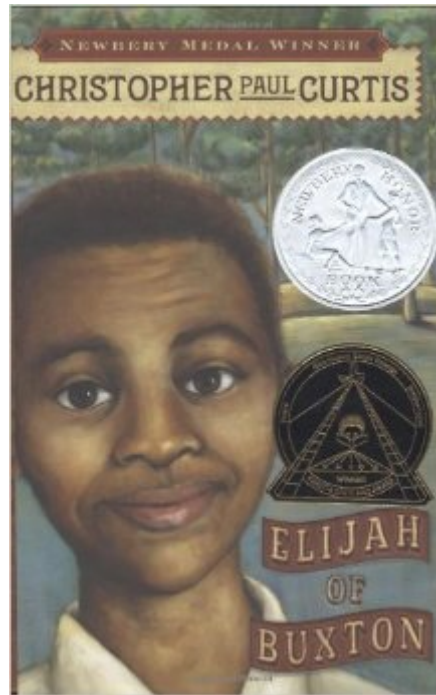


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# Elijah Of Buxton



## Synopsis

Newbery Medalist and CSK Award winner Christopher Paul Curtis's debut middle-grade/young-YA novel for Scholastic features his trademark humor, compelling storytelling, and unique narrative voice. 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 for having made a memorable impression on Frederick Douglass, but that changes when a former slave steals money from Elijah's friend, who has been saving to buy his family out of captivity in the South. Elijah embarks on a dangerous journey to America in pursuit of the thief and discovers firsthand the unimaginable horrors of the life his parents fled--a life from which he'll always be free, if he can find the courage to get back home.

## Book Information

Lexile Measure: 1070L (What's this?)

Hardcover: 352 pages

Publisher: Scholastic Press; First Edition edition (August 6, 2007)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0439023440

ISBN-13: 978-0439023443

Product Dimensions: 1.2 x 5.5 x 8.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.4 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (143 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #250,238 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #17 in [Books > Children's Books > Geography & Cultures > Explore the World > Canada](#) #18 in [Books > Children's Books > Education & Reference > History > Canada](#) #300 in [Books > Children's Books > Literature & Fiction > Historical Fiction > United States > 1800s](#)

Age Range: 8 - 12 years

Grade Level: 3 - 7

## Customer Reviews

The Author's Note of "Elijah of Buxton" begins with a statement on the part of author Christopher Paul Curtis declaring that when you ask authors what their favorite published work is, they'll generally hem and haw and refuse to select just one title. Not Mr. Curtis. Unlike these writers, he has no qualms about selecting the book he has always loved the most (it's "The Watsons go to Birmingham", in case you were curious). Now ask a librarian what his or her favorite Christopher

Paul Curtis title is. Go on. The answer is going to be interesting. Some might play the hem and haw game, but many will burst out with their favorites without hesitation.Â The Watsons Go to Birmingham - 1963! Bud, Not Buddy! Mr. Chickee's Funny Money! One or two brave souls might even select his teen novel on the sly. Not me, of course. My favorite Curtis novel is "Elijah of Buxton", no question. And when I am old and grey I will claim that it was my favorite right from the start, publication dates be damned. To my mind "Elijah" is an example of everything Curtis does well. His historical research is superior. His characters heartwarming. His prose funny and heart-wrenching in turns. Plus, any book where a character is famous for having upchucked onto Frederick Douglass when he was a baby is worth its weight in gold. Be prepared to meet your favorite Christopher Paul Curtis book as well. Elijah Freeman's known for two things. First and foremost, he was the first child born free in the Elgin Settlement at Raleigh in Canada West (better known as Buxton). Second, when he was a baby he barfed all over the great Frederick Douglass. That's the kind of stuff no one ever lets you forget when you grow up in a town as small as Buxton. Populated entirely by escaped slaves and their children in 1860, Buxton residents make it their business to help new arrivals any way they can. Described as "fragile" because he cries easily, Elijah has a hard time convincing anyone that he's ready to be a man. But that's before Mr. Leroy, his friend, gets enough money to buy his family. Before he trusts that money to the slick-talking preacher in town. Before the preacher disappears with the money somewhere in Michigan and Mr. Leroy wants Elijah to come with him to track the double-crosser down. And before Elijah must puzzle through and come to terms with a decision that means life or death. When it comes to writing, doff your hat to Mr. Curtis. The history of Buxton was what really hooked me from the start. As the Author's Note in the back points out, Buxton was a real place and it thrived and survived beautifully. Economically self-sustaining with an enviable school system, the place was practically custom made for a children's novel. And the more I learned about the place, the more I wanted to learn. I wouldn't be shocked if next year we see a crop of fine Buxton-related non-fiction children's titles sweeping the marketplace. As for Curtis's subject matter, not only does he go in for great settings, Curtis tackles a wide array of issues that might catch you off-guard. When Elijah uses the n-word around a former slave (and his superior) the response is swift and furious. The piece undoubtedly is speaking as much to Elijah as it is to kids today, but when a discussion of this sort fits the story and doesn't feel hammered into place, you don't have to label it as necessarily didactic. Elijah's such an interesting character too. On the one hand, he's just your average eleven-year-old troublemaker. And sometimes (probably more often for the adult reader, than for the child) he's a little more dense than you'd like. How often does one meet a heroic and not entirely with it hero, though? I also enjoyed the little observations slipped

within the text that come up with situations that are immediately understandable. Things like, "I learnt a long time ago that when you're smelling something real good, you only get two or three first-place smells of it afore your nose won't take no more notice." Words and language play an important part in the book. For example, a particularly frightening doll owned by a fellow student is labeled "terrorific " in Elijah's eyes. Best of all, there's humor, as seen when discussing the aptitude many former slaves have for storytelling and exaggeration. Elijah mentions that, "They'll tell you I throwed up on Mr. Douglass for a whole half a hour afore Ma come and snatched me away and pointed me out the schoolhouse window. They say I near drowned the man." I'd write more but it gets kind of gross after that point. "Elijah" kind of reminded me of those old Robert Peck "Soup" books. Same mischief and confusion. Same high spirits and fun. The section where poor Cooter (Elijah's best friend) comes to believe that the day's lesson "Familiarity Breeds Contempt" is going to be dirty has all the markings of a classic. One person I spoke to about "Elijah" mentioned that the book hopped about from story to story too much for her tastes. She didn't feel that Curtis had created an adequate linear narrative, choosing instead to leapfrog between incidents and occurrences. To my mind this was a very purposeful move on Curtis's part. The first half of the book (at least) does indeed show a variety of different interactions and happenstances between the residents of the town and Elijah. Then, as you grow to know them, you better understand the final thrust of the novel. From page 181 or so onward, the book's plot becomes less flexible and more straightforward. I would argue that you need the fun early chapters, in part because they contain small details and incidents that grow in importance as you continue to read the story. They also happen to make the book fun and interesting right from the start. Jump into the seriousness that marks the latter half early on and you end up playing your hand too soon, scaring off potential readers.

Christopher Paul Curtis has created another masterpiece in the realm of children's literature with his new novel, *Elijah of Buxton*. Like his previous books, *Bud*, *Not Buddy* and *The Watson's go to Birmingham - 1963*, *Elijah of Buxton* depicts the struggle of a young boy to understand and overcome the atrocities of racial injustice. Eleven-year-old Elijah Freeman takes readers on a journey to the final destination of the Underground Railroad, the Canadian settlement of Buxton. Like many contemporary children, Elijah enjoys a life of freedom characterized by normal childhood activities. As the first child born free to parents who were former slaves, Elijah is sheltered from the harsh realities of slavery. His only knowledge of slavery is obtained through secondhand accounts painfully recounted by residents of Buxton. Young readers will laugh out loud as they accompany

Elijah on hilarious adventures with Hoopsnakes, Moth Lions, and Chunking Stones. Students will feel empathy for Elijah as he realizes that he isn't the brightest bulb in Mr. Travis's class. Children struggling to grow into young adults will identify with the shame Elijah feels when he is teased and rebuked for being a "fragile boy". A vivid cast of characters peppers the book with spicy personality and captures the reader's interest more effectively. Elijah's chunking stones capture fish. As Elijah interacts with former slaves, he realizes that the scars of slavery go deeper than the flesh. Elijah stumbles upon a hornet's nest of human nature when he utters a racial slur which causes a former slave to attack him. Throughout the book, glimpses of racism periodically appear, but Curtis skillfully encourages the reader to befriend Elijah so neither the reader or Elijah will face the atrocity of slavery alone. When at last Elijah crosses the Detroit River into America and encounters slaves, the reader feels as if he or she is alongside Elijah, facing danger, feeling nauseous, and desperately searching for methods to free the trapped victims of slavery. As tears of empathy begin to roll down reader's cheeks, they almost expect to find Elijah there beside them, identifying with their deep sorrow. As a child who has faced bigotry firsthand, I felt inspired to become actively engaged in changing the world after reading *Elijah of Buxton*. Elijah Freeman's courage reminds us that it's not enough to merely be a survivor of hatred. As children we share a moral obligation to become "conductors" of social change. *Elijah of Buxton* leaves readers with a universal truth understood by all groups who have been oppressed and enslaved; as long as Hope survives, a brighter tomorrow exists for future generations. I was deeply honored to be one of the first readers of this monumental book which chronicles the story of one boy's journey into adulthood set against the backdrop of a peoples' journey into freedom. Librarians, teachers, parents and students, make room on your bookshelves for what is sure to become an award-winning classic!

Once again, Curtis has written a lively, funny story with important and interesting history underneath. Many schoolkids study slavery and the Underground RR--this book provides a glimpse of "what happens next?" This title would be a great follow-up/companion book to Shelley Pearsall's *Trouble Don't Last*--a first person narrative like this one--which follows a young boy (not unlike Elijah) who is trying to escape to Canada on the Underground RR. Many kids who read that book want to know what happens to Samuel in Canada? What kind of a life do the former slaves create? Do their hopes and dreams become reality? Curtis' book takes readers there.

I'll tell you upfront I'm a fan of Christopher Paul Curtis, and his young and "fra-gile" (read gullible and easily scared) hero Elijah is my favorite. If I have any criticism, it is that *ELIJAH OF BUXTON* is a bit

slow starting, but once the author hits his stride, watch out! Those who read this book will learn a lot about slavery and its after effects. By turns hilarious and heart-breaking, children who read it will realize that even the most "fra-gile" boy is capable of being a hero, and helping to make the world a better place.

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