song while she drank from the stream. Madame Zeroni told Elya that if he failed at any of this, his family would be cursed for eternity. Elya did indeed fail to follow through and began to wonder if the curse was real when he arrived in America. Though he asked people often if they knew of anyone named Zeroni, he never found any relatives of hers. In the present, Zero is Madame Zeroni's great-great-great grandson.

Sam – Sam is the black onion seller in 1880s Green Lake. He touts the healing powers of onions, citing his donkey Mary Lou as evidence: he claims that she's nearly 50 and never gets sick

because she eats only onions. Nobody is sure if they can believe him, given that Sam himself is only twenty. Aside from selling onions, Sam also makes a number of tinctures and ointments out of onions meant to cure all manner of illnesses and ailments. Even Doc Hawthorn uses Sam's cream to cure balding. Sam is gregarious and appears to be loved by all. He and Miss Katherine form a friendship and then a romance when he offers to fix the dilapidated schoolhouse for her. When there's no more to fix at the schoolhouse, Sam kisses Katherine in the rain, insisting it will fix her breaking heart. However, because Sam is African-American, the kiss is illegal and the townsfolk riot. Sam and Katherine attempt to escape across the lake to Sam's secret onion fields, but Trout Walker's motorized boat is inescapable. Trout shoots Sam in the water, which puts a curse on Green Lake: no rain falls until Stanley and Hector, 110 years later, set things right. Katherine tries to avenge Sam's death by killing the sheriff, who wanted to hang Sam.

Mr. Sir – Mr. Sir is a nasty middle manager at Camp Green Lake. He's especially grumpy because, when Stanley arrives, Mr. Sir has recently quit smoking; instead, he eats sunflower seeds by the bag. His favorite catchphrase is to say that Camp Green Lake isn't a **Girl Scout** camp, and he loves telling campers that they're not in the Girl Scouts anymore. Mr. Sir is a callous man who thinks little of the lives of the boys at camp; he tells Stanley outright that he's not worth wasting bullets on. He's also extremely vindictive. When Stanley takes the blame for stealing Mr. Sir's sunflower seeds, the Warden believes that bringing the matter to her is a waste of her time, so she hits and scratches Mr. Sir across the face with her rattlesnake venom-infused nail polish. This causes Mr. Sir's face to swell painfully, and he goes on to punish Stanley by depriving him of water for more than a week. He's later complicit in destroying Zero's records. Much to Mr. Sir's chagrin, after the Attorney General shuts Camp Green Lake down, it eventually becomes a **Girl Scout** camp.

Mr. Pendanski – Mr. Pendanski is the Tent D counselor. He's relatively young and wears a buzz cut, but he also has a thick curly beard. The Tent D boys refer to him as “Mom,” which he allows. He does, however, make a point to call his charges by their given names. He often attempts to give them pep talks and inspirational speeches about personal responsibility and life after Camp Green Lake. Of all the named authority figures, Mr. Pendanski is by far the kindest; he gives Stanley extra water when he realizes Mr. Sir is depriving Stanley and even offers to give Stanley a ride back to camp after his first day digging. Despite these positive qualities, Mr. Pendanski also thinks very little of Zero and is constantly cruel to him. He insists that Zero has nothing to offer, is unable to learn, and is only good for digging holes. This culminates in Zero hitting Mr. Pendanski across the face with a shovel. Later, Mr. Pendanski is complicit in destroying Zero's records. It's unclear what fate befalls Mr. Pendanski after the camp shuts down.

Charles "Trout" Walker – Charles Walker is the eligible bachelor of the richest family in 1880s Green Lake. He's most often referred to as Trout Walker; the nickname comes from his feet, which are afflicted with an incurable foot fungus that makes them smell like rotting fish. He's described as loud, stupid, and entitled—and proud of being all three. He's extremely angry when Miss Katherine turns down his advances and after she runs away with Sam, he takes justice into his own hands. He shoots Sam and "rescues" Katherine, after which no rain falls on Green Lake for the next 110 years. Twenty years later, Trout and his new wife, Linda, find Kate living on the edge of Green Lake and attempt to make her give up her treasure, having lost their own fortune as the lake dried up. The Walker family lives on the lake until the present, digging for Kate's treasure. The Warden is Trout's descendant.

Clyde Livingston – Clyde "Sweet Feet" Livingston is a famous baseball player. He also suffers from an incurable foot fungus that makes his feet smell like dead fish. Despite this, he donates an old pair of his shoes to a local homeless shelter to auction them off, even though they reek. Zero steals the shoes, though Stanley is the one convicted of the crime. Stanley idolizes Clyde Livingston and has a poster of the baseball player on his wall until it's confiscated as evidence. When Livingston testifies at Stanley's trial, he heartbreakingly calls Stanley a terrible person for stealing from homeless children. In the epilogue, Livingston and the Yelnats family presumably have made up for this, as he's the spokesperson for Stanley's father's cure for foot odor, Sploosh.

Zero's Mother – Though Zero's mother is described as being quite young, she looks older than she is and as though she's seen a number of unpleasant things in her life. Zero begins to tell Stanley about her as he recovers on **God's Thumb**. He recounts memories of her singing the same lullaby that Stanley's family has passed down for generations. She and Zero became homeless when Zero was very small, and she would often leave him places when she went to do things alone. Though it's unclear what exactly happened or when it happened, she abandoned him at a playground. After Zero gets money from the first Stanley's suitcase, he hires private investigators to find her and succeeds.

Stanley's Father – Stanley's father is the third Stanley Yelnats. He's an inventor, though his inventions are never very successful. He claims not to believe in the family curse but he also regularly blames mishaps on Elya Yelnats. When Stanley is convicted, his father is working on discovering a way to recycle old sneakers. While Stanley is at camp, he learns that the stench from this endeavor may lead to his family's eviction from their home. Stanley's father experiences a breakthrough immediately after Stanley carries Zero up the mountain and breaks the curse: he develops what he later names Sploosh, which is a fruity and spicy spray to cure foot odor. Clyde Livingston later promotes the product.

The Sheriff – The sheriff is a racist and powerful man in 1880s Green Lake. He's prepared to hang Sam for kissing Miss Katherine, and he drunkenly bullies Miss Katherine to try to get her to kiss him. He tells Miss Katherine that God will punish her for kissing Sam, and he presumably supports Trout Walker when he shoots Sam and "rescues" Katherine. Three days later, Miss Katherine shoots the sheriff and gives him the kiss he asked for.

The First Stanley Yelnats – The first Stanley was the son of Elya Yelnats and Sarah Miller. He made his fortune in the stock market on the east coast in the mid-late 1800s, went west with a valuable suitcase, but was robbed by Kissin' Kate Barlow. She left him in the desert, where he survived for 17 days on **God's Thumb**—although, when he came out of his delirium in the hospital, he had no idea what that even means. He married his nurse and remained in Texas, where the Yelnats family lives to the present day.

X-Ray/Rex – X-Ray is a small boy in Tent D. Despite his size, he's the leader of the group and is always first in line for water. Though he allows others to believe that he got his nickname because he has sharp eyesight, in reality, X-Ray is just Rex in pig Latin and he has terrible eyesight. After Stanley finds the fossil, X-Ray asks that if Stanley finds anything else, he give it to him—he's been at Camp Green Lake a year and believes he's the most deserving of a day off.

Zigzag/Ricky – Zigzag is one of the boys in Tent D. He's white and one of the tallest at camp, though this is mostly because his neck is exceptionally long. He takes a great deal of offense to Stanley and Zero's agreement for Zero to dig part of Stanley's hole, so he begins a fight with Stanley with Mr. Pendanski's blessing. He also tells the Warden about the agreement, which culminates in Zero heading off alone into the desert after hitting Mr. Pendanski with a shovel.

Stanley's Mother – Stanley's mother insists there's no family curse, though she also can't ignore the fact that things go wrong for her family often. While Stanley is at Camp Green Lake, he and his mother write letters to each other. His mother appreciates Stanley's attempts to make it seem like he's at a real summer camp, as it makes her feel like a much wealthier parent.

Myra Menke – Myra is the object of Elya Yelnats's affection in mid-1800s Latvia. Though she's exceptionally beautiful, Madame Zeroni describes her as being "as empty as a flower pot." Elya eventually discovers that this is true: though he thought Myra loved him, when asked to choose between him and Igor Barkov, Myra cannot make a decision and instead she asks her suitors to choose numbers between one and ten so that chance can make her decision for her. She marries Igor.

Myra's Father – Myra Menke's father wishes to marry her off when she turns fifteen. He doesn't much care whom she marries; he simply wants a fat pig in return. This leads him to

consider Igor Barkov and agree to Elya's suggestion that the suitor to bring the fattest pig should win her hand.

Igor Barkov – Igor is a 57-year-old pig farmer in mid-1800s Latvia. Like Elya, he wishes to marry Myra Menke and he promises Myra's father a fat pig as a bride price. He agrees with Myra's father to accept that whomever brings the fattest pig will win Myra's hand. He ends up marrying Myra, as the pigs weigh exactly the same and Myra was unwilling to choose.

Sarah Miller – Elya Yelnats marries Sarah Miller not long after he immigrates to the United States in the mid-1800s. She can think for herself and has a number of practical skills. She doesn't fully buy Elya's story that the family is cursed, but she is entranced by the song that Madame Zeroni taught him. She makes the song rhyme in English and sings it to her son, the first Stanley.

Ms. Morengo – Ms. Morengo is technically a patent lawyer, but she also represents Stanley. Stanley's father is able to hire her after experiencing a breakthrough in his invention to cure foot odor. Ms. Morengo is a very short Hispanic woman who is a force to be reckoned with. She is able to take both Stanley and Zero away from Camp Green Lake.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Doc Hawthorn – Doc Hawthorn is the doctor in 1880s Green Lake. Residents of Green Lake seek out both Doc Hawthorn's services as well as Sam's onion potions, and neither man is bothered by this arrangement. Doc Hawthorn himself uses an onion cream for balding.

Linda Walker – Linda Walker is Trout Walker's wife. Though Kate remembers Linda as one of her former students (and a pleasant one), after her marriage, Linda becomes just as cold and mean as her husband.

Squid/Alan – Squid is one of the boys in Tent D. When Stanley is released from Camp Green Lake, Squid asks him to call his mother and relay to her that he's sorry, using his given name, Alan.

Magnet/José – Magnet is a Mexican boy in Tent D. He implies that he was arrested for theft, and he steals Mr. Sir's sunflower seeds at camp. During one of Mr. Pendanski's conversations, Magnet suggests he'd like to train animals for movies.

Armpit/Theodore – Aside from Stanley, Armpit is the biggest boy in Tent D. He's often angry and can be violent.

Mrs. Tennyson – A woman in Green Lake who thanks Sam for curing her daughter with onions.

Barf Bag – The boy whose place Stanley takes at Camp Green Lake. He left the camp and was hospitalized because he purposefully stepped on a rattlesnake.

Twitch – A boy assigned to Tent D to take Zero's place. His real name is Brian and he was arrested for stealing a car.

The Guard – The guard accompanies Stanley to Camp Green Lake.

The Bus Driver – The driver who takes Stanley to Camp Green Lake. He cautions Stanley to be careful.

Hattie Parker – The woman in Green Lake who saw Sam and Miss Katherine kissing and then spread the news.

The Attorney General – The Texas Attorney General accompanies Ms. Morengo to pick up Stanley from Camp Green Lake. He's tall and wears a cowboy hat.

Derrick Dunne – Stanley's bully at home. Because Derrick is small, the teachers don't take his bullying seriously.



THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



FATE AND DESTINY

Holes follows fourteen-year-old Stanley Yelnats, a boy wrongly accused of stealing a pair of shoes, as he's sent to Camp Green Lake in the Texas desert to serve his sentence. For generations, Stanley's family has been haunted by the specter of Stanley's "no-good-dirty-rotten-pig-stealing-great-great-grandfather." That great-great grandfather, Elya Yelnats, didn't follow through on a bargain he struck with a "gypsy" woman, Madame Zeroni, and the Yelnats family has been plagued by bad luck ever since. Opinion varies among the Yelnats family members as to whether this is due to a real curse put on the family by Madame Zeroni or a simple case of constant bad luck, but the narrator is quick to point out instances in which things seem far too serendipitous to be the work of mere chance. With this, *Holes* presents a world in which there's a very real chance that fate is at work, even if it's never possible for the characters to ever know for sure. In this way, Sachar is able to use fate and destiny as devices to make the plot of the novel feel especially dramatic, ordered, and satisfying.

It's worth noting that, at least according to what they say, none of the Yelnats family truly believes in the curse—even Elya. The narrator states that when Elya realized he broke his promise to Madame Zeroni, he was only fifteen and instead of worrying about his family being cursed for generations, he was simply sad that he'd broken a promise to his friend. Over the next several generations (Stanley the protagonist is the fourth Stanley Yelnats; the first Stanley was Elya's son), the Yelnats family is plagued by bad luck. Most notable is the first Stanley, who surprisingly did make his fortune on the east coast and

then headed west with a valuable suitcase. In Texas, his stagecoach was attacked by the outlaw Kissin' Kate Barlow, who stole his suitcase. He survived for seventeen days in the desert, married a nurse at the hospital where he was treated, and the Yelnats family has been in Texas ever since. Notably, Kate's story is also one in which fate factors dramatically. Before she was Kissin' Kate Barlow, she was Miss Katherine, the beloved schoolteacher of the idyllic Texas town of Green Lake. When she fell in love with Sam, an African-American onion seller, his murder by the wealthy white man Trout Walker propelled Kate into a life of banditry and put a curse of sorts on Green Lake: the narrator states that since Sam's death, 110 years before the present, not a drop of rain has fallen in the area.

Though Stanley's time at Camp Green Lake is horrific and makes little sense to him, his transformation over the course of the novel very much mirrors the transformation that young Elya went through as he entered into his agreement with Madame Zeroni. In order to win over his love, Myra Menke, Elya was to carry a piglet up the mountain every day to drink from a magical stream and sing it a special lullaby. This would both make him extremely strong and help his pig grow bigger than that of Igor Barkov, his rival for Myra's affection. On the final day, Elya was supposed to carry the pig up the hill and then carry Madame Zeroni herself to the stream. Stanley, on the other hand, digs holes five feet wide and five feet deep every day for about the same amount of time that Elya carried his pig up the mountain. At what comes to be the end of Stanley's sentence, he runs away into the desert after his friend, Hector "Zero" Zeroni. Zero becomes extremely ill and dehydrated after several days in the desert, leading Stanley to carry Zero up a mountain to where they believe there's water. Unbeknownst to both boys, Zero is actually the great-great-great grandson of Madame Zeroni—and after Stanley carries Zero up the mountain and sings him the special lullaby, it appears to break the curse. Stanley's dad promptly experiences a breakthrough in his formula to cure foot odor and, because of this, he is finally able to hire a lawyer to prove Stanley's innocence. Ms. Morengo isn't just able to clear Stanley, but is able to also take temporary custody of Zero and shut down Camp Green Lake. This in particular suggests that Stanley's actions also did something to atone for Sam's murder, as the Warden is Trout Walker's descendent—and following Stanley's release, rain finally falls on the lake again.

Though the characters remain seemingly unconvinced of the actual existence of the curse, the ways in which Stanley's completion of his great-great grandfather's task appears to set things right for the family suggests that fate and destiny clearly exist and hold sway in Stanley's world. In the end, it seems to matter less whether or not the Yelnats family truly believes or not in fate or curses—the success and relief that Stanley's family feels in the epilogue suggests that, even if they don't fully

believe in the curse, Stanley's actions still somehow freed them from ever needing to blame their misfortunes on Stanley's no-good-dirty-rotten-pig-stealing-great-great-grandfather.



CRUELTY VS. KINDNESS

Camp Green Lake is an impossibly cruel place. There, the Warden forces teenage inmates to dig holes five feet wide and five feet deep, seemingly

for no reason other than to "build character." In addition to this backbreaking labor, the adults in charge, who are ironically referred to as counselors, also work hard to terrify the inmates and destroy their senses of self-worth—and in turn, they foster an environment in which cruelty and terror are valuable currency, while kindness is a joke when it exists at all. In this environment Stanley's kindnesses to his fellow Group D members, and specifically to Zero, stand in sharp contrast to the way the rest of the camp functions. Through the relationship between Stanley and Zero, *Holes* explores the truly transformative power of kindness, as well as the dehumanizing effects of cruelty, ultimately suggesting that kindness and friendship in particular can help to remedy some of the effects of cruel mistreatment.

Stanley is described as being a "good kid," and his actions and outlook on life are surprisingly generous given the circumstances. He's arrested because he's just "in the wrong place at the wrong time," but he's also trying to do something nice for his dad by bringing him the smelly pair of shoes that mysteriously fell from the sky (Stanley's dad is in the process of figuring out how to recycle old sneakers, and Stanley feels instinctively that the shoes will be the key to his dad's success). Stanley simply has no idea the shoes were stolen. Immediately upon arrival at Camp Green Lake, however, Stanley learns that his kindness and generosity aren't going to get him far in the cutthroat social structure of Group D or the camp at large. Mr. Sir, the cantankerous middle manager of Camp Green Lake, handles Stanley's intake and promptly reminds him that "this isn't a **Girl Scout** camp," a phrase that he repeats in some form nearly every time he speaks. Coupled with the fact that Mr. Sir is easily the nastiest adult in charge, second only to the Warden, his constant refrain about the Girl Scouts sets up the idea that the things and ideas that he considers embarrassingly feminine—in this case, things like kindness, empathy, or care for others—don't exist at Camp Green Lake, the goal is to be as toxically masculine and as cruel as possible, just like he is.

Mr. Sir and the Warden's insistence on cruelty filters down to the campers, which in turn keeps the campers from forming meaningful connections with each other, truly caring about others' fates, or being at all willing to help each other. Of the boys in Group D, Stanley seems relatively unique in that he clearly recognizes that the social hierarchy of Group D is based on terror and power, not camaraderie. Thus, Stanley "moves up one spot in line" for water only when he caves to X-Ray's

intimidation, while any attempts he makes to express care or interest in his peers' wellbeing are met with explosive anger. The only person that this doesn't hold true for is Zero, who is spoken to with unmatched cruelty by both his peers and adults, even the relatively kind Mr. Pendanski. The fact that Zero and Stanley are able to form a friendship suggests that Zero, like Stanley, doesn't necessarily buy into the idea that behaving cruelly is the only way to get ahead in the world. Indeed, Zero doesn't participate in any of the group intimidation of Stanley and is the only camper who refuses to use Stanley's assigned nickname, Caveman. Zero's choice to instead be mostly solitary culminates in his decision to walk away from the camp altogether into the desert, a choice that suggests it's better to be alone than to live with the kind of cruelty that's commonplace at Camp Green Lake.

When Stanley decides to go after Zero, understanding that Zero has no chance of survival without water, he rebels dramatically by choosing kindness in a place where kindness is severely undervalued. The high degree of care that Stanley shows Zero while they wander in the desert, including carrying him up an impossibly steep mountain, finding him water, and feeding him onions, allows Stanley and Zero to become close to each other and become true friends. Stanley's kindness to Zero even allows him to break the curse that Madame Zeroni, a distant grandmother of Zero's, put on Elya Yelnats, Stanley's great-great grandfather. Finally, the lake's subsequent transformation into a real lake—and the fact that Camp Green Lake becomes a real Girl Scout camp after the Warden's operation is shut down—illustrates clearly that harmony among nature and people rests on kindness, while cruelty has the power to destroy both.



JUSTICE

Holes explores the complexity of justice, both in terms of formal justice systems like courts of law, and more personal justice systems, such as the banditry and vigilante justice of the outlaw Kissin' Kate Barlow in the late 1800s. By exploring the ways in which the formal justice system falls short and doesn't actually promote justice, both in the present and in the past, *Holes* questions the usefulness of formal systems of justice in the first place. At the same time, it also questions the role of both vigilante justice and justice that appears to come from fate, destiny, or possibly God. Ultimately, the novel suggests that it takes all three methods to properly uphold justice, while also suggesting that everyone will eventually receive the justice they deserve—though it may come through mysterious means.

From the beginning, the reader is led to believe that the formal justice system is ineffective at best. The narrator explains upfront that Stanley didn't steal the famous baseball player Clive Livingston's shoes from the homeless shelter, where they were supposed to be auctioned to raise money. Regardless, Stanley is

convicted and sent to Camp Green Lake, which is sold to him as an option superior to going to prison. Stanley then arrives at Camp Green Lake and becomes aware of just how dysfunctional and cruel the camp truly is. While Camp Green Lake is technically part of the formal Texas justice system, in reality, it exists in a separate realm altogether from the justice system. This is reinforced and magnified by the fact that it soon becomes clear that the teenage inmates aren't actually there just to "build character" by digging holes; Stanley realizes after a few weeks that the Warden is looking for something buried in the lake and is using the inmates as cheap labor to help her find it. This shows clearly just how corrupt and ineffective the formal justice system is, as it doesn't seem like the state particularly cares about the injustices that go on at Camp Green Lake.

When the novel goes back in time to tell the history of Green Lake, it quickly becomes clear that Camp Green Lake is barren and horrific in the present as punishment for an instance in which justice was *not* served in the 1880s. When Miss Katherine, the beloved schoolteacher, first rejected the advances of the wealthy Trout Walker and then fell in love with the black onion seller Sam, the idyllic town dissolved into race-driven violence. The town of Green Lake had outlawed interracial relationships, and thus Katherine and Sam's kiss sparked a riot that resulted in Trout Walker shooting Sam in the middle of the lake as he tried to escape with Katherine, and then rescuing Katherine "against her will." Prior to her attempt to escape with Sam, Katherine approached the sheriff for help when the mob began to torch the schoolhouse. The sheriff not only refused to put a stop to the violence, but presumably went on to condone Trout Walker's actions. He also suggested that God would punish Kate for kissing Sam, given that her participation in the kiss wasn't illegal, it was just considered morally wrong in the racist world of the 1880s. This illustrates how the formal justice system in Green Lake has been corrupt for more than a century—as the sheriff's cruelty continues to be perpetuated by the Warden in the present. Then, after describing what happened to Sam, the narrator notes that "not one drop of rain has fallen on Green Lake" since Sam was murdered, 110 years ago. The narrator even asks the reader to decide whom God punished. In this way, the novel encourages the reader to see the horror of Camp Green Lake as divine punishment for the morally repugnant actions of the sheriff and Trout Walker, whose descendent is none other than the Warden.

When Katherine kills the sheriff, she also seeks to do her part to atone for Sam's death. The fact that she dies laughing twenty years later at the hands of Trout Walker and his wife when they come for her treasure suggests that she very literally got the last laugh—the Walker family continues to pay for their racism and greed for generations, even after the novel ends (the Warden is forced to sell Camp Green Lake after the Texas

attorney general shuts it down). With this, the novel makes it clear that everyone will eventually receive justice, even if justice comes on its own timeline and from outside the formal justice system.



POWER, MONEY, AND EDUCATION

At its heart, *Holes* is a study of power dynamics. By considering the different ways that characters gain power, hold onto it, or are unable to do either, *Holes*

questions the very nature of power and, specifically, the different ways that individuals are denied power due to poverty and a lack of education.

One of the first means of gaining power that the novel explores is through money. The Yelnats family is extremely poor, while Zero and Zero's mother lived in dire poverty until his mother disappeared, leaving Zero to live as an orphan on the streets. For both boys—and, indeed, their families as well—their economic standing is one of the main reasons why Stanley and Zero end up at Camp Green Lake in the first place. Stanley's family is unable to pay for a lawyer to defend Stanley, which puts him at the mercy of the criminal justice system that's more interested in convicting someone for stealing Clyde Livingston's shoes than discovering the truth of who did it. Stanley chooses to go to Camp Green Lake instead of prison because the judge pressures him into making a quick decision, which again illustrates how Stanley's lack of power in the courtroom relegated him to a horrendous fate: in the event that Stanley had lost his case even with the help of a lawyer, a lawyer still would've been aware that Camp Green Lake is no idyll and, at the very least, could've given Stanley more time to make an informed decision.

Zero is similarly victimized because his poverty forces him to petty theft in order to simply survive—he's arrested and sent to Camp Green Lake after stealing a pair of shoes from a shoe store, and he tells Stanley that he and his mother have always had to steal in order to eat. For Zero in particular, he believes that the only way to maintain power and control over his own life is to steal and hide from the authorities, as the government discovering that he's living as an orphan gives them the right to declare him a ward of the state—in other words, to take control over Zero's life.

Unlike Stanley or the other campers, Zero is victimized because of his lack of education; he's entirely illiterate when Stanley meets him. Stanley's opinion of Zero evolves relatively quickly—he very soon recognizes that Zero is exceptionally smart and worthy of consideration, regardless of whether or not he can read—but Zero's lack of education means that no one else at Camp Green Lake takes him seriously and he simultaneously has less power to stand up for himself. Though it's somewhat unclear if the other boys at camp are aware that Zero is illiterate, they nonetheless view him as stupid, uneducated, and only good for digging holes, and they use this

image of him to justify their own superiority and their bullying and poor treatment of Zero. The power of education comes to the forefront when, at the end of the novel, Zero has learned to read well enough to be able to read Stanley's name on the mysterious suitcase he and Stanley dig up. This allows Zero to effectively make the case to Ms. Morengo that the suitcase belongs to Stanley, not the Warden, finally gaining a degree of power over a person who has, for the entirety of the novel, held Zero's life in her hands.

Though the epilogue doesn't reference education specifically, Stanley and Zero both earn a small fortune from the contents of the first Stanley Yelnats's suitcase. With this money, Stanley is able to buy a house, and Zero—who chooses to go by his real name, Hector—is able to finally reunite with his mother. This happy ending implies that, even if money can't necessarily buy happiness, it does indeed have the power to make it easier for one to move through the world and support one's family, which the novel ultimately suggests is one way to get closer to true happiness.



MAN VS. NATURE

In all three settings of the novel (Latvia in the mid-1800s; Green Lake, Texas in the 1880s; and Camp Green Lake in the late 1990s), the natural world is afforded a great deal of power over its human inhabitants. For those who are willing to play by the natural world's rules, nature isn't something to be feared; rather, it's something that can bring happiness, good fortune, and even economic prosperity. For those who seek to dominate the land, and, in some cases, for those who do respect the land, the natural world strikes back with surprising force. In this way, *Holes* presents a version of nature in which nature is something sentient whose rules require respect and reverence.

The power of the natural world is first introduced in Elya Yelnats's story, when Madame Zeroni tells him that if he carries his piglet up the mountain daily to drink from a stream that runs uphill, it will grow big enough for him to win his beloved Myra's hand. It very quickly becomes clear that the stream has magical powers, as the runty piglet is exactly as big as Igor's pig on the day of Myra's birthday—but not bigger, as Elya didn't take the pig up the mountain that final day. The stream represents an unnatural yet benevolent side to nature, and it shows up again in Green Lake, Texas. Sam the onion man carefully guards the location where he grows his onions, but it later comes to light that the water there either runs uphill or comes from some other mysterious means. This in turn helps Sam market his onions, as well as the tinctures and lotions he makes with them, as a sort of miracle drug for all manner of maladies and ailments. Most notably, Sam makes an onion drink that repels the deadly yellow-spotted lizards that, at the time, lived only in the mountains. In particular, when the knowledge that the lizards hate onions dies with Sam, it suggests that the

ability to coexist with the natural world belongs only to those who treat it with respect and take its unnatural elements in stride, unlike Sam's killer Trout Walker and his descendent, the Warden.

When the narrator suggests that Green Lake dried up and became a desert to punish Trout Walker and the racist townsfolk who participated in the mob, it implies that nature in the world of *Holes* isn't just something that exists alongside humans. Rather, it's something sentient with a keen interest in the goings-on of its human inhabitants, as well as a sense of morality and judgment that is clearly not in line with that of Trout Walker and the sheriff. With the transformation of Green Lake into a desert, the yellow-spotted lizards also descend from the mountains to prey on any humans not quick enough to escape them. Though the novel suggests that this was a natural move for the lizards, which thrive in the dry desert sun, it's also possible to read this as another way in which the natural world punishes its inhabitants for misdeeds by making its desert even more dangerous.

Stanley clearly reads the land as sentient. He makes note of the rock formation he refers to as "**God's Thumb**," where the first Stanley supposedly survived for seventeen days after Kissin' Kate abandoned him in the desert. As Stanley and Zero make their way across the desert towards the mountains, they keep an eye on the formation and feel as though the land itself is giving them a thumbs-up to urge them on. When they finally arrive, Stanley and Zero find the land (which is implied to be Sam's onion field) truly life-giving: they're able to dig to find water, and the steady diet of onions that both boys eat for several days not only brings Zero back to some semblance of health—it keeps the boys safe when they find themselves in a nest of yellow-spotted lizards upon their return to Camp Green Lake.

Taken together, the end of the novel clearly reinforces the power of the natural world and its interest in human events: Stanley's act of carrying Zero up the hill, helping him drink, and singing him Madame Zeroni's lullaby appears to break the curse, while rains finally come to Green Lake and turn the lake into an actual lake again following the Warden's removal from the land. When the narrator explains that Camp Green Lake is slated to become an actual **Girl Scout** camp within a few years, it suggests that Green Lake itself is turning over a new leaf and will be presumably be managed by better stewards with the power to impart an appropriate sense of respect and reverence in the campers to come.



GIRL SCOUTS

Mr. Sir's favorite catchphrase is that "this isn't a Girl Scout camp," and calling the campers Girl Scouts is his favorite insult. This speaks to the way that those at Camp Green Lake gender their cruelty—it's masculine (and acceptable) to be cruel and perform hard labor, while anything else, even positive qualities like kindness or caring, are unfashionably feminine. In this way, Mr. Sir's catchphrase comes to encapsulate the toxic nature of the camp and show that the camp takes destructive masculine ideas to the extreme. When the narrator says at the end of the novel that a restored Camp Green Lake will actually be turned into a Girl Scout camp in the future, it suggests that, with balanced restored to the area of Green Lake, these more feminine qualities have prevailed and, contrary to Mr. Sir's beliefs, kindness and genuine care for others and the environment—as represented by the Girl Scouts—will govern the area going forward.



GOD'S THUMB

God's Thumb, which Stanley also refers to as Big Thumb, is a rock formation in the mountains several miles away from Camp Green Lake. It looks like a fist making a thumbs-up sign on a massive scale. It comes to represent the sentience of nature within the world of the novel, especially as Stanley and Zero begin their journey towards it. Stanley in particular feels as though the rock is encouraging him and urging him on. Stanley, Zero, and the first Stanley all survive thanks to the water and onions available around the rock formation. This suggests that nature's benevolence is reserved for those who are willing to look for it and respect the natural world. On the other hand, God's Thumb is barely visible from Camp Green Lake, an area that has been effectively abandoned by nature, unless one is specifically looking for it.



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Random House edition of *Holes* published in 1998.



SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

Part 1, Chapter 3 Quotes

☞ Stanley was not a bad kid. He was innocent of the crime for which he was convicted. He'd just been in the wrong place at the wrong time.

It was all because of his no-good-dirty-rotten-pig-stealing-great-great-grandfather!

He smiled. It was a family joke. Whenever anything went wrong, they always blamed Stanley's no-good-dirty-rotten-pig-stealing-great-great-grandfather.

Related Characters: Madame Zeroni, Elya Yelnats, Stanley Yelnats

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 7

Explanation and Analysis

Stanley is on the bus to Camp Green Lake as the narrator explains that Stanley is innocent and goes on to introduce the Yelnats family curse to the reader. At this point, Stanley and the rest of his family don't believe in the curse, though they're able to use it like Stanley does here to help them assign meaning to their difficult situations. This suggests that even if someone doesn't believe in fate or destiny, referencing those ideas is one way to help achieve a sense of control and meaning in regards to one's life. Specifically in regards to Stanley's character, the fact that he's able to smile right now points to his overwhelmingly positive and optimistic nature, which helps to develop him as a "good kid" who is fundamentally kind and hopeful.

Further, when the narrator insists that Stanley is innocent, it introduces the idea that the justice system at work in the novel isn't exactly the best way to get justice. It suggests that the system is rigged, difficult, and uninterested in helping someone like Stanley.

☞ All of them had something else in common. Despite their awful luck, they always remained hopeful. As Stanley's father liked to say, "I learn from failure."

But perhaps that was part of the curse as well. If Stanley and his father weren't always hopeful, then it wouldn't hurt so much every time their hopes were crushed.

Related Characters: Elya Yelnats, Stanley's Father, Stanley Yelnats

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 9

Explanation and Analysis

The narrator explains the Yelnats family curse and notes that the Yelnats men in particular are all extremely hopeful individuals. By suggesting that this quality may be part of the family curse, the narrator shows how fate and destiny have the potential to infiltrate all parts of Stanley and his family's lives. This becomes even more important later, as this introduces the idea that every element of the story, even these seemingly inconsequential character traits, are the work of destiny. Later, these will come to the forefront and help the novel to flesh out the idea that all of these little things are actually extremely consequential.

Part 1, Chapter 4 Quotes

☞ "I see you're looking at my gun. Don't worry. I'm not going to shoot you." He tapped his holster. "This is for yellow-spotted lizards. I wouldn't waste a bullet on you."

Related Characters: Mr. Sir (speaker), Stanley Yelnats

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 14

Explanation and Analysis

As Mr. Sir points out how deadly the desert surrounding Camp Green Lake is, he insists that the teenage inmates aren't worth shooting. This is one of the first ways that Mr. Sir tells Stanley that Stanley doesn't matter to him—he's merely a body to verbally abuse, no more. This also provides some evidence for the possibility that the camp itself is merely using the inmates as inexpensive labor for ulterior motives, given how little the adults in charge seem to care about the boys. Mr. Sir's mention of the yellow-spotted lizards also impresses upon both Stanley and the reader that the natural world is a dangerous place that commands respect from those who live with it. Clearly, the lizards are more consequential to Mr. Sir than the human lives he's at camp to protect.

Part 1, Chapter 7 Quotes

☞ He wasn't afraid of the curse. He thought that was a lot of nonsense. He felt bad because he knew Madame Zeroni had wanted to drink from the stream before she died.

Related Characters: Madame Zeroni, Elya Yelnats

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 37

Explanation and Analysis

The narrator tells the story of Elya Yelnats and notes that when Elya realized he'd broken his promise to Madame Zeroni, he was upset only because he knew he'd let down a friend. This begins to impress upon the reader the importance of kindness and following through on one's promises. Using this model, the curse on the Yelnats family is a punishment for not keeping a simple promise, and in this way, it can be seen to exist entirely separately from the implied magic of the stream and the special song. Elya's unwillingness to take the curse seriously also sets up the rest of his family, including all his descendants, to not believe in the curse. Because of this, the Yelnats family has far less power to right Elya's wrongs.

●● Stanley waited for him to drive away, then took another look at his hole. He knew it was nothing to be proud of, but he felt proud nonetheless.

He sucked up his last bit of saliva and spat.

Related Characters: Mr. Pendanski, Stanley Yelnats

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 40

Explanation and Analysis

After Stanley finishes his first hole, he feels strangely proud and engages in the custom of spitting in the finished hole. Stanley's strange sense of pride begins to show how the specific environment of Camp Green Lake warps the campers' perceptions of what's normal and reasonable. This is exactly because Camp Green Lake exists outside of the normal Texas justice system and indeed, well outside of any civilization at all. This isolation allows it to create a system based on hard manual labor and cruelty. The consequences of this are Stanley's strange sense of pride, as well as the boys' inability to truly care for or about each other as they go about their days at camp.

Part 1, Chapter 8 Quotes

●● A lot of people don't believe in curses.

A lot of people don't believe in yellow-spotted lizards either, but if one bites you, it doesn't make a difference whether you believe in it or not.

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 41

Explanation and Analysis

The narrator takes a short chapter to introduce the reader to the yellow-spotted lizards and explain how deadly they are and outline their semi-mystical place in the culture of the Green Lake area. Remember that Mr. Sir has already told Stanley that his bullets are reserved for yellow-spotted lizards; this confirms for the reader that the lizards are indeed real. By conflating the lizards with curses as a whole, the narrator suggests that, just as the lizards are hardly believable and yet real, curses are also real. This helps frame the world of the novel as one in which destiny plays a major role, specifically in terms of how Stanley and his family handle their family curse.

Part 1, Chapter 11 Quotes

●● The more he thought about it, the more he was glad that he agreed to let X-Ray have anything he might find. If he was going to survive at Camp Green Lake, it was far more important that X-Ray think he was a good guy than it was for him to get one day off.

Related Characters: The Warden, X-Ray/Rex, Stanley Yelnats

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 53

Explanation and Analysis

After Stanley promises X-Ray whatever interesting things he might find out on the lake, Stanley reasons that the easiest way to make his time at camp better is to get on X-Ray's good side. This suggests that, even at this early stage (Stanley has only been at camp a few days), Stanley is already acutely aware of how the social structure functions. For the boys, it's based on their own desires to climb the totem pole and gain some modicum of power over their lives. In turn, this shows that Stanley is willing to play the game in order to do well and get ahead. However, it's also

notable that Stanley believes that his own welfare will be directly influenced by X-Ray's happiness. This is another way that the novel suggests that Stanley is, at heart, a kind and thoughtful person. For him, it's just icing on the cake when being nice also benefits him.

Part 1, Chapter 16 Quotes

☝☝ *It was wonderful to hear from you. Your letter made me feel like one of the other moms who can afford to send their kids to summer camp.*

Related Characters: Stanley's Mother (speaker), Stanley Yelnats

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 75

Explanation and Analysis

When Stanley reads a letter from his mother, he reads that his letter about swimming on the lake and learning to water ski (none of which is true) is helping his mom escape from her own poor financial situation. This first reinforces just how poor Stanley's family is, especially since it equates camp with wealth. Stanley's mom implies that the Yelnats family is nowhere near well-off enough to send Stanley to camp, and it's a wonderful fantasy for her that Stanley is indeed at camp.

This also helps develop Stanley as a kind and caring character, as it's clear that he knew this letter would go over well with his mom and make her feel better about the situation. Similarly, the act of writing about all the "fun things" he's not actually doing likely helps Stanley mentally escape from his horrible situation, something that the narrator suggests is part of the Yelnats family curse.



Part 1, Chapter 17 Quotes

☝☝ "That's your dirt," Zigzag said. "You have to dig it up. It's covering up my dirt."

Stanley felt a little dizzy. He could see a small pile of dirt. It took him a moment to realize that it was the dirt which had been on his shovel when he was hit.

He scooped it up, then Zigzag dug his shovel into the ground underneath where "Stanley's dirt" had been.

Related Characters: Zigzag/Ricky (speaker), Stanley Yelnats

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 79

Explanation and Analysis

While Group D is engaged in working on the Warden's massive hole, Zigzag accidentally hits Stanley in the head with his shovel. First, it's telling that Mr. Sir sends Stanley back into the hole after such an injury, as Stanley's dizziness indicates that he's clearly not well enough to be doing this kind of hard manual labor. This is again indicative of the cruelty of Camp Green Lake and the fact that the adults in charge care little for the boys in their care. Then, Zigzag's petty insistence that Stanley pick up "his" dirt shows just how the adults' lack of care poisons the way that the inmates think about justice and their relationships with each other. In other words, Zigzag is far more concerned with making sure that Stanley does his fair share, even if it kills him, than he is in taking care of one of his tent mates, something that would be encouraged in a less toxic environment.

Part 1, Chapter 18 Quotes

☝☝ "Sorry," Stanley said again.

His muscles and hands weren't the only parts of his body that had toughened over the past several weeks. His heart had hardened as well.

Related Characters: Stanley Yelnats (speaker), Zero/Hector Zeroni

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 82

Explanation and Analysis

When Zero asks if Stanley would teach him to read, Stanley insists that he can't. When the narrator notes that Stanley's heart has hardened since arriving at Camp Green Lake, it illustrates just how toxic the environment is. Even someone as caring and as kind as Stanley isn't immune; everyone is at risk of adapting to the toxicity and accepting it as normal.



By refusing to teach Zero to read, Stanley is also refusing to help Zero develop a way to stand up for himself. Though the novel never says outright why Mr. Pendanski and the other boys dislike Zero and pick on him, it's possible that they look down on him because of his lack of education. That Stanley has noted this before but still decides to not stand up for Zero shows that Stanley is becoming someone very

different than the person who arrived at camp, and that someone isn't nearly as nice.

Part 1, Chapter 19 Quotes

Stanley kept his mouth shut most of the time. He didn't talk too much to any of the boys, afraid that he might say the wrong thing. They called him Caveman and all that, but he couldn't forget that they were dangerous, too. They were all here for a reason. As Mr. Sir would say, this wasn't a Girl Scout camp.

Related Characters: Zero/Hector Zeroni, X-Ray/Rex, Magnet/José, Zigzag/Ricky, Squid/Alan, Armpit/Theodore, Mr. Sir, Stanley Yelnats

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 84

Explanation and Analysis

After Stanley attempts to make sure that Squid is okay when he hears him crying, the narrator explains that Stanley stays quiet at camp. Specifically, Stanley's willingness to invoke Mr. Sir's catchphrase suggests that he's beginning to take some of Mr. Sir's core beliefs to heart: namely, that the boys at camp must be extremely masculine and not show any softness in order to survive at camp.

It's also important to note that Stanley thinks of himself as being very different from the rest of the boys at Camp Green Lake. This shows that even though Stanley is a kind and generous person at heart, he still struggles to empathize with those who are different from him. This is, for example, why he's still struggling at this point to bring himself to teach Zero to read: he views Zero as being so different as to be not worth the time of day.

Part 1, Chapter 23 Quotes

A lot of men in town were not educated. This didn't bother Miss Katherine. She knew they'd spent most of their lives working on farms and ranches and hadn't had much schooling. That was why she was there—to teach them.

But Trout didn't want to learn. He seemed to be proud of his stupidity.

Related Characters: The Warden, Zero/Hector Zeroni, Stanley Yelnats, Charles "Trout" Walker, Miss Katherine/Kissin' Kate Barlow

Related Themes:   


Page Number: 103

Explanation and Analysis

The narrator describes the role of Miss Katherine, the schoolteacher in 1880s Green Lake, and that of Trout Walker, the nasty eligible bachelor. Most importantly, this passage places Trout Walker in direct opposition to education, which becomes important later when the Warden forbids Stanley from teaching Zero to read. As Trout Walker's descendant, the Warden appears to share his disdain for the power of education to change lives. Similarly, his distaste for education and his disrespect for his fellow students shows that, like the Warden, Trout Walker cares only for himself and what the world can offer him. Miss Katherine, on the other hand, shows what can be accomplished when one looks at the potential in uneducated but interested individuals; her desire to teach suggests that Stanley will also come around and decide to try to teach Zero.

Everyone in town had seen—and heard—the Walkers' new boat. It made a horrible loud noise and spewed ugly black smoke all over the beautiful lake.

Related Characters: Charles "Trout" Walker, Miss Katherine/Kissin' Kate Barlow

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 103


Explanation and Analysis

After Miss Katherine declines Trout Walker's invitation to go out on the boat, the narrator describes the motorized boat itself. The description of the boat suggests that it destroys the idyll that is Green Lake in the 1880s. This turns the boat itself into a way for Trout Walker and his family to exert control over the land, and sets up the idea of man versus nature as the real conflict at play here. This shows that the coming conflict is very human, but it's also very much rooted in a conflict between those who respect and love nature (such as Miss Katherine and Sam) and those who wish to dominate it (specifically, Trout Walker).

Part 1, Chapter 26 Quotes

☞ Miss Katherine jerked her hand free. As she hurried to the door, she heard the sheriff say, "The law will punish Sam. And God will punish you."

Related Characters: The Sheriff (speaker), Charles "Trout" Walker, Sam, Miss Katherine/Kissin' Kate Barlow

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 114

Explanation and Analysis

After the sheriff refuses to help Katherine stop Trout Walker's mob, she leaves his office as he insists that God will punish her for kissing Sam. The sheriff's words show that, as far as he's concerned, the formal legal system and the moral system upheld by Christianity are two ways to achieve the same kind of order—namely, an order that is racist, sexist, and supports people like him and Trout Walker. This illustrates how the sheriff is able to use his power to corrupt the justice system. These abuses make him feel comfortable propositioning Katherine for a kiss and invading her space and privacy as punishment for her "transgression" of kissing Sam.

☞ These are the facts:

The Walker boat smashed into Sam's boat. Sam was shot and killed in the water. Katherine Barlow was rescued against her wishes. When they returned to the shore, she saw Mary Lou's body lying on the ground. The donkey had been shot in the head.

That all happened one hundred and ten years ago. Since then, not one drop of rain has fallen on Green Lake.

You make the decision: Whom did God punish?

Related Characters: Charles "Trout" Walker, Sam, Miss Katherine/Kissin' Kate Barlow, The Sheriff

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 115

Explanation and Analysis



The narrator takes a step back from telling the story of Katherine and Sam's escape attempt from the mob in Green Lake to give a brief overview of the facts. The narrator's assessment of these events, in particular the note that rain hasn't fallen in Green Lake since Sam's murder, suggests

that the natural world isn't something indifferent to human events—rather, it's sentient, extremely tuned into human events, and possesses a firm sense of morality that's not in line with that of the sheriff and Trout Walker. As the narrator implies, this means that the fact that Green Lake is a desert in the present is divine punishment for Sam's murder. This then becomes a curse of sorts on the land, just as Stanley struggles with Elya Yelnats's curse. However, by placing the two curses together, it offers hope that Stanley will be able to right the wrongs that caused both curses in the first place.

Part 1, Chapter 27 Quotes

☞ Fortunately, Mr. Pendanski delivered the water more often than Mr. Sir. Mr. Pendanski was obviously aware of what Mr. Sir was doing, because he always gave Stanley a little extra. He'd fill Stanley's canteen, then let Stanley take a long drink, then top it off for him.

Related Characters: The Warden, Mr. Pendanski, Mr. Sir, Stanley Yelnats

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 116

Explanation and Analysis

After the Warden scratches Mr. Sir with rattlesnake venom, Mr. Sir begins depriving Stanley of water. Mr. Pendanski attempts to make up for this cruelty by giving Stanley extra. This suggests that, of all the adults in charge, Mr. Pendanski may not be as cruel or as horrible as the others. It suggests at the very least that he's still aware of the toxicity of Camp Green Lake and recognizes that it goes too far regularly, a realization that Mr. Sir and the Warden don't seem to have made. Stanley's thankfulness reinforces just how dysfunctional the social structure at Camp Green Lake is, as it's undeniably cruel—not to mention dangerous—to deprive people of water, especially given the kind of work the inmates are doing. This then comes to illustrate another incidence in which the adults in charge seem to care little for their charges.



Zero wrote the letters as Stanley said them. "Zero," he said, looking at his piece of paper. His smile was too big for his face.

Stanley watched him write it over and over again.

Zero Zero Zero Zero Zero Zero Zero...

In a way, it made him sad. He couldn't help but think that a hundred times zero was still nothing.

Related Characters: Zero/Hector Zeroni, Stanley Yelnats

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 119

Explanation and Analysis



Stanley and Zero continue their reading lessons and, finally, Zero learns to write his name. Stanley's thoughts about how sad Zero's name is points to the dehumanizing nature of the boys' nicknames. Though for the other boys they're a way to gain some semblance of control over their lives, identities, and how they're seen at Camp Green Lake, for Zero, his nickname is seen as both a solid reason to dehumanize him and a way in which to carry out that dehumanization. When Stanley still has these thoughts, it shows that he's not yet able to think of Zero as anything more than what his nickname connotes. This is especially true given that Stanley hasn't even considered that Zero does indeed have a given name and an identity outside of being Zero, a boy who loves to dig holes.

Part 2, Chapter 30 Quotes

"He's a genius, all right!" said Mr. Pendanski. "He's so stupid, he doesn't even know he's stupid."

Stanley didn't know why Mr. Pendanski seemed to have it in for Zero. If Mr. Pendanski only thought about it, he'd realize it was very logical for Zero to think that the letter "h" made the "ch" sound.

Related Characters: Mr. Pendanski (speaker), Zigzag/Ricky, The Warden, Zero/Hector Zeroni, Stanley Yelnats

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 138

Explanation and Analysis

After the Warden tests Zero on his spelling and Zero pronounces "hat" as "chat," Mr. Pendanski becomes especially nasty to Zero. Mr. Pendanski's nastiness suggests first that, as comparatively kind as Mr. Pendanski may be

among the authority figures at camp, he's still awful and cruel—and isn't afraid at all to show it. In particular, the fact that Mr. Pendanski is willing to be so cruel in front of his boss as well as in front of Zero suggests that there are no consequences at Camp Green Lake for behaving with this kind of cruelty.

On the other side, Stanley's ability to see that Zero's pronunciation is very logical for someone who hasn't yet learned what sound "h" makes shows that helping Zero learn to read is one way for Stanley to reclaim some of his humanity and his ability to think and act kindly and generously. In short, teaching Zero to read is making it so that Stanley doesn't suffer quite as badly as the other boys, who all overwhelmingly have warped senses of justice due to the cruelty they suffer at the hands of those like Mr. Pendanski.

Part 2, Chapter 31 Quotes

He knew he never should have let Zero dig part of his hole for him. He still could've taught him to read. If Zero could dig all day and still have the strength to learn, then he should have been able to dig all day and still have the strength to teach.

What he should do, he thought, was go out after Zero.

But he didn't.

Related Characters: Zero/Hector Zeroni, Stanley Yelnats

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 141



Explanation and Analysis

After Zero leaves camp and heads off alone into the desert, Stanley feels complicit in the events that precipitated Zero's decision to go. It's telling that Stanley recognizes where he went wrong and also what he must do; this suggests that even though the camp has absolutely tainted some of Stanley's sense of justice, fairness, and morality, his friendship with Zero reminded him of the importance of kindness and care. He also is finally forced to recognize just how motivated Zero was to learn, as Zero was willing to do a great deal more manual labor in order to get some semblance of an education from Stanley. This in turn shows that Stanley also underestimated just how much Zero was disadvantaged by being unable to read. For Stanley, who is very literate, he simply doesn't understand how difficult life is for someone who cannot read even street signs.

“I don't think I can erase him completely from all the state files, said Mr. Pendanski. "Too many cross-references. But I can so make it so it would be very difficult for anyone to ever find a record of him. Like I said, though, no one will ever look. No one cares about Hector Zeroni."

"Good," said the Warden.

Related Characters: The Warden, Mr. Pendanski (speaker), Mr. Sir, Zero/Hector Zeroni, Stanley Yelnats

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 144



Explanation and Analysis


When Mr. Pendanski, Mr. Sir, and the Warden come to ask Stanley about Zero's whereabouts, they discuss in front of Stanley the possibility of erasing Zero's records to the best of their ability. Notably, the Warden and Mr. Pendanski feel as though they're able to do this because they believe that there's no family in particular to care about Zero. This suggests that they place far more importance on familial relationships than on relationships that aren't familial—namely, Stanley's friendship with Zero. This opens it up for Stanley to be able to help Zero, as it's clear that none of the adults in charge expect that their inmates will ever stand up for each other.

Part 2, Chapter 34 Quotes

“He kept walking toward it, although he didn't know why. He knew he'd have to turn around before he got there. But every time he looked at it, it seemed to encourage him, giving him the thumbs-up sign.

Related Characters: Zero/Hector Zeroni, Stanley Yelnats

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 153

Explanation and Analysis

After Stanley walks out into the desert after Zero, he feels as though God's Thumb and the mountains are giving him the strength to keep walking, even though he believes he needs to turn back. This begins to give more credence to the novel's insistence that the natural world is something sentient and involved in human events. Stanley's sense that God's Thumb is encouraging him could very well be because


the rock formation is indeed doing so; sentience like that makes perfect sense within the logic of the novel. In turn, this also suggests that Stanley will find something important at God's Thumb, or that there's some reason that he needs to go there. Essentially, this feeling reintroduces the idea of destiny to Stanley's story, as it's also possible to read his sense as destiny itself leading him on.

Part 2, Chapter 38 Quotes

“Higher and higher he climbed. His strength came from somewhere deep inside himself and also seemed to come from the outside as well. After focusing on Big Thumb for so long, it was as if the rock had absorbed his energy and now acted like a kind of giant magnet pulling him toward it.

Related Characters: Zero/Hector Zeroni, Stanley Yelnats

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 170

Explanation and Analysis

As Stanley carries an unconscious Zero up the mountain towards God's Thumb, he feels as though the land itself is helping him move forward. Per the logic of the novel, Stanley's sense that the land is helping him is likely not just due to his exhaustion or lack of food and water; it's likely that God's Thumb is actually encouraging Stanley in his climb. This reinforces the sentience of nature. Further, the novel draws a number of similarities between Stanley and between Elya Yelnats, who carried a pig up a mountain every day to fulfill part of a promise to Madame Zeroni. Stanley's journey of becoming stronger through digging holes, and then carrying his dear friend up the hill, suggests that he may be accomplishing Elya Yelnats's task, more than a hundred years after Elya broke his promise to Madame Zeroni.

Part 2, Chapter 41 Quotes

“I didn't go to the homeless shelter very often," Zero said. "Just if the weather was really bad. I'd have to find someone to pretend to be my mom. If I'd just gone by myself, they would have asked me a bunch of questions. If they'd found out I didn't have a mom, they would have made me a ward of the state."

"What's a ward of the state?"

Zero smiled. "I don't know. But I didn't like the sound of it."

Related Characters: Stanley Yelnats, Zero/Hector Zeroni (speaker), Zero's Mother

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 183

Explanation and Analysis

As Zero recovers on God's Thumb, he begins to share stories of his life before Camp Green Lake with Stanley. Here, Zero implies that he's a deeply independent person who, more than anything, wishes to control the trajectory of his life himself. Being a ward of the state would've allowed the state of Texas to put Zero in foster care and take away some of the freedom he experienced while living on the streets, which reinforces just how little power Zero has as a child and as a homeless person to advocate for himself. This adds more nuance to the novel's exploration of power, as it shows that children especially are easy to victimize and control simply because they're not given as many rights in society with which to defend themselves. For someone like Zero, who also can't read, he is extremely disadvantaged because of this.



Part 2, Chapter 43 Quotes

☝☝ "Then later a boy asked me if I wanted a piece of cake, but then that same mother told me, 'Go away!' and she told all the kids to stay away from me, so I never got the piece of cake. I ran away so fast, I forgot Jaffy."

"Did you ever find him—it?"

For a moment, Zero didn't answer. Then he said, "He wasn't real."

Related Characters: Stanley Yelnats, Zero/Hector Zeroni (speaker), Zero's Mother

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 195

Explanation and Analysis

Zero tells Stanley about a time when his mother left him for several weeks in a park, where a mother chased Zero away from a birthday party. When Zero admits that his beloved stuffed giraffe Jaffy wasn't actually real, it suggests that he and Stanley have a great deal in common: the novel began with Stanley thinking about his own imaginings as a child, which also helped him cope and come to terms with his family's poor financial situation. However, in Zero's case, the way he speaks about Jaffy suggests that Jaffy was a way for

Zero to feel more normal by creating a stuffed animal for himself. Again, this reinforces just how disadvantaged Zero was by living on the streets and the many ways he has to pay for that disadvantage, as he had to create for himself something as simple as a stuffed toy for comfort.

Part 2, Chapter 47 Quotes


☝☝ "It's got his name on it," said Zero.

Stanley's lawyer pushed past the tall man to have a look.

"See," Zero showed her. "Stanley Yelnats."

Stanley looked, too. There, in big black letters, was STANLEY YELNATS.

Related Characters: Zero/Hector Zeroni (speaker), The First Stanley Yelnats, The Attorney General, Ms. Morengo, Mr. Pendanski, Mr. Sir, The Warden

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 216

Explanation and Analysis

After Stanley and Zero manage to climb out of the yellow-spotted lizard nest, Zero points out that the suitcase they dug out of the hole has Stanley's name on it. This moment brings the novel's insistence on the power of education to the forefront, as Zero's ability to read Stanley's name is what allows Stanley and Zero to triumph and escape the Warden's clutches. This also suggests that it doesn't take full literacy to be able to reap the benefits of being able to read; Zero has only been reading for weeks and is still capable of tapping into those benefits. In this way, the novel shows that education offers individuals the power to best even those who appear to have an inordinate amount of power for no good reason, such as the Warden.

Part 2, Chapter 48 Quotes

☝☝ "Will you do me a favor?" asked Squid.

"I guess," Stanley agreed, somewhat hesitantly.

"I want you to—" He turned to Ms. Morengo. "Hey lady, you have a pen and paper I can borrow?"

She gave it to him, and Squid wrote down a phone number which he gave to Stanley. "Call my mom for me, okay? Tell her...Tell her I said I was sorry. Tell her Alan said he was sorry."

Related Characters: Stanley Yelnats, Squid/Alan (speaker),

Ms. Morengo

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 221

Explanation and Analysis

When Group D realizes that Stanley is being released, Squid asks Stanley to call his mom for him. When Squid makes this request and specifically, when he asks Stanley to use his real name instead of his nickname, it redeems the rest of Group

D and shows that they're not actually the bad boys that Stanley thought they were. Squid clearly still cares about his mother, even though he puts on a show of being impossibly tough. Squid's decision to make this request suggests that the climate and social structure at Green Lake is changing and, possibly, that these kinds of requests will become more normalized now that Stanley and Zero have set things right in terms of the family curses and the curse on Green Lake itself.



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

PART 1, CHAPTER 1

The narrator explains that there's no camp or lake at Camp Green Lake. 100 years ago, it was the largest lake in Texas, but the lake and the town dried up. Temperatures hover at 95 degrees, and the only shade is under two oak trees with a hammock strung between—though that shade is "owned" by the Warden. There are rattlesnakes and scorpions around, but being bitten or stung by them isn't the worst thing that could happen. Campers who are bitten spend a day recovering and then return to digging holes. However, if someone is bitten by a yellow-spotted lizard, death is guaranteed.

Using the word "owned" to describe the Warden's relationship to the shade shows that she's a person who seeks to dominate the natural world and use it for her own means, rather than coexist with it. It also suggests a domineering nature, which introduces the Warden herself as a dangerous and controlling character. The mention that bitten campers have only a day to rest implies that the camp pays little attention to the welfare of the campers there.



PART 1, CHAPTER 2

The narrator notes that the reader is certainly curious why anyone would even go to Camp Green Lake. They explain that Camp Green Lake is a camp for "bad boys," and the people there believe that if bad boys dig holes every day, they'll turn into good boys. Most boys there weren't given a choice about whether or not to go, but Stanley Yelnats was. He chooses Camp Green Lake over jail because his family is poor and he's never been to camp.

Stanley's reasoning for choosing Camp Green Lake over jail illustrates one way that his family's financial situation hurts him: camp under any circumstances seems preferable to jail, but this is probably incorrect reasoning, given what readers know about this camp.



PART 1, CHAPTER 3

Stanley is the only passenger, aside from the driver and the guard, on the bus to Camp Green Lake. He sits handcuffed to his armrest, sweating in the heat. Stanley and his parents had tried to pretend that he was actually going to camp like rich kids, and Stanley remembers pretending as a kid that his stuffed animals were going to Camp Fun and Games. He hopes he'll make friends and swim in the lake when he arrives. Stanley doesn't have friends at home, as he's overweight and the object of merciless bullying at the hands of teachers and kids alike.

Stanley's reverie sets up camp as a marker of economic success, while his family's attempts to pretend that Camp Green Lake is a real camp indicate that they desperately do want to do better economically. Note that Stanley is already the victim of cruelty and unkindness; this suggests that he may be coming to camp already unwilling to stand up for himself.



The narrator explains that Stanley is innocent; he was convicted because of his no-good-dirty-rotten-pig-stealing-great-great-grandfather. Supposedly, Stanley's grandfather stole a pig from a "Gypsy" and she cursed all of Stanley's descendants. The family, of course, doesn't actually believe this, but things do seem to go wrong a lot. Stanley's father is an inventor, though none of his inventions have been successful.

This explanation introduces the possibility that Stanley is the victim of bullying (and his dad is an unsuccessful inventor) not because of any fault of their own, but because of something well outside their control. Similarly, this also suggests that Stanley's family is paying for his great-great-grandfather's transgression, illustrating one way that justice is served.



Stanley's mother often points out that not every Stanley Yelnats has been a failure—Stanley is the fourth Stanley Yelnats—and this is technically true, as the first Stanley made a fortune in the stock market. However, the bandit Kissin' Kate Barlow robbed him as he tried to move to California. Stanley thinks this is kind of cool. His reverie is interrupted when the bus arrives at Camp Green Lake.

The fate of the first Stanley Yelnats suggests that the possible curse on the family doesn't necessarily mean that no family members can ever experience success—their successes just aren't things they get to keep. This is another way that Stanley's family becomes disadvantaged economically.



PART 1, CHAPTER 4

As Stanley steps off the bus, the driver tells him to be careful. Stanley thanks the driver for the ride, feeling parched and sweaty. The guard leads Stanley to a small building. Inside, a man wearing a cowboy hat and sunglasses sits at a desk, eating sunflower seeds and drinking soda. When the guard comments on the seeds, the man explains they help him quit smoking. The man gives the guard sodas and sends him away. Finally, the man turns to Stanley and introduces himself as Mr. Sir. He tells Stanley that he's not in the **Girl Scouts** anymore.

When Stanley thanks the driver, it shows that Stanley is, at heart, a kind person who understands the power of acknowledging everyone for the work they do. This casts Stanley as a direct foil to the Warden, who thus far appears to be someone who thinks only of herself. Mr. Sir's actions show that he's more in line with the Warden, as he seems to care little for Stanley.



Stanley changes into an orange jumpsuit and orange tee shirt, and is also given an orange cap and an empty canteen. Mr. Sir explains that Stanley will be expected to dig a hole every single day that's five feet deep and five feet across, beginning at 4:30am. Mr. Sir says that this is to escape the heat of the day, and he tells Stanley to report anything "interesting" to him or another counselor. With this, Mr. Sir leads Stanley outside. He asks if Stanley sees any fences or guard towers (there are none). He then explains that they don't need them—Camp Green Lake has the only water for miles around. Noticing Stanley eyeing his gun, Mr. Sir assures him he won't shoot him: the gun is for the yellow-spotted lizards and Stanley doesn't warrant wasting a bullet.

The set up of Camp Green Lake positions manual labor as being in direct opposition to education or other types of reform. This suggests that at camp, one's ability to perform this manual labor is all they'll be valued for. Mr. Sir's assurance that the gun is for the lizards again makes it very clear that Mr. Sir doesn't value the lives of the campers, as he basically says that it's not even worth attempting to keep them at camp with violence. This shows that selfishness and cruelty reign at Camp Green Lake.



PART 1, CHAPTER 5

Stanley is assigned to D tent and meets his counselor, Mr. Pendanski. He doesn't look nearly as scary as Mr. Sir, though he assures Stanley that Mr. Sir is only cranky because he quit smoking. He does say that the Warden is the only person to worry about. As Mr. Pendanski tells Stanley that he knows he's not a bad kid, even if he has made mistakes, Stanley thinks it's not even worth it to tell him he's innocent.

Stanley's decision to not even try to talk to Mr. Pendanski about his innocence shows that, at this point, Stanley believes that nobody will ever help him get justice: his resignation to his fate suggests that he's given up entirely on the formal justice system, which in turn indicates that he'll need to rely on other forms of justice.



Two boys, caked in dirt and dripping with sweat, enter the compound. Mr. Pendanski calls them over and they're so dirty that Stanley can barely tell that one boy is black and the other is white. Mr. Pendanski introduces Stanley to Rex and Alan, but the boys introduce themselves as X-Ray and Squid. Mr. Pendanski assigns Stanley a cot that X-Ray says was previously inhabited by a boy named Barf Bag. Squid fetches four other boys, three of whom Mr. Pendanski introduces as José, Theodore, and Ricky (but they call themselves Magnet, Armpit, and Zigzag). The boys and Mr. Pendanski call the last boy Zero, and Mr. Pendanski explains that Zero has nothing in his head. Finally, Armpit introduces Mr. Pendanski as "Mom."

Mr. Pendanski gives the campers a speech about taking care of Stanley and then leaves. The other boys head out to shower and as they go, Stanley asks Theodore where he can fill his canteen. Theodore angrily grabs Stanley's collar, spits that Stanley has to call him Armpit, and tells him where the water spigot is.

PART 1, CHAPTER 6

Because of the scarcity of water, campers are only allowed to take cold four-minute showers. Stanley uses his four minutes getting used to the water. At dinner, another camper asks Stanley what he did to end up at Camp Green Lake. The boy doesn't believe Stanley when he says he stole Clyde Livingston's sneakers. Stanley thinks it's funny that nobody believes anything he says about his "crime"—nobody believed him either when he said he *didn't* steal them.

Clyde "Sweet Feet" Livingston is a famous baseball player whom Stanley idolized; he had a poster of him on his wall until the police took it away as evidence. When Stanley learned that Livingston would be at his hearing, he was excited to meet his hero. Livingston testified that he'd donated his shoes to raise money for a local homeless shelter. The worst part for Stanley was that Livingston stated that Stanley must be a horrible person to steal from homeless children. Stanley mulls this over as he carefully turns on his cot, hoping it won't collapse under his weight.

At school, a bully named Derrick Dunne tormented Stanley regularly and the teachers did nothing. The day that Stanley was arrested, Derrick had dropped Stanley's notebook in the toilet. Poor Stanley missed the bus while he was fishing it out and was walking home from school when the sneakers fell from the sky. Stanley took it as a sign and raced home with the smelly shoes to his father, though he was arrested before he got home. He only found out later what the shoes were for and who they belonged to.

The nicknames (which the boys choose themselves or assign to each other) allow the boys to differentiate themselves from the adults, suggesting that there's a divide between the adults who go by their real names and the kids who don't. It's important to note that even as Mr. Pendanski seems nicer than Mr. Sir, he's still extremely callous towards Zero and clearly thinks little of him. This suggests that even "kindness" at Camp Green Lake is tainted and not to be taken at face value.



By insisting that Stanley use his nickname, Armpit is asking Stanley for a kindness of sorts: to see Armpit how Armpit wants to be seen. However, the way he goes about asking for this again shows that kindness in pure form doesn't exist at Camp Green Lake.



The fact that nobody believes Stanley when he says anything about his crime reinforces the novel's insistence that the formal justice system is somewhat absurd; this suggests that the absurdity of Stanley's story essentially renders the justice system unable to function effectively.



Stanley's optimism and positive outlook on life shines through when the narrator says he was excited to get to meet Clyde Livingston; it appears as though it's possibly part of the family curse when Livingston then calls Stanley a terrible person. This also shows how Livingston, who is wealthy and famous, feels as though he has the power to say this sort of thing to an innocent teenager.



Again, that Stanley's first thought when the shoes fall from the sky is of his dad shows that even as Stanley is consistently bullied, he still has a good heart and wants to do nice things for others—the justice system just gets in the way. This shows up too when the teachers do nothing about Derrick's bullying.



Because of Clyde Livingston's baseball schedule, the trial was delayed for more than a month. Stanley's parents couldn't afford to hire a lawyer and this proved damning: the judge didn't believe the shoes fell from the sky. He suggested that Stanley agree to go to Camp Green Lake instead of prison and encouraged Stanley's parents to make a quick decision, saying that vacancies don't last long there.

When the judge pressures Stanley and his family into making a quick decision, it again shows how Stanley's family's poor economic standing disadvantages them. Being able to afford a lawyer would've meant that Stanley could've made a more informed decision.



PART 1, CHAPTER 7

The next morning, Stanley eats his lukewarm cereal, fills his canteen, and chooses a shovel before the sun comes up. He tries to dig the point of the blade into the ground, but it's baked hard. Stanley helplessly watches Zero, who already has a large pile of dirt next to his hole. Mr. Pendanski had told Stanley to report anything "interesting or unusual" to him, as interesting finds earn campers a day off—though he insisted that they're not actually looking for anything. Stanley wedges his shovel in a crack and finds that being overweight is helpful, as he can more easily sink his shovel in the ground. He marks the perimeter of his hole, and soon blisters form on his fingers.

Forcing teenagers to dig holes like this is far beyond what any normal or reasonable punishment would be; this again helps to situate Camp Green Lake as a place that functions outside of the formal Texas justice system. Especially given Mr. Pendanski's caginess regarding "interesting finds," it suggests that the camp itself has ulterior motives for making the campers dig holes and is abusing its power to obtain cheap labor.



The narrator jumps back in time to tell the story of Elya Yelnats. He was born in Latvia and at age fifteen, fell in love with fourteen-year-old Myra Menke. Myra's father decided that when Myra turned fifteen, she should be married. Both Elya and 57-year-old pig farmer Igor Barkov went to ask for Myra's hand. Myra's father insisted he'd rather have one of Igor's pigs than Elya's "heart full of love," so Elya went to see Madame Zeroni, an old Egyptian woman with only one foot.

Igor's age is intended to evoke a sense of disgust in the reader and make it seem as though, to any sensible person, Elya is clearly the more appropriate suitor based on age alone. When Myra's father doesn't see it this way, it again shows how he's able to use his power to promote what appears to be an unjust status quo.



Elya told Madame Zeroni about his plight, but she was unsympathetic. She insisted that Elya was too young to marry and that Myra was silly, foolish, and spoiled. She encouraged Elya to go to America like her own son did, but Elya remained unmoved. Finally, Madame Zeroni led him to her pigsty, where her sow had just given birth to piglets. She handed him the runt and instructed him to carry the piglet up the nearby mountain every day to drink from the stream. She said he also had to sing the piglet a special song.

Madame Zeroni's decision to help Elya is a very kind one; it shows that even if she doesn't necessarily agree with him, she wants him to be happy and is glad to use her implied magical powers to help him achieve happiness. The stream in particular introduces the idea that nature itself can be magical and unnatural (and can be helpful to humans at times).



Madame Zeroni said that Elya should carry the pig up the mountain for the last time on Myra's fifteenth birthday, at which point it would be fatter than Igor's pig. She assured Elya that as the pig grew, he'd grow strong enough to carry it. Finally, she asked that he carry her up the mountain and sing to her on the last day. She explained that she'd curse his descendants forever if he didn't do this. Elya thought nothing of it, though he did think he'd be happy to carry Madame Zeroni up the mountain right then if only he were strong enough.

At its heart, Madame Zeroni and Elya's agreement is designed to instill in Elya the belief that it's important to follow through on one's promises—it's one of the easiest and most effective ways to show another person kindness and care. Thus, this sets up the idea that Stanley will learn the importance of follow-through in his journey as he deals with the aftermath of Madame Zeroni's curse.



Stanley's hole grows to about three feet deep as the sun peeks over the horizon. His hands are covered in blisters, and Stanley can tell that everyone else's holes are far bigger. When he notices a moving cloud of dust following a red pickup truck, he lines up with the other boys to get water. X-Ray is first, while Stanley is last in line behind Zero. Mr. Sir fills their canteens and then follows Stanley to check his progress. As he encourages Stanley to hurry up, he spits sunflower shells into Stanley's hole.

Elya did as he was told and as the pig grew big and strong, so did he. The pig was massive by Myra's birthday, so instead of carrying it up the mountain one last time as Madame Zeroni had told him to, Elya took a bath. Then, he presented his pig to Myra's father. Elya boldly asked to marry Myra, but her father insisted on weighing Elya and Igor's pigs. They weighed exactly the same.

As Stanley digs, his blisters rip open and new ones form. He tries to use his cap to cushion his hands, but the sun is hot on his neck. Stanley realizes he'll need to move his dirt piles—he's going to run out of room.

Myra's father examined the pigs, declared them fine pigs, and couldn't decide whose pig to accept. When Elya suggested that Myra choose, both Igor and Myra's father were shocked, but Myra's father agreed on the grounds that he didn't care whom she married. He called Myra, explained the situation, and asked her to decide. She was extremely confused and couldn't decide, so she secretly chose a number and asked her suitors to choose a number between one and ten. Disgusted, Elya told Myra to keep his pig as a wedding present and marry Igor.

At lunchtime, Mr. Pendanski drives the water truck out with sack lunches. While the boys eat, Magnet assures Stanley that the first hole is the hardest. Stanley wonders what they'd do to him if he just quit.

Elya wandered aimlessly until he ended up on a pier. He was heartbroken; he thought that Myra loved him. Madame Zeroni was right. Elya read a sign asking for deck hands on a ship to America, and the captain signed Elya up even though he didn't have any sailing experience. Elya didn't realize until the ship was in the open water that he'd broken his promise to carry Madame Zeroni up the mountain. He wasn't afraid of the curse, but he did feel bad for breaking a promise to a friend.

It's worth noting that in the case of the holes, Stanley has no choice but to follow through and finish, no matter how badly it hurts. Again, this shows how power can be corrupted to taint things that even the novel suggests are fundamentally positive actions. Mr. Sir's spitting is a way for him to tell Stanley he doesn't actually care about him, even as he offers encouragement.



The fact that the pigs weigh exactly the same provides some weight to the realness of Madame Zeroni's curse; it suggests that had Elya followed through, his pig would weigh more and he'd win outright.



Because of what Stanley is being asked to do, nature is his enemy right now. This shows how even good characters can be placed in situations in opposition to nature; it's not the realm of villains alone.



Myra's character shows the consequences of being given absolutely no power over one's own life, seeing as she's wholly unable to make a very important decision for herself. Further, the fact that she doesn't even seem aware that this isn't a good thing indicates that living without power can be normalized and in doing so, those such as Myra's father gain even more power.



Magnet's assurance suggests that there could be a sense of camaraderie among the boys; his encouragement shows that they may be able to care for each other.



Madame Zeroni's curse may be even worse simply because Elya doesn't show it (and by extension, Madame Zeroni) an appropriate degree of respect. This reinforces that part of the curse has to do with punishing Elya for not following through on his promises and not being a good friend to Madame Zeroni.



Even though Zero is the smallest boy in Group D, he finishes digging first. In awe, Stanley watches Zero measure his hole, spit in it, and head back to camp. Zigzag declares Zero a "weird dude," but Stanley thinks that Zigzag is objectively weirder: his neck is long and skinny, and he has wild, frizzy blond hair. One by one, the other boys of Group D finish and head back to camp. After a while, Stanley realizes he'll need to move his dirt piles again. He feels as though he's digging his grave.

In America, Elya fell in love with a woman named Sarah Miller. She was smart and strong, and she and Elya loved each other very much. However, bad luck seemed to follow Elya. He remembered that Madame Zeroni mentioned having a son in America, so he began approaching people asking if they knew anyone named Zeroni. Finally, after Elya's barn was struck by lightning for the third time, he told Sarah about the curse. She was unconcerned but asked Elya to sing her the "pig lullaby." She loved it and a year later, when the first Stanley Yelnats was born, Sarah made the song rhyme in English and sang it to her baby.

Stanley discovers that his hole is very close to big enough. He digs out a few more shovelfuls and finally, he can lay his shovel flat on the bottom. He feels a strange sense of pride and can't wait to show whomever is in the approaching water truck his hole. Stanley has to dig himself steps to climb out and discovers Mr. Pendanski, out to check on him. Mr. Pendanski asks for a high-five, but Stanley doesn't have the energy. Mr. Pendanski praises Stanley and offers him a ride back, though Stanley insists he'll walk. He spits in his hole before he starts for camp.

PART 1, CHAPTER 8

The narrator notes that lots of people don't believe in curses or yellow-spotted lizards, but in the case of the lizards, it doesn't matter if you believe or not if one bites you. The narrator explains that the yellow-spotted lizards are named for their spots, though the spots are their least obvious feature. They're between six and ten inches long with red-rimmed, yellow eyes. They have black teeth and white tongues. If anyone gets close enough to see the spots, they're as good as dead. The lizards live in holes and leap out to attack live prey. They also eat the shells of sunflower seeds.

When Stanley feels like he's digging his own grave, he's developing the mindset that the natural world is his enemy, is out to get him, and is dangerous. Notably, this does begin to instill a sense of respect for the natural world in Stanley, as he begins to learn how to work with the earth to dig holes more efficiently in the future.



Overwhelmingly, Holes suggests that it doesn't really matter whether Sarah believes in the curse or not; the fact of the matter persists that Elya appears to be extremely unlucky. This again suggests that, within the world of the novel, fate and destiny absolutely hold sway. When Sarah translates the lullaby and sings it to the first Stanley, she ensures that the song will remain family knowledge and be passed down to the present.



When Mr. Pendanski offers Stanley acknowledgement, it suggests that he does recognize how difficult survival is at Camp Green Lake and may take his role of counselor somewhat seriously. This suggests that not all of Camp Green Lake is overtly evil; kindness can still exist and when placed next to Mr. Sir's cruelty, for example, Mr. Pendanski seems even less offensive.



The yellow-spotted lizards are another way that the novel suggests that nature requires respect: the lizards require humans to understand that they're dangerous and not to be messed with if they mean to survive. The mention that they eat sunflower seeds casts Mr. Sir's habit of spitting seeds into holes in an especially sinister light. Though it's unclear if he knows this, he is definitely attracting lizards to where the boys are digging.



PART 1, CHAPTER 9

Stanley doesn't use soap in the shower; he's too tired. After putting on his clean set of clothes, he grabs his stationery and heads to the rec room. The sign on the door says "WRECK ROOM" and everything inside is broken. X-Ray and Armpit play pool on a pitted pool table as Stanley heads towards them. He trips over someone's leg, and the kid turns out to be big and belligerent. X-Ray and Armpit step to Stanley's side and say that nobody should mess with the Caveman. They finally lead Stanley to a couch and tell him that Caveman is tough.

Squid joins the boys and asks Stanley how his day was. Stanley parrots that the first hole is the hardest, but X-Ray says the second one is harder: Stanley will hurt before he's even begun. X-Ray says the fun is gone too; he thinks that every kid secretly wants to dig a hole to China, but the fun wears off fast. When Squid asks about Stanley's stationery, Stanley explains he's going to write to Stanley's mother. Stanley looks around the room, in awe of the fact that the boys destroyed the one place at camp where they could enjoy themselves.

Stanley writes in his letter that he's making friends and learning to swim. He stops when he senses that someone is reading over his shoulder, so he turns to find Zero behind him. Stanley explains he doesn't want Stanley's mother to worry. Zero looks serious and possibly angry as he asks if "the shoes" had red X marks on the back. Stanley realizes he's talking about Clyde Livingston's shoes and wonders if Zero may have seen Livingston in a commercial for the brand. Armpit calls Caveman for dinner, and Stanley realizes that *he's* Caveman. He reasons it's a better name than Barf Bag.

PART 1, CHAPTER 10

When Stanley wakes in the morning, he can barely get out of bed because he's so sore. He only gets up because he knows the rising sun is his sworn enemy. As he begins his second hole, he's careful to dump his dirt far away and tries to protect his raw hands with his cap. At one point, Stanley drops his shovel. As he reaches to pick it up, he notices a rock with a fossilized fish in it. Stanley hopes the Warden will find the fossil interesting.

The Wreck Room is indicative of the boys' position at Camp Green Lake. They have so little power to stand up for themselves or make any of their own decisions, and the only place they have control over anything is in the Wreck Room. The fact that they destroy it makes it clear that cruelty and violence reign at camp, given that they choose to act destructively in the one place in which they have a choice.



X-Ray's suggestion that every kid wants to dig to China makes it clear that the boys at Camp Green Lake are actually just boys, not adults—they're being robbed of their childhoods as they serve their sentences. When Stanley is in awe that the Wreck Room is destroyed, it sets him apart from the other boys and shows that, at this point, he's still a good, kind kid who doesn't yet struggle with anger.



When Stanley pretends that camp is fun for his mother's sake, it again shows how kind Stanley is: he wants to make his mother feel better about Stanley's fate, especially since she was unable to protect him from the justice system. Note too that Stanley assumes that Zero saw Clyde Livingston in a TV commercial; this suggests that Stanley isn't aware that anyone at Camp Green Lake may have lived in dire poverty, as he'll eventually learn that Zero did.



Stanley's conception of the sun as his sworn enemy suggests that he's beginning to develop the view that nature is something to be fought, not something that could help him. Notably, the Warden cultivates this view very carefully, and it will later come to light that this is because the Warden's entire family is positioned opposite characters who are aligned with nature.



Stanley digs slowly as he waits for the water truck. When it arrives, he realizes that Group D always lines up in the same order: X-Ray first, then Armpit, Squid, Zigzag, Magnet, Zero, and finally Stanley. When Mr. Pendanski fills Stanley's canteen, Stanley hands over the fossil and points out the fish. Mr. Pendanski agrees that it's interesting, but says the Warden isn't interested in fossils. The other boys pass the fossil around and admire the fish.

The fact that the Warden isn't interested in objectively interesting fossils suggests that the Warden may be looking for something specific, regardless of what Mr. Pendanski and Mr. Sir told Stanley. This also suggests that finding things may be far more difficult than Stanley initially thought, given that it's unclear what they're even looking for.



PART 1, CHAPTER 11

Stanley returns to digging, seething about how unfair not being rewarded for his fossil is. Soon, he notices X-Ray watching him. X-Ray asks to talk and explains that he's been at Camp Green Lake a year, but he's found nothing. He admits his eyesight is poor and explains that his nickname doesn't have to do with his sight; it's just his real name, Rex, in pig Latin. X-Ray asks Stanley to give him anything interesting that he finds, as he's more deserving of a day off. Stanley agrees. As Stanley resumes digging, he thinks he made the right choice: it's more important for X-Ray, the group leader, to like him than it is to get a day off.

When Stanley recognizes that it's important to cozy up to X-Ray, even if it means never getting a day off, it shows that he recognizes that the social structure among the boys at Camp Green Lake is based on low-key bullying and intimidation, not necessarily camaraderie. This trickles down from the way that the adults treat the boys; the boys are learning by example that intimidation and cruelty are the only ways to gain power over their lives.



Stanley marvels that X-Ray is the leader, since he's the smallest aside from Zero. Stanley thinks that Armpit is the biggest before realizing that he himself is actually bigger. He thinks he likes his nickname, as it means the group has accepted him. Stanley thinks of how scared Derrick Dunne would be of any of the boys here, and imagines his new "friends" standing up for him against Derrick. It eases Stanley's pain to know that in his mind, Derrick is suffering worse.

Stanley's realization that he's the biggest suggests that he may be coming to terms with the fact that if he chooses to take it, he may have more power than he gives himself credit for. This implies that he's beginning to understand the way that the social structure works at camp, and that possibly, he's becoming less kind.



PART 1, CHAPTER 12

Stanley is again the last boy to finish digging. When he arrives at Tent D, he finds Mr. Pendanski and the other boys sitting in a circle. Mr. Pendanski invites Stanley to join their discussion of what they want to do with their lives after Camp Green Lake. Mr. Pendanski carefully calls the boys by their given names as he asks Magnet what he likes to do. When Magnet offers that he likes animals, the other boys suggest different jobs involving animals. Magnet likes Stanley's suggestion of training animals for movies.

The tenor of this conversation suggests that Mr. Pendanski is forcing the issue somewhat, but Magnet's willingness to participate reinforces the fact that he's just a child who thinks animals are cool. The idea of life after Camp Green Lake also situates the camp as being a part of the formal justice system, as a main tenet of the justice system in the U.S. entails seeing prison or punishment as rehabilitation.



When X-Ray laughs at Magnet, Mr. Pendanski insists they "don't laugh at people's dreams" and points out that someone has to train the animals. X-Ray insists that Magnet will never be an animal trainer, to which Mr. Pendanski offers an inspirational speech about not giving up even when life is hard. Stanley thinks of what he'll say if Mr. Pendanski asks him what he likes to do, reasoning that his desire to work for the FBI won't go over well with this group.

Again, it's worth noting that Mr. Pendanski is able to give such inspirational speeches only because he actually has some power and agency over his own life; for X-Ray and Magnet, they'll have comparatively little power even after camp given that they've already been convicted of crimes as teens.



Mr. Pendanski turns to Stanley, comments on his new nickname, and asks Stanley who's responsible for landing him at Camp Green Lake. Everyone, including Zero, laughs when Stanley suggests it's the fault of his no-good-dirty-rotten-pig-stealing-great-great-grandfather. Mr. Pendanski tells Stanley that it's his own fault, and he's the only one responsible for fixing it. Zero's smile disappears when Mr. Pendanski says that even Zero isn't totally worthless and has something to offer. When Mr. Pendanski asks Zero what he wants to do with his life, Zero glares back and says he likes digging holes.

Mr. Pendanski's insistence that Stanley is the only one to blame for his actions reinforces the absurdity of the justice system and of Stanley's conviction in particular; per the logic of the novel, it absolutely was Elya Yelnats's fault that Stanley was convicted for a crime he didn't commit. This begins to allow the reader to put pieces together in a way that feels satisfying, since the characters aren't fully aware of this logic.



PART 1, CHAPTER 13

As Stanley digs holes, he loses track of the days. He thinks he's probably lost five pounds and reasons that in a year and a half, he'll either be dead or in excellent condition. His hands grow calluses and the shovel isn't as painful to hold. One morning, as Stanley digs, he notices something shiny in his dirt. He deliberates whether or not he should investigate but finally gives in to his curiosity. He discovers a thin, finger-length gold tube that's open at one end. On the closed end, he finds the initials KB inscribed in a heart.

When Stanley appears to give equal weight to the possibility of being either dead or very fit by the end of his sentence, it shows that he does still have his positive outlook on life, though it is being tainted by the toxic structure of Camp Green Lake. The discovery of the tube shows the natural world bestowing a gift upon Stanley, as nature has been hiding the tube for years.



Stanley tries to figure out how to get out of giving it to X-Ray. X-Ray's hole is almost finished, unlike Stanley's, and by the time the Warden deems the find interesting, X-Ray might already be done. Stanley wonders if he could take the tube directly to the Warden, who might then make up a story to protect him from X-Ray. As Stanley is trying to figure out what the object even is, Zigzag notices Stanley and asks what he has. Stanley takes the tube directly to X-Ray.

The fact that Stanley spends so much mental energy figuring out how to get out of keeping his promise to X-Ray suggests that he's taking to heart that justice is something that can be molded to meet one's own needs. It also shows that he has a long way to go to learn the lesson that Elya Yelnats didn't learn when he broke his promise to Madame Zeroni.



All of Group D crowds around X-Ray to inspect the tube. Squid thinks it looks like a shotgun shell, but Magnet insists it's too long. Stanley suggests that X-Ray wait to show Mr. Pendanski until the next day so he can have a whole day off, not just an hour. X-Ray thanks Stanley for his excellent idea and when the water truck comes, he tells Stanley to get behind Magnet in line.

When Stanley is rewarded with moving up one spot in line, it impresses upon him the importance of carrying through with his promises. However, it's also worth noting that the line order is a show of power, not anything that's actually based on merit, which illustrates the way that the camp co-opts things and makes them cruel.



PART 1, CHAPTER 14

That night, Stanley tries to figure out what he could've done differently. He decides he was absolutely in the right place at the right time, but it didn't help him at all. The next day at breakfast, he asks X-Ray if he has the tube. X-Ray feigns ignorance and eventually snaps at Stanley. Mr. Sir marches the boys to the lake a while later and as Stanley begins his hole, he can't figure out why X-Ray snapped at him. When the water truck arrives just after sunrise, Stanley notices the mountains in the distance before getting in line. Just as Mr. Pendanski is about to drive away, X-Ray yells that he found something. Mr. Pendanski examines the tube and says the Warden will like it. He encourages Rex to not dig too hard.

Mr. Pendanski drives back to camp and returns a short while later with a tall, red-haired woman. The Warden approaches X-Ray, confirms where he found the tube, and tells Mr. Pendanski to drive X-Ray back to camp after filling the other campers' canteens. When Mr. Pendanski remarks that he just filled the canteens, the Warden softly reminds Mr. Pendanski that it's hot and "these fine boys" probably had a drink since he filled their canteens. She calls Stanley to her, calling him Caveman, and asks if he's had anything to drink since Mr. Pendanski filled his canteen. Stanley has, and the Warden tells Mr. Pendanski to follow instructions or he'll end up digging and Caveman will fill canteens.

PART 1, CHAPTER 15

After Mr. Pendanski fills canteens, the Warden picks through X-Ray's pile of dirt with a pitchfork. She asks Mr. Pendanski to drive X-Ray back to camp and then return with three wheelbarrows. As he drives away, the Warden turns to Group D and explains that they'll be working in pairs; one will excavate the hole while the other will put the dug-up dirt into wheelbarrows and cart it away. Stanley is assigned to work with Zero. The Warden stays at the site all day and makes sure the campers never run out of water. Stanley thinks this is much easier than digging his own hole.

The boys dig until their holes are more than six feet deep and wide, and then the Warden returns to her cabin. As the boys return to the compound, Stanley remarks that the Warden knew all of their names. Zigzag and Armpit explain that the Warden has hidden microphones and cameras all over, and Stanley realizes this is why X-Ray didn't want to talk that morning. Stanley also realizes they're not just digging to build character; they're looking for something. He makes a note of the hole in which he actually found the tube.

X-Ray's inexplicable behavior shows Stanley that even though he's been at camp for a few weeks, he's still the new guy and doesn't know everything. This then becomes another way for X-Ray to exert power over Stanley. When Stanley begins to notice the mountains in the distance, it suggests he's becoming more interested in or curious about the natural world around him. Per the logic of the novel, this could be in part because of the trajectory of destiny it sets out.



The Warden's behavior shows that her power over the camp is far greater than that of any other adult; she even has the ability to cow Mr. Pendanski. When she calls Stanley Caveman, it suggests that she's aware that the simple kindness of learning someone's name and using it is a valuable and powerful tool: in this case, it seems to scare Stanley a bit in part because it means that she's far more involved somehow in the camp than he gave her credit for. Essentially, it begs the question of how much she does or doesn't know about her charges.



This setup indicates that the Warden is absolutely looking for something, while the fact that she wants them to sift the dirt suggests it may not be very large. Remember though that this isn't actually where Stanley found the tube; this can be seen as the work of fate and suggests that the Warden shouldn't yet find whatever she's looking for in order to move the story forward.



It's worth noting that the possibility of hidden cameras and microphones is, over the course of the novel, not something that any of the boys can truly confirm or deny. This begins to turn Camp Green Lake itself into a surveillance state in which the inmates are never sure if or where they're being watched. In turn, this heightens their anxiety and makes them even less willing to push back on unjust treatment.



PART 1, CHAPTER 16

When Stanley slouches into the Wreck Room later, X-Ray is animated and talking loudly. Stanley joins Squid on the couch and as X-Ray shouts, Zigzag grouses for X-Ray to be quiet so he can watch TV. Stanley is perplexed and a little worried; Zigzag is staring intently at the broken television.

The next morning, the Warden walks Group D to the holes again. Stanley spends most of the day dumping wheelbarrows and thinks a lot about the tube. He thinks it looks familiar and wonders if it's the lid of a fancy gold pen. The Warden starts getting impatient by lunchtime and even tells Mr. Sir that if the boys don't dig faster, he'll have to dig with them. After this, the boys work extremely fast and Stanley almost runs with his wheelbarrow, especially when Mr. Sir is around. He reminds them they're not **Girl Scouts**. They're the last group in that afternoon.

Later, Stanley wonders if there's a way he could tell the Warden where the tube actually came from. As he's turning it over, Mr. Pendanski comes into the Wreck Room with a letter for Stanley. Squid gives Stanley a hard time about receiving a letter from Stanley's mother, but X-Ray suggests the letter is probably from Stanley's girlfriend. Stanley waits to read it until later. His mother writes that Stanley's letter made her feel like a parent who can afford to send her kid to summer camp. She also explains that while Stanley's father is close to a breakthrough with his sneaker project, the landlord is threatening to evict them because of the smell. She makes a joke about feeling sorry for the little old lady who lived in a shoe.

Zero startles Stanley asking him what's funny. Stanley initially refuses to tell Zero what Stanley's mother wrote, but eventually gives a basic explanation of Stanley's father's project and his mom's joke. Zero seems to not recognize the reference to the nursery rhyme about the little old lady who lived in a shoe, which amazes Stanley. Zero asks Stanley to recite it, but Stanley just goes to dinner.

When compared to the other boys' exhaustion, X-Ray's behavior shows just how mentally, emotionally, and physically difficult digging is. It reinforces how cruel the camp is, as it clearly deprives the boys of their humanity.



When Group D is the last group in, it shows again that the Warden makes the rules at Camp Green Lake and can break them just as easily: making them keep digging shows her breaking the contract of sorts between the adults and the inmates and reinforces her power. Her threat to Mr. Sir shows too that she can and will weaponize absolutely anything to get what she wants.



X-Ray's suggestion that the letter came from a girlfriend suggests that the inmates at camp may actually be more willing to look out for each other than the novel has thus far let on. Note, however, that X-Ray's suggestion does indicate that he's been listening to Mr. Sir's refrain about the Girl Scouts. It's likely that Mr. Sir would deem a letter from one's mother girly, while a letter from one's girlfriend connotes masculinity and power.



Stanley's reaction here shows that, at this point, he's pretty unwilling to think about people's experiences that are very different from his own, which Zero's lack of familiarity with the nursery rhyme suggests. When Stanley simply leaves, it also implies that he's becoming less interested in others.



PART 1, CHAPTER 17

Group D digs in the area around where X-Ray supposedly found the tube for a week. Eventually, the holes all connect. The Warden becomes less and less patient and snaps one afternoon when Armpit returns from a bathroom break. With her pitchfork, the Warden jabs at Armpit, pushing him backwards into the hole and leaving three bloody spots on his chest. The Warden also tells Mr. Pendanski that he's giving the boys too much water.

That afternoon, Zigzag's shovel hits Stanley in the head. Magnet calls for Mr. Sir, who bandages Stanley's bloody head and sends him back to the hole. When Stanley returns, Zigzag points to the bit of dirt that fell off of Stanley's shovel when he fell. He insists that it's Stanley's dirt and is covering up his own dirt. After Stanley moves it, Zigzag begins digging again.

The Warden's behavior here is horrifying, but it does drive home that for her, the inmates are absolutely a means to find whatever she's looking for--essentially, she doesn't care about the boys themselves. Again, this suggests that Camp Green Lake itself exists outside the realm of the formal justice system that technically forbids these abuses.



Zigzag's petty behavior illustrates poignantly how the cruelty of Camp Green Lake creates a system in which the boys feel they can't actually look out for each other: doing so would mean doing more backbreaking work than is absolutely necessary.



PART 1, CHAPTER 18

The next morning, Mr. Sir assigns the boys to a new section of the lake to dig their own holes. Stanley is relieved, though his head is swollen and painful where Zigzag's shovel hit him and it makes digging difficult. Otherwise, Stanley isn't sore—the digging has made him strong, and calluses cover his hands. He's still slow, but not that much slower than Magnet.

After Stanley showers, he stays in the tent to write to his parents. As he begins a letter telling them about swimming and rock climbing, Zero walks in and stands behind Stanley. When Stanley asks him not to read his letters, Zero admits he doesn't know how to read and asks Stanley to teach him. Stanley laughs in surprise. He tells Zero he doesn't know how to teach and thinks he doesn't have the energy to teach Zero anyway. Zero insists he only needs to learn to read, as he has nobody to write to. Again, Stanley refuses. The narrator notes that Stanley's heart has hardened over the last few weeks.

Note that Stanley is growing strong as he digs just as Elya Yelnats grew strong as he carried the growing piglet up the hill. This suggests that Stanley is unwittingly being prepared for a task of some sort, just like his great-great grandfather.



Zero's illiteracy is possibly one reason why Mr. Pendanski and the rest of Group D pick on him so much; he doesn't have the power afforded to someone via education to stand up for himself. When the narrator notes that Stanley's heart is hardening, it shows the consequences of existing in such a cruel environment long-term: it's now unthinkable for Stanley to consider anyone but himself.



PART 1, CHAPTER 19

One night, Stanley wakes to a strange noise. He eventually realizes it's Squid crying and asks Squid if he's okay. Squid sniffs that he's fine. In the morning, Stanley checks on Squid. Squid informs Stanley that he has allergies and if Stanley says anything else, he'll break his jaw. Stanley complies, though he doesn't say much anyway, as he's afraid of saying the wrong thing. He knows his fellow campers are dangerous. Stanley is thankful and surprised that there aren't racial tensions between the campers.

Stanley's belief that his tent mates are dangerous and fundamentally different from him is again indicative of the cruel and selfish environment that Camp Green Lake promotes. This thought also suggests that Stanley isn't fully aware that he's changing to become more accepting of the camp's social structure, while checking on Squid suggests he's not fully hardened yet.



One day, Stanley sees the water truck coming and takes his place in line. Mr. Sir fills their canteens and as the truck pulls away, Magnet asks Group D if anyone wants sunflower seeds. Magnet tosses Mr. Sir's bag of seeds to X-Ray, Armpit, Squid, and then Zigzag. Stanley has no interest—he knows the salty seeds will get them in trouble at worst and at the very least, make them thirsty. When Zigzag tosses the bag, the seeds spill all over Stanley's hole. As Stanley tries to gather the seeds, Zigzag shouts that the truck is coming back. Stanley feels extremely unlucky.

Stanley is unable to cover the sack properly by the time Mr. Sir arrives. Mr. Sir observes that Stanley found something, and suggests that they take it to the Warden. Stanley explains that he stole the sack himself and ate the sunflower seeds all by himself. Armpit, X-Ray, and Magnet shout to Stanley that he was rude to not share. Stanley follows Mr. Sir to the truck and thinks it feels good to sit in the shady cab.

PART 1, CHAPTER 20

Stanley thinks the shade of the oak trees feels wonderful, and he wonders if this is how condemned men feel on their way to the electric chair. Stanley is surprised to see holes all around the Warden's house as Mr. Sir knocks on the door. The Warden frostily invites Mr. Sir and Stanley into the air conditioning. She sits down and asks Stanley to tell her what happened. Stanley does, and Mr. Sir explains that he thinks that Stanley is covering up for another boy.

The Warden points Stanley to a dressing room of sorts and asks him to fetch a small flowered case. He does as he's told and when the Warden opens it, he realizes it's a makeup case. She pulls out a bottle of dark red nail polish and explains that she has to make the color herself with rattlesnake venom. She begins painting her nails and says that it's only toxic when it's wet. When she's finished painting both hands, she approaches Stanley and touches his face. One nail brushes Stanley's injury and a sting of pain sends Stanley backwards.

The Warden turns to Mr. Sir. As he begins to explain again what he thinks happened, she strikes him across the face, leaving three red marks. After a moment, Mr. Sir screams and clutches his face. The Warden tells him that she doesn't care about his sunflower seeds; she preferred his smoking. Turning to Stanley, she sends him back to his hole. Stanley has to step over Mr. Sir on his way out. The Warden tells Stanley that, unfortunately for him, Mr. Sir won't die.

Note that Stanley doesn't blame his own lack of hand-eye coordination; by blaming his family's bad luck he's able to make more sense out of the event and feel as though it's something that was bound to happen. This also tells the reader that even though Stanley thinks the curse is far-fetched, something will probably happen that will lead Stanley closer to his destiny.



Though the rest of Group D's teasing is a way for them to help corroborate Stanley's story, it's also telling that Stanley is willing to take the blame. This suggests that he fears the social backlash of ratting out Magnet more than he fears dealing with Mr. Sir.



By setting this terrifying scene someplace that's physically more comfortable (with shade and air conditioning), the novel insists again that nothing at Camp Green Lake can be trusted to be good or just. There is, in short, nothing good about the camp.



The venomous nail polish shows that the Warden has been able to harness the natural world, though the fact that she's using this power to instill terror and inflict pain suggests again that she's not properly using the natural world. Her methods show, once again, that Camp Green Lake exists well outside the formal justice system, which is the only way these injustices can happen.



The Warden's parting words to Stanley tell the reader that she's well aware that Mr. Sir is going to punish Stanley for this—and, most tellingly, that she doesn't really care. This again illustrates how the camp creates an environment built on terror and cruelty where both are wholly unavoidable.



PART 1, CHAPTER 21

As Stanley walks, he hopes that he can finish his hole before Mr. Sir recovers, as he doesn't want to be out in the lake with Mr. Sir alone. He thinks about the first Stanley, who was robbed by Kissin' Kate Barlow and left in the desert. Stanley reasons their situations aren't so different. When two rattlesnake hunters found the first Stanley, he was insane and only said that "he found refuge on **God's thumb**." After he recovered, he had no idea what that meant. Stanley hears a twitching sound and looks down to see a rattlesnake. He turns around, runs away, and mentally thanks the snake for warning him.

When Stanley returns to the group, he says simply to his curious fellow campers that the Warden just got mad at Mr. Sir for bothering her. Stanley is surprised to see that his hole is nearly finished and as a smile crosses his face, he thanks the group for digging his hole. None of the boys take credit for digging. Stanley notices Zero's hole is smaller than all the others.

PART 1, CHAPTER 22

Stanley finishes his hole first and heads back to camp to mull over why Zero dug his hole for him. Later, Armpit, Zigzag, X-Ray, and Squid suggest that Zero just likes digging holes. Stanley waits in the tent for Zero to return from his shower. When Zero walks in, Stanley thanks him and asks why he did it. Zero notes that Stanley didn't steal the seeds or the sneakers. Stanley is confused, but calls after Zero. He offers to try to teach him to read and Zero smiles.

Stanley and Zero return to the tent and pull out Stanley's box of stationery. They begin with reciting the alphabet, which Zero memorizes quickly. Zero seems extremely proud. Then, Stanley prints a capital A and Zero copies it. Stanley explains the difference between capitals and lowercase letters and when to use each, which he knows Zero doesn't understand. Zero states that there are then actually 52 letters. Stanley is perplexed, especially when Zero can't explain how he did the math.

Zero suggests that Stanley teach him ten letters per day, five capitals and five lowercase, and after five days he'll know them all. Stanley is perplexed again by how Zero did the math. Zero continues and says he'll dig part of Stanley's hole each day in exchange. Stanley agrees. He asks Zero how he figured out how many letters he'd need to do each day, but Zero again says it's just what it is. He says he's not stupid; he just doesn't like answering people's questions.

The fact that the rattlesnake does indeed warn Stanley suggests that not all of nature that appears scary and terrible is actually out to get people. The snake represents a side of nature that's capable of coexisting with humans—and most importantly, doesn't actually want to hurt them. When compared to the Warden's venomous polish, this again shows that she's on the opposite side in this relationship to nature.



As Zero begins to appear more and more like a full-fledged, feeling human being to Stanley, it reinforces Stanley's own growing callousness for the reader. It suggests that Stanley will need to think more about these changes he's undergoing if he wishes to learn to see Zero as a real person.



"The sneakers" presumably refers to Clyde Livingston's sneakers, which makes Zero appear as though he has far more information than Stanley gave him credit for—something that aligns him with the likes of Madame Zeroni and the novel's idea of fate and destiny.



The fact that Zero is somehow a math whiz shows Stanley that he clearly didn't know Zero at all before this. In turn, this reinforces the dangers of turning someone into a one-dimensional figure rather than treating them as a living, breathing, feeling human. This in turn will begin to show Stanley that there's power to be had in kindness and in friendship.



When Zero says he doesn't like answering questions, it suggests that he absolutely has more than he's hiding from both Stanley and the reader. The fact that he appears aware that this can make him look less smart brings up the possibility that Zero finds looking uneducated to be useful at times, though maddening at others.



Stanley thinks about the deal later. He knows that X-Ray won't like it, but he reasons that he still needs a break from digging to teach Zero. He thinks about the Warden's cabin and the mysterious gold tube. Suddenly, Stanley realizes it's half of a lipstick container and wonders if KB might be Kate Barlow.

Stanley's mental gymnastics here suggests that he's aware that his agreement with Zero isn't exactly fair, though he's trying to make it seem fair so that he can live with it.



PART 1, CHAPTER 23

The narrator explains that 110 years ago, Green Lake was the largest lake in Texas. Every Fourth of July, the town would host a picnic and award prizes for the best peach pies and jams. Miss Katherine Barlow always won a special prize for her delicious spiced peaches. She was the only schoolteacher and even though the schoolhouse was poorly maintained, her students loved her. In addition to teaching children, she taught adults during the evenings. The young men were all interested in Miss Katherine romantically, but she made sure they learned.

In particular, the fact that Miss Katherine presumably spends her whole day teaching (kids during the day and adults at night) suggests that she's a firm believer in the value of education. Her spiced peaches suggest also that she has a good and respectful relationship with nature, given that she can use nature's bounty in a noninvasive way to do well in the manmade world.



One of these young men was Charles "Trout" Walker, whose nickname came from his incurable foot fungus that made his feet smell like dead fish. Most people in Green Lake expected Miss Katherine to marry Trout Walker, as his family was the wealthiest in the area. However, Trout never paid attention during the night classes. He was loud and stupid. Miss Katherine didn't care that her other adult pupils were uneducated since most of them still wanted to learn, but Trout was proud to be uneducated. One evening, he invited her out on his new motorized boat. She declined; the boat was noisy and spewed black smoke. Trout was angry, as he'd never been denied anything he wanted before.

The way that the narrator describes Trout Walker's motorized boat positions him and his family as being somewhat in opposition to nature; the motorized boat, by its very nature, pollutes the air and the water and apparently destroys the peace and quiet of the lake. When combined with Trout's disdain for education, it suggests that Trout, like the Warden, seeks to gain power through money, exploitation, and reputation alone.



PART 1, CHAPTER 24

The next morning, Stanley is wide awake as soon as he sees Mr. Sir's face at breakfast. Half his face is the size of a melon, and there are three angry, dark purple lines running down it. Nobody in Stanley's tent says anything, but another boy asks what happened to Mr. Sir's face. Stanley hears a crash and turns around to see Mr. Sir holding the boy's head against the oatmeal pot, asking him if there's something amiss with his face. Mr. Sir lets the boy fall to the ground with a thud, and the boy agrees when Mr. Sir says he's handsome.

Mr. Sir's willingness to lash out at any boy, not just Stanley, shows that Mr. Sir's power makes him feel as though he doesn't even need to adhere to some form of justice. Not that this kind of abuse is ever acceptable, but it's telling that Mr. Sir appears to blame the entire inmate population for his fate, not just the person he probably blames for the incident.



Stanley refuses to talk about Mr. Sir's face the rest of the day. He looks forward to his break, which Zero said he could have whenever he's ready. When the water truck comes around the second time, Mr. Sir is driving. Stanley is extremely thirsty. Mr. Sir takes Stanley's canteen, but holds it to the side of the stream of water. Stanley watches the water evaporate but thanks Mr. Sir anyway.

By depriving Stanley of water, Mr. Sir turns the landscape into even more of an enemy. Along with the lack of guard towers or fences, this illustrates how the adults in charge at Camp Green Lake manipulate the natural world to help them achieve their own terrible goals.



PART 1, CHAPTER 25

110 years ago, the people of Green Lake went to both Doc Hawthorn and Sam, the onion man, for their maladies. Sam grew onions on the opposite side of the lake. He claimed that his donkey, Mary Lou, was 50 years old thanks to her steady diet of onions. Nobody was sure they believed Sam, as Sam himself was only twenty. Sam sold all manner of ointments, pastes, and lotions made out of onions. Doc Hawthorne even used one to cure baldness.

When Katherine bought onions, she often bought one for Mary Lou, as well. One afternoon, Katherine lamented the coming rain, explaining to Sam that the schoolhouse leaked. He offered to fix it in exchange for six jars of spiced peaches. It took him six days, as he could only work in the afternoons. As a black man, he wasn't allowed to attend school—he could only fix the building. He and Katherine spoke at length while he worked, and she was surprised by his love of poetry. After the roof, Sam fixed the windows, the wobbly desk, and the crooked door. Within a few months, the schoolhouse was all fixed.

Katherine, however, was sad, as she had nothing else for Sam to fix. One afternoon as she cried and rain poured outside, she heard Sam selling onions. She raced outside, hugged Mary Lou, and told Sam her heart was breaking. Sam kissed her. Nobody else was in the street except for Hattie Parker. She whispered that God would punish them.

PART 1, CHAPTER 26

The story spread like wildfire through Green Lake, and no children showed up for school the next day. Katherine wondered if she'd gotten her days mixed up when, suddenly, a mob led by Trout Walker burst into the schoolhouse. He called her the "Devil Woman" and yelled that she was poisoning children with books as the mob began piling desks in the middle of the schoolhouse. Katherine managed to escape the schoolhouse and ran to the sheriff's office.

The sheriff, drinking whiskey, greeted Katherine pleasantly and told her to calm down. She began to tell him about Trout Walker's mob, but he refused to hear anything bad about Trout. He told her she was pretty and asked her to kiss him, since she kissed Sam. Horrified, Katherine accused the sheriff of drinking. He explained that he always drinks before a hanging—Sam will hang for kissing her, as it's illegal for a black man to kiss a white woman. He asked Katherine for a kiss in exchange for sparing Sam's life, but Katherine ran away. The sheriff called out that God will punish her.

Because the residents of Green Lake go to both Sam and Doc Hawthorn, it suggests that the town as a whole has a relatively good relationship with both nature and the manmade world. Sam's potions in particular suggest that he's very tuned into nature and is able to use it to his advantage, though not exploit it.



Katherine's surprise at learning about Sam's love of poetry mirrors Stanley's surprise at Zero's mathematical prowess; this suggests that these two are becoming friends in much the same way that Stanley and Zero are. Similarly, Sam's interest in poetry makes the injustice of not being able to attend school appear even worse, as he clearly has a desire to learn.



To a contemporary audience, Hattie Parker is intended to read as impossibly racist for her remark. Notably, however, her remark suggests that she believes that racial differences are set out and upheld by the divine, an idea that the novel will test soon.



By burning the schoolhouse and insisting that books are poison, Trout Walker shows that he believes education absolutely has a great deal of power to create change in the world—presumably, he believes education would make the children question their parents' racism. In this way, leaning on his power and money is a way to impede kindness and social progress.



When the sheriff insists that God will punish Katherine for the kiss, he shows clearly that he believes that the divine powers are on his side and share his view of morality. However, remember Trout Walker's terrible boat. The boat alone suggests that these views are in opposition to the divine and to nature, which the novel tends to link to each other. In short, this tells the reader that the sheriff is wrong.



Katherine found Sam and told him they needed to leave. Sam agreed to leave Mary Lou behind and they started off in Sam's boat, rowing across the lake. However, he couldn't escape Trout Walker's motorized boat. The narrator states the facts: Trout shot Sam in the water and rescued Katherine, even though she didn't want to be rescued. When they returned to shore, Katherine saw that Mary Lou had been shot, as well. Since then, rain hasn't fallen on Green Lake, and the narrator asks the reader whom God actually punished. Three days later, Katherine shot the sheriff, applied fresh lipstick, and kissed him. She became Kissin' Kate Barlow and spent the next twenty years terrorizing the West.

The lack of rain on Green Lake after Sam's unjust death shows that the sheriff and Hattie Parker weren't correct; God and nature are linked and have a very different idea of right and wrong than most of the inhabitants of Green Lake. Katherine's decision to become an outlaw brings up the idea of vigilante justice, as she saw firsthand that the formal justice system wasn't actually that just. When she kills the sheriff, she's able to do a small thing to atone for Sam's death and begin to recalibrate the scales.



PART 1, CHAPTER 27

Stanley glances at his canteen, uncertain if he can take a drink of water. Mr. Sir has continued to dump Stanley's water on the ground, though Mr. Pendanski has been making a point to give Stanley extra. It also helps to have Zero digging, but the other boys don't like it. They mock Stanley and insist that he's a master, while Zero, who is black, is his slave. The mocking intensifies when he insists he needs to save his strength to teach Zero to read. Though this is true, Stanley also knows that Zero is a fast learner. He sometimes hopes the Warden is watching them so she'll know that Zero isn't stupid.

Stanley was once relieved that there were no "racial issues," but the way the other boys specifically conceptualize Stanley and Zero's agreement shows that, clearly, he was wrong. Again, this implies that Stanley may have more power than he thought he did based solely on his skin color. The fact that the other boys don't like this agreement again shows that they're far more interested in upholding a system in which everyone has to be miserable.



Stanley sees the water truck approaching. Mr. Sir is driving, so Stanley doesn't finish his canteen. When he hands it to Mr. Sir, Mr. Sir fills it and then takes it to the cab of the truck. After a few minutes, he returns and hands Stanley his full canteen. Stanley is afraid to drink, but takes it back to his hole. Finally, he dumps the water out.

Just as with the Warden's possible surveillance of the boys, when Mr. Sir possibly puts something in Stanley's water, it means that Stanley has to live in a state of constant fear.



Once Zero learns the alphabet, Stanley teaches him to write his name. Zero smiles hugely and seems very proud as he writes it over and over again. Stanley is sad to think that even those hundred zeros still equal nothing. As they head for dinner later, Zero explains his real name is actually Hector Zeroni.

Hector's last name is notably the same as Madame Zeroni's; this offers more evidence that there's more to Zero than Stanley initially allowed. Stanley's thoughts on Zero writing his name also allude to how dehumanizing the nickname system is.



PART 1, CHAPTER 28

Kate Barlow returned to Green Lake twenty years after Sam's death. It was a ghost town at that point, and the lake was little more than a puddle. The peach trees were gone, but there were oak trees around an abandoned cabin. She lived there, listening to Sam's voice in her head. After three months, Kate woke one morning to a rifle in her face. It belonged to Trout Walker, and he wanted to know where Kate's treasure was.

Remember that Trout Walker's family was the wealthiest in town. The fact that he now feels the need to bully Kate for her treasure suggests that perhaps Trout Walker's newfound poverty is his punishment, by God or nature, for killing Sam in cold blood.



Kate noticed the woman with Trout as one of her former students, Linda. She'd been a beautiful red headed child, but she looked unkempt and blotchy as an adult. Linda spat she married Trout and they're desperate for money—all of the Walker family's money disappeared with the lake. Linda shouted that Kate must've buried the treasure, and Trout fired the rifle to intimidate Kate. Kate told him to kill her, and said that his grandchildren will still be digging—they'll never find it.

Linda and Trout pulled Kate out of bed in her pajamas, leaving her boots by the bed. They tied her legs together loosely and made her walk across the hot ground until she showed them where the treasure was. Kate's feet blistered, but whenever she stopped, Linda hit her with the shovel. Suddenly, Linda jumped as a yellow-spotted lizard jumped towards them. It landed on Kate's leg and bit her. She died laughing after telling Trout to start digging.

PART 2, CHAPTER 29

The weather becomes unbearably humid and Stanley hears thunder across the lake, near the mountains. He's surprised that he can even see the mountains, as they usually aren't visible through the haze. X-Ray and Zigzag joke about building an ark as a strike of lightning illuminates a rock formation that Stanley thinks looks like a fist making a thumbs-up sign. He thinks of the first Stanley, who said he survived on **God's Thumb** in the desert. Nobody knows how he did so without water or food. The image of the thumb remains in Stanley's mind, though in his mind, the lightning comes out of the thumb itself as if the thumb truly belongs to God.

PART 2, CHAPTER 30

The next day, Zigzag declares that it's July 8, his birthday. He sleeps in and cuts in front of Squid in the breakfast line. Stanley doesn't even know what day of the week it is, but he attempts to figure out how long he's been at Camp Green Lake. Zero does the math for him; if it's indeed July 8, Stanley has been there 46 days and has dug 44 holes. Surprisingly, Mr. Sir gives Zigzag an extra carton of juice when Zigzag says it's his birthday.

As Stanley digs his shovel into the dirt, he thinks that the 45th hold is the hardest. However, he knows it's not true: he's stronger now and better adapted to the heat, Mr. Sir isn't depriving him of water anymore, and Zero digging part of his hole helps. He still feels awkward about it, though. As the sun rises, Stanley looks for **God's Thumb** in the distance. He realizes that he's probably close to where Kate Barlow robbed the first Stanley.

Linda's unkempt appearance suggests that even just associating with the likes of Trout Walker can destroy a person, especially when one also considers her combative nature here. This suggests that both Linda and Trout still believe in their own righteousness and that the town's wealth should be theirs, even though they've done nothing to deserve it.



When Kate dies by yellow-spotted lizard, it recalls the chapter in which the narrator insists that it doesn't matter if one believes in curses or the lizards—this is visible proof that the lizards are deadly, and it also suggests that curses (or the Yelnats family curse, at least) are very real within the world of the novel.



Remember that there's been no rain on Green Lake since Sam's death; the storm in the distance near the mountains now acts as a signal that in order to set things right, one must find the rain and the mountains first. This is supported by the existence of God's Thumb there, as well, as that landmark in particular indicates that the divine is also involved in making the mountains a magical place.



It's worth noting that Mr. Sir's kindness to Zigzag may appear at first glance to be real kindness. However, this is likely incorrect, especially given that Stanley seems surprised at this turn of events. This illustrates how such a cruel environment makes even these small favors seem monumental.



Stanley's realization suggests that the cabin where the Warden lives now is possibly the same cabin where Kate Barlow lived when Trout Walker found her. Again, this allows the reader to make these connections that are satisfying and seem to make sense, which helps Sacchar develop the way that destiny helps move the plot forward.



When Zero takes his turn in Stanley's hole, Zigzag, X-Ray, and Armpit again suggest that Stanley get a whip to hit his slave with. They ask Stanley if he's better than them and discuss that, since he is, they should all be digging Stanley's hole for him. Stanley does his best to deflect and play along. When Mr. Pendanski arrives for lunch, X-Ray makes Stanley get in line first, insisting that Stanley is better than them. Stanley hurries away to eat in peace and wonders if he should stop letting Zero dig for him.

Stanley looks up as Zigzag and Squid approach. Zigzag tries to make Stanley take his cookie and then begins pushing Stanley while telling Stanley not to push him. Stanley insists he doesn't want trouble as he carefully steps backwards around the holes. He's relieved when Mr. Pendanski walks over, but is shocked when Mr. Pendanski tells him to hit Zigzag to "teach the bully a lesson." Stanley makes a halfhearted attempt to hit Zigzag and suddenly, Zigzag grabs Stanley and begins actually punching him. Stanley falls and Zigzag continues punching, even after Mr. Pendanski yells for him to stop.

Suddenly, Zigzag is lifted off Stanley. Stanley looks up to see Zero with an arm around Zigzag's neck, choking him. Zero refuses to stop, even when Mr. Pendanski shouts. Armpit runs into the fray as Mr. Pendanski fires his pistol, and the boys fall apart. The counselors and the Warden hurry over and Mr. Pendanski explains that there was a riot. Armpit and X-Ray attempt to play down the seriousness of the situation, but Zigzag lets slip that the fight began because Stanley wasn't digging his hole.

Stanley calmly explains his deal with Zero to the Warden and suggests that Zero learning to read is building his character, just like digging holes. The Warden turns on Zero and asks him to share what he learned yesterday. Mr. Pendanski laughs and suggests that it'd be easier to teach a shovel to read, though Zero answers that he learned the "at" sound. The Warden spells several words for Zero and he's able to sound them out, but Zero pronounces "hat" "chat." The counselors laugh, though Stanley reasons that Zero's answer was perfectly logical, given the way the letter "H" sounds.

The reader is aware that, as far as Zero and Stanley are concerned, they're both behaving kindly towards each other, but to the other boys their arrangement reads as a rejection of a carefully curated social structure. This shows that true kindness is simply not something that can happen in a place like Camp Green Lake, which thrives on selfishness and cruelty.



Again, the events surrounding the beginning of this fight suggest that, while there's some belief in justice or deserving justice, the fact that Mr. Pendanski facilitates this kind of violence and strife suggests that it's not in his best interest to have the boys treat each other kindly. Essentially, he and the other adults can maintain their power as long as the boys don't band together to stage an uprising.



Though Zero's behavior is undeniably violent, it's also extremely important to note that he's standing up for Stanley—something that seems unheard of given the way Camp Green Lake functions. Armpit and X-Ray's desire to downplay the situation is more evidence that this sort of thing may not be an everyday occurrence, but it's still relatively normal for them.



Stanley's ability to see how Zero got to "chat" from "hat" suggests that, even though he began to become more callous and cold, his friendship with Zero is helping him remember to be empathetic and understanding of others. Mr. Pendanski's horrible words about Zero again reinforce how cruel Camp Green Lake is, as this kind of abuse from an authority figure would be unthinkable in most other circumstances.



The Warden says that nobody will dig anyone else's hole and that Zero's reading lessons must stop. Zero answers that he's not digging another hole, which the Warden ignores. Stanley asks why he can't teach Zero to read anyway, and the Warden and Mr. Pendanski insist that the reading leads to trouble and that Zero is too stupid to learn to read. Mr. Pendanski hands Zero a shovel but instead of returning to his hole, Zero swings it at Mr. Pendanski's head. Mr. Pendanski is unconscious before he hits the ground. Zero says he hates digging holes and begins backing away. Stanley notices Zero's abandoned canteen. The Warden assigns counselors to act as guards for when Zero inevitably returns for water, and tells Group D she still expects seven holes.

Mr. Pendanski and the Warden's reasoning closely mirrors what Trout Walker said about Miss Katherine poisoning kids with books; it admits that there's power to be had through education, power that would be dangerous for them if Zero had it. Similarly, though whacking Mr. Pendanski with a shovel is objectively horrible, within the system of Camp Green Lake, it's not that far-fetched: Zero lashed out the only way he knows how and the only way he's been shown how in this system.



PART 2, CHAPTER 31

Stanley digs angrily. He thinks he should've taught Zero to read even without the deal. He knows he should go out after Zero, but he doesn't. He digs Zero's hole alone, wondering if maybe they could make it to **God's Thumb** where there's possibly water. Stanley thinks that even if they made it there, they'd still have to come back eventually and face the Warden. Stanley wonders if he could somehow strike a deal with the Warden, but figures she'd just scratch everyone with her rattlesnake fingers.

When Stanley considers going to the Warden for help of some sort, it again suggests that his friendship with Zero has taught him the power of kindness and working together (though it's unlikely the Warden will go for any of this). This in turn shows that there are some people, like the Warden, for whom kindness is simply not valuable or a motivator in the least.



Zero hasn't returned by the next morning. Stanley keeps an eye out as he digs and even considers walking out to look. He hopes that Zero somehow found **God's Thumb**, just as the first Stanley did. He hopes there's still water there. When Stanley returns to his tent after digging, he finds the Warden, Mr. Sir, and Mr. Pendanski waiting for him. They want to know where Zero is, but Stanley honestly doesn't know. The Warden asks Mr. Pendanski if it's true that Zero has no family, and Mr. Pendanski replies that Zero is a ward of the state. The Warden confirms again that there's nobody to care about him and then asks Mr. Pendanski to destroy Zero's records so it will be like he was never at Camp Green Lake.

The Warden's logic here seems to imply that family are the only people who could possibly care about someone. This makes it clear how warped the Warden's views of love, kindness, and friendship are, as she's ignoring the friendship that Stanley and Zero formed in this calculation. However, by ignoring their friendship, she also shows that she underestimates Stanley's willpower or actual power to do anything to help Zero, something that will prove a terrible mistake on her part.



PART 2, CHAPTER 32

Two days later, Group D gets a new boy named Brian, though X-Ray calls him Twitch. Twitch explains that he was arrested for stealing a car. As Twitch talks, Stanley lies on his cot and wonders if it actually no longer smells or if he's just used to it. He wonders if Zero might still be alive and thinks that he's most worried that it's maybe *not* too late—Zero could somehow still be alive in the desert, looking for water.

Here, Stanley's private musings about his cot serve as a symbolic representation of the way the camp normalizes toxic behavior, relationships, and situations. It reinforces that at Camp Green Lake, toxicity becomes a part of the background, just as the smell of the cot does.



The next morning, when the water truck arrives, Stanley wonders if it's not too late to save Zero. He watches Mr. Sir fill canteens and wonders if he left the keys to the water truck in the ignition. Carefully, Stanley steps around and observes that the keys are right there. He takes a deep breath and reasons that driving can't be that hard. Quickly, Stanley climbs into the cab, starts the truck, and steps on the gas pedal. The truck doesn't move, and Twitch yells for Stanley to put it in gear. Stanley does and the truck jumps forward. Stanley picks up speed until suddenly, the truck bounces and the airbag inflates. He realizes he drove into a hole and reasons he can't even blame his no-good-dirty-rotten-pig-stealing-great-great-grandfather for this. Stanley abandons the truck and runs into the desert with his empty canteen.

It's notable that Twitch is the one to offer Stanley help in this situation; this is his first day, which suggests that Twitch probably isn't so acclimated to the toxicity of Camp Green Lake's culture yet. As a result, he's more willing to help someone else out than the other boys are. Stanley's decision to go out after Zero at all shows that he's decided to reaffirm his belief in the power of kindness and friendship, as he recognizes that Zero can't survive out there by himself. Note too that at this point, Stanley still sees the natural world as being against him, given his lack of water.



PART 2, CHAPTER 33

Stanley slows down when he realizes nobody is chasing him. He heads towards **God's Thumb**, but decides he will return to camp after everyone has calmed down. He reasons he needs to go half as far as he thinks he can, then turn back. Then he'll make a deal with the Warden. Stanley is surprised to see holes so far away and not dug systematically, like at camp. Stanley starts checking in holes, though he won't admit he's looking for Zero. He finds a family of yellow-spotted lizards in one and runs away, terrified. He collapses a ways away and catches his breath. Stanley notices something on the ground and walks towards it. It's an empty bag of sunflower seeds with one seed still in it. He eats the seed for lunch.

As minimal as the positive events here are (not dying by yellow-spotted lizard; finding a speck of food), it's possible to read these events, particularly the lizard sighting, as the natural world helping Stanley along on his journey. This also suggests that Stanley might not have as hard of a time finding water as he seems to think he will. Stanley's decision to try to cut a deal with the Warden is again indicative of his optimistic nature and his belief in the goodness of people.



PART 2, CHAPTER 34

When the sun is overhead, Stanley figures he can only go for another hour before turning back. He can't see anything, but does notice a pool of water ahead. When he hurries towards it, he realizes it's a mirage. Stanley holds onto the sack from the sunflower seeds, just in case, and continues to walk towards the mountains. **God's Thumb** and the mountains look impossibly far away, though Stanley feels like the mountains are giving him the thumbs-up sign to encourage him on.

The mirage here represents the power of the natural world to alter humans' perceptions of it. Especially when combined with Stanley's sense that the mountains are urging him on, this suggests that nature itself, and possibly God, are leading him on a pre-prescribed journey towards something specific.



Stanley notices a large object on the lake. He can't figure out what it is, so he decides to head to the right and investigate it. He decides that the object will be his halfway point, and then he'll turn back. When he finally reaches it, he discovers that it's an old boat, half buried in the dirt. The boat's name is Mary Lou. Stanley notices a tunnel leading under the boat, large enough for a big animal. He hears something inside and tries to shout to scare the critter back in. However, the animal says "hey" back and Zero's hand pokes out.

The boat's name suggests that this boat is actually Sam's old boat. When Stanley discovers Zero hiding under it, it reads as though Sam himself is helping Zero along. This opens up the possibility that Stanley's journey doesn't just mirror that of Elya's; he may also be able to take actions that help atone for the atrocities committed in Green Lake, as well.



PART 2, CHAPTER 35

Zero's face is sunken and droopy. Stanley admits his canteen is empty and says he tried to bring the water truck. He insists they need to go back to camp, but Zero refuses and invites Stanley into the hole for "sploosh." Stanley squeezes through the hole, marveling at the fact that he can fit. He notices Zero's stolen shovel as Zero attempts to get a lid off of a glass jar. Zero explains there were sixteen jars buried under the boat and uses the shovel to break the top off. Zero offers the broken jar to Stanley. Stanley is afraid of the broken glass and whatever the sploosh is, as he thinks it's probably 100 years old and could be seriously contaminated.

Stanley wonders if Zero knows what bacteria are as he takes a sip. The liquid is sweet and peachy and the boys drink the entire jar. Zero then admits it was the last jar, and Stanley insists that they need to return to camp. He suggests that they'll probably send Zero to the hospital, like Barf Bag. Zero admits that Barf Bag stepped on a rattlesnake on purpose.

Zero asks what "Mar-ya Luh-oh-oo" is, and leads Stanley back aboveground to point at the boat. Stanley explains that Y can act as both a vowel and a consonant. Suddenly, Zero groans, grabs his stomach, and falls to the ground. Stanley feels helpless. When Zero's episode passes, the boys again argue about whether to go back to camp. Zero says he'd rather die in the desert than go back. Stanley stares at the mountains for a minute and then asks Zero to tell him if the fist-like mountain looks like anything. Slowly, Zero forms his hand into a fist and puts his thumb up.

PART 2, CHAPTER 36

Stanley and Zero put four unbroken jars in the sack, just in case. Zero carries the shovel and is unworried when Stanley warns him that he's unlucky. Zero insists they can only go up from where they are. Not long after they set off, Zero has another episode. Stanley feels as though **God's Thumb** isn't getting any closer and realizes that even if they do make it, they'll have to climb it. Zero begins using the shovel as a cane as the boys wonder who Mary Lou was.

Just as Sam's boat appears to be helping Zero, the jars, which are likely Miss Katherine's spiced peaches, are also helping Stanley and Zero along on their journey. This reinforces that the boys will somehow help make up for Sam's murder as they go along. With this, the novel suggests that destiny is circular in that the boys are going to at least attempt the same things that Elya, Miss Katherine, and Sam did.



The revelation that Barf Bag hurt himself on purpose to get out of Camp Green Lake illustrates that the camp is capable of pushing the inmates to drastic measures to escape the toxicity—but also, that in that regard, the natural world is a friend, not a foe.



Zero's question shows that he's taking his education very seriously, which implies that he understands that he'll gain a great deal of power just by being able to read and better understand the world around him. When Zero agrees that God's Thumb looks like a thumbs-up, it shows that nature isn't just out to help Stanley; essentially, he's not special.



Now that Stanley and Zero are removed from the camp itself, the shovel becomes a lifeline instead of acting as the boys' sentence. This again shows that the camp has the power to corrupt even the most normal and mundane of garden tools and turn them into something horrific and toxic.



Zero has another episode and Stanley wonders if he'll have to dig Zero's grave. He's surprised when Zero gets up again. Zero asks Stanley to spell words for him to sound out, and the spelling seems to distract Zero from his pain. They stop when they're so parched it hurts to talk. Stanley wonders if the bad bacteria only contaminated the jars that were easy to open. He thinks he's not afraid of dying or the pain, but he is afraid of his parents not knowing what happened. He wonders if the Warden will send out a search party and reasons that he at least has a family who will care, unlike Zero.

Zero wonders what's at the top of **God's Thumb**, and Stanley suggests there's probably an Italian restaurant there. The boys joke about what they'd order. A few hours later, they reach the west edge of the lake. Unlike on the other side, this edge is a steep cliff. They decide to try to climb up using a series of ledges and Zero miraculously manages to keep up. When they reach a large flat ledge, Stanley realizes that the next one is several feet above his head with no footholds.

Zero suggests that Stanley boost him up, and then he can pull Stanley up with the shovel. Boosting Zero up works, and Stanley uses the shovel handle to help him walk up the wall. Zero somehow helps pull him onto the ledge. Stanley notices blood and realizes that Zero cut his hands holding onto the blade of the shovel while Stanley climbed. Zero drinks the blood. They rest and then climb the rest of the way up. The sun looks like it's resting on the top of **God's Thumb**.

PART 2, CHAPTER 37

As **God's Thumb** looms overhead, Stanley feels afraid. He fears that if there's no water up there, he and Zero will have nothing. The land gradually becomes steeper and steeper, forcing Stanley and Zero to zigzag up the mountain. They begin to see weeds, which get thicker the higher they climb. The sun begins to set and gnats attempt to land on the boys. Zero and Stanley resume their spelling game until Zero vomits. Stanley realizes that they must be close to water if there are weeds and bugs, and he tells Zero this. Zero smiles, flashes Stanley a thumbs-up, and collapses. He doesn't move when Stanley shakes him.

It's worth noting here that as Stanley thinks about his own family and Zero's lack thereof, he very clearly believes what the Warden says about Zero—even though she's proven herself to be untrustworthy, nasty, and dismissive of non-blood relationships that may be just as fulfilling. This offers hope that there is actually someone besides Stanley who can care about Zero; whoever that person is just isn't on the Warden's radar.



Though the ledges and footholds are very difficult for Stanley and Zero to scale, it's also important to recognize that there are, at the very least, ledges and footholds—in short, nature is helping them out here by offering them a way up the lake bed.



As the sun moves and gets closer and closer to God's Thumb, it acts as a beacon that Stanley and Zero can follow. Again, this is another way that the natural world appears to be helping the boys reach God's Thumb. The boys' teamwork reinforces the power of their friendship to achieve common goals.



When Stanley is able to deduce that there must be water nearby, it shows that he's developing more of an appreciation for the natural world and doesn't necessarily see it as his sworn enemy anymore. This suggests that he's changing to become more like Sam in how he views the natural world; it is something benevolent, especially now that he's following nature's signs towards God's Thumb.



PART 2, CHAPTER 38

Stanley pulls a limp Zero upright and then onto his shoulder, with Zero's legs dangling in front. He leaves the shovel and the jars behind and picks his way up the incline. Stanley feels as though **God's Thumb** is giving him strength and pulling him towards it. He begins to smell something foul in the air as the ground levels off. Stanley looks in front of him; the thumb no longer looks like a thumb and it's far too big to climb. He feels as though the smell in the air is the smell of despair. As Stanley heads towards the thumb, he slips, drops Zero, and lands facedown in a muddy gully.

As Stanley laments his fate, he suddenly realizes that one needs water to make mud. He begins to dig in the wettest part of the gully and in the darkness is able to fill a small hole with dirty water. When Stanley has a reasonably sized hole, he scoops water and splashes it on Zero's face. Zero begins to stir, so Stanley pulls Zero closer and pours more into Zero's mouth. He discovers an onion as he digs for water and eats half without even peeling it. He gives the other half to Zero and tells him it's a hot fudge sundae.

PART 2, CHAPTER 39

Stanley wakes up in a meadow, staring up at the **thumb**. Finally, he rolls over to look at his water hole and discovers two inches of brown water in the bottom. He tries to rinse his mouth of the dirty water with little success. Zero stirs, moans, and tells Stanley he's not doing well. Zero crawls to the water hole, sips some water, and then has another painful episode. Stanley considers going back down the mountain to look for the shovel and the jars, but he's not sure he has the strength. He walks to the thumb through a field of white flowers, touches it, and then heads back to Zero. He realizes that he needs to look for the shovel now while the trail is fresh, but he's afraid Zero will die while he's gone.

With difficulty, Zero says that he needs to tell Stanley something. Zero grits his teeth through the pain and tells Stanley that he stole Clyde Livingston's shoes from the shelter. This confession seems to make Zero feel better, and Zero falls asleep. Stanley sings him the old family lullaby.

Stanley's decision to carry Zero instead of abandoning him or staying put is a testament to Stanley's newfound appreciation for the boys' friendship, as he now sees leaving Zero as something wholly wrong. His conception of the smell as foul shows that this is a moment of doubt for Stanley; he hasn't yet learned to truly trust the natural world to guide him.



Splitting the onion in particular shows that Stanley truly values Zero's life and their friendship; the presence of water and food suggests that Stanley's kindness, combined with nature's benevolence, will have the power to bring Zero back to life and wellness.



Now, the shovel is even more of a life-saving implement than it was when Zero used it as a cane—near God's Thumb, it becomes something the boys can use to make use of nature, rather than a way for the Warden to try to exert dominance over the natural world like at camp. When Stanley goes to touch God's Thumb for the sake of touching it, it shows that he's learned the importance of following through on the things he's decided to do, even when it's only for his own satisfaction.



When Zero feels better after confessing, it suggests that this personal acknowledgement of justice is one way to help right the ills of the world. Stanley's song shows that he cares more for Zero now than he does about looking cool.



PART 2, CHAPTER 40

Stanley wonders if there are more onions around. He pulls up one of the white flowers, including the roots. The narration jumps back to the past; Sam is selling onions on the streets of Green Lake. Mrs. Tennyson, a very proper woman, runs after Sam in her nightgown. She stops him and explains that her daughters will be okay, thanks to Sam's onion tonic. She derisively says that Doc Hawthorn was useless, as he wanted to use leeches.

Hattie Parker and other townsfolk gather, and Hattie asks Mrs. Tennyson if her husband is aware of the way she's dressed. Mrs. Tennyson curtly explains that she and her husband have been up all night with their daughter, who ate bad meat—Hattie Parker's husband is the butcher. Hattie's face flushes. She excuses herself and Mrs. Tennyson buys onions from Sam. When she insists he keep the change, Sam asks her to buy onions for Mary Lou with it.

Back in the present, Stanley and Zero take the next two days to recover. They eat onions and drink the dirty water. Since Zero seems to be feeling marginally better, Stanley decides to go look for the shovel. He feels strong as he heads down the mountain. After a while, he looks back and doesn't think he could've carried Zero so far, so he reasons he must've missed the shovel. Regardless, he keeps going just in case. Finally, Stanley sits down and decides that if he's so tired after walking down, he never would've been able to carry Zero up. However, Stanley finds the shovel and the sack of jars right next to each other.

PART 2, CHAPTER 41

Zero continues to improve. Stanley digs the water hole to about the size of the holes at Camp Green Lake. The hole is full of murky water. Stanley is surprised that he hasn't gotten sick from something, as he used to get sick all the time. Zero begins to tell Stanley about his life before Camp Green Lake. He says he didn't go to the homeless shelter often but when he did, he had to find someone to pretend to be his mom. Otherwise, they would've made him a ward of the state. Zero says he isn't sure what that means, but he doesn't like it. Stanley wonders if Zero knows that he's now considered a ward of the state.

The juxtaposition of Stanley discovering onions with Mrs. Tennyson's insistence that onions cured her daughter reinforces that onions are life-saving within the world of the novel. Onions contain chemicals that help the gut remain healthy, which is likely how and why they're able to help Zero and Mrs. Tennyson's daughter.



Hattie's derision falls right in line with her assertion that God would punish Katherine and Sam; her sense of right and wrong is focused entirely on manmade systems and moralities at the expense of the actual humans negatively impacted by that focus.



Stanley's surprise at his own apparent strength suggests that he is, to some degree, unaware of the power of kindness and of caring about someone—his belief that Zero was worthy of care, coupled with the help from the natural world, is what enabled Stanley to carry Zero up the hill in the first place. This shows that even though the reader may make some of these connections, Stanley likely won't make all of them.



Zero's declaration that he doesn't want to be a ward of the state suggests that more than anything, Zero wants to be able to control his own life. That is, notably, something that he wouldn't be able to do as a ward of the state, as that would give the government power to likely put him in foster care. However, it's also worth noting that had that happened, Zero may have had a better chance at an education than he did on the streets.



Zero says he liked sleeping outside because he wanted to be a Cub Scout. He notes that his mother was once a **Girl Scout**. Zero says that he and his mother always had to steal, but it took him a long time to realize it was wrong. He and his mother took just what they needed, so when he saw Clyde Livingston's shoes at the shelter, he took them. Zero says he reasoned that it was better to take old shoes than new ones. He says he was wearing the smelly shoes when everyone realized they were missing. Nobody noticed him. He just left them on the top of a car. Zero says he should've kept the shoes; he was arrested the next day for stealing a new pair of sneakers.

Zero's logic when he stole Clyde Livingston's shoes makes perfect sense and reveals that even though Zero has technically lived his life as a criminal, he still has a very finely tuned sense of what's right, what's wrong, and how to commit "wrong" acts that do the least amount of damage to others. This offers another side to Zero and suggests that, instead of a traditional education, he's received an education in morality and justice.



PART 2, CHAPTER 42

Zero grows strong enough to help dig the water hole. He makes it about six feet deep and puts rocks on the bottom to make the water cleaner, and then declares that it's the last hole he'll ever dig. Stanley knows they need to return to Camp Green Lake at some point. There's nothing but desert for miles. Zero wonders out loud if there's a hole in the top of the thumb and that's where the water is coming from, noting that water doesn't run uphill. Stanley realizes that the onion smell doesn't bother him anymore and he can't really taste them anymore either.

The realization that he's acclimated to the onion smell suggests again, as it did with Barf Bag's cot, that Stanley is capable of adapting to all manner of situations, not all of them positive. When Zero suggests the water must be in the thumb or running uphill, it draws a parallel between this stream and the Latvian stream of Madame Zeroni. This in turn implies that this stream, like that one, has magical powers.



Two nights later, Stanley happily stares at the stars. He thinks that he has no real reason to be happy and wonders if he's going to die. He realizes he's never been truly happy, but now he likes who he is. He watches Zero's breath blow a flower petal around and thinks that Zero had only been at Camp Green Lake a month or so more than Stanley. He thinks that even though Zero is right that neither of them would be here if he'd kept the shoes, Stanley is glad that Zero abandoned the shoes and they fell on him. He remembers how he thought that destiny struck him and thinks that it must've been true.

Stanley's happiness and satisfaction at the way things have worked out shows that he too will get to experience some of the satisfaction of the way that destiny works within the plot, even without knowing all the exact pieces. This suggests that, at its heart, the idea of destiny allows people to make more sense of their world and feel more secure in the way things progress in their lives.



Stanley wonders if he and Zero could possibly sneak past the camp and follow the road back to civilization. He reasons that nobody at Camp Green Lake is looking for them at this point. He dreams about living as a fugitive and getting a new identity, and he realizes it's crazy but also thinks that it'd be easier if he and Zero could find Kissin' Kate Barlow's treasure to fund their adventure. He wakes Zero up and asks if he wants to dig one more hole.

Given the way that Stanley's journey has mirrored Elya's thus far (and especially since he's now uncharacteristically happy), it suggests that it's actually part of Stanley and Zero's destiny to dig up Kate Barlow's treasure. It also implies that by doing so, they'll somehow atone for Sam's murder.



PART 2, CHAPTER 43

After spending the morning picking onions and preparing for their journey back to Camp Green Lake, Stanley listens to Zero talk about his mother. Zero says they used to live in a real house, and his room was yellow. His mother used to sing the same lullaby that Stanley sang to him. Zero isn't sure why they had to move out and live on the street.

Stanley and Zero's plan is to leave early the next morning, arrive at Camp Green Lake before dark, and then dig in the hole where Stanley found the lipstick tube overnight. Then, regardless of what they find, they'll leave after hopefully stealing food and water. Stanley thinks about his parents and wonders if they've been evicted for the smell of Stanley's dad's experiments. He wonders if they'll be homeless, and wonders, too, if the camp told them he's missing.

Stanley and Zero head down the mountain the next morning. Stanley points out where he found the shovel, and Zero is impressed that Stanley carried him so far up the mountain. Stanley, who is carrying the sack of jars filled with water, slips and begins to slide down the mountain. The onions spill but finally, Stanley is able to stop himself. Miraculously, the jars don't break, and the boys are able to collect the onions they lost as they continue down the mountain.

At the bottom, Stanley and Zero ask each other if they're thirsty. Stanley lies and says he isn't, and he thinks that this is becoming a contest between them. Neither of them wants to be the first to drink. They carefully climb down the cliff and again discuss drinking, feigning worry for the other. Finally, the boys decide to drink together. They find the Mary Lou before noon and sit in its shade to rest.

Zero says that he has no idea why Zero's mother left him. As Zero talks, Stanley thinks that Zero is explaining this to himself more than to him. Zero says that his mother used to ask him to wait for her while she went off alone. Zero would hug his stuffed giraffe, Jaffy, while she was gone. Then, he says, she left him at a park and didn't come back for a month. The boys eat onions and drink, and then discuss which direction to go to reach Camp Green Lake.

The lullaby offers more evidence that Stanley and Zero are more connected than they initially thought, whether or not they ever realize that. That again acts as a way for the novel to show that fate and destiny are at play in their lives.



When Stanley isn't sure if the camp told his parents that he's missing, it suggests that he is coming to a better understanding of the fact that Camp Green Lake doesn't exactly operate within normal rules and regulations that govern the formal justice system.



The "miracle" of the jars remaining intact again suggests that destiny is on Stanley and Zero's side as they go on their quest. The fact that Stanley slips in the first place alludes to the possibility that this quest isn't going to be easy, even with nature on their side: nature still has the power to ruin things for them.



As Stanley and Zero engage in this argument, it's worth noting that they're engaging more in a fight against each other than against nature itself. This shift suggests that Stanley and Zero will be tackling human foes in the next part of their quest rather than natural ones.



The relationship that Zero describes with his mother makes it clear that Zero absolutely had someone to care for him at this point in his life, even if the particular ways she cared for him were sometimes questionable given their homelessness. Regardless, it opens it up for Zero's mother to still be out there to care for him.



Zero continues his story as they walk. He says that once, a few weeks after Zero's mother left, some kids about his age had a birthday party at the park. One girl invited him to play, though Zero knew he didn't belong. He noticed one mother who stared at him as though he were a monster. When one boy offered Zero cake, the mother told Zero to go away and told the other kids to stay away from him. Zero says he ran away so fast that he forgot Jaffy. Stanley asks if Zero ever found Jaffy, and Zero admits that Jaffy wasn't real. Stanley thinks of how awful it would be for his parents to not know if he was dead or alive, and thinks that's how Zero must've felt.

With Zero's story, the novel suggests that when it comes to children, they're naturally kinder and more accepting of difference; it's the adults in charge who have the power to create an environment that treats Zero like a monster. This suggests in short that cruelty is something that people learn as they grow up, likely from their parents. When applied to the Warden, this suggests that she may be so cruel because others were cruel to her.



Zero stops suddenly and insists they're going the wrong way. He draws a map in the dirt proving his point and Stanley follows him, even though he doesn't think it's right. Later that afternoon, a cloud rolls overhead and casts shade. Finally, Zero stops Stanley and asks him to listen. They can hear Camp Green Lake and, specifically, Mr. Sir. As the boys approach some holes, they decide to climb into them and wait. Stanley and Zero wait until they can't hear anything and then creep silently towards camp. Stanley feels a rush of fear as he sees the camp, but he manages to point out the hole where he found the lipstick tube. He and Zero hide and wait for nightfall.

The cloud here is notable; remember that it hasn't rained over Green Lake in more than a century, and the clouds have taunted the boys at camp for the entire novel. The cloud's presence then suggests that something important has shifted in nature, implying that change is on the way for Camp Green Lake. Stanley's fear illustrates how deeply he's internalized the terror of the camp, given that he feels the terror even when he's not a victim.



PART 2, CHAPTER 44

Stanley struggles to sleep but is surprised when Zero wakes him up. There's one light on in the camp office and moonlight above as Stanley climbs down into the correct hole. He begins to dig. Zero watches and then sneaks to camp to fill the water jars. It's so dark, Stanley can't even see if he's digging up something valuable. He decides to make the hole wider as Zero surprises him with breakfast. Stanley pours some cereal down his throat and almost gags at how sweet it is after the onions. Zero takes over digging and they switch several times.

At this point, it seems the work of destiny that Zero is able to sneak in and out of camp to fill the jars and steal food. The unnaturally sweet cereal shows again how unnatural and negative the camp is, given that something that's normally positive (sweet cereal) now seems overly sweet and even unpalatable.



Finally, Stanley's shovel hits something hard. Surprised, he chips off dirt and discovers that it's a chest of some sort. He carefully digs into the wall and discovers the object is about eight inches tall and two feet wide, though he has no idea how far into the side of the hole it goes. Stanley fears making the side of the hole cave in, but he and Zero decide that Stanley should try to wedge it free. It works, and Stanley pulls out a heavy suitcase. He hands it to Zero. As Stanley tries to pull himself out of the hole, the Warden turns on a flashlight and thanks him for his help.

Even though the novel led the boys and the reader to believe that destiny was on Stanley and Zero's side, the Warden's appearance calls this into question. However, given the way the novel suggests that destiny works, her appearance may also be something that's foretold. This is supported by the fact that she and Stanley are now on opposite sides of nature, which suggests that man versus nature will be the next showdown.



PART 2, CHAPTER 45

Mr. Pendanski shines the flashlight on Zero, who sits with the suitcase on his lap. Mr. Sir points his gun at Zero. He's wearing nothing but pajama pants. The Warden starts to speak, but stops and begins to back away. Two yellow-spotted lizards crawl up on the suitcase as Zero sits perfectly still. Mr. Pendanski gasps and then shines the flashlight into the hole. Stanley chokes back a scream as he realizes he's standing in a lizard nest. There are six in the hole, several of which are climbing on him. The Warden tells Mr. Pendanski that they won't have to wait long, and then they'll have a body to give "that woman" (Ms. Morengo). She says that she doesn't care what happens as long as she gets the suitcase, and recounts having to dig holes every day as a kid.

The Warden's mention of digging holes herself as a child reinforces the idea that violence and abuse are cyclical. Though the novel never says if she has children of her own, she's perpetuating this cycle of violence and hard physical labor by taking on teenage inmates. This suggests that something will need to happen to break the cycle and reintroduce kindness into Camp Green Lake, as it's fairly clear that even if the Warden has found what she's looking for, that doesn't mean she's going to stop being cruel.



PART 2, CHAPTER 46

Several hours later, Zero and Stanley are still alive. As a lizard springs towards Mr. Pendanski, Mr. Sir shoots it and then lights a cigarette. Mr. Pendanski suggests they shoot "them" anyway, and another counselor asks if he's referring to the lizards or the boys. Mr. Pendanski points out that they have lots of graves to choose from, and the boys will die anyway.

Mr. Pendanski's shockingly callous statement betrays that even though he was the kindest counselor the narrator named, it was all a front: he's just as cruel and heartless as the Warden and Mr. Sir, and he likely acted kindly so that he could use it as a weapon as needed.



The Warden tells the counselors that their story is simple: Stanley tried to run away, fell in a hole, and the lizards got him. She says they won't even give "them" Zero's body. Mr. Pendanski notes that it doesn't make sense for Stanley to run if he knew he was getting released, but the Warden retorts that they couldn't release him yesterday because he was delirious. She stares at Zero and asks why he isn't dead yet. Stanley is barely listening and doesn't know what they're talking about. Instead, he remembers a time when he and Stanley's mother rolled down a snowy hill. Stanley is so caught up in his memory, he doesn't hear Mr. Sir tell him he's innocent and his lawyer came to pick him up.

The adult conversation going on here suggests that things have changed at Camp Green Lake: it may be moving towards being forced to comply with normal standards, given that the justice system has apparently discovered that Stanley is innocent. As Stanley escapes into his memory, it's notably one in which the natural world provides a sense of wonder and helps him get through this ordeal, much in the same way that God's Thumb helped him and Zero to survive for a week in the desert.



Not long before 4:30am, the Warden sends the counselors to the tents to deal with the campers. Only Mr. Sir remains with her. Stanley glances at Zero, who slowly gives Stanley a thumbs-up. Stanley wonders what Mr. Sir was talking about; he knows his parents are too poor to hire a lawyer.

Stanley understands that his parents have very little power to truly take on the justice system and he's fairly certain that this is a fact that's not up for debate. The possibility that this has changed suggests that there may be more justice in the world than previously thought.



PART 2, CHAPTER 47

As the sun rises, Stanley counts eight lizards in the hole with him. Inexplicably, Zero says, "Satan." The Warden suggests that Mr. Sir take the suitcase from Zero, as the lizards clearly aren't hungry, but none of them move. Hours later, they watch a tarantula lumber along the ground. A lizard leaps from Stanley's head towards the tarantula, devouring it in one gulp. Mr. Sir observes that the lizards are absolutely hungry.

The lizards move lower in the hole to escape the sun as the day progresses. Stanley believes that there are two hiding between Zero's knees. The boys whisper to each other, and Stanley tries to climb out. He feels a claw dig in and gives up. Zero asks Stanley if his last name is his first name backwards. Stanley is amazed that Zero could figure that out. They hear cars approaching, and Mr. Sir says it's certainly not **Girl Scouts** with cookies.

A short while later, Mr. Pendanski leads a short woman and a tall man in a suit to the hole. When they're close enough to see, the woman (Ms. Morengo) turns to the man, the Texas Attorney General, and says that if anything happens to Stanley, they're filing charges against the Warden as well as the state of Texas. The Attorney General asks the Warden how long the boys have been stuck. The Warden insists that the boys snuck into her cabin, stole her suitcase, and then fell into the nest last night. Stanley says it's not true, but Ms. Morengo advises him not to speak. Stanley wonders who actually owns the suitcase.

Ms. Morengo angrily says that this wouldn't have happened if the Warden had released Stanley to her yesterday, but the Warden insists that this is Stanley's fault. The Attorney General asks why the Warden didn't release Stanley when asked, and the Warden insists that Ms. Morengo didn't have proper authorization. She insists that she needed authentication from the Attorney General before she could abide by even a signed court order. She again says that Stanley has been delusional for days.

Stanley carefully pulls himself out of the hole and the lizards allow him to do so. He steadies himself and then helps Zero stand. As the last of the lizards skitter away, the Warden rushes to Zero, hugs him, and tries to take the suitcase. Zero jerks it away and says it belongs to Stanley. The Warden reminds him that it came from her cabin and threatens to press charges, but Zero points to Stanley's name written in big black letters on the suitcase. The Warden sputters.

When the lizards show that they're hungry, just not for Stanley and Zero, it again appears as though fate and destiny are helping the boys get through this ordeal—but also, that nature is conspiring to help. The lizards keep the Warden and Mr. Sir away, even as they terrify the boys.



When Zero asks Stanley about his last name, it again reinforces that Zero isn't dumb; he's just uneducated. By making that distinction, the novel is able to point to the ways that Zero, even as an intelligent kid, is disadvantaged because of not getting an education, especially when even Stanley is surprised.



The Warden's decision to lie shows that she believes herself to be above the law or, at the very least, outside of it—the setup of Camp Green Lake itself is testament to that. This also shows that she doesn't value Stanley or Zero's lives at all, given that if the Attorney General or Ms. Morengo believe her, Stanley and Zero will certainly be in deep trouble.



When the Warden insists that Stanley was delusional, she attempts to discredit him by creating an image of him that's not at all credible—which is very similar to the way that Mr. Pendanski thought of Zero as being wholly useless and unintelligent. This again shows that there's a great deal of power to be had by dehumanizing someone and making them seem uneducated.



It's fairly clear for the reader that the suitcase isn't Stanley's; it's likely the one that Kate Barlow stole from the first Stanley. This shows that even the Yelnats's decision to name their sons Stanley for generations is linked to destiny and was fated, as this will certainly help Stanley out of this pickle.



PART 2, CHAPTER 48

Stanley holds his suitcase, so tired he can barely speak. Mr. Sir fetches Stanley's belongings while Mr. Pendanski grabs Stanley and Zero food. Ms. Morengo assures Stanley that he'll see his parents soon. The Warden attempts to say that the suitcase itself belongs to Stanley, but the contents are hers. Ms. Morengo tells Stanley not to open the suitcase so the Warden can search it. The Warden is nearly hysterical as she argues with Ms. Morengo.

The Attorney General tells Stanley he's free to go, so Ms. Morengo bustles Stanley away. He turns around to look at Zero and says he can't leave Hector. Zero looks from Mr. Pendanski to the Warden and Mr. Sir, insisting he'll be fine. Stanley insists that the Warden will kill Zero if they leave him behind, but the Attorney General assures Stanley he's taking control of the camp and investigating it. When Stanley refuses to move, Ms. Morengo asks for Hector's file. The Warden sends Mr. Pendanski to get the file, though he returns to say the file is missing. The Attorney General is enraged, makes a phone call, and then calls the Warden into the office to talk.

Stanley turns when he hears Armpit and Squid coming out of the Wreck Room. Soon, the other Group D boys gather around and congratulate Stanley on being released. Zigzag apologizes for ratting out Stanley. Squid asks Ms. Morengo for paper, writes a phone number, and asks Stanley if he'll call his mom to tell her that Alan says he's sorry. The boys disperse when the Warden and the Attorney General return. The Attorney General explains that he can't find any of Hector's records, including his release date or reason for incarceration. Enraged, Ms. Morengo takes Zero's hand and pulls him away with her and Stanley.

PART 2, CHAPTER 49

The narrator states that there weren't yellow-spotted lizards in Green Lake until after the lake dried up, but everyone knew about the "red-eyed monsters" in the hills. One afternoon, several men approached Sam. They said they were going rattlesnake hunting and wanted some of his "lizard juice." Sam gave each man two bottles of onion juice and instructed them as to when to drink it. He said that lizards don't like onion blood.

From the way that Ms. Morengo and the Warden interact, it's clear that the Warden hasn't spent much time with people who have far more power than she does. This suggests that unlimited power is actually a handicap in some cases, as it keeps her from arguing her case with any effectiveness.



Calling Zero by his real name is a way for Stanley to tell Zero that he truly cares about him, as a person and as a friend—it's a way for him to say that Zero is worth something, no matter what Mr. Pendanski says. Notably, this kindness leads to an attempt to learn more about Zero and his dealings with the justice system, which suggests that kindness and interest are important if one wants to truly receive justice.



Just as when Stanley called Zero by his name, Zigzag's request that Stanley call his mom and use his given name is a way for Zigzag to behave kindly towards his mother and show her that he's still her son. The fact that Ms. Morengo feels she has the power to take Zero away from Camp Green Lake in the absence of records suggests that though the justice system crumbles without records, one can only get justice when the bad records disappear.



Finally the narrator solves the mystery: onions provided Stanley and Zero protection against the yellow-spotted lizards. This is another way that the natural world helped the boys, either inadvertently or on purpose, to best the Warden and complete their task.



Stanley and Zero sit in Ms. Morengo's backseat, the suitcase between them. Stanley admits he has no idea what's in it. Ms. Morengo explains that she's a patent attorney helping Stanley's father with his new invention, and she looked into the events that took place on the day the shoes were stolen. When she mentions interviewing Derrick Dunne, Stanley is surprised to still feel ashamed about the bullying he suffered. Zero admits that he stole the shoes, but Ms. Morengo says she didn't hear that.

Ms. Morengo explains that Stanley's father invented a product to cure foot odor and passes the boys samples. Zero thinks it smells familiar, and Ms. Morengo says people think it's peaches. The boys fall asleep and it begins to rain at Green Lake.

When Derrick's bullying turns out to be one of the things that frees Stanley, it suggests that even though his cruelty was nonsensical and awful, it too happened for a reason—it becomes Stanley's alibi. Ms. Morengo's insistence that Zero not confess to the crime reinforces the idea that the formal justice system's provisions aren't enough to truly get justice; it takes human discretion to do that.



Remember that Trout Walker had an incurable and smelly foot fungus; Stanley's father's invention then appears to be linked to the way in which Stanley atoned for Sam's death, as evidenced by the rain at Green Lake.



PART 3, CHAPTER 50

The narrator says that, despite the fact that Stanley's mother doubts that there was ever a curse, it's true that Stanley's father invented his foot odor cure the day after Elya Yelnats's great-great grandson carried the great-great-great grandson of Madame Zeroni up the mountain. The Warden was forced to sell her family's land after the Attorney General closed Camp Green Lake. It's slated to become a **Girl Scout** camp.

The contents of the suitcase turned out to be several low-quality gems and a stack of old stock certificates and deeds of trust from the first Stanley. Stanley and Hector each got a little less than a million dollars. Stanley bought his family a house, and Hector hired private investigators. As a final offering, the narrator recounts a scene that takes place a year and a half after Stanley and Hector left Camp Green Lake.

On Super Bowl Sunday, there's a party at the Yelnats house. Stanley and Hector are the only teens in attendance. As a commercial comes on, everyone stops to watch. It shows Clyde Livingston, who's also sitting in Stanley's living room, playing baseball. He explains that his nickname is Sweet Feet, but his feet didn't used to actually smell good. He pulls out a can of something called Sploosh and says it cured his foot smell. Everyone at the party claps their hands as Clyde Livingston's wife makes jokes about how bad her husband's feet used to smell.

Here, the narrator confirms the reader's suspicions: Stanley's journey absolutely mirrored that of Elya Yelnats, and by carrying Zero up the mountain, he broke the family's curse. In turn, this seems to have also made up for the atrocities committed at Green Lake in the 1880s given that the Warden, Trout Walker's descendent, loses control of the land.



When the narrator shifts to calling Hector by his given name, it suggests that the novel itself now recognizes Hector as a full person, deserving of kindness and recognition. It's telling that both boys do nice things for their families with their money; this suggests that they truly internalized what they learned about the power of kindness.



Clyde Livingston's presence in Stanley's living room, and the fact that he's the spokesperson for Stanley's dad's invention, suggests that he and the Yelnats family were able to make up for Livingston's heartbreaking testimony against Stanley during his trial. Now, Stanley has money, proximity to fame, and a robust, loving family—all things that are only available to him after breaking the curse.



Stanley turns towards Hector, who's sitting on the floor in front of a youngish woman. She looks weathered and weary, as though she's seen too much. As Hector's mother runs her fingers through Hector's hair, she sings a song her grandmother used to sing to her—a version of the song that Stanley's family has been singing for generations.

The presence of Hector's mother indicates that he hired an investigator to find her with his money, thereby putting what he has of his family back together. This suggests that Stanley breaking the curse has also freed the Zeronis; it provided relief for all.





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