

Task 1 – Read through the extract.

The shovel felt heavy in Stanley's soft, fleshy hands. He tried to jam it into the earth, but the blade banged against the ground and bounced off without making a dent. The vibrations ran up the shaft of the shovel and into Stanley's wrists, making his bones rattle.

It was still dark. The only light came from the moon and the stars, more stars than Stanley had ever seen before. It seemed he had only just gotten to sleep when Mr. Pendanski came in and woke everyone up.

Using all his might, he brought the shovel back down onto the dry lake bed. The force stung his hands but made no impression on the earth. He wondered if he had a defective shovel. He glanced at Zero, about fifteen feet away, who scooped out a shovelful of dirt and dumped it on a pile that was already almost a foot tall.

For breakfast they'd been served some kind of lukewarm cereal. The best part was the orange juice. They each got a pint carton. The cereal actually didn't taste too bad, but it had smelled just like his cot.

Then they filled their canteens, got their shovels, and were marched out across the lake. Each group was assigned a different area.

The shovels were kept in a shed near the showers. They all looked the same to Stanley, although X-Ray had his own special shovel, which no one else was allowed to use. X-Ray claimed it was shorter than the others, but if it was, it was only by a fraction of an inch.

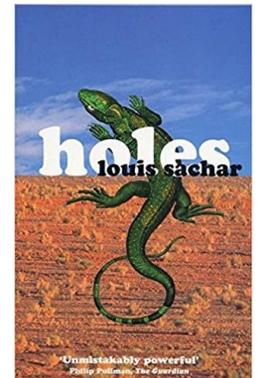
The shovels were five feet long, from the tip of the steel blade to the end of the wooden shaft. Stanley's hole would have to be as deep as his shovel, and he'd have to be able to lay the shovel flat across the bottom in any direction. That was why X-Ray wanted the shortest shovel.

The lake was so full of holes and mounds that it reminded Stanley of pictures he'd seen of the moon. "If you find anything interesting or unusual," Mr. Pendanski had told him, "you should report it either to me or Mr. Sir when we come around with the water truck. If the Warden likes what you found, you'll get the rest of the day off."

"What are we supposed to be looking for?" Stanley asked him.

"You're not looking for anything. You're digging to build character. It's just if you find anything, the Warden would like to know about it."

He glanced helplessly at his shovel. It wasn't defective. He was defective.



Task 2 – Look up definitions for the following words, then use the words to form two sentences (You'll have to add words and you can mix up the order): defective, glanced, assigned, reminded, supposed

Task 3 – What do we learn about Stanley from the first paragraph? How do we know he is going to find digging his first hole hard?

Task 4 – The text says that X-Ray has a special shovel that no one else can use. What does this tell us about the character of X-Ray?

Task 5 – Mr Pendanski says they are digging to build character, but do we really believe that? What clues are there that they are actually looking for something?

Bonus task – Chapter 7 is written in the form of a dual narrative, with the story of Stanley digging his first hole and how his 'no-good-dirty-rotten-pig-stealing-great-great-grandfather' came to America told together. Why do you think the writer has put these two stories side by side?