**Lesson 1: Introducing Holes**

**Lesson Objective:** This lesson aims to introduce *Holes* to the students and consider the central themes and motifs used in the text. By the end of the lesson the students should:

1. Understand the context of *Holes* and the effect it has on the book
2. Be able to name at least three central themes of the book and explain the way in which these themes are explored and developed
3. Be able to confidently compare the moral of *Holes* with that of *War Horse* and to consider and contrast how the two authors explore similar themes (i.e. friendship)

**Plan:**

* Begin the class with a general discussion of the book. What did the students enjoy about the book? What did they not enjoy? What was interesting about the way the book was written? Ask the students to note down three things they liked and three things they did not and discuss this as a class
* Remind students of the concept of a semantic field. Brainstorm what would be in the semantic field encompassed within *Holes,* what recurring symbols, themes and motifs can they find in the book (i.e. fate, free-will, friendship)?
* Discuss the context of *Holes.* Remind the class that *Holes* is set over a period of about one-hundred years and so there is a lot of context to cover! Ask the students what they know about the American South, Texas in particular, in the 19th century. Introduce some information on racial segregation, and the prison system in the US. Can they think how this connects to the novel?
* Introduce some information about Louis Sacher. Knowing all this, why do they think he might have chosen to write a story like *Holes?* What do they think he might be trying to say about American society?
* Returning to the brainstorm made at the beginning of the lesson about themes, ask the students to pick one theme and find two different examples within the book where this theme is explored or developed. Demonstrate an example of this with the theme of “fate”, using two extracts from the text to highlight the theme’s effect.
* Open up a discussion about fate in *Holes,* is fate more important than free-will in this book? How does Sachar develop the theme through the use of symbols? What symbols can they identify? How does the theme of fate connected to a wider idea of American society? Write a P.E.E. paragraph on this as a class
* Drawing on the final *War Horse* lesson, what do the class think the moral of *Holes* is?

**Homework:** Do the characters in *Holes* shape their own destiny or are they controlled by fate? Explain your answer with reference to the text and the wider context of 19th and 20th century American society .

**Lesson 2: Exploring Style and Narrative**

**Lesson Objective:** This lesson aims to enable to students to think more broadly about the way in which *Holes* is written. By the end of the lesson the students should:

1. Be able to talk confidently about the genre of *Holes* and the way in which Sachar uses setting, symbols and names to explore it
2. Be able to identify examples of literary techniques within *Holes* and write a P.E.E. paragraph explaining the effect
3. Be able to talk confidently about narration and perspective in *Holes,* and to compare the narrative voice in *Holes* with the narrative voice in *War Horse*

**Plan:**

* **Start the lesson by watching the scene from the film version of *Holes* (2003). Ask the class to think about what the genre could be. Put a list of possibilities up on the board.**
* **Introduce the idea of *Holes* as a folk tale. Can they name other folk tales? Why might Sachar have chosen to use folkloric elements within *Holes?* Identify as a class elements in the book that are similar to classic fairy tales or folklore**
* **Read the excerpt from *Holes,* and discuss it in relation to ideas of folklore. Why is it written in the way it is? What effect does the word choice and the language in the excerpt have (i.e. the choice of the word ‘curse’ or the use of colloquialisms)?**
* **Discuss how the fact that the story is told by a third-person omniscient narrator feeds into the genre. Why might Sachar have made this choice? Compare this to the narrative voice in *War Horse,* what is different about the perspective of both novels? What is different about the timeline of the novels? How does this link to the narrative style?**
* **Now, hand out a sheet with literary techniques used in *Holes,* discuss any techniques they might be unfamiliar with. The students should find examples of these techniques, and link each technique they find to one theme (i.e. foreshadowing links to the theme of fate)**
* **Introduce the idea of the importance of names in *Holes*, thinking about how this links to fairy tales (i.e. Rumpelstiltskin, Snow White). Using a list of different names in *Holes,* unpick the symbolic importance of each of them, paying attention to the use of irony and what this might be saying about Sachar’s view on fate vs. choice**
* **As a finishing activity, discuss setting. How does the physical environment in *Holes* play into the plot and central themes? How does this link to the names of these settings, for example the barren wasteland of Camp Green lake and the lushness of God’s Thumb**

**Homework: Is *Holes* a modern fairy-tale, and if so, what is it trying to say?** Explain your answer with reference to the text and the wider context of the book, and make sure you say what either makes or does not make *Holes* a modern fairy-tale (i.e. the use of names, setting and narrative voice).

**Lesson 3: Close Textual Analysis**

**Lesson Objective:** This lesson will aim to make students more comfortable with close textual analysis and how to incorporate it into their essays. By the end of the lesson the students should:

1. Be able to describe the effect of Sachar’s style, language and his exploration of themes, and replicate it in their own writing
2. Be able to use close textual analysis when analysing a poem from *Holes,* linking their analysis to wider themes within the book
3. Be able to speed-plan an essay based on different essay questions, picking out the main themes to discuss and evidence to use to support their argument

**Plan:**

* Read the poem “If Only” from *Holes* and watch the scene where it is recited in the film. What do the class think the poem is about? How does this link to the themes we have discussed in previous lessons? Analyse the poem (rhyme scheme, techniques, imagery etc.) and briefly discuss the fact that we only hear the second verse right at the end of the book. Why might that be? If it significant that we hear it from Hector’s mother?
* Ask the class to right their own verse using the same opening and closing refrain of “if only, if only”. They should make sure that their verse explores the same themes as Sachar does, and replicates his style of writing and word choice. They should pick one word (or technique) from their version of the poem and explain their language choice to the class
* Now brainstorm with the class: how do they approach writing about language choice and thematic material in essays? What kinds of things would they put in their essay plan to ensure they used P.E.E. and language analysis?
* Discuss how they would fit themes into their analysis, introducing the idea of how symbols and motifs function as a vessel for themes
* Bring up a list of essay questions. Plan the first together as a class, using a skeleton structure based on an example essay structure. Make sure the emphasise the P.E.E. element to their planning, and go over how to think of and find quotational evidence quickly
* Tell the class that they will have five minutes to choose and plan a second essay question individually. Feedback as a class and compare the different approaches to planning essays
* Go through the mark scheme for the essay plan and ask students to evaluate their own work based on these criteria. They should give their plan a mark and then write two ‘what went wells’ and three ‘even better ifs’
* For the last ten minutes of the lesson, facilitate a wider discussion on what they have learnt from *Holes,* what they think is the most powerful theme or message and why. Did they prefer *Holes* or *War Horse.* Why?

**Homework:** What do you think the title *Holes* means? Why did Sachar chose this name for the book?Explain your answer with reference to the text and the wider context of the book, making sure to include a discussion of the themes.