

## Teaching the Book

In *Elijah of Buxton*, young readers meet Elijah Freeman, a fast-talking, adventure-loving boy who lives in the free black settlement of Buxton, Ontario. Elijah has never known the horrors of slavery that his parents escaped, but when he crosses the border into the United States, he learns about the real costs of freedom. This award-winning book provides opportunities to discuss slavery, the Underground Railroad and the meaning of freedom. Activities engage students in researching the history and culture of a critical time in our country's past.

**Theme Focus:** Freedom, Slavery, Courage

**Comprehension Focus:** Make Inferences

**Language Focus:** Words from History

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Christopher Paul Curtis was raised in Flint, Michigan. While working on the assembly line of the Fisher Body Flint Plant, he took night classes, graduated from college, and discovered writing. His book, *The Watsons Go to Birmingham—1963*, received a Newbery Honor and Coretta Scott King Honor book citation in 1996. His second novel, *Bud, Not Buddy*, received the Newbery Medal and Coretta Scott King Award in 2000.

*Elijah of Buxton* won a Newbery Honor, the Coretta Scott King Author Award, and the Scott O'Dell Award for Historical Fiction in 2008. "This novel came to me in a way that was far different than any other," states Curtis. "From the word 'go' Elijah and I became close friends. When I'd go to the library to write, it was as if he were anxiously waiting for me, waiting to tell about his life, his worries, his adventures."

Christopher Paul Curtis lives with his wife and two children in Windsor, Ontario, Canada.

## BOOK STATS

Grade Level Equivalent: 5–7

Ages: 10–13

Lexile Measure®: 1070L

Pages: 352

Genre: Historical Fiction

Subject/Theme: Freedom, Slavery, Courage

Common Core Standards	Reading	Writing	Listening & Speaking	Language
Grade 5	RL.5.1, RL.5.2, RL.5.4, RL.5.6	W.5.3	SL.5.1	L.5.4, L.5.6
Grade 6	RL.6.1, RL.6.2, RL.6.4, RL.6.6	W.6.3	SL.6.1	L.6.4, L.6.6
Grade 7	RL.7.1, RL.7.2, RL.7.4, RL.7.6	W.7.3	SL.7.1	L.7.4, L.7.6

## OVERVIEW

### Book Summary

Eleven-year-old Elijah is the first child born into freedom in Buxton, Canada, a settlement of runaway slaves just over the border from Detroit. He's best known in his hometown as the boy who made a memorable impression on Frederick Douglass when the great orator visited Buxton. But Elijah is also known for his amazing abilities to run on at the mouth, "rememberize" things, and hit fish dead in the water with one throw of a chunking stone.

Elijah yearns to be "growned up," and he gets the chance when Mr. Leroy, a hard-working man in Buxton, risks everything to buy his wife and children out of slavery. Elijah joins Mr. Leroy on a journey from Canada to the United States in an attempt to regain his money from the double-dealing the Preacher. When Mr. Leroy dies on the journey, Elijah winds up pursuing the Preacher alone, but instead finds a group of runaway slaves who have been recaptured by slavers. Elijah witnesses the cruel realities of slavery for the first time; yet he summons up the courage to take a baby girl with him back to Buxton and to freedom.

Told through the viewpoint of Elijah, this touching story—both humorous and tragic—conveys the real meaning of freedom to young readers.

# Get Ready to Read

## Pre-Reading Activities

**Christopher Paul Curtis at Buxton** Tell students that they will be reading a story that is told by a funny, trouble-loving, and brave eleven-year-old boy named Elijah. Elijah lived during the 1850s just before the Civil War. He was the first free baby born in the town of Buxton, Canada. Elijah's parents, and all the other grown-ups in the town, had escaped slavery and come to Canada on the Underground Railroad.

Play the short video trailer of the book that features Christopher Paul Curtis visiting the historical town of Buxton and talking about why he wrote the book. View this Scholastic Kids video at <http://bit.ly/PVK545>.

After viewing the video, encourage students to ask questions and predict what they think the story might be about.



## BIG QUESTION

**Critical Thinking** Ask students to think about this question as they read and be ready to answer it when they have finished the book. Write the question on chart paper or have students record it in their reading journals.

**What did Elijah learn about the meaning of freedom?**

## Vocabulary

**Words from History** Explain to students that *Elijah of Buxton* contains many words that were commonly used in the 1800s during the time of slavery. These words are important to the meaning of the story. Ask students to watch for the following words as they read the book. Encourage them to look for clues in the text to figure out the meanings and then check the dictionary definitions and write them on the vocabulary cards.

Use **Resource #1: Vocabulary Cards** on page 7 and distribute copies to students.

conjure (p. 31)	shackles (p. 58)
scallywags (p. 58)	haint (p. 60)
paddy rollers (p. 163)	abolitionist (p. 204)
slavers (p. 204)	plantation (p. 228)

## As You Read

### Reading the Book

**Modeled Reading** Read aloud several pages from the first chapter of the book, asking students to follow along. Then prompt them to discuss questions such as: Who is telling the story? How is the language different than what you usually read? What kind of person is Elijah? Do you like him?

**Independent Reading** Assign students to read *Elijah of Buxton* independently. Encourage them to discuss the book with a partner as they read, asking questions and sharing responses about what is happening in the story.

### Comprehension Focus

**Make Inferences** Explain to students that the author of *Elijah of Buxton* doesn't always explain everything that is going on in the story. Tell students that sometimes readers must figure out how a character feels or what is happening in a situation on their own. Explain that students must piece together hints from within the story with their own past experiences to make inferences.

Use the graphic organizer on **Resource #2: Make Inferences** to model for students how to make inferences. Project the page on a whiteboard or pass out copies to students.

**Model:** On page 16, Elijah describes how his mother acted when he came home after hiding the toady-frog in her sewing basket: “When I got home, Ma didn’t say a word! She must’ve thought the whole thing was too embarrassing and couldn’t see no way of ‘buking me without bringing up the subject of toady-frogs again, so she let it go.” What can I learn by making inferences about these words? Well, I’m really surprised Elijah isn’t being punished. Maybe this all seems too good to be true. Maybe Elijah will be punished later. The author hasn’t told me any of these things directly, but I can use the text clues and my own experience to guess what might happen—and it does!

Have students fill in the rest of the organizer with inferences based on text clues and their own experiences. Discuss students’ answers and ask them to give evidence to support them.

## After You Read

### Questions to Discuss

Lead students in a discussion of these focus story elements.

**1. Freedom** Mrs. Chloe says to Elijah, “Seeing you shows me the whole thang ain’t no dream.” What do you think she means? What does Elijah prove to her? (*Sample answer: Elijah is a free-born, educated child and proves that freedom from slavery is real and possible.*)

**2. Make Inferences** Why do you think Elijah makes up the story about his mother losing a little girl to tell Mrs. Chloe? (*Sample answer: He wants Mrs. Chloe to know her little baby will be loved and cared for in Canada.*)

**3. Words from History** Do you think it would have been dangerous to be an abolitionist? Describe

why or why not. (*Sample answer: Yes, because the paddy rollers killed people who were helping slaves escape to freedom.*)

### Questions to Share

Encourage students to share their responses with a partner or small group.

**1. Text to Self** How do you feel about Elijah going back to the stable to save the baby and take her to Canada? What would you do?

**2. Text to World** Who do you think understands freedom more—someone who has always had freedom, or someone who has had to fight for it? Explain your answer.

**3. Text to Text** Why do you think the author chose to tell this story from Elijah’s point of view? How does Elijah help you understand what slavery was really about? Compare this story to other stories about the Underground Railroad and slavery.

## WORDS TO KNOW

### Words from History

Ask students to refer to the definitions they wrote on their vocabulary cards to answer the following questions.

1. Where did most of the **slavers** live in America?
2. Why did the slaves have **shackles** on their feet?
3. How did **abolitionists** feel about slavery?
4. Who lived on the **plantations** in the South?
5. Why was Elijah afraid of someone who could **conjure** things?

Ask students to generate questions about the rest of the vocabulary words to clarify their meanings.

## Extension Activities

### Reading/Writing Connection

**A Letter from Elijah** Christopher Paul Curtis said that he and Elijah were like friends and Elijah was always waiting to tell about his life, his worries, and his adventures. Challenge students to take on the voice of Elijah and let him tell a story through them. Have students write a letter from the point of view of Elijah, describing his trip to the United States. Suggest that Elijah write to his friend Cooter, to the baby Hope, or even to the great Frederick Douglass. Remind students to use Elijah's language and describe his adventures and his feelings about what happened.



Don't forget the

### BIG QUESTION

**Critical Thinking** Give each student an opportunity to answer the big question. Encourage students to support their answers with details and evidence from the text. Remind them that there is no one right answer.

**What did Elijah learn about the meaning of freedom?**

## Content Area Connections

**Science The North Star** The goal of escaping slaves was to go North—as far north as Canada where they could be free. Challenge students to learn more about the North Star that guided slaves on their journey to freedom. Suggest that they research the group of stars that helped people find the North Star and report on what the constellation looks like and what it was called by the slaves.

**Geography The Underground Railroad** Suggest students interested in the Underground Railroad visit the interactive Scholastic website at <http://bit.ly/YVtX2Q>. Encourage them to share what they learned with the class, summarizing the information about the different stops on the Underground Railroad.

**Language Elijah's Dictionary** Encourage students interested in Elijah's original variation of English to take a closer look. Suggest that students work in pairs to create a dictionary of their favorite words and phrases that Elijah uses in his speech and descriptions—from "fra-gile" to "chunking" to "trickaration geometry."

**Literature Author Report** Christopher Paul Curtis has brought African-American history to life for a generation of readers through his humorous and humane works of fiction. Suggest that students learn more about the author by visiting his website at <http://www.nobodybutcurtis.com>. Encourage them to choose another of Curtis's books to read and compare to *Elijah of Buxton*.

### BIG ACTIVITY

**The Buxton News** Remind students that Elijah had a habit of making news from the day he was born. Explain to students that their assignment for this activity is to be a reporter for *The Buxton News*, the local newspaper of Elijah's hometown of Buxton. Have students write about an event that is described in the novel as though it has just happened. Guide students to choose any event they think would make a good article.

Make copies of the **Big Activity: The Buxton News** on page 5 and distribute them to students to use as a template for their news article.

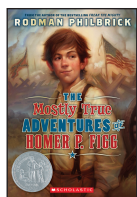




# READ MORE AND LEARN MORE

Use these books and other resources to expand your students' study of the book or theme.

## Theme Connections



### **The Mostly True Adventures of Homer P. Figg**

*Rodman Philbrick*

**Ages:** 11–13

**Grades:** 5–7

**Lexile Measure®:** 950L

**Pages:** 240

**Guided Reading Level:** X

Homer P. Figg's beloved older brother, Harold, is illegally sold into the Union Army by their ruthless guardian. Now Homer must run away from his wretched Maine home to follow his brother into the thick of the Civil War and save him! Award-winning novelist Rodman Philbrick recreates the turbulent times of the Civil War through the observant eyes of a backwoods boy who is both courageous and funny—and always willing to stretch the truth.

**Available as a Stora e-book**



### **Dear America: With the Might of Angels**

*Andrea Davis Pinkney*

**Ages:** 9–13

**Grades:** 4–7

**Lexile Measure®:** 740L

**Pages:** 336

**Guided Reading Level:** U

It's 1955, and the United States Supreme Court has just ruled that the segregation of schools is unconstitutional. As a result, Dawn Rae Johnson is the only one of her friends to go to an all-white school. Dawn wonders if she has the courage to face down the bigotry of her town, or if she will crumble beneath the pressure. This diary-style novel is a gripping and inspiring chronicle of a troubled time in American history. **Available as a Stora e-book**



### **The Royal Diaries: Anacaona, Golden Flower, Quisqueya, Haiti, 1490**

*Edwidge Danticat*

**Ages:** 10–13

**Grades:** 5–8

**Lexile Measure®:** 1080L

**Pages:** 224

**Guided Reading Level:** X

The setting is 15th-century Haiti (then called Quisqueya), and 16-year-old Anacaona is part of the Taino tribe that lives on the island. At her coming-of-age ceremony, she makes the choice to leave her home and be married to a leader in another part of the country. Anacaona loves her husband, but the arrival of Spanish sailors cut their happiness short. Anacaona's struggle against the invaders is also the struggle of her country against its European conquerors.

**Available as a Stora e-book**



### **Belle Teal**

*Ann M. Martin*

**Ages:** 9–12

**Grades:** 4–6

**Lexile Measure®:** 870L

**Pages:** 224

**Guided Reading Level:** W

Belle Teal starts fifth grade as a group of African American students desegregate her school. Belle quickly befriends a new student named Darryl and defends him against the insults and bullying of her own friends. The story brings dignity and grace to a difficult chapter in American history as one courageous girl follows her heart to deal with a big issue while managing equally difficult personal problems. **Available as a Stora e-book**



### **America at War: Civil War**

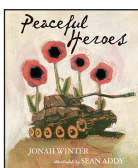
*John Perritano*

**Ages:** 9+

**Grades:** 4–7

**Pages:** 32

This riveting book covers the most important details of a war that pitted brother against brother. It contains little-known quotes and trivia about specific leaders and battles. Filled with graphics and amazing images, it is an excellent overview of a war that almost ripped the country apart forever. **Available as a Stora e-book**



### **Peaceful Heroes**

*Jonah Winter*

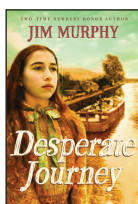
**Ages:** 8–12

**Grades:** 3–6

**Lexile Measure®:** 1050L

**Pages:** 288

Featuring people such as Clara Barton, Sojourner Truth, and Martin Luther King, this book celebrates brave men and women who have brought about change by standing up for justice and what is right. These heroes faced down violence and many other dangers to make the world a better for those around them. **Available as a Stora e-book**



### **Desperate Journey**

*Jim Murphy*

**Ages:** 10–13

**Grades:** 5–8

**Lexile Measure®:** 860L

**Pages:** 288

**Guided Reading Level:** V

It's 1848, and times are tough along the banks of upstate New York's Erie Canal. Twelve-year-old Maggie and her Irish immigrant family spend their lives hauling cargo along the canal's 360 miles. Maggie's father lost the family's entire savings, and now they're in danger of having their boat seized. Can Maggie, her nine-year-old brother, and their sick mother overcome the odds to save their boat—and their family? **Available as a Stora e-book**

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<http://teacher.scholastic.com/ereading-resources/>

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Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## RESOURCE #2: Make Inferences

Make inferences based on clues in the text and your own experiences or knowledge. Write in your own example of a text clue for #3.

TEXT	INFERENCE
1. "When I got home, Ma didn't say a word! She must've thought the whole thing was too embarrassing and couldn't see no way of 'buking me without bringing up the subject of toady-frogs again, so she let it go." (p. 16)	Has Ma really forgotten about the trick Elijah played on her?
2. "Pa says when someone sweet-talks you like this, you got to be real careful with the next words that come out of their mouth. He says the sweet-talking is like a rattling-snakes rattles, it's like you're getting a warning that you're about to get bit." (p. 47)	What did Pa really mean?
3.	