

“No Good, Dirty, Rotten, Pig-Stealing Great Great Grandfathers”: White Atonement and Subsequent Baptism in Louis Sachar’s *Holes*.

The climactic descending rains upon the barren landscape of Louis Sachar’s Newbery- winning novel *Holes* function as a symbolic baptism of both the main character’s and the land’s tumultuous history. Camp Green Lake, Sachar’s fictional setting, has been punished by a hundred-year drought following a traumatic hate crime committed in the 1800s. The drought mirrors the curse over *Holes* protagonist Stanley Yelnats and his twisted family history. When Stanley first arrives at the juvenile delinquency camp, he blames his misfortune on the curse brought on by his no good dirty rotten pig-stealing great great grandfather. Yet as Stanley connects his family’s curse to the history of Camp Green Lake, he bears responsibility for the actions of his past generations and atones for previously-committed sins. Consequently, the rippling effects of Stanley’s atonement bring salvation to his family via wealth and vitality to Camp Green Lake via the rain. While the drought’s suspension does not inherently reflect a religious baptism within the framework of deity worship, the rains washing over the land represent a baptismal cleansing of the hatred scorched into the packed desert sands.

Literature on labor, redemption, and symbolic baptism suggest that the racially-charged wrongdoings of both the Yelnats’ and Camp Green Lake’s past reflect similar injustices committed by previous generations of many modern white Americans. Stanley’s atonement is ultimately a white atonement, a pertinent topic within the current diversity discussions taking place across children’s book publishing and in children’s literature criticism. Just as the diversity movement calls for additional stories based from marginalized perspectives, so too does the movement require acknowledgement and discussion of the “cursed” imbalances today ignited by past wrongdoings, as well as the importance of modern acts of atonement and reparation. As *Holes* celebrates its twentieth anniversary of publication, its messages and symbols are more relevant than ever. White Americans are called upon to acknowledge the actions of their ancestors that have granted them privilege and simultaneously contributed to the struggles of marginalized peoples.