

“Holes”

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But there’s more afoot than simple character-building, as any fan of Louis Sachar’s 1998 award-winning children’s novel can attest.

The qualities that make “Holes” hard to synopsise also make it a good story. With multiple storylines in different time periods, it’s hard for the uninitiated to imagine how the filmmakers can plug seeming holes in the narrative.

But they do. And adults will likely be as intrigued as children.

Stanley Yelnats IV (Shia LaBeouf) is a teenage boy struggling with a 150-year-old family curse (his great-great-grandfather stole a pig, and the Yelnatses have had bad luck ever since).

Young Stanley gets his fair share of misfortune when he is wrongfully accused of stealing a prized pair of cleats belonging to pro baseball player Sweet Feet Livingston. He’s sent to Camp Greenlake, where the warden (an unfortunately underused Sigourney Weaver) forces all the boys to dig holes—five feet wide by five feet deep, using their shovel as a measure.

The warden directs the boys—who adopt camp nicknames like Zig Zag, Armpit and Zero—to report “anything special” they find while digging.

Her enforcer is Jon Voight’s gun-toting Mr. Sir. Voight hits the perfect pitch for this film, able to make both children and adults laugh.

But scenes at Camp Greenlake cut away to the Old West, where a romance blossoms between schoolteacher Kate Barlow (Patricia Arquette) and local handyman Sam (Dule Hill). As if that’s not enough, “Holes” is also poked by flashbacks to Stanley’s pig-stealing ancestor.

Wondering how all these stories tie together is part of what will make audiences

dig “Holes.” It’s a bit of a mystery, told through cross-cutting that actually works, even if it makes the movie a little longer than it merits.

Can Stanley break his family curse? Will the warden find what she’s looking for? In “Holes,” the central questions actually matter, as they should in any good film.

As the characters dig their holes, audiences actually fill them in—with clues gathered, laughs shared, hopes fulfilled and lessons learned.

One of the best and most important lessons children and adults will unearth here is that people are the way they are for a reason. You may like some people and dislike others, but we all have reasons—not necessarily excuses—for who we are.

It’s doubtful whether digging holes builds character. But dig in the right place, and you’ll uncover the character in each person you meet.

Grab a shovel and check out “Holes.”

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MPAA Rating: PG for violence, mild language and some thematic elements

Director: Andrew Davis

Writer: Louis Sachar (based on his novel)

Cast: The Warden: Sigourney Weaver; Mr. Sir: Jon Voigt; Kate Barlow: Patricia Arquette; Dr. Pendansky: Tim Blake Nelson; Sam: Dule Hill; Stanley Yelnats: Shia LaBeouf; Stanley’s Father: Henry Winkler.