



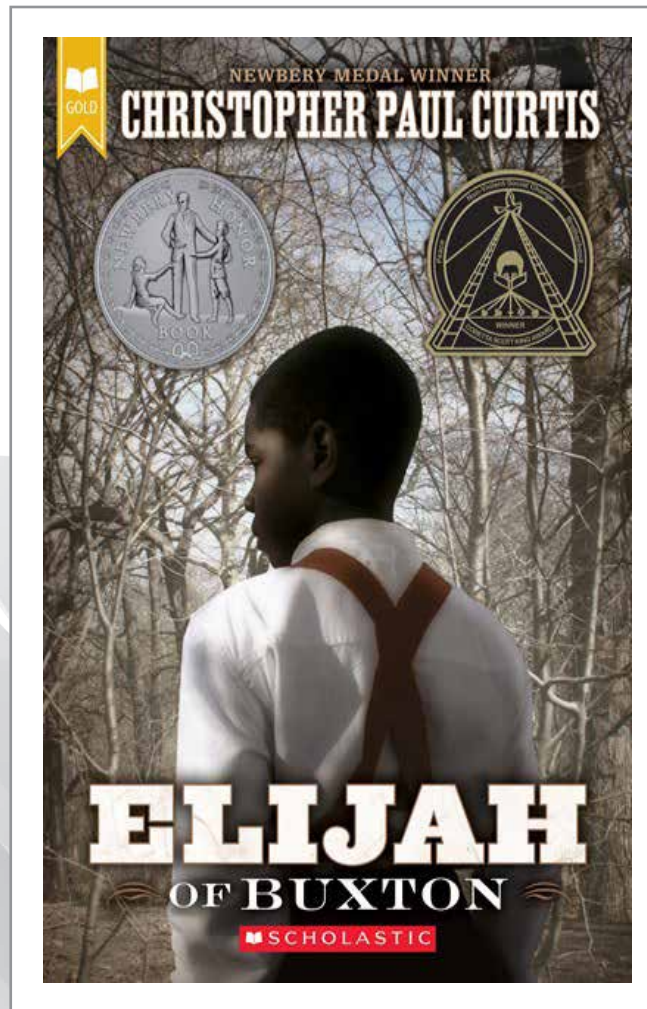
TEACHER GUIDE

GRADES 6-8

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

Elijah of Buxton

Christopher Paul Curtis



READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT

Elijah of Buxton

Christopher Paul Curtis

TEACHER GUIDE

NOTE:

The trade book edition of the novel used to prepare this guide is found in the Novel Units catalog and on the Novel Units website. Using other editions may have varied page references.

Please note: We have assigned Interest Levels based on our knowledge of the themes and ideas of the books included in the Novel Units sets, however, please assess the appropriateness of this novel or trade book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading with them. You know your students best!

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Skills and Strategies

Critical Thinking

Main idea/supporting details,
compare/contrast,
summarizing

Literary Analysis

Character analysis, figurative
language, author's purpose,
story map, foreshadowing

Comprehension

Cause/effect, sequencing,
predicting, conflict

Vocabulary

Context clues, word maps

Writing

Character journal, personal
writing, poetry

Across the Curriculum

Map skills, history, research

Genre: young-adult historical fiction

Setting: Buxton, Ontario, Canada

Point of View: first person

Themes: coming of age, facing fears, hope, triumph, family, friendship, freedom

Conflict: person vs. person, person vs. society

Tone: adventurous, humorous, serious

Summary

Elijah, the first freeborn child in a settlement of freed slaves, is a sensitive child. Elijah and his best friend Cooter have several comical adventures, each usually ending with Elijah running off scared and screaming. Although naïve, Elijah proves his importance to the community by helping neighbors and through his involvement in school, church, and the community. Life takes a turn when 11-year-old Elijah is kidnapped and finds himself in pursuit of a thief. The thief has stolen money intended to buy freedom for a former slave's family. As the novel progresses, Elijah matures and rises to the challenge of unimaginable hardships, including the death of a friend. *Elijah of Buxton* introduces readers to a little-known piece of history: 1860 pre-emancipation America and the Canadian haven for runaway slaves in Buxton, Ontario, Canada.

About the Author

Christopher Paul Curtis lives in Windsor, Ontario, Canada, only miles from the setting of *Elijah of Buxton*. Born in Michigan, Mr. Curtis says that while writing this book, he and Elijah became “close friends.” He explains: “When I’d go to the library to write, it was as if [Elijah] was anxiously waiting for me, waiting to tell me about his life, his worries, his adventures.” Winner of both the Newbery Honor and the Coretta Scott King Award, Christopher Paul Curtis is the author of *The Watsons Go to Birmingham* and *Bud, Not Buddy*. Some of his best-known novels are both comical and deeply moving, blending fictional accounts of families with factual events. He and his wife have two children.

Background Information

Buxton, Canada: The Canadian town of Buxton is located just 40 miles from Detroit, Michigan. During the 1860s (the time period in which the novel is set) Buxton served as a community for runaway slaves and their children, a place where blacks could govern themselves away from the dangers of pre-emancipation America. As described in the Author's Note, the Settlement ranged in population at its height from 1,500 to 2,000 escaped and freed people. The success of Buxton resulted from the determination of its mostly freed black residents and the strict codes instituted by its founder, Reverend William King. Buxton's students included native Canadian children, since the school developed a stellar reputation among families in the area.

Slavery in America: Twelve million Africans were brought to America as slaves between 1600 and 1900. Slaves were used as laborers by their white owners primarily in the South, on tobacco plantations and in other areas of agriculture. There were no laws regarding slavery in pre-emancipation America. Consequently, harsh living conditions led to resistance, and slave owners often employed violence to sustain sunrise-to-sunset gang labor. Slaves were provided minimal housing, food, and medical care. They had little opportunity to improve their quality of life. Beginning in the 1750s, sentiment regarding the social evil of slavery grew, leading to the movement to end slavery. Following the Civil War, slavery became illegal.

Characters

Elijah Freeman: main character and protagonist; 11-year-old boy who is the first freeborn child in a community of former slaves; thoughtful and naïve

Ma and Pa: Elijah's parents

The Preacher/The Right Reverend Deacon Doctor Zephariah Connerly the Third: self-proclaimed preacher who attempts to ensnare Elijah in his flimflam activities

Mr. Leroy: a freed slave who is saving his money to buy his wife and children out of slavery

Cooter: Elijah's best friend; described as dimwitted

Mrs. Bixby: Cooter's domineering mother

Mrs. Holton: runaway slave raising two daughters; Her husband dies at the hands of slave owners.

Mr. Segee: owns stables, horses, and Old Flapjack, Elijah's favorite mule

Emma: Elijah's sensitive and annoying classmate; chosen to welcome escaped slaves to Buxton

Mrs. Chloe, Kamau, and Hope/Too-mah-ee-nee: family of slaves captured while escaping

Mr. Highgate: resident of Buxton who is shot by the Preacher while traveling to America

Mr. Benjamin Alston: American black who helps Mr. Highgate after he is shot

Mr. Travis: Elijah's demanding school and Sunday school teacher

Miss Carolina, Mr. Waller, the Miss Duncans, Mr. Polite, Mrs. Guest: hardworking residents of Buxton

The Taylors: former slave family that has escaped to Buxton from America

Vocabulary

plaguing
familiarity
contempt
suspicious
oddities
calliope
dexterity
reputation
rendered
ambush

4. Why does Mr. Leroy toil long hours at such back-breaking work? What does this say about him? (*He is trying to save money to buy his family out of slavery. He loves and misses his family and thus makes sacrifices for them.*)
 5. What is Mr. Leroy's philosophy of life? (*You cannot be timid or expect bad things to happen, or they will.*)
 6. What is the best way to learn something, according to Elijah? Is this the way you learn best? (*He thinks learning by experience is the best method. Answers will vary.*)
 7. What lesson is Mr. Travis trying to teach? (*"Familiarity breeds contempt," meaning that people who feel too comfortable around their superiors do not treat them with due respect. Cooter misinterprets the phrase to mean "family breeding contest."*)
8. Why does Elijah's remark make Mr. Leroy so angry? (*Mr. Leroy was called this term when he was being abused as a slave in the South.*)
 9. What does the Preacher want Elijah to do? How does Elijah feel about the offer? (*He wants Elijah to sneak out at night and go to a carnival with him. Elijah is suspicious and wary because he knows his parents wouldn't let him go, but he agrees because it is an opportunity for adventure.*)
 10. What does Elijah discover about MaWee? (*He finds out that "MaWee" is really a white student from his school.*)

Supplementary Activities

1. Literary Techniques: At the beginning of Chapter 7, Elijah foreshadows coming events. Find and record two other examples of foreshadowing from previous chapters.
2. Creative Thinking: Create a carnival sideshow attraction like the ones in the book. Consider the "unreal" atmosphere and attitude involved in such activities. Illustrate and summarize your sideshow idea in a brief paragraph, and then act it out.
3. Writing: Pretend you are Elijah, and write a letter of apology to Mr. Leroy for offending him.
4. Literary Devices: Continue adding to your Metaphors and Similes chart. Examples: **Simile**—"The fish bones crackled and snapped in his mouth like dry corn in a mill" (p. 76); **Metaphor**—Mrs. Holton: unfortunate soul (pp. 71–72)

Metaphors and Similes

A **metaphor** is a comparison between two unlike objects. For example, "he was a human tree." A **simile** is a comparison between two unlike objects that uses the words *like* or *as*. For example, "the color of her eyes was like the cloudless sky."

Directions: Complete the chart below by listing metaphors and similes from the novel, as well as the page numbers on which they are found. Identify metaphors with an "M" and similes with an "S." Translate the comparisons in your own words, and then list the objects being compared.

Metaphors/Similes	Ideas/Objects Being Compared
1. Translation:	
2. Translation:	
3. Translation:	

Cause and Effect

Directions: Write four events from the story, and then list the effect of each event.

Cause

Effect