

Holes

Where does Stanley find the strength to carry Zero up the mountain? Why did he do it even though he didn't know what he'd find at the top? Describe something you've done that at first seemed impossible. What did you learn from the experience?

How does digging holes help Zero and Stanley survive?

What happened when Stanley found Kate Barlow's lipstick? Why does he give it to X-Ray? Would you have kept it?

How does Stanley's character change while he is at Camp Green Lake? Do you think Stanley had a "hole" in his life before attending Camp Green Lake? Does he have one now?

Stanley's father, an inventor, says, "I learn from failure." What do you think this means? Have you ever learned from failure?

Why do the boys always line up for water in the same order? What's the significance to this order?

Can you think of some reasons why Zero might not be familiar with any nursery rhymes or the show Sesame Street?

Louis Sachar

Born on March 20, 1954, in East Meadow, New York, Sachar moved with his family at age nine to Orange County, California. He was a good student and excelled in math, but it was not until high school that he fell in love with reading. At one point in his studies, enchanted with Russian literature, he decided to learn the language so he could read these novels in their original version. "After taking a year of Russian," he once commented, "I realized it was still Greek to me. A week into the semester I dropped out of Russian V and tried to figure out what other class I should take instead."

At this point, serendipity intruded into Sachar's life. An elementary school girl was handing out leaflets at his campus in the hopes of recruiting teachers' aides.. Without really thinking about it, Sachar took one of the leaflets and signed on as a teacher's aide. "Prior to that time I had no interest whatsoever in kids," Sachar once said. "It turned out to be not only my favorite class, but also the most important class I took during my college career." His interaction with the school kids was heightened when he became the lunchtime supervisor and was known affectionately as "Louis, the Yard Teacher."

Hatchet

Put yourself in Brian's shoes. How would you fare in his situation? Which personal qualities and skills would you draw upon to survive? Could you survive? Do you think you could survive alone in the wild? How would you do it?

What is the significance of the title? Why would Gary Paulsen have chosen "hatchet" as the name of his book? What does the hatchet symbolize?

What are the most important lessons Brian learns about the natural world? How does his time in the wilderness affect his attitude toward the land and the animals?

"Just the lakes, and it came to him that he would have to use a lake for landing. If he went down in the trees he was certain to die. The trees would tear the plane to pieces as it went into them" (p23). Would you choose to land the plane in a lake like Brian? Why or why not?

In what ways is the "new" Brian different from the boy who first took off in that plane?

How does Brian feel about the fire he makes? How does it change things for him?

Gary Paulsen

A writer in several genres, Gary Paulsen is acclaimed as the author of powerful young adult fiction. Usually set in wilderness areas, Paulsen's young adult books feature teenagers who have experiences in nature--often through challenging tests of their own survival instincts. Paulsen often writes from his first-hand knowledge of the outdoors, and from his experiences as a hunter, trapper, and even a dogsledder in the Alaska Iditarod race.

Paulsen is a popular and respected author. In awarding the writer the 1997 Margaret A. Edwards Award, the award committee commented on this trait: "With his intense love of the outdoors and crazy courage born of adversity, Paulsen reached young adults everywhere. His writing conveys respect for their intelligence and ability to overcome life's worst realities." As Paulsen has said, "I know if there is any hope at all for the human race, it has to come from young people."

Wonder

Throughout *Wonder*, Auggie describes the way that many people react to seeing his face for the first time: by immediately looking away. Have you ever been in a situation where you have responded like this to seeing someone different? Having now read *Wonder*, how do you feel about this now?

How would you describe Auggie as a person in the first few chapters of the book? What about the final few chapters? Has he changed significantly? Are there any experiences or episodes during the story that you think had a particular effect on him? If so, how?

In the chapter 'Costumes' Auggie describes the astronaut helmet that he wore constantly as a younger child. We later learn that Miranda was the one to give Auggie the helmet, and is proud of the gift, but that it was Auggie's father who threw it away. What do you think the helmet signifies to each of these characters and why do you think they all view it so differently?

Why do you think Via was so angry to learn that Auggie cut off his Padawan braid?

The author has explained that she was inspired to write *Wonder* after an experience at a local ice cream parlour, very similar to the scene described in the chapter 'Carvel', where Jack sees Auggie for the first time. In this scene, Jack's babysitter Veronica chooses to get up and quickly walk Jack and his little brother Jamie away from Auggie, rather than risk Jamie saying something rude or hurtful. What do you think you would have done, if put in that position?

R.J. Palacio

RJ Palacio is a pen name. Her real name is Raquel Jaramillo. Raquel was born in 1963 and for many years worked in the publishing industry as an artist, creating book covers. In 2007, she was with her children on a family vacation. She noticed a mom and young girl with severe facial deformities. She writes that she was ashamed of her reaction to the girl and concerned about what her children's reaction would be to seeing her. In a newspaper article, she said "It was horrible, just horrible. My heart broke for this woman and for this girl, for whom this must happen a million times each day." In response to this experience, she wrote *Wonder*. She wrote the novel after work, at night. It took about a year to write.

The BFG

Roald Dahl uses some very strange words in his book. Here are a few: butterflyflies, scrumdiddlyumptious, frobscottle, scrumplet. What other strange words does he use? What do they mean? Why do you think he uses strange words?

Sophie was very excited to meet the Queen of England? If you could meet any ONE person in the world who would it be? Why?

Did the giants get the punishment they deserved? What punishment do you think should have happened?

Do you think the Queen will believe Sophie and the BFG and try to stop the giants? How do you think she will do it?

What does the witching hour make you think of? Have you ever experienced this time of night? What do you imagine might happen at this time based on the author's descriptions.

Roald Dahl

Roald Dahl, born in South Wales in 1916, wrote his first story for children, *The Gremlins*, in 1942 for Walt Disney. The story wasn't really successful, so he went back to writing mysterious stories geared for adult readers. Dahl established himself as a children's writer when he published *James and the Giant Peach*, which was inspired by the nightly bedtime stories he made up for his children. The book was met with wide commercial acclaim. Shortly later Dahl published another winner: *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. Both books were eventually made into popular movies. In addition to *James and the Giant Peach* and *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, Dahl's most popular books include *Fantastic Fox*, *The Witches* and *Matilda*. Over his decades-long career, Roald Dahl composed 19 children's books. He died in 1990 at the age of 74.

Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone

Why does Dumbledore decide to have Harry grow up with the Dursleys rather than with one of the wizard families? How does Harry's experience with his relatives build his character?

Why do Harry and Ron dislike Hermione in the beginning? How does their friendship with her grow? What qualities and strengths does each of them bring to their adventures?

Discuss the importance of the Mirror of Erised and the meaning of its name. Dumbledore tells Harry: "It shows us nothing more or less than the deepest, most desperate desire of our hearts . . . However, this mirror will give us neither knowledge or truth." (p. 213) What does he mean by this? What would you see if you looked in the mirror?

While finding their way to the Sorcerer's Stone, what strengths do Harry, Ron, and Hermione each contribute to solving the puzzles? Were you surprised when Quirrell turned out to be the one who was after the Sorcerer's Stone? Was there anything in the plot that led you to suspect him?

Besides Harry Potter himself, who was your favorite character in the book? Or which character did you find most interesting? Why? What details did Rowling provide that made that character come alive in your mind in all his or her complexity?

The author has more than a little bit of fun with names in this story. For example, the Professor of Herbology is Professor Sprout, and even the authors of the textbooks Harry must study are puns and riddles. Can you find other examples of this wordplay and show how the names reflect the characteristics of their owners? What about names that are the opposite of what you'd expect? — for example, the huge, terrifying three-headed dog named Fluffy?

JK Rowling

Joanne Rowling was born in Yate, England in 1965. Rowling has stated that the idea came to her for Harry Potter while taking the train from Manchester to London King Cross train ride back in 1990. Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone did not get published until 1997. Ten years later, Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows, was published in 2007. J.K. Rowling is a huge supporter of charities and created the charity organization Lumos, which works to "transform the lives of disadvantaged children."

Tuck Everlasting

Why has living forever not always been fun for the Tucks?

If you could drink a potion, and it would magically make you live forever, would you take it? What would be the positives? What would be the negatives?

The first week in August is described as like the top of a Ferris wheel. In what ways is the image of a Ferris wheel significant to the theme of the story?

Consider the inscription on the tombstone. "In loving memory / Winifred Foster Jackson / Dear Wife / Dear Mother /1870-1948" Does this tell us anything of significance? After all, it is about as spare as a tribute can be.

How does the author connect Winnie and the Tucks at the end of the story?

Natalie Babbitt

Natalie Babbitt started illustrating children's books for her husband. After her husband's job kept him from writing more books, Natalie's publisher encouraged her to write her own children's books. Babbitt wrote *Tuck Everlasting* in 1975.

On writing for children, Babbitt says, "I write for children because I am interested in fantasy and the possibilities for experience of all kinds before the time of compromise. I believe that children are far more perceptive and wise than American books give them credit for being."

Natalie Babbitt has three grandchildren and lives in Rhode Island.