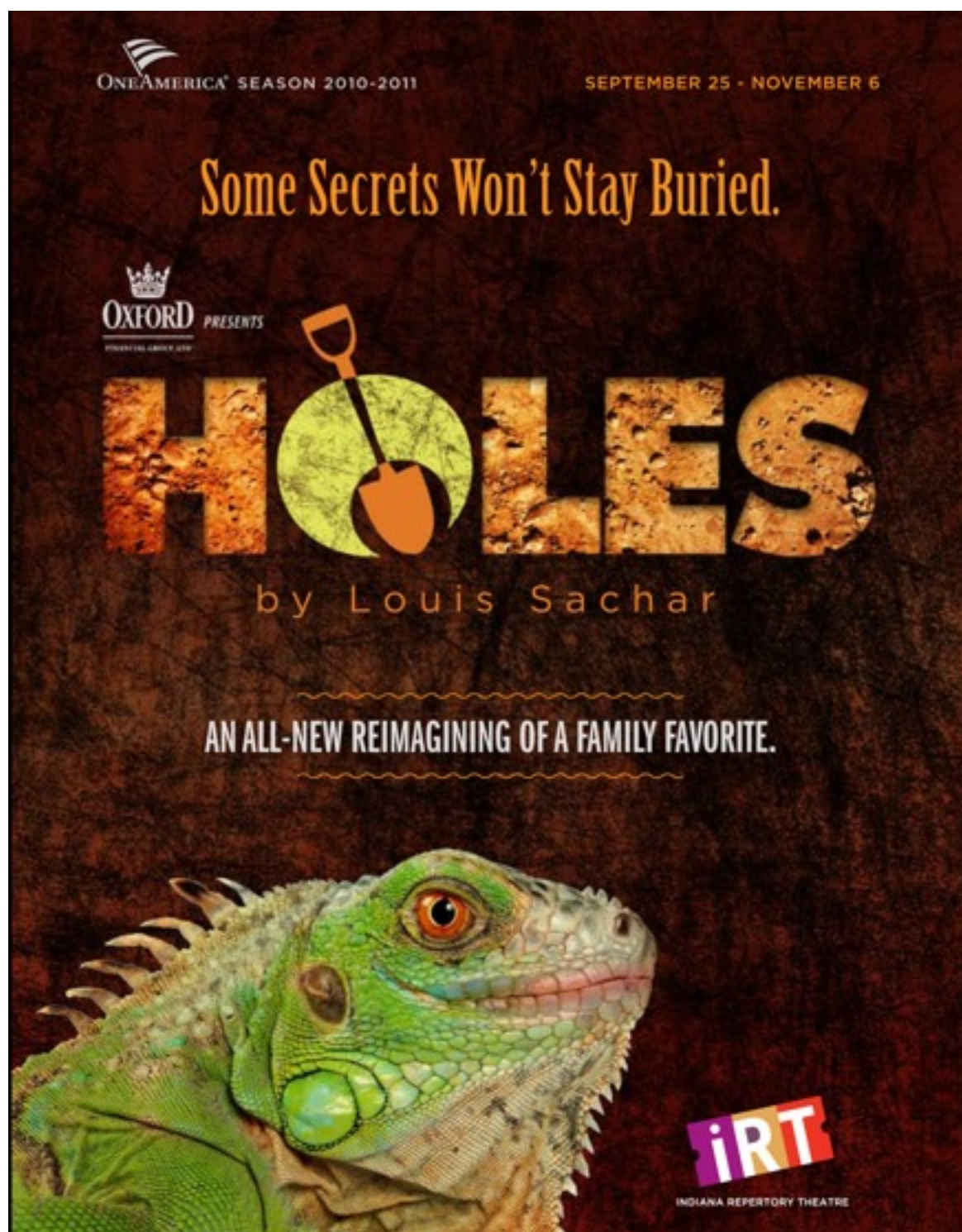


Family Zone Activity Guide



**IRT
Family
Zone**



INDIANA REPERTORY THEATRE

Keep on Digging

An Interview with Author & Playwright Louis Sachar

The stage script of *Holes* was published in *American Theatre* magazine in April 2002. The following article accompanied the script. —Ed.

ABOUT THE PLAY

Holes was the first book chosen for the Seattle area's literacy initiative program: "What if All Kids Read the Same Book?" in 2002. Sponsored by Seattle Children's Theatre, Seattle Public Library, the King County Library System and Seattle Public Schools, the region-wide program encouraged young members of the community to read and discuss *Holes*, and to see a performance of Seattle Children's Theatre's world premiere stage adaptation. After adapting his novel into a play, Mr. Sachar won the Roger L. Stevens award from the Kennedy Center Fund for New American Plays and received the AT&T: OnStage Award from Theatre Communications Group.

At that time, Louis Sachar was no stranger to adapting his award-winning books for the stage, having done so at Seattle Children's Theatre during the 1990-1991 season with his novel *There's a Boy in the Girl's Bathroom*. Initially reluctant to create a stage version of *Holes*—he had spent 18 months writing the novel and then immediately turned his attention to the screenplay for the 2003 Disney film—Sachar felt he had spent enough time with the material. It was SCT's artistic director, Linda Hartzell, who managed to rekindle his interest in the story. In a bold move, Hartzell sent Sachar an outline detailing how she thought the story should look on stage. Sachar was so impressed with the outline that he agreed to return to *Holes* one more time.

What inspired *Holes*?

My stories develop as I'm writing them. So it's hard to even say where they begin. This one was inspired by the Texas heat. I moved to Texas in 1991 from San Francisco. The summers in Texas are so long and so hot; working outside in the summer, just planting a tree, can be so miserable. *Holes* started as an outlet for my misery about the hot Texas summers.

What was it like adapting your own material for the stage?

I had done it before for *There's a Boy in the Girl's Bathroom*, which the Seattle Children's Theatre also staged. I like adapting my own material because it stays true to the story and true to the feelings behind the story. But adapting work is more difficult than creating it new, because it's hard to generate the spark again.

What's it like to go from the solitary world of novel writing to the collaborative medium of theatre?

It's fun to work with other people. There are so many talented people in the theatre—the actors, the set designer, the director. I really enjoy that whole process. I wish there was a way to do that while I'm writing novels—have someone to hash it around with.

And working with actors?

Working with the actors was helpful—especially with Madame Zeroni. Once I'd heard the actress, I made up more lines for her. I could hear the actress's voice in my head as I was writing. The same thing with the boys, who nailed their characters.

Madame Zeroni makes up the "Pig Lullaby," which deepens in significance as the story progresses. Where did the song come from?

I wanted the "Pig Lullaby" to sound like it was translated from an old, Eastern European song and that some elements were lost in translation, like the rhymes.

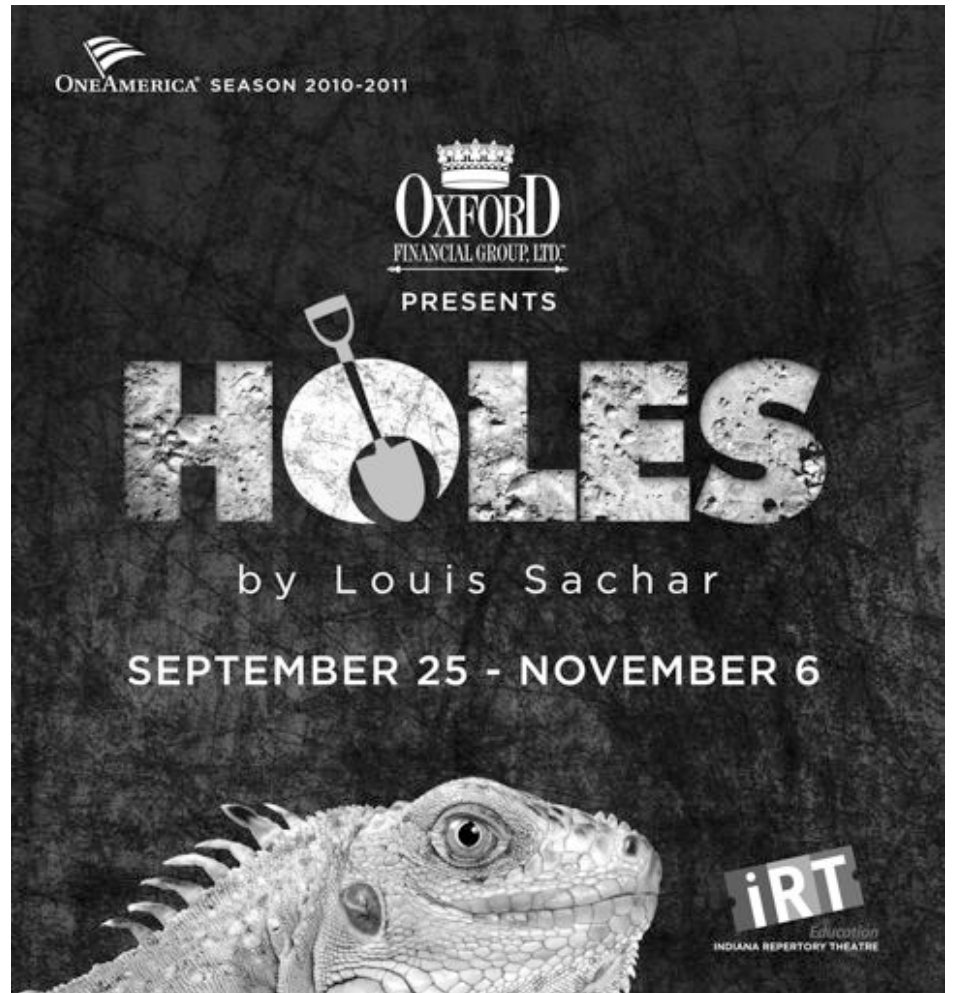
In the play *Holes*, many scenes are performed on stage simultaneously—a scene from the past with a scene from the present. This device is quite different from the book, which uses flashbacks.

Once I decided to do the play, I had that structure in mind. I thought that it would be more fun to have it all happening at the same time—so that, while the boys dig, we see things that happened a hundred years ago.



INDIANA REPERTORY THEATRE

EXPLORING ...



In adapting *Holes* for the stage you changed some of the original story, including cutting two of the boys at Camp Green Lake: Squid and Twitch. Why did you make that choice, and was it a difficult one to make?

That was probably the hardest decision, cutting out the boys. But unlike the world of novels, every character on stage is expensive. And, on a more practical note, we also realized that it's very hard, logistically, to have seven actual holes on stage.

What is it about Stanley Yelnats that kids can relate to?

First of all, his plight. Anyone falsely accused of a crime immediately has your sympathy. I think all adolescents feel, in one way or another, that life has treated them unfairly. And then there's his strength of character. Stanley's the one who's courageous enough to run away from Camp Green Lake, to save Zero, to come back and dig that one last hole. He finds the strength within himself to do all that. It's his bearing up under it all that makes people like him.

There are quite a few subplots in *Holes*: Zero's story, which touches on the issue of homelessness, and the 19th-century interracial romance between Kissin' Kate Barlow and Sam, the onion peddler.

One of my favorite parts of *Holes* is the whole Kate Barlow–Sam story. I had come up with the idea that this famous outlaw, Kissin' Kate Barlow, had buried this treasure. And when I needed some background on Kate Barlow, I just started making her story up. Suddenly, it became my favorite part of the book. It just took off.

Do you have a philosophy when it comes to telling stories for children?

I tell a story to children the same way I would tell it to adults. I don't want to have an attitude, to say, "Gather around boys and girls, I'm going to tell you a story." I don't want to be patronizing. I write what I like, and I just try to make it accessible for kids.

Would you ever write an original story for the stage?

I might. I think it's something I would enjoy doing.

—Interview by Todd Miller, courtesy of *American Theatre* magazine

The cast of *Holes* practices digging in the IRT rehearsal room: (left to right) Brandon Merriweather (Armpit), David Anderson (X-Ray), Nick Abeel (Stanley), Mauricio Suarez (Zero), Jaron Cook (Magnet), director David Bradley, and Matthew Joseph Lindblom (Zigzag).



Louis Sachar was one of the first winners of the Indianapolis–Marion County Public Library’s Kurt Vonnegut Award in 2007. Created as a tribute to the city’s own legendary literary son, the award celebrates those whose works uniquely document and define the human condition. Sachar has often cited Vonnegut as one of the inspirations for his own career.

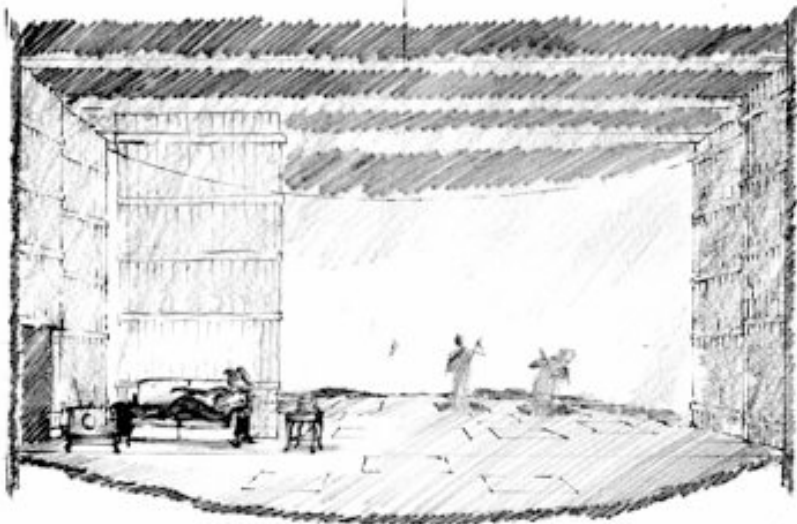
Author & Playwright Louis Sachar

Louis Sachar was born in East Meadow, New York, and moved to California when he was nine. He grew up in what he calls “a happy, normal suburban family.” Although he enjoyed school, he did not become interested in reading and writing until high school, when he was inspired by the work of J. D. Salinger and Kurt Vonnegut. Sachar attended the University of California, Berkeley, during which time he worked at an elementary school to earn college credit.

After graduating in 1976 with a degree in economics, Sachar began working on a children’s book set at an elementary school with supernatural elements. *Sideways Stories From Wayside School* was released in 1978; although it was not widely distributed and did not sell very well, Sachar began to accumulate a fan base among young readers. He published *Someday Angeline* in 1983, *Sixth Grade Secrets* in 1987, and *There’s a Boy in the Girls’ Bathroom* in 1988. Sachar published *The Boy Who Lost His Face* and *Wayside School Is Falling Down* in 1989. By this time his books were selling well enough that Sachar was able to begin writing full-time. *Wayside School Gets a Little Stranger* was published in 1995. The Wayside books are centered around a school built as a tower 30 stories high, with one room per story; each book contains 30 chapters, complementing the 30 stories in the school. Between 1992 and 2000 Sachar published eight books in his *Marvin Redpost* series about the comic misadventures of a third-grade boy.

In 1998, Sachar published what has become his best-known book, *Holes*. Darker and scarier than his previous books, *Holes* has sold more than five million copies in some 28 languages and has won several awards, among them the 1998 National Book Award for Young People’s Literature and the 1999 Newbery Medal, the highest honor accorded to children’s literature in the United States. *Holes* remains the only book to have won both awards. Sachar himself wrote the screenplay for *Holes*, which was released as a Disney film in 2003. While the film was still in production, Sachar was commissioned by the Seattle Children’s Theatre to write a stage adaptation which premiered in 2002. He published a short *Holes* spin-off, *Stanley Yelnats’ Survival Guide to Camp Green Lake*, in 2003, and the full-length novel *Small Steps*, which features characters from *Holes*, in 2006. Sachar’s stage adaptation of *Small Steps* premiered at Oregon Children’s Theatre last spring.

Holes at the IRT



Preliminary sketch
by scenic designer
Robert M. Koharchik.

Wendy Meaden
Costume Designer

The costumes in *Holes* serve to illustrate the historical periods and to support the emotional environment of the play as well as to help define the characters. Color is a primary tool for the task: rich but slightly faded colors and varied textures for the Latvian ancestors who began this somewhat magical tale; dustier hot desert colors for the desolate Camp Green Lake of today; and bright refreshing garden colors for the picturesque town of Green Lake long ago. The costumes also make connections between characters when they share accessories, textures, or palettes. Aesthetically, I hope they help to bridge the tall tale qualities of this story with our affection for some very realistic underdog heroes.

Costume rendering for the boys
by designer Wendy Meaden.



Robert M. Koharchik
Scenic Designer

When designing a play, it is important for each designer to understand how best his or her individual design area will contribute to the telling of the given story. In the area of set design, it is sometimes best to create an environment that is more abstract and evocative than one designed to represent place and time in a more realistic manner. Either choice is valid as long as it helps rather than hinders the storytelling. For *Holes*, it was best to capture a wide-open vast landscape, one where boys dig under a hot sun, characters with hidden agendas look for buried treasure, and ancestors from the past are resurrected.

Holes Board Game

What You’ll Need:

- a die (a single dice)
- a different token for each player

How to Play:

Start at D Tent. Each player rolls the die, advances his or her token that number, and answers the question or follows the instructions for that hole. (Your teacher has the answer sheet.) If you answer correctly, move forward one hole and wait your next turn. If you answer incorrectly, stay in the same hole and wait your next turn. The player who arrives at the suitcase first wins!

QUESTIONS

- A Stanley Yelnats’s name is an example of what literary device?
- B Who is the athlete whose sneakers are stolen?
- C What sport does Sweet Feet play?
- D What options does the judge give Stanley?
- E What is Stanley’s father’s profession?
- F What is Stanley’s father trying to find a cure for?
- G Who does Stanley blame all his problems on?
- H What is Stanley’s great-great-grandfather’s first name?
- I What two creatures do the boys need to beware of in the dried-up lakebed?
- J What nickname do the boys give Stanley?
- K What is the name of the girl that Stanley’s great-great-grandfather tries to marry in Latvia?
- L How does Stanley’s great-grandfather lose his fortune?
- M What is the first “interesting” thing that Stanley finds while digging?
- N What is the secret ingredient in the Warden’s nail polish?
- O What is Zero’s real first name?
- P What is the name of the town that used to be where the camp is now?
- Q Why do Trout Walker and the other townspeople burn down Kate Barlow’s schoolhouse?
- R What finally happens to Sam, the onion picker?
- S How does Kissin’ Katie Barlow get her nickname?
- T Zero finds something he calls “sploosh” under the boat he’s hiding in. What is sploosh?
- U Where do Stanley and Zero travel to after they escape from Camp Green Lake?
- V What food do Stanley and Zero find on the mountain top?
- W Who is the Warden’s grandfather?
- X What book did Louis Sachar write as a sequel to *Holes*?

8 Other Newbery Award–Winning Novels Adapted into Films

A Wrinkle in Time by Madeleine L’Engle
book 1963, film 2003

From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler
by E. L. Konigsburg—book 1968, film 1995

Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH by Robert C. O’Brien
book 1972, film (*The Secret of NIMH*) 1982

Bridge to Terabithia by Katherine Paterson
book 1978, film 2007

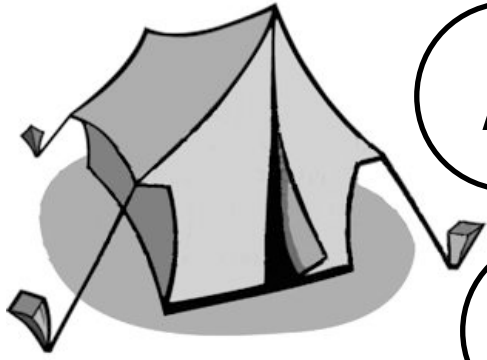
The Westing Game by Ellen Raskin
book 1979, film (*Get a Clue*) 1997

Sarah, Plain and Tall by Patricia MacLachlan
book 1986, film 1991

Maniac Magee by Jerry Spinelli
book 1991, film 2003

Shiloh by Phyllis Reynolds Naylor
book 1992, film 1996

D Tent.
Start here!



A



You survive
your visit to the
Warden's Cabin.
Take another turn.

J

K

L



You step on
a rattlesnake!
Back to
D Tent.

B

H

C

G

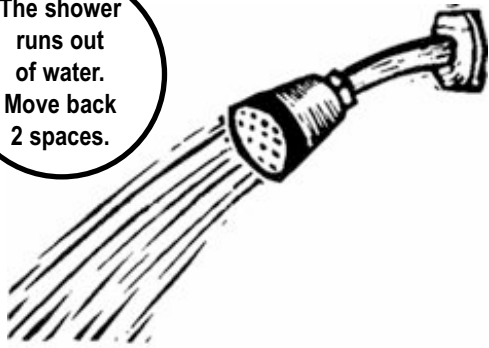
X-Ray invites
you to play pool in
the Wreck Room.
Move ahead
3 spaces!



M

D

The shower
runs out
of water.
Move back
2 spaces.



N

E

F

Sam
fixes the
schoolhouse roof.
Move ahead 2
spaces!

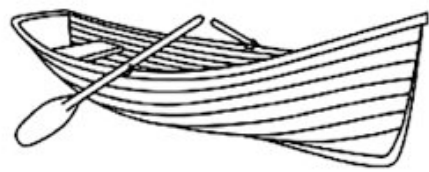


H O L E S

O

P

You found
Kate's loot.
You win!



Sam's
boat sinks.
You lose
a turn!

X

T

S

Q

You
found Sam's
onion field!
Move ahead
5 spaces.

W

R

Bitten by a
yellow spotted
lizard.
You're out of
the game!



V

U

Questions for Discussion

Before Seeing the Play:

What qualities make up a loyal friend?

"Fate is what we are given. Destiny is what we make of it." What does this statement mean to you?

Discuss myths and tall tales. How are such stories part of America's literary and social history?

Dividing the class in half, debate the struggle between good and evil. One side takes the position that people are naturally good, and the other side takes the position that our true nature leans toward the bad. How do these two viewpoints play out in terms of ethics, morality, everyday relationships, and our criminal justice system?

After Seeing the Play:

Discuss the friendship between Zero and Stanley. What differences must they overcome in order to become friends? Relate their experience as friends to your own.

Discuss the Warden, Mr. Sir, and Mr. Pendansky. Do they possess good or bad qualities or both? How do you think they each feel at the end of the play when Zero and Stanley succeed? What do you think it would be like to be a counselor at Camp Green Lake? What kind of counselor would you be?

What is the importance of the story's flashbacks? How do they play well into the storyline? How do they help or hinder your understanding of the story? How does the staging of these scenes affect this storytelling device?

Discuss the "curse" on the family. What other reasons might there be for the unfortunate events Stanley blames on the curse? What happens to change Stanley's luck? How might Stanley's own way of thinking affect this situation? In your own life, do you believe everything is already planned out for you, or do you believe that you choose your own destiny? Why?

Discuss how the production's design elements help to carry the play between locales and through time.

How does the phrase "everything happens for a reason" fit into the story? For example, would Camp Green Lake exist if Kissin' Kate Barlow had not robbed Stanley's great-grandfather? Think of other examples from the story that either support or contradict this idea.

What is irony? Why is the name of Camp Green Lake ironic? What other forms of irony are seen in the play? Explain.

On the internet or in a book, find and read Edgar Allan Poe's poem "Annabel Lee," which Miss Katherine and Sam quote in the play. How does the story in the poem relate to the story of the play?

Describe Zero's character as he is seen at the beginning of the play. Why is he nicknamed Zero? How is Zero's true nature different from what he appears to be to the others? Think of someone in your life whom you have initially misjudged. What caused you to change your mind about that person? Who in your life might you now be misjudging? How might you find a different way to look at that person? If you feel you have been misjudged, what can you do to deal with the situation?

Think about all the characters in the story. Which character, or characters, do you relate to the most? What qualities do you believe you share with them? Which character do you relate to the least? Why?

One of the truths exemplified in *Holes* is that innocent people, both adults and youth, have been incarcerated. What does the word "exonerated" mean? Google "exonerated" for articles and organizations devoted to this issue. What does society owe the victims of such injustices? Debate both sides of the issue.

Mr. Sachar's play depicts a pluralist society. What are the advantages of living in a diverse society? What are the challenges? How do we work together to rise above the conflicts that arise?

Do you believe that communication and literacy lead to empathy? How or how not? Where in this story is this idea supported and/or refuted?

Writing Activities

Imagine yourself as a camper at Camp Green Lake. Think about what it would be like to be separated from your family and friends. Write a journal entry about your experiences. Include details about the other campers, the counselors, and the typical events of the day. Write about incidents that do not occur in *Holes* but might. Press yourself to be truthful with yourself.

Write a history of Green Lake. Describe how the area was 100 years ago and how it is now. How was the town founded? What happened in the 100 years between the events depicted in the play?

Write a short story about an incident you experienced that changed your life. How did this event alter your behavior both day-to-day and on a long-term basis? How are you different now from then?

Research your ancestry. Write about how your family's heritage has an impact on your life today.

Write a review of *Holes* and post it on the Review It page of irtlive.com. Discuss how the staging, design elements, and acting serve the story.

Souder by William H. Armstrong
Dandelion Wine by Ray Bradbury
The Tequila Worm by Viola Canales
Ender's Game by Orson Scott Card
The Artemis Fowl Series by Eoin Colfer
The Red Badge of Courage by Stephen Crane
Boy & James and the Giant Peach by Roald Dahl
Robinson Crusoe by Daniel Defoe
Great Expectations by Charles Dickens
The Count of Monte Cristo by Alexandre Dumas père
The Great Gatsby by F. Scott Fitzgerald
Johnny Tremain by Esther Forbes
Old Yeller by Fred Gipson
Lord of the Flies by William Golding
The Golden Scrolls by Tavis J. Hampton
Hoot by Carl Hiaasen
The Outsiders & That Was Then, This is Now by S. E. Hinton
The Iliad & The Odyssey by Homer
Senderos Fronterizosi: Breaking Through by Francisco Jimenez



INDIANA REPERTORY THEATRE

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Janet Allen, Artistic Director
Steven Stolen, Managing Director

Study Guide edited by Richard J Roberts & Millicent Wright
Contributors: Catherine Bayt, Molly Wible

UPCOMING STUDENT MATINEES

Mary's Wedding • Nov. 10, 17

A Christmas Carol • Nov. 22-24, 30; Dec. 1-3, 7-10, 14-17, 21

The Diary of Anne Frank • Jan. 20, 25-28;
Feb. 1-4, 8-11, 14-18, 22-25

Neat • Feb. 25

In Acting Shakespeare • Feb. 17, 18, 21-24; Mar. 11, 14

The Gospel According to James • Apr. 1, 5, 6

The 39 Steps • May 4, 6, 10-13

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D Tent Bookshelf

The company of *Holes* would like to recommend some other books for your enjoyment:

To Kill a Mockingbird by Harper Lee
The Call of the Wild by Jack London
The Giver by Lois Lowry
Walkabout by James Vance Marshall
Parrot in the Oven: Mi vida by Victor Martinez
Monster & Scorpions by Walter Dean Myers
1984 by George Orwell
The Merry Adventures of Robin Hood by Howard Pyle
The Harry Potter Series by J. K. Rowling
The Catcher in the Rye by J. D. Salinger
Comes the Blind Fury by John Saul
Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy by Gary D. Schmidt
Crash, Loser, & Maniac Magee by Jerry Spinelli
Of Mice and Men by John Steinbeck
Treasure Island by Robert Louis Stevenson
The Lord of the Rings & The Hobbit by J. R. R. Tolkien
The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn & The Adventures of Tom Sawyer by Mark Twain
20,000 Leagues under the Sea by Jules Verne
The Brothers Torres by Coert Voorhees