

**CYRM Resource Book
Middle School/
Junior High Nominees
(Grades 6-8)
2010-2011**

Elijah of Buxton

by Christopher Paul Curtis

Scholastic, 2007

Cracker? The Best Dog in Vietnam

by Cynthia Kadohota

Atheneum, 2007

***Skulduggery Pleasant:
Scepter of the Ancients, Book 1***

by Derek Landy

The Bowen Press, 2007



California Young Reader Medal
Middle School/Junior High
Ballot
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- _____ *Elijah of Buxton*
- _____ *Cracker!*
- _____ *The Best Dog in Vietnam*
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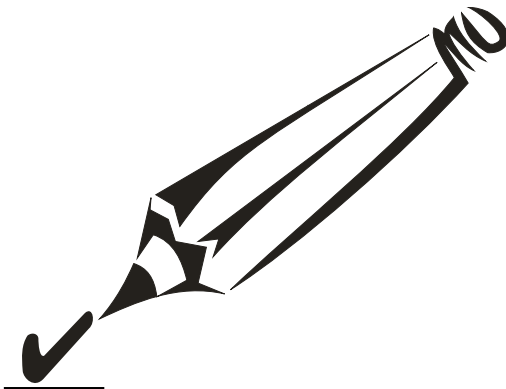


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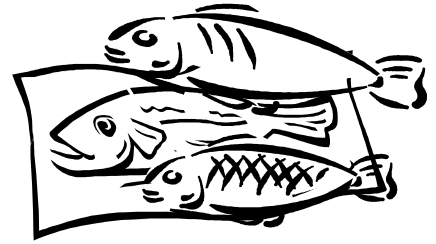
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Elijah of Buxton

by Christopher Paul Curtis



Synopsis

Elijah Freeman is a young boy coming of age in Buxton, Canada – a settlement of former slaves who have established a free society just over the border in Ontario. Through Elijah’s eyes, the reader is given a window into what life was like in the 1860’s for newly freed people struggling to build lives, educate themselves, and survive in a world where prejudice is commonplace and nothing can be taken for granted.



Hooks

- Freedom is precious. In what ways do the residents of Buxton show that they appreciate their freedom?
- What does the preacher find so upsetting about the traveling carnival?
- What does Elijah’s mother mean when she calls him fragile? Is being fragile a good thing, a bad thing, or both?
- In what ways is Elijah, who was born free, different from those who live in Buxton but were born slaves?
- Is it better to work hard and make your own decisions, or to be taken care of but live at someone else’s whim, like MaWee?
- How far would you be willing to go to help a friend?

Meet the Author—Christopher Paul Curtis



Christopher Paul Curtis was born in 1953 in Flint, Michigan. For thirteen years he worked on an assembly line in a plant manufacturing cars, and during his breaks he would write. He also worked as a maintenance man, a purchasing clerk, a customer service representative, and other jobs, while going to school part-time. In 1993, he took a year off to write his first book, *The Watsons Go to Birmingham – 1963*, while his wife, a nurse, supported the family. He wrote in the Windsor Public library, the children's area, and hand wrote the novel. His son, Steven, typed out his father's writing. Since then, Curtis has been writing books that are lauded by award-givers and enjoyed by children. *Elijah of Buxton* (New York: Scholastic Press, 2007) has been recognized as an ALA Notable Book for Children 2008, Coretta Scott King Award 2008; Newbery Honor 2008; and Scott O'Dell Award for Historical Fiction 2008, among others. When Curtis is not writing laugh-out-loud fiction, he enjoys playing basketball and collecting records.

Other notable books by Christopher Paul Curtis:

Bucking the Sarge (New York: Wendy Lamb Books, 2004) ALA Notable Book for Children 2005; ALA Ten Best Books for Young Adults 2005.

Bud, Not Buddy (New York: Delacorte Press, 1999) ALA Notable Book for Children 2000; ALA Best Book for Young Adults 2000; Coretta Scott King Award 2000; Newbery Medal 2000.

The Watsons Go to Birmingham – 1963 (New York: Delacorte, 1995) ALA Notable Books for Children 1996; Coretta Scott King Honor 1996; Jane Addams Honor Book 1996; Newbery Honor 1996.

For more information, see:

<http://www.nobodybutcurtis.com/>

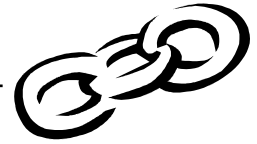
Contemporary Authors Online (Detroit: Gale, 2008).

Contemporary Authors New Revision Series, Volume 173, Gale (Detroit, MI).

Authors and Artists for Young Adults, Volume 37, Gale (Detroit, MI).

Children's Literature Review, Volume 68, Gale (Detroit, MI).

Something About the Author, Volume 93, 140, 187, Gale (Detroit, MI).



The Underground Railroad

Lassieur, Allison. *The Underground Railroad: An Interactive History Adventure*. Capstone Press, 2008.

Raven, Margot Theis. *Night Boat to Freedom*. Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2006.

Rinaldi, Ann. *The Ever-after Bird*. Harcourt, 2007.

Weatherford, Carole Boston. *Moses: When Harriet Tubman led her People to Freedom*. Jump at the Sun: 2006.

Levine, Ellen. *Henry's Freedom Box*. Scholastic, 2007.

Online Information:

www.americancivilwar.com/kids_zone/undergroundrailroad.html

www.socialstudiesforkids.com/.../undergroundrailroad.htm

www.nationalgeographic.com/railroad/kids.html

Freedom

Bryan, Ashley. *Let it Shine: Three Favorite Spirituals*. Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2007.

Cantwell, Lois F. *Freedom*. F. Watts, 1985.

Polacco, Patricia. *January's Sparrow*. Philomel Books, 2009.

Black History

www.blackhistoricalmuseum.com/history.htm

The official site of the North American Black Historical Museum which makes a connection between Canadian Black History and Black History of the United States.

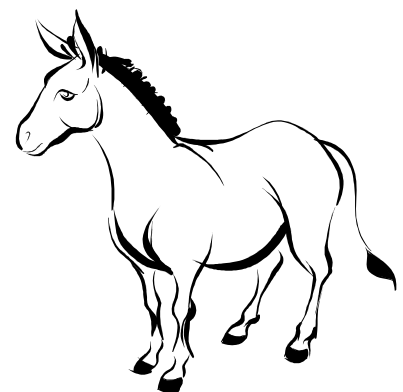
www.nps.gov/archive/frdo/freddoug.html

The official site for the Frederick Douglass National Historic Site.

Writing Prompts / Discussion Questions for *Elijah of Buxton*

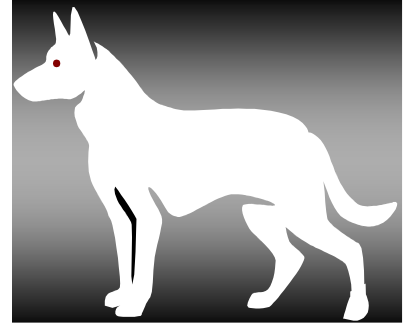


- Elijah has a reputation of being “fra-gile.” What are the characteristics of a fragile person? Does Elijah ever realize that he has outgrown his reputation?
- What is the first clue that the Reverend isn’t an honest man? Why does everyone still trust him?
- Which character contributes the most to Elijah’s growth as a person?
- Living free in Canada doesn’t guarantee the people of Buxton a safe life without prejudice. What are some challenges they face?
- How is understanding “growned-up talk” important for Elijah when he come the United States?
- Mr. Frederick Douglass talks about freedom. Why does he say the second hardest step to freedom is the first one...and the hardest step of all is the last one?
- What is the most touching part of the story?



Cracker! The Best Dog in Vietnam

by Cynthia Kadohota



Synopsis

Cracker is a German Shepherd owned by a 12-year-old boy named Willie. Willie's family is forced to move, and Willie is forced to give up Cracker. Cracker is given to the Army for training as a scout dog in Vietnam. Cracker is upset about losing her loving family, but grows to accept her situation as she develops a relationship with Rick, her handler.

Rick and Cracker are trained to work as a team, spotting dangerous booby traps and ambushes, and are eventually flown to Vietnam where they must lead units of troops through treacherous jungles, villages, and battlefields. This book tells of their tour of duty together. The reader learns about everything that makes Cracker the best dog in Vietnam.



Hooks

- Is it fair or humane to involve animals in armed conflict?
- How does Rick earn Cracker's trust? How does Cracker earn Rick's?
- Is an animal's life as valuable as a human's life?
- Why does Rick develop such intense feeling for Cracker?
- Are there any good reasons to go to war? If so, what are they?
- Are any beliefs worth dying for? What would they be?
- How far would you go to help someone you love? How far would you go to help one of your pets?

Cracker! The Best Dog in Vietnam

Meet the Author— Cynthia Kadohata



In 1956, Cynthia Kadohata was born in Chicago to Japanese-American parents. She moved a great deal as a child, living in five different states. She attended college at the University of Southern California, earning a degree in journalism. She worked earnestly on her writing, attending graduate school and submitting 25 stories to the *New Yorker* before her first was accepted. She wrote three novels for adults before writing her first book for young adults. That book, *Kira-Kira*, won the Newbery Medal in 2004. She has written six books and many short stories for the *New Yorker*, *Grand Street*, *Ploughshares*, and the *Pennsylvanian Review*. Some of her favorite authors include Lois Lowry, Hilary McKay, and Linda Sue Park. *Cracker! The Best Dog in Vietnam* (New York: Atheneum, 2007) has been recognized as a Notable Social Science Trade Book 2008.

Other notable books by Cynthia Kadohata:

Kira-Kira (New York: Atheneum, 2004) ALA Notable Book for Children 2005; Newbery Medal 2004.

Weedflower (New York: Atheneum, 2006) Jane Addams Book Award 2007; Notable Social Studies Trade Book 2007.

For more information, see:

<http://www.kira-kira.us/>

"Cynthia Kadohata." *Gale Online Encyclopedia*. Detroit: Gale, 2010. *Literature Resource Center*. Web. 8 Feb. 2010

Contemporary Authors Online (Detroit: Gale, 2009).

Contemporary Authors New Revision Series, Volume 124, Gale (Detroit, MI).

Authors and Artists for Young Adults, Volume 71, Gale (Detroit, MI).

Contemporary Literary Criticism, Volume 59, 122, Gale (Detroit, MI).

Children's Literature Review, Volume 121, Gale (Detroit, MI).

Something About the Author, Volume 155, 180, Gale (Detroit, MI).

Connections for *Cracker!* *The Best Dog in Vietnam*



Vietnam War

- Dowell, Frances O’Roark. *Shooting the Moon*. Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2008.
- Murray, Stuart. *Vietnam War*. DK Publishers, 2005.
- Myers, Walter Dean. *Fallen Angels*. Scholastic Inc., 1988.
- White, Ellen Emerson. *The Journal of Patrick Seamus Flaherty, United States Marine Corps*. Scholastic, 2002.

Online information:

- www.42explore2.com/vietnam.htm Excellent portal to Vietnam War information.
- <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/vietnam/> Provides detailed timeline and cast of Participants.

Military Dogs

- Burnham, John C. *A Soldier’s Best Friend: Scout Dogs and Their Handlers in the Vietnam War*. Carroll & Graf Publishers, 2003.
- Ruffin, Frances E. *Military Dogs*. Bearport Publishing, 2006.
- Sherlock, Patti. *Letters from Wolfie*. Viking, 2004.

Online Information:

- www.olive-drab.com > [War Dogs](#)
- www.vdha.us Vietnam Dog Handler Association.
- www.uswardogs.org

Writing Prompts / Discussion Questions

Cracker! The Best Dog in Vietnam



- Willie knows that if he doesn't find someone to adopt Cracker, he will have to give her to the pound. Is the pound worse for Cracker than going to war? Is Cracker suited as a war dog?
- Why does Rick's father agree to sign the papers for him to join the army?
- Rick's parents taught him about fairness. How does basic training teach him about politics?
- What is the toughest lesson he learns in basic training?
- In the beginning, it is doubtful that Cracker is going to make it through training. At what point, then, does Rick realize that Cracker is going to become "the best dog in Vietnam"?
- Rick sees courage and also feels it. What might he say is the most courageous act he witnessed?
- Compare and contrast Cracker's relationship with Willie and Rick.



Skulduggery Pleasant: Scepter of the Ancients, Book 1

by Derek Landy



Synopsis

Skulduggery Pleasant is a wise-cracking detective who operates within a world of magic that coexists within our own. He also happens to be a long-dead skeleton who has stuck around to save the world from evil. In this book, he teams up with a twelve-year-old girl named Stephanie who has unsuspectingly inherited a powerful magic scepter.

The scepter is an ancient weapon that belongs to The Ancients, magical beings who existed at the beginning of time. The scepter was used to banish a group of evil beings called The Faceless Ones. In this novel, The Faceless Ones have re-emerged and are seeking the scepter. It is up to Skulduggery and Stephanie to foil their plans.

Hooks

- Do you believe magic exists?
- Is it OK to lie to your family if you're doing so for a good reason?
- What are the qualities that Stephanie has that make her an ideal partner for Skulduggery? What qualities should a hero possess? Is Skulduggery a good hero?
- Stephanie fools her parents by creating a "double" of herself to stand in for her while she sneaks around with Skulduggery. If someone were to offer this option to you, would it be easy to fool your family? Would you try it?
- If you were to make a will, would there be anything special that you would leave to anyone in particular?
- Would you be willing to embark on an adventure, even if it meant risking your life?

Skulduggery Pleasant: Scepter of the Ancients, Book 1

Meet the Author—Derek Landy



Born in 1973, Irish writer Derek Landy grew up on a farm pulling cauliflower and celery. As an adult he lives near Dublin, Ireland, but not too far from his parents' farm. Landy always wanted to write. As a child, he loved class assignments that called for writing stories. A fan of horror and fantasy movies, Landy became a screenwriter; he didn't expect to write a novel for young people. The character's name popped in his head and the book followed quickly. When not writing humorous, fantasy detective fiction, Landy collects comics. He is also a black belt in Kenpo Karate, which he taught to children for ten years. *Skulduggery Pleasant* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007) has been recognized as an ALA Best Book for Young Adults 2008 and an ALA Ten Best Books for Young Adults 2008. The first novel has spawned a series, with the first book renamed to *Scepter of the Ancients* to distinguish it from the later books, followed by *Playing with Fire* (2008), and *The Faceless Ones* (2009). The fourth book, *Dark Days*, was released April 1, 2010. He plans for the series to run nine books. The movie rights for *Skulduggery Pleasant: Playing with Fire* have been purchased by Warner Brothers, for a possible release in 2011.

For more information, see:

<http://www.skulduggerypleasant.com/us/>

[http://www.harpercollins.com/author/authorExtra.aspx?
authorID=31880&isbn13=9780061231155&displayType=bookinterview.](http://www.harpercollins.com/author/authorExtra.aspx?authorID=31880&isbn13=9780061231155&displayType=bookinterview)

Connections for *Skulduggery Pleasant: Scepter of the Ancients, Book 1*



The Series:

Landy, Derek. *Skulduggery Pleasant: Scepter of the Ancients*. HarperCollins, 2007.
Landy, Derek. *Skulduggery Pleasant: Playing with Fire*. HarperCollins, 2008.
Landy, Derek. *Skulduggery Pleasant: The Faceless Ones*. HarperCollins, 2009.

Additional Fantastical Reading:

DuPrau, Jeanne. *City of Ember*. Yearling, 2008.
Gaiman, Neil. *The Graveyard Book*. HarperCollins, 2008.
Nimmo, Jenny. *Midnight for Charlie Bone*. Orchard Books, 2002.
Prineas, Sarah. *The Magic Thief*. Harper Trophy, 2009.
Riordan, Rick. *Lightning Thief*. Miramax Books/Hyperion Books for Children, 2005.

All things Skulduggery Pleasant:

www.skulduggerypleasant.com



Writing Prompts / Discussion Questions for *Skulduggery Pleasant: Scepter of the Ancients, Book 1*



- Taking a name is a very important point in the story. A main character takes on the name Skulduggery which means “crafty deception or trickery or an instance of it.” What name would you take for yourself? Explain.
- Of the elemental powers, rank them in the order of most useful to least useful.
- If you had to live as a walking skeleton, what elements of your daily life would be drastically different? Think about such factors as senses, food, clothing, travel and daily interactions.
- Would you be an Elemental or an Adept? Explain.
- What name does Stephanie take? What does it mean? Does it fit?
- If there are 2 main characters, namely Skulduggery and Stephanie, who would you say is the most important secondary character? Why?
- What is the cruelest part of Skulduggery Pleasant? What is the most hopeful part of Skulduggery Pleasant?
- What part of the story would you change, if you were the author?
- Like many books, Skulduggery Pleasant may become a movie. If you were in charge of casting the movie, which actors would you cast?