Dramatic As It Can Be: The Power of Fate in Louis Sachar’s *Holes*
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I. Introduction

The book *Holes* is written by Louis Sachar in 1998, and it won him a National Book Award and the Newberry Medal. Louis Sachar was born in 1954 and now lives in Austin, Texas with his wife and daughter. He is also famous for writing other children books. The following is the summary of the book *Holes*.

The book *Holes* is about how the main character Stanley Yelnats IV redeems the curse caused by his great-great grandfather, which influenced the Yelnats family for generations.

Elya Yelnats, Stanley’s great-great grandfather, forgot to realize his words to Madame Zeroni. As a result, she cast a spell on him, making his descendants disturbed by bad luck ever since. His son, Stanley Yelnats I, got robbed by the famous outlaw Kissin’ Kate Barlow, and after three generations, his great-great grandson Stanley Yelnats IV, the protagonist of the book, was accused of a crime which he did not commit. He was sent to Camp Green Lake as a punishment, where he was told to dig a hole every day. The more holes he dug, the more hidden facts were uncovered.

Camp Green Lake was actually an illegal organization. It was founded because the Warden needed campers to help her dig up a treasure that Kissin’ Kate Barlow left. The treasure turned out to be Stanley’s great grandfather’s fortune! Moreover, Zero, a friend Stanley made in the camp, turned out to be Madame Zeroni’s great-great-great grandson. Zero was the fastest digger in Group D, but he was weird and unwelcomed by the others. However, Stanley and Zero became great friends. They fought against the Warden side by side, and won back the treasure in the end.

*Holes* is the coolest book ever. Like a giant jigsaw puzzle, I find the process of finding the missing piece filled with twists and turns, and the final result brings luck back to the Yelnats family.

II. Thesis

In this essay, I am going to discuss one major theme in the book: the power of fate, and its great influence on the two main characters, Stanley Yelnats and Hector Zeroni. First of all, I would like to briefly discuss how fate brought the Yelnats and Zeroni families together.
1. How it started: The family curse

The bond of the Yelnats and Zeroni families can be traced back to the time when Stanley’s great-great grandfather Elya Yelnats broke his promise to Madame Zeroni.

Elya fell in love with a beautiful girl named Myra, but Madame Zeroni thought she was just a flowerpot, beautiful but without intelligence. Despite this, she agreed to help Elya to win the marriage from Igor Bagkov, a pig farmer who wanted to marry Myra, too. Both were asked to bring a pig on a day they all agreed, and the one who had the heaviest pig could have Myra’s hand in marriage. Madame Zeroni gave Elya a little runt, and told him that he had to take it up the mountain and have it drink by the stream every day, singing to it a special song she taught him later. Before he left, the Madame commanded him to take her up the mountain to drink by the stream, just like what he did to the pig, after he proposed to Myra. She warned him sternly if he failed to do this, he and his descendants would be doomed for all eternity (Holes, p.31). However, Elya became disgusted when Myra was slow to prefer him to the pig farmer. He gave up the chance to marry Myra and felt disappointed. Wandering through the town, he found a sign leading him to a free passage to America. But sadly, it wasn’t until he was on board and the ship was sailing across the Atlantic that he remembered his broken promise to Madame Zeroni. And lying ahead was the unstoppable fate cursing him always.

Elya began his new life in America, and was forever looking for Madame Zeroni’s son, but in vain. Later on, bad things seemed to occur one after another: a lightning hit, numerous problems in jobs, and so much more happened to himself and his descendants. Stanley, our protagonist, is the fourth generation of the family, and he always seems to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. While cursing his “no-good-dirty-rotten-pig-stealing-great-great grandfather” (Holes, p.57), he wasn’t surprised to find himself heading off to the middle of a desert because of a pair of stolen shoes.

Although Madame Zeroni was the one who cursed the Yelnats family, Elya’s broken promise had caused a great impact on her and her descendants as well. For example, the lives of Zero and his mother were stuck in poverty. In Zero’s (also Hector Zeroni’s) dim memory, when he was little, his mother and him lived in a house. As he grew up, they moved out for an unknown reason and had to live on the streets. One day his mother left him and never returned. What was worse, after his mother left
him, Zero had no choice but to survive being a thief.

2. The power of fate

The power of fate is awesome and unpredictable. It brings Stanley and Zero together, and subsequently leads Stanley to fulfill the promise, which his great-great grandfather failed to keep, to Madame Zeroni’s descendent, Zero.

2.1 Stanley and Zero at Camp Green Lake

Stanley and Zero met at Camp Green Lake. Zero was sent to Camp Green Lake because he stole a pair of new sneakers, and Stanley was sent to Camp Green Lake because of a pair of old sneakers that Zero had stolen earlier.

The day before Stanley was arrested, Zero had stolen a pair of old sneakers that belonged to a famous baseball player, Clyde Livingston. The shoes were displayed and would be sold to rich people, and the money would be donated to the homeless shelter. AfterZero realized what he had done, he hid the shoes on top of the car roof. Sometimes later, in the other corner of town, Stanley was walking under a freeway overpass when the same pair of shoes fell on his head. Not knowing the importance of the shoes, Stanley took them back to his inventor father, who attempted to discover a way to recycle old sneakers. Unfortunately, not long afterwards, a police car chased him down and arrested him after seeing Clyde Livingston’s shoes in his hands. Both Stanley and Zero were sent to Camp Green Lake for stealing shoes, and were coincidentally put in Group D. The “destiny’s shoes” brought Stanley and Zero together.

At first, there was no particular interaction between Stanley and Zero. It was not until Stanley found out that Zero was illiterate and Zero showed his eagerness to learn how to read and write that the two people really became allies. That was another example of how fate brought them together.

In the Camp, Stanley taught Zero how to read and write and Zero dug holes for Stanley, so it was actually a trade at first. Gradually, the two people built friendship and became partners. Once, Zero had a collision with the Warden. He hit the instructor for his insulting words, and ran away. Stanley cared about Zero so much that he tried to search for Zero on a dry, flat wasteland without concerning his own safety. He had no choice, for the friend that he really cared about was out there.
It is very unbelievable to see that after generations and thousands of miles (from Latvia to America), the bond of the two families is again linked together.

2.2 Stanley and Zero on God’s thumb

After Stanley Yelnats I (Stanley’s great grandfather) got robbed by Kissin’ Kate, he was able to stay alive for days in the desert, thanks to a refuge somewhere situated in the middle of a dry wasteland. However, no one believed him at that time. And after such a long time, no one would know, not even Stanley’s great grandfather himself, that his great grandson would find the same magical place.

Stanley and Zero found the place when they ran away from the Warden. Having no idea where to go, Stanley came up with the idea of going to a place his father had mentioned, a refuge that is shaped like God’s thumb. It was their only hope, and it turned out to be a task from fate because Stanley and Zero had to climb up the mountain as a team. On their way up, Zero suffered from a stomachache. Since they were both essential help to each other, they had to stop every now and then. Feeling destiny on his side and truly believing there would be a refuge, Stanley amazingly carried Zero up the mountain for a difficult distance before their destination. There, the water ran uphill, and they ate onions that grew around the muddy place. Stanley saved Zero’s life, and also broke the family curse by fulfilling the promise that his great-great-grandfather, Elya Yelnats, made to Madame Zeroni, Zero’s ancestor.

3. Influence of fate on Stanley and Zero

3.1 Transformation of Stanley and Zero in character

When Stanley established friendship with Zero, his character seemed to grow stronger. From the beginning to the end of the book, by using his own strength, Stanley had undergone an transformation — “from being an unfortunate boy to becoming a very fortunate one.” (Pinsent, 2002). But in my opinion, the immense transformation on both Stanley and Zero can be seen happening little by little, quietly shaping their personalities, and contradicting the curse that has been existing for hundreds of years.

At the beginning of the book, Stanley was a shy kid, lack of self-confidence because of his proportion, and also a little coward. These traits were all weakened
when he went to the detention center, Camp Green Lake. He got thinner, and plucked up the courage to teach Zero how to read and write. Although he knew he might be laughed and bullied by the other campers, still he did something cool. While trying to drive the water truck to find Zero, he couldn’t avoid the numerous holes so he drove it into a hole (Holes, p.147-148). It seems that Stanley was gradually gaining his courage to do things that he would not dare to do before he entered the camp.

On the other hand, Zero was a person not willing to share his thoughts with anyone and was indifferent to things around him before he met Stanley. He was looked down on by many people in the camp because he rarely spoke. For example, Mr. Pendanski always mocked him, saying “there’s nothing inside his head” (Holes, p.19). But after he became good friends with Stanley, who taught him how to read and write, Zero knew Stanley was the only one he could count on. He started talking about where he first lived since he had memory and what happened when he and his mother lived on the streets later on.

Zero was in nature a man of justice and bravery, but he did not show these traits to others before fate brought Stanley to him. Usually, when Mr. Pendanski and other campers made fun of him, Zero just remained silent. But, after he became friends with Stanley and acquired literacy, he regained his courage. When Mr. Pendanski once again insulted him, he slammed his face with his shovel and refused to dig another hole. This was a deed against the detention center, against the injustice.

3.2 Friendship between Stanley and Zero

Fate brought Stanley and Zero together. If it had not been because of the pair of stolen shoes, Stanley and Zero would not have met at the camp. They went through different things and developed friendship and trust.

At first, Stanley, like all the others, viewed Zero only as a weirdo. But after they made the trade, it is obvious that Zero was actually not what we think he was. The “friends” in Group D who used to recognize Stanley despised him without considering his feelings. On the other hand, Zero was actually righteous, he helped Stanley dig his hole because he knew he was in trouble with Mr. Sir when none of the campers would help him. Stanley would have to spend extra time under the hot sun because of their stealing, so Zero helped dig Stanley’s hole.

Their friendship became even closer after Stanley and Zero ran away from the
Camp. When Stanley and Zero strived to climb up God’s thumb, both suffered from poor physical condition. Zero was even going through a stomachache because he had drunk something wrong. Feeling worse, Zero eventually wanted to give up. However, Stanley was determined to bring him up. Stanley carried Zero on his back and they made it to the refuge together at last. It was obvious that Zero had let Stanley carry him when he felt sick and almost impossible to move. Stanley became the first person Zero believed in. Instead of being locked in his own space, isolated and weird, he grew to go out and trust someone other than his mother. It was this friendship that enabled them to survive.

From the above examples, we can see immense transformation in both Stanley and Zero. Stanley was an overweight boy with low self-esteem, but he slowly developed self-confidence as well as emotional strength. Zero used to be someone who did not believe in others, but later he grew to believe Stanley and to depend on him.

III. Conclusion

Sometimes, the way fate changes the ordinary lives of individuals can be wondrous and fantastic. In *Holes*, Stanley and Zero, one fat and overweight, one small and thin, one white and one black, were put together by the hands of fate. After a series of events that happened at the detention center, they developed a sturdy friendship together because of the courage they maintained in an environment that seemed totally hopeless.

After the two boys were set free, both of them led greater lives with the problems they used to have all resolved. Stanley’s family moved to a big house and Zero found his missing mother at last. It seems that fate did not just changed the two boys’ lives but the two families.

Though *Holes* is a fiction for it includes some elements that do not exist in the real world, there is no way to deny that such a story would inspire us to pursue our dreams passionately even in the most dreadful times.

IV. References

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