

## Literature Circle Questions

Use these questions and the activities that follow to get more out of the experience of reading *Elijah of Buxton* by Christopher Paul Curtis.

1. What trick do Elijah and Cooter play on Ma? How does Ma teach Elijah a lesson?
2. What is Elijah's "gift from the Lord"? How does the preacher want him to use it to "help the Settlement" and why doesn't the idea work?
3. How does Mr. Leroy get the money to buy his family's freedom from slavery?
4. Buxton is an unusual place with very special customs. In your own words, describe some of the rules and rituals that come with living there.
5. MaWee comes to Buxton under unusual circumstances. Compare his first impressions of the Settlement with the Taylor family's experience upon arrival. How and why are their perceptions so different?
6. Throughout the book, Elijah worries about being "fra-gile." What does "fra-gile" mean to him? Describe some of the situations in which Elijah is "fra-gile."
7. Mr. Leroy says that eating fish is "like anything else in life. . . . If you go at it 'specting something bad to happen, all you gunn do is draw that bad thing to you. You caint be timid 'bout nothing you do, you got to go at it like you 'specting good things to come out of it" (page 77). Using details from the book, show how Mr. Leroy truly lives by this philosophy.
8. When Mr. Leroy asks Elijah whether he thinks the Preacher can be trusted, Elijah says yes—and regrets it. List the Preacher's actions in the first half of the novel and classify each as trustworthy or untrustworthy. How are your conclusions different from those Elijah reaches on page 234?
9. At the beginning of the novel, Elijah has a hard time understanding the language of "growned folks." He can't tell when they are teasing or exaggerating and doesn't always see why they act the way they do. Compare Elijah's reasoning then with his understanding at the end of the book. Explain how he changes.
10. Many of the people in *Elijah of Buxton* have physical and emotional scars from their days in slavery. Identify some of the ways slavery has left its mark on characters in the book. What do Elijah's parents explain to him about former slaves? What does he learn about slavery on his own?
11. Doomed to slavery, Mrs. Chloe gives her daughter to Elijah in hopes that the baby will grow up safe and free. Imagine that Mrs. Chloe could have written Hope

- Too-mah-ee-nee a message to read when she grows up. What would she have said? Write a letter to Hope that explains the heartbreaking decision her mother faced.
12. Elijah works hard to help Mrs. Holton write a fitting tribute to her husband to be carved above the door of her home. If you were Elijah, what would you write to honor Mr. Leroy? Compose a few sentences to memorialize him.
  13. The Preacher is known for his sweet talk and nonsense tales. If he were alive to defend himself at the end of the book, how do you think he would justify his actions? Write an argument he might use to convince the community that he did the right thing.
  14. Elijah does not think you can learn a lesson by “talking the subject near to death” (page 11). Discuss what makes a lesson “stick” for Elijah. What makes a lesson stick for you?
  15. At the end of the book, Mr. Alston disappoints Elijah when he refuses to try to rescue the family in the barn. “I do truly feel for them poor souls what’s been caught, but they gots laws here,” he says (page 324). Do you believe Mr. Alston and the other men could have done anything differently? From your point of view, do they share blame for allowing slave hunters to do their work? Why or why not?

*Note: These questions are keyed to Bloom’s Taxonomy as follows: Knowledge: 1–3; Comprehension: 4–6; Application: 7–8; Analysis: 9–10; Synthesis: 11–12; Evaluation: 13–15.*

## **Activities**

1. Turn one of your favorite scenes from *Elijah of Buxton* into a short play. Use the dialogue in the book to create a script that you can read with a few classmates. Find or make simple props and scenery to make your scene come to life. Practice reading your lines together and perform the scene for your class.
2. Create an album of illustrations that show the important people, places, and objects in the fictional Buxton. Sketch “snapshots” of characters, scenes, and images that were memorable for you and arrange them in a booklet. Compose captions that explain what each illustration shows.
3. *Elijah of Buxton* is a work of fiction, but Buxton is a real place. Use the information Christopher Paul Curtis includes in his author’s note as a starting point for some research of your own about the Elgin Settlement and Buxton Mission of Raleigh. Prepare an informational report about the history of the Settlement to present to your class.

**Other Books by This Author**

*The Watsons Go to Birmingham—1963; Bud, Not Buddy; Bucking the Sarge; Mr. Chickee's Funny Money; Mr. Chickee's Messy Mission.*

**Author Web Site:** [www.nobodybutcurtis.com](http://www.nobodybutcurtis.com)