

## Olentangy Local School District Literature Selection Review

Teacher:	Mallory Harper	School:	OLMS
Book Title:	Elijah of Buxton	Genre:	Historical Fiction
Author:	Christopher Paul Curtis	Pages:	352
Publisher:	Scholastic Express	Copyright:	2007

*In a brief rationale, please provide the following information relative to the book you would like added to the school's book collection for classroom use. You may attach additional pages as needed.*

**Book Summary and summary citation:** (suggested resources include book flap summaries, review summaries from publisher, book vendors, etc.)

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.

**Provide an instructional rationale for the use of this title, including specific reference to the OLSD curriculum map(s):** (Curriculum maps may be referenced by grade/course and indicator number or curriculum maps with indicators highlighted may be attached to this form)

This particular text has been selected for a number of reasons. First, the 8<sup>th</sup> graders at OLMS all participate in a cross curricular research project on the Civil War during the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter. "Elijah of Buxton" is a historical fiction novel set during the time period they will be studying. So far, we have not read any historical fiction as a class this school year. This book will serve as a companion piece of literature that relates to the informational texts and primary sources they will be accessing through their research. Additionally, this text will allow the students to achieve the following Common Core Literature Standards for Grade 8:

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.8.1 Cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.8.6 Analyze how differences in the points of view of the characters and the audience or reader (e.g., created through the use of dramatic irony) create such effects as suspense or humor.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.8.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including analogies or allusions to other texts.

**Include two professional reviews of this title:** (a suggested list of resources for identifying professional reviews is shown below. Reviews may be “cut and pasted” (with citation) into the form or printed reviews may be attached to the form)

Review #1

Publishers Weekly

Elijah Freeman, 11, has two claims to fame. He was the first child "born free" to former slaves in Buxton, a (real) haven established in 1849 in Canada by an American abolitionist. The rest of his celebrity, Elijah reports in his folksy vernacular, stems from a "tragical" event. When Frederick Douglass, the "famousest, smartest man who ever escaped from slavery," visited Buxton, he held baby Elijah aloft, declaring him a "shining bacon of light and hope," tossing him up and down until the jostled baby threw up on Douglass. The arresting historical setting and physical comedy signal classic Curtis (*Bud, Not Buddy*), but while Elijah's boyish voice represents the Newbery Medalist at his finest, the story unspools at so leisurely a pace that kids might easily lose interest. Readers meet Buxton's citizens, people who have known great cruelty and yet are uncommonly polite and welcoming to strangers. Humor abounds: Elijah's best friend puzzles over the phrase "familiarity breeds contempt" and decides it's about sexual reproduction. There's a rapsallion of a villain in the Right Reverend Deacon Doctor Zephariah Connerly the Third, a smart-talking preacher no one trusts, and, after 200 pages, a riveting plot: Zephariah makes off with a fortune meant to buy a family of slaves their freedom. Curtis brings the story full-circle, demonstrating how Elijah the "fragile" child has become sturdy, capable of stealing across the border in pursuit of the crooked preacher, and strong enough to withstand a confrontation with the horrors of slavery. The powerful ending is violent and unsettling, yet also manages to be uplifting. Ages 9-12. (Oct.)

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Review #2

Children's Literature

Christopher Paul Curtis knows how to write characters so engaging and believable you want to meet them in person. In fact, after reading his books, you feel like you have. From the author of award winners, *The Watsons go to Birmingham 1963* and *Bud, not Buddy*, comes another novel with heart and meaning wrapped in rollicking humor. Readers will slip into the story as they, along with eleven-year-old Elijah, assume a life of freedom, but this is the 1850's and slavery still exists in America, alarmingly close to the freed slave community of Buxton, Canada. Helping people escape from slavery is a deadly business, hardly a task for the fragile Elijah. His claim to fame is being the nervous baby who threw up on Frederick Douglas. He is scared to death of snakes and is taken in by a colorful con-artist called the Preacher, but the kid has heart, a sense of responsibility, and a feeling of what is right and wrong. He witnesses death and learns grisly truths, including the idea that giving up a child for the sake of freedom may well be the greatest gift. Elijah's heroism is believable, growing from almost accidental, to faltering, to determined, albeit limited, saving one tiny soul rather than a whole group, which is all that can be expected of a child. Indeed, giving a child the opportunity to learn the horrors of the past but understand the hope of the future is the most we can ask of a character—and of an author.

**What alternate text(s) could also fulfill the instructional requirements?**

Title: **The Watsons Go To Birmingham**

Author: **Christopher Paul Curtis**

Title: **Bud, Not Buddy**

Author: **Christopher Paul Curtis**

Title:

Author:

Title:

Author:

Title:

Author:

Title:

Author:

**Document any potentially controversial content:**

Parents need to know that, while this isn't as graphic as some books about slavery, it has its share of horrors, including beating deaths (only the aftermath described), lynching, scars from beatings and brandings, and adults and children shackled, starved, and deprived of water.

**Keeping in mind the age, academic level, and maturity of the intended reader, what is the suggested classroom use: (check all that apply)**

Gifted/Accelerated  Regular  At Risk

**GRADE LEVEL(S):** 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

**Reading level of this title (if applicable):** Lexile 1070

**Date Submitted to Department Chair:** 2/25/13

**Suggested Professional Literary Review Sources:**

School Library Journal

Horn Book

Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books

VOYA (Voice of Youth Advocates)

Library Journal

Book Links

Publisher's Weekly

Booklist

Kirkus Review

Wilson Library Catalog

English Journal (and other resources of the National Council of Teachers of English)

The Reading Teacher (International Reading Association)

Literature for Today's Young Adults