

## **Grade 5: Unit 7**

### **Holes: Introduction**

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#### **Purpose: Why This Unit?**

*Holes* by Louis Sachar is an insightful and humorous coming-of-age novel. When sent to a boys' detention camp for a crime he did not commit, Stanley Yelnats learns about himself, his family, and the power of friendship. During the next few weeks, you will immerse your scholars in *Holes* and guide them to unpack and appreciate Sachar's masterful storytelling.

Your job, though, is first and foremost that of a reading teacher. You must ensure that your scholars enlist the basic tools of great readers — envisioning, reading with fluency, engaging in word attack, and of course, using plot, setting, and character development — to understand the book's provocative ideas. You must know your scholars' Fountas & Pinnell levels and ensure that they are swiftly growing as readers. You must ensure that your scholars are reading and writing at home and that your scholars' parents are invested in their learning.

You are also a teacher of writing. You must ensure that your scholars are deeply invested in improving their writing and that they give you their best work. Always set sky-high expectations and settle only for scholars' best efforts. It is your responsibility to dramatically improve your scholars' writing capacities. You will need to study the Top 5 Writing Tactics and ensure that scholars know how to be critics of their own writing.

**In particular, you are responsible for the following outcomes:**

- First and foremost, you must get 100% of your scholars independently reading at least four books per month.
- You are responsible for 100% of your scholars completing nightly literacy homework that will develop them as readers and writers.
- You are responsible for getting minimally 90% of your scholars on or above grade level in reading, as measured by the Fountas & Pinnell Reading Assessment..

You will not achieve 100% without setting clear expectations for your scholars and their parents, and driving relentlessly toward these goals. If you hold scholars and parents accountable and are an absolute stickler at the beginning, you will make it easier for yourself and, frankly, for your scholars and their parents. The worst thing you can do as a teacher is let scholars slide and then get tough. You will breed resentment and distrust, whereas clear expectations and utter consistency breed trust and respect.

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## Themes in *Holes*

In order to successfully teach this unit, you must be intellectually prepared at the highest level. This means reading and studying the entire book before launching the unit, and understanding the major themes that Sachar communicates through the book. By the time your scholars finish reading *Holes*, they should be able to articulate and explain these themes.

The table below outlines the major topics and themes highlighted in *Holes*. Note that you should not review these with scholars before they begin reading the book. Rather, scholars will uncover the themes organically through their reading. As a teacher of reading, you need to facilitate rich conversations about the meaning of each chapter. You will do this by posing the discussion questions provided in each seminar. As scholars read the text, you will press them to analyze how the author uses events in the book to communicate the major themes.

While there is not one correct thematic statement for each major topic discussed in the book, there are accurate (evidence-based) and inaccurate (not evidence-based) interpretations of what the author is arguing. Therefore, we have provided exemplar thematic statements in the table below.

Topic	Theme
<b>The Value of Friendship</b>	Meaningful friendships immensely impact a person's quality of life. Friends help one another face challenges and can provide happiness even under adverse circumstances.
<b>Questioning Authority</b>	When freedom and justice are at stake, it is necessary and worthwhile to question authority, despite the great risk entailed.
<b>The Power of Hope</b>	Maintaining hope during times of difficulty strengthens individuals and helps them overcome challenges.
<b>Karma and the Importance of Doing Right</b>	All actions bear consequences. Rewards come to those who follow through on promises and live upstanding lives. Selfishness and deceit will ultimately be penalized.