



HOLES

A Reader's Guide

ON THE SAME PAGE 2024
MADISON LIBRARY DISTRICT

LOUIS SACHAR

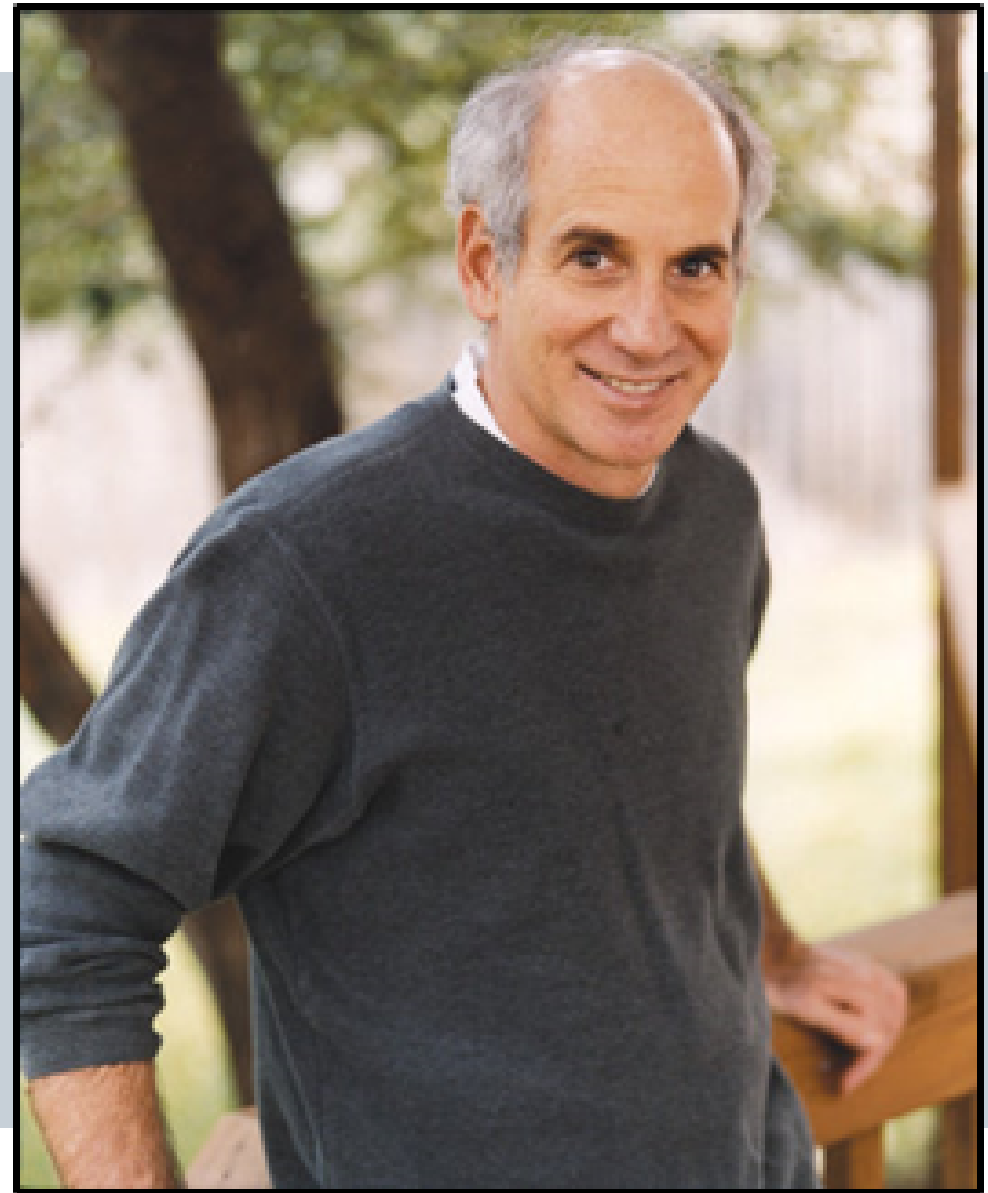
Louis Sacher

(March 20, 1954)

Louis Sachar was the second of two sons born to Robert J Sachar and Ruth Raybin Sachar on March 20, 1954. He and his older brother, Andy, were close, and it was Andy who encouraged Louis's writing.

The Sachar family was devoutly Jewish and Louis attended Hebrew school where his family lived in East Meadow, New York.

When he was nine, the family moved to Tustin, California.



After high school, he attended Antioch College, a private liberal arts college in Ohio. He left after one semester when his father unexpectedly died and returned to Tustin to be with his mother.

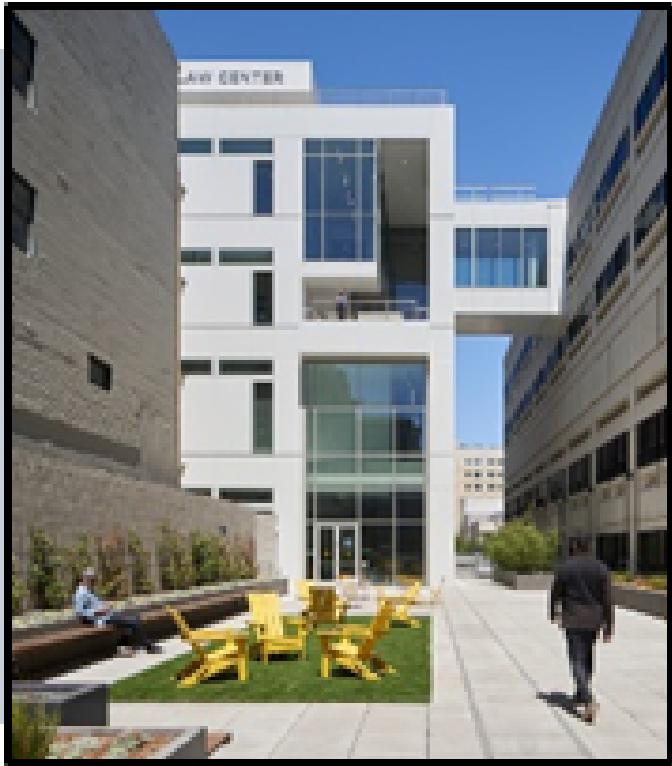
He later attended the University of California at Berkeley where he majored in economics. While there, he noticed a little girl

handing out flyers and took one. The flyer asked for volunteers at a local elementary school and noted that the position would give three college credits.

"I thought it over and decided it was a pretty good deal. College credits, no homework, no term papers, no test, all I had to do was help out in a second/third grade class at Hillside Elementary School. Besides helping out in a classroom, I also became the noontime supervisor, or 'Louis, the Yard Teacher' as I was known to the kids. It became my favorite college class, and a life changing experience."

Sachar finished his economics degree in 1976 and began writing *Sideways Stories from the Wayside School* which was published in 1978. Although he used many of the names of the children at Hillside Elementary, he emphatically states that none of the stories actually happened.

“My personal experiences are kind of boring. I have to make up what I put in my books.”



Sideways Stories didn't attract much attention initially, so Sachar entered UC's Hastings College of Law, graduating in 1980. He worked as a lawyer but continued to write part time until 1989 when his books were selling well enough to justify him becoming a full-time author.

During his half lawyer – half writer phase, Louis married Carla Askew, an elementary school counselor. They had a daughter, Sherre, in 1987.

Sachar has said that his wife was the inspiration for the counselor in *There's a Boy in the Girl's Bathroom* and Stanley's lawyer in *Holes*.



Hillside Elementary School



Louis Sachar claims that he would never have begun writing children's books without the inspiration from his time and experiences at Hillside Elementary. The Hillside School is a former elementary school in the Berkeley foothills listed on the U. S. National Register of Historic Places. It first opened in 1901, but was destroyed the 1923 Berkeley fire.

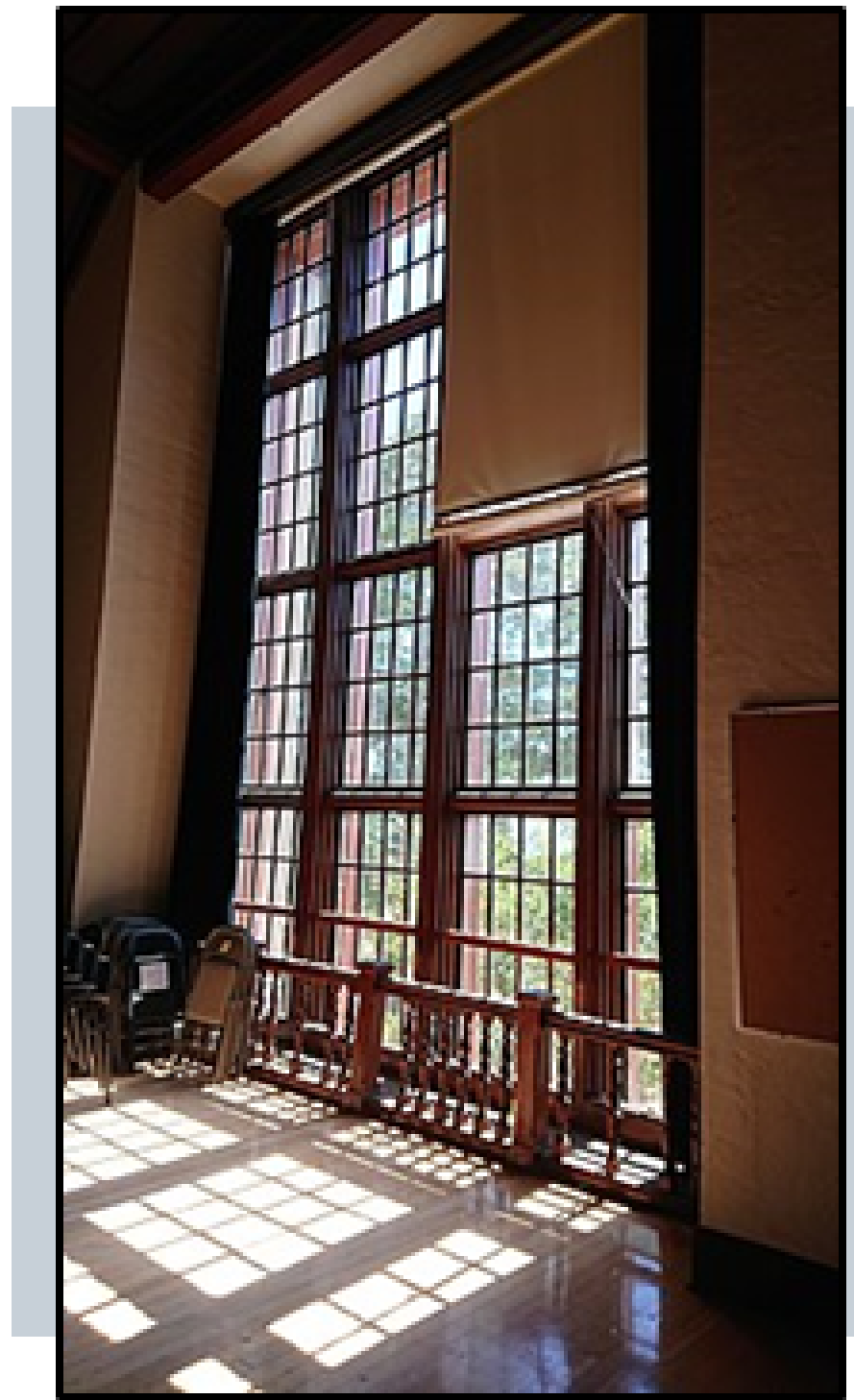


The current structure was completed in 1925 and designed by prominent architect Walter H. Ratliff in the Tudor Revival style. A seismic retrofit was done in the 1930s and an additional wing added in in 1964.

In the late 1960s, the school was limited to Kindergarten through third grade, and would have been such when Louis Sachar did his volunteer work there.

By 1983, because of declining school age population in the area and because it was noted that the structure was sitting of the Hayward Fault, the school was closed. During the next years, the space was leased by the Berkeley Montessori School and the Berkeley Chess School.

In 2012, the school district sold the building to the German International School of Silicon Valley which did significant restoration work. Six years later, the German school sold Hillside to a Finnish businessman who intended to use it as artists' studios.



Residents of the area have also used Hillside's playground, where Louis the yard teacher reigned, as a neighborhood park with clear pedestrian parkways leading to it. When the rumors of sale began, residents proposed a special assessment district to purchase that portion of the site.

Holes

Louis Sachar's 1998 novel *Holes* is much darker than any of Sachar's other books. The tale is rich with historical sub-plots that give depth and meaning to the present-day story. The tales of Stanley and Hector's ancestors help to explain their current predicaments and the contemporary actions resolve the problems of the past.



In an interview with Todd Miller, Sachar gave some insights into his creation of the book.

What inspired Holes?

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 is it about Stanley Yelnats that kids can relate to?

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 Kissing 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, Kissing 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.

Awards

The Newberry Medal

The National Book Award for Young People's Literature

The Pacific Northwest Young Readers Choice Award

The New York Times Book Review Notable Children's Book of the Year

American Library Association Best Book for Young Adults

Publishers Weekly Best Book of the Year

School Library Journal Best Book of the Year

It was the first book ever to win both the Newberry and National Book Award.



Adaptations

2003 Film



The best known *Holes* adaptation is undoubtedly the 2003 film directed by Andrew Davis for Disney.

Davis, primarily known for big budget action films like *The Fugitive*, *Under Siege*, *Collateral Damage*, and *Code of Silence*, worked closely with Sachar who wrote the screenplay. Sachar liked the process. "I like adapting my own material because it stays true to the story and true to the feelings behind the story."

He also said, "Working with the actors was helpful--especially with the Madame Zeroni character. Once I'd heard the actress (Eartha Kitt), I made up more

lines for her. I could hear the actress's voice in my head as I was writing.

Special care was given to Zeroni's song. "I wanted the 'Pig Lullaby' to sound like it was



was translated from an old, Eastern European song and that some elements were lost in translation, like the rhymes.”

Sachar was on the set every day of filming, working closely with Davis, and even had a cameo in old Green Lake.



The Stage Play

In 2002, the Seattle Children’s Theatre approached Sachar about adapting his novel into a play. He had just finished the screenplay and filming and felt like



he was done with the story. However, the artistic director, Linda Hartzell, wouldn’t accept his “no.” She sent him an outline of what she thought the play would look like on stage. Sachar was so impressed that he agreed to adapt one more time.

“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.”

The play received an award from the Kennedy Center Fund for New American Plays and an OnStage Award from the Theatre Communications Group.



Other Adaptations

While Kissing Kate's Sploosh had a very limited run, there are dozens of spiced peach offerings currently available to order.



Yellow-Spotted Lizards

One of the greatest terrors of Camp Green Lake are the yellow-spotted lizards. Aggressive and lethal, one bite is a sure and horrible death sentence.

The good news is, that yellow-spotted lizards live only in the dry bed of the imaginary Green Lake.



If you've seen the film adaptation of the book, the terrifying creatures were really bearded dragon lizards with spots painted on. Bearded dragons are fairly docile and often kept as pets. Some owners even have a harness and leash to take them for walks.

The only poisonous lizard in North America is the gila monster which lives in our southwest deserts. A gila monster's bite is likely to cause swelling, nausea, and of course, extreme pain. Hospitalization is a good possibility, though instances of death are very rare. Still, best to stay away.



Other Works

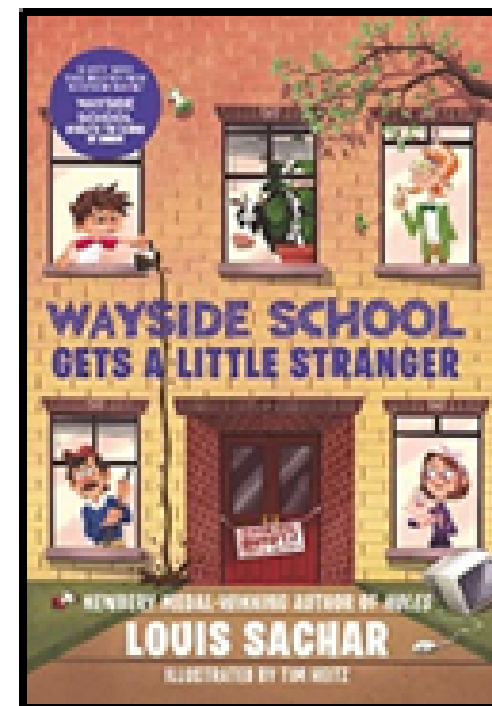
The Wayside School Series

Sideways Stories from Wayside School

Wayside School is Falling Down

Wayside School Gets a Little Stranger

Wayside School Beneath the Cloud of Doom



Marvin Redpost Series

Marvin Redpost: Kidnapped at Birth?

Marvin Redpost: Why Pick on Me?

Marvin Redpost: Is He a Girl?

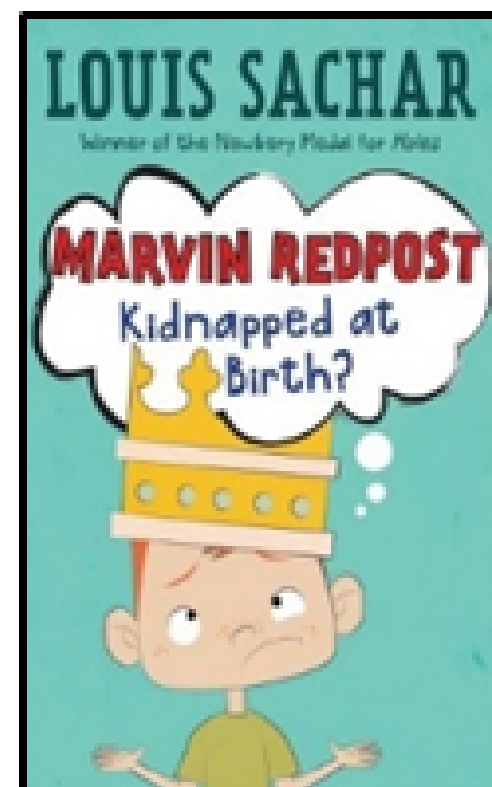
Marvin Redpost: Alone in His Teacher's House

Marvin Redpost: Class President

Marvin Redpost: A Flying Birthday Cake?

Marvin Redpost: Super Fast, Out of Control

Marvin Redpost: A Magic Crystal?



Best of Friends: Sixth Grade

Dogs Don't Tell Jokes

Fuzzy Mud

Johnny's in the Basement

Monkey Soup

Pig City

Sideways Arithmetic from Wayside School

More Sideways Arithmetic from Wayside School

Sixth Grade Secrets

Small Steps

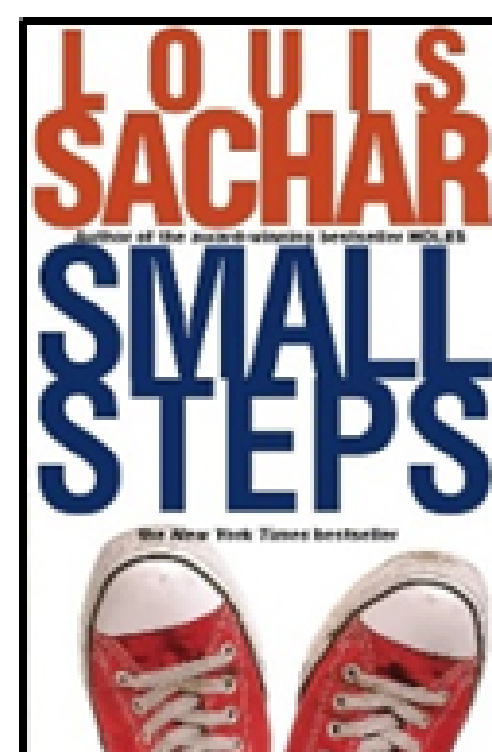
Someday Angeline

Stanley Yelnats Guide to Survival

The Boy Who Lost His Face

The Cardturner

There's a Boy in the Girl's Bathroom



Questions for Discussion

1. Why the title *Holes*? What holes are in Stanley's life when he first arrives at Camp Green Lake?
2. Why do the boys resort to nicknames? What do these nicknames say about them? Do you think a name changes the way other people see a person? What would your Camp Green Lake nickname be and why?
3. How does Stanley and Zero's relationship parallel other relationships in the book?
4. *Holes* is really three stories. Which speaks the most to you? Why? Can any of these stories stand without the others?
5. Is there significance to Stanley Yelnats being a palindrome?
6. *Holes* was the first book to win both the Newberry Medal and the National Book Award for Young People's Literature. Why do you think that happened?
7. If you have seen the film *Holes*, how does it compare to the book? Which do you prefer?
8. Does it seem like Sam is a respected member of Green Lake? Why or why not? Were you surprised to see the community turn on Kate and Sam?
9. How does Stanley and Zero's relationship change throughout the novel? Do you feel one of them initiates that change more? Is there a moment when the tides turn?
10. Stanley's father says, "I learn from failure." What does this mean? Is there a time that you learned from failure?
11. Before going to Camp Green Lake, Zero is homeless. How does your community deal with homelessness?
12. Stanley and his family blame their misfortunes on Stanley's "no-good-dirty-rotten-pig-stealing great-great grandfather." Does your family have any stories that have been passed down through generations?
13. How does Stanley find the strength to carry Zero up the mountain even though he didn't know what he would find at the top?
14. Describe something you've done that seemed impossible. What did you learn from the experience?
15. How does Stanley find the strength to carry Zero up the mountain even though he didn't know what he would find at the top? Describe something you've done that seemed impossible. What did you learn from the experience?
16. Even though his fate is uncertain, Stanley is suddenly very happy as he lies awake on the top of the mountain. Why? How has his life changed from the start of the story.
17. When Hattie Parker sees Katherine and Sam kiss, she says, "God will punish you!" Based on events later in the book, whom do you think was really punished?
18. If you have read any of Sachar's other books, how does *Holes* compare?
19. Discuss the symbolism of:
Holes -- Onions -- Spiced Peaches -- God's Thumb -- Yellow Spotted Lizards

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