

Week 21

Elijah of Buxton

by Christopher Paul Curtis

Unit 1



Week 21

Student Checklist

This week you will read nonfiction articles on the town of Buxton, Canada and chapters 1-5 of *Elijah of Buxton*:

- Read nonfiction articles on the town of Buxton, Canada
 - Answer comprehension questions, workbook pages 49-50 and 54
- Chapters 1-3 (“Snakes and Ma” – “Fish Head Chunking”)
 - Answer comprehension questions, workbook pages 59-60
- Chapters 4-5 (“Kidnappers and Slavers!” and “Sharing the Fish”)
 - Answer comprehension questions, workbook page 64

Complete lessons on:

- Hyphens and dashes
- Parentheses and Brackets
- Setting
- Close reading of *Elijah of Buxton*: Setting

Daily writing exercises:

- Summary of a nonfiction article
- Summary of a nonfiction article
- Acrostic poem
- Table of uses of setting in chapters 1-5 of *Elijah of Buxton*

Do extra activities (optional)

- _____
- _____

Reading

Read articles on Buxton as assigned by your teacher.



Questions

1. In what Canadian province is Buxton located?

2. For what group of people was Buxton established?

3. Buxton was one of the last stops on the _____.

4. Was slavery abolished in the British Empire (which included Canada) before or after it was abolished in the United States?

5. What was the initial response of the White settlers in the region to the establishment of Buxton and why?

6. During the 19th century, Buxton had three schools. The education in these schools was considered:
 - A. inferior
 - B. mediocre
 - C. standard
 - D. superior

7. Buxton has a huge bell that was rung at the beginning and end of each day and during emergencies. But for what other important reason was the bell rung?

[continued]

8. Buxton’s residents built their own homes, but there were several requirements they had to follow. Name two of them.

9. About how many people currently live in Buxton? _____.

Lesson: Hyphens and Dashes

Hyphens and dashes are punctuation marks that look similar but have different uses. Hyphens are both simpler and more complicated than dashes, so we’ll look at them first. Although there are many rules for hyphens (hence the complicated part) I’m going to stick with the most common usages.



Hyphens

You may recall learning about an earlier use of the hyphen – the compound adjective. To review the major points, if you have multiple adjectives (but not adverbs) in front of a noun that join together to modify the noun, you join them with hyphens:

Addie is a second-year student whose brother is a world-class gymnast, and they are extremely close siblings.

This gives us a clue as to the basic purpose of the hyphen: to join things. You can think of hyphens as helping words to hold hands. It brings them closer together while not quite making them into a new word. (Although over time, sometimes that happens. For example, centuries ago, you would have written “to morrow” – two words to express the next day. By the 19th century, this changed to the hyphenated “to-morrow” – and indeed, in the stories I edited for *The Rainy Day Reader*, I often had to change that spelling to our current “tomorrow” for simplicity’s sake.)

As with yesterday’s *to-morrow*, we currently have words that are in a hyphenated phase of development. While grandfather and grandmother don’t need hyphens, if you start going further back than that, you’ll need to hyphenate all the “greats” (great-great-grandmother). The other family members who get hyphens are in-laws (mother-in-law, son-in-law). Other family members who you might think would be hyphenated (stepbrother, foster daughter, godmother, half sister) are not. Sometimes they are one unhyphenated word, sometimes two.

A lot of our numbers are hyphenated (twenty-four; seventy-six). Many fractions are too (one-third, three-fourths).

Words that start with the prefixes self-, all- and ex- (when it means *former* as opposed to *out*) are hyphenated (self-aware, all-powerful, ex-husband,). (Be careful not to hyphenate words with *self* as a root such as *selfish*.) But most prefixed words aren't, unless you need a hyphen to avoid confusion:

Please resign this paper/Please re-sign this paper.

Are you going to recover the furniture?/Are you going to re-cover the furniture?

He erased all the answers in order to resolve the puzzle/He erased all the answers in order to re-solve the puzzle.



Here you can see that you need the hyphen so the words clearly mean sign again (rather than to quit something), cover again (rather than get something back), and solve again (rather than settle a dispute). Sometimes you will also use a hyphen to make the word clear. If you learn something again, you re-educate yourself because to reeducate yourself looks like you're learning about marsh grasses or wind instruments.

You also need a hyphen when you stick a prefix on a proper noun or a proper adjective:

We'll hold the meeting in mid-August.

Those actions were un-American.

In addition to words, we also use hyphens to show number ranges such as page numbers or time:

Class is scheduled for 2:00-2:55; please read pages 2-62.

Dashes

Instead of joining words, dashes are used in sentences to set words or phrases apart from the rest of the sentence. But before going into the dash's function, let's take a look at appearance.

The hyphen is one short line with no spaces around it:

World-class 9:00-5:00 pre-eminent

The dash is a longer line, about twice as long as a hyphen. It can also have no spaces around it, or it can have a space on either side. If you do this in a word-processing program, the program will automatically make the line longer:

The dash can be surrounded – like this – by a space on each side.

Here, all I did was type one line, like I would for a hyphen, but the spaces on either side told the program to lengthen the line. If your program doesn't do this—or if you're using a typewriter—you can type two hyphens together without the spaces, as I've done here.

Now let's talk about when you would use dashes. What is their function? Generally speaking, if you can easily use commas in the sentence, don't replace them with dashes:

We went to the store, which is all the way across town, in the afternoon.

There's no reason to replace those commas with dashes. But just as semicolons can sometimes help with comma clutter, so can dashes. Compare:

Then finally, after we went to the store, which is all the way across town, the new television was delivered, and we couldn't get back in time to receive it.

Then finally, after we went to the store – which is all the way across town – the new television was delivered, and we couldn't get back in time to receive it.

Here you can see that this is easier on the eye. I've popped out the phrase telling how far the store was, emphasizing the reason we couldn't get home in time. Dashes are often used to emphasize pieces of sentences. Whereas commas are used more for pauses and to separate phases, dashes push a phrase forward, making it more important.

Dashes can sometimes replace colons. They cannot replace them to introduce a long list or quote (that is offset from the main body of the text). Nor can they replace them in a business letter. But they can replace them when introducing an item or a short list. Here it's more a question of formality. Colons are somewhat more formal than dashes:

Layla had one purpose: making sure that Max and Ruby won the competition.

Layla had one purpose – making sure that Max and Ruby won the competition.

Either of these is fine. But the dash can offset some things the colon can't. For example, as we saw above, it can emphasize an idea in the middle of a sentence:

Layla had one purpose – making sure that Max and Ruby won the competition – but her single-mindedness was alienating everyone around her.

A dash can follow a phrase or dependent clause, while the colon needs to follow an independent clause:

Making sure Max and Ruby won the competition – that was Layla's one purpose.



Like colons, dashes are used to emphasize portions of sentences. But dashes are a bit more informal and flexible than colons. Generally speaking, you should tend towards colons in more formal papers like research papers and dashes in more informal papers like fiction and personal essays. This is not a hard and fast rule though, and you may find reason to use both types of punctuation in all types of papers.

Summary

- Use hyphens for compound adjectives, some prefixes, and certain words like some fractions and numbers.

- Use hyphens for spans of time and page numbers.
- A hyphen is a short line with no spaces on either side.
- A dash is a longer line that may have no space or one space on either side.
- Dashes are used to emphasize portions of sentences.
- Dashes can sometimes take the place of a colon, but they are less common.

Insert hyphens where necessary.

Example: Teddy and his ex-wife will be at the wedding.



1. Kimiko painted an incredibly beautiful, three meter mural.
2. Mackenzie might recover her strength if she would stop spending so much time recovering the dining room chairs.
3. Sumner, the exmayor of Penshaw, felt that revitalizing the downtown was all important.
4. Jacob added one third cup of sugar to the twenty two pints of lemon juice.
5. The movie is scheduled for 8:00 9:45.
6. The dinner party consisted of Natalie’s great grandfather, motherinlaw, stepsister, and half brother.
7. Jackson said he would rather resign from his job than resign the purchase order.
8. George’s book group will be meeting in mid July and discussing pages 83 109.

Write two sentences that correctly use dashes. At least one of these sentences must use two dashes to set off a phrase in the middle of the sentence.

Reading

Read articles on Buxton as assigned by your teacher.



Questions

1. On the blackboard at the front of the classroom, what is the first rule for students?

2. On the blackboard at the front of the classroom, what is the fifth rule for teachers?

3. What constellations or star did enslaved people follow towards freedom?

4. When enslaved people were escaping using the Underground Railroad, who were they talking about when they referred to Moses?

5. What was the name of the reverend who founded Buxton?

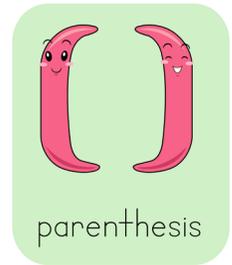
6. What was the name of Buxton's first settler?

7. Why was a nearby White school closed in the 1850s and the children sent to the schools in Buxton?

Lesson: Parentheses and Brackets

Parentheses

Like dashes, parentheses also separate out a section of a sentence, but they do it in an almost opposite way. Dashes emphasize an idea, but parentheses let us know the idea is less important than the rest of the sentence, or it may even be a digression. Let's look again at one of our dash sentences:



Then finally, after we went to the store – which is all the way across town – the new television was delivered, and we couldn't get back in time to receive it.

In this sentence, it makes sense to emphasize how far away the store was because we're communicating that we couldn't get back in time to receive the television. Suppose we wanted to write this sentence, but without comma clutter:

Then finally, after we went to the store, which is Maggie's favorite, the new television was delivered, and we couldn't get back in time to receive it.

The fact that it's Maggie's favorite isn't important to the main point of this sentence, so here we can use parentheses to help us:

Then finally, after we went to the store (which is Maggie's favorite), the new television was delivered, and we couldn't get back in time to receive it.

Here are a couple of mistakes to avoid with parentheses. First, when considering the grammar of the rest of the sentence, you have to pretend the parenthetical (the part in parentheses) isn't there:

- | | |
|---|--------------|
| Jeremy is going to the beach. | RIGHT |
| Jeremy and his dog are going to the beach. | RIGHT |
| Jeremy (and his dog) are going to the beach. | WRONG |
| Jeremy (and his dog) is going to the beach. | RIGHT |

If that last sentence feels weird to you, I don't blame you. In a case like this, it's best to rewrite the sentence without the parentheses. You could stick with the second sentence, or you could switch to, "Jeremy is taking his dog to the beach."

Another tricky part of parentheses is whether the final punctuation is inside or outside the parentheses. If an entire sentence is inside parentheses and is not part of another sentence, the final punctuation goes inside:

Stan started snoring. (He sounded rather like a horse.) Twyla smiled.

But if the parenthetical is part of a larger sentence, you don't put a period inside it:

Stan started snoring (rather like a horse). Twyla smiled.

If a comma would normally fall by a parenthetical, it immediately follows it. Compare these sentences:

Stan started snoring, and Twyla smiled.

Stan started snoring (rather like a horse), and Twyla smiled.

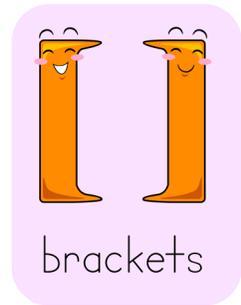
I don't think you have to be as sparing in using parentheses as you should be with colons and semicolons. But ask yourself if you need that parenthetical. Since parentheses indicate something less important or a digression, you may be able to eliminate it, or it might be better elsewhere in the paper. But often you will want it right where it is, and that's fine.

Brackets

There are different types of brackets, but I'm only going to talk about square brackets, which look like this: [].

The easiest rule about square brackets is that you use them in parentheses if you need another set of parentheses:

Maria asked Amelia (Rollie's cousin [who Maria had never met] to help her move.



The remaining uses of square brackets all involve quotes. Sometimes you quote from print or from what someone says, but you either need to explain something or you don't want to quote it exactly. Examples will help.

When I asked Carmella, she said, "The City [San Francisco] is my favorite place on earth!"

In this case, the exact quote from Carmella was "The City is my favorite place on earth!" But if I have not yet given the reader enough context to know what city she is talking about, I can use square brackets to explain it.

Similar to this, it's not uncommon to quote a sentence from print that uses a pronoun whose antecedent is in an earlier sentence that you aren't quoting:

"It [studying a foreign language] takes a lot of effort and persistence, but in the end the rewards are great."

As with the previous example, the part in brackets is not part of the original quote, but explains what the pronoun is referring to. And while we're on foreign languages, another reason for square brackets is translation:

Moshe's Aunt Rivka always used to say, "A mensch tracht, un Got lacht [Man plans and God laughs]."

This way we get the flavor of the original (notice the rhyme lost in translation) but all the non-Yiddish speakers also understand, which seems at least as important. (Of course, we

would only do this if Aunt Rivka actually said it in Yiddish.)

Sometimes you need to change a quote a bit for grammatical or style purposes. But you still need to show that you're changing it. Suppose you interviewed Cora for a paper, and got this quote:

“My sister Lynn and I are best friends.”

For whatever reason, you want to quote it like this in the paper:

Cora is often saying that “[her] sister Lynn and [she] are best friends.”

Here, the writer has made the decision to change it from first to third person. You can do these sorts of changes, but you need to make your changes clear by putting them in square brackets.



The last use of square brackets is when the original quote is wrong in some way, and you want to make it clear that the mistake is part of the original material, not a mistake you made:

When I asked Lilly why she kept her winnings rather than trying for more, she replied, “A bird in the hand is worth two in the brush [sic].”

The actual saying is “A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush,” but by putting [sic] after *brush*, you let the reader know that this isn't a typo – this is what Lilly (who is a bit confused about this saying) said. The word *sic* is Latin for “thus” or “so.” We use it in a quote, from speech or text, any time there is a word or phrase we think is mistaken.

Summary

- Use parentheses to set off parts of sentences that are less important, including digressions.
- If an entire sentence is inside parentheses, the final punctuation goes inside.
- When you write a parenthetical, ask yourself if you really need it.
- When you have a parenthetical inside parentheses, use square brackets for the inner one.
- Square brackets are also used to explain parts of quotes, to translate foreign words and phrases, and for *sic*.

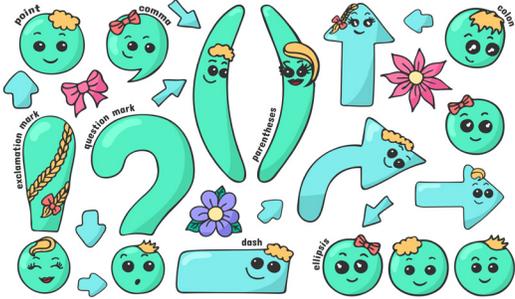
Week 21 - Day 2

Write a sentence using parentheses where the final punctuation (e.g., period, question mark, etc.) is inside the parentheses.

Write a sentence using parentheses where the final punctuation (e.g., period, question mark, etc.) is outside the parentheses.

Write a sentence using square brackets inside parentheses.

Write a sentence using square brackets inside a quote. It can use any of the rules taught in this lesson. Feel free to invent the quote.



Reading

Read chapters 1-3 (“Snakes and Ma” – “Fish Head Chunking”) of *Elijah of Buxton*.

Questions

1. Elijah goes with Cooter to his home and sees the mysterious tracks in the “truck patch.” Going by context and description, what is a truck patch?
 - A. vegetable garden
 - B. place to park vehicles
 - C. place to raise animals
 - D. flower bed

2. According to the Preacher, what is making the mysterious tracks?

3. What type of animal is Elijah afraid of? What animal is his mother afraid of?

4. Who does Elijah’s mother want him to stop associating with?

5. How does Elijah’s mother repay him for hiding the toad in her sewing basket?



6. What happened when Frederick Douglass came to Buxton that haunts Elijah for years afterwards?

7. What is Elijah’s favorite chore in the stables?

[continued]

8. What can Elijah do that the Preacher claims is a gift from Jesus? What do Elijah's parents think about this?

9. Why does the Preacher live outside the Buxton settlement?

Lesson: Setting

Setting is where and when a story takes place. Stories can have multiple settings, a few, or only one. Sometimes where a story takes place is more important; other times we notice more when it takes place. Sometimes, as in the case of the story you're about to read, the combination of when and where is crucial.



With *Elijah of Buxton* (much like with *Alice in Wonderland*), we have a clue right from the beginning that setting is important because it is mentioned in the title. Where is Buxton, and why is it so important to Elijah's character? We've read two stories so far where the title is only a setting: "The Lumber Room" and "The Shed Chamber." Although we're about to read *Elijah of Buxton*, let's take a moment to look at setting in those two stories.

The when of "The Lumber Room" is unimportant. In fact, with some minor changes, this story could take place at nearly any time. But as we've discussed before, the lumber room itself is vital. This is a setting filled with delights and mysteries for Nicholas to explore. When outside the room, Nicholas's energy is spent in conflict with his aunt (and we suppose others as well). But inside the room, Nicholas is a curious, imaginative, creative child. Nicholas is a changed boy, depending on his setting.

"The Shed Chamber" is different, although it's also about change. Again, it's not so important when this story takes place (though it is more grounded in time than "The Lumber Room"). Nora is not in conflict with people outside the shed chamber – quite the opposite in fact, as she is busily engaged in helping the family. But the shed chamber is her scene of conflict. The happenings there test her bravery, fortitude, and devotion. And she proves herself. In both stories, the main characters become more themselves through the events in the title settings, but in different ways.

We can divide settings into three types: realistic, fantastical, and historical. The lumber

room and the shed chamber are realistic settings. This is also true of the settings in “The Snake,” “A New England Nun,” and “The Revolt of ‘Mother’.” In some of these stories, the setting is more important than others. I would argue that the setting in “The Snake,” is less important than the other two. We have a rough idea of the setting, but it doesn’t strongly impact the battle between the man and the snake. We’ve already explored how Louisa’s house informs her character. And in “The Revolt of ‘Mother’” setting is the reason for the central conflict of the story.

The Hobbit and *Alice in Wonderland* are famous examples of fantastical settings. Tolkien in particular took great care in describing his settings. Carroll’s *Wonderland* is much more sparsely described. He seems to have been more interested in creating odd characters to populate his world. There is nothing else like the Cheshire Cat or the Mad Hatter or the Queen of Hearts in literature. They are unique fantastical beings. Tolkien, on the other hand, largely stuck with creatures drawn from existing fantasy like elves and dwarves or real animals like spiders. (Hobbits are a notable exception.)



A setting moves from the realistic to the historical when you choose a specific time and place in the past and that setting is important to your story. You’ve already read an example of this in *Prairie Lotus*. That setting was crucial to Park because she wanted to explore the problems of bigotry in that time and place. As you’ve seen from this week’s reading, Buxton is also a real place. In that sense, *Elijah of Buxton* is historical fiction, even though none of the characters is historical. But this story is more than setting fictional characters in a real place like novels that are set in New York or Chicago or Miami. Curtis brings in many of the unique historical properties of Buxton as central to his plot.

When analyzing any novel or short story, first identify the setting(s), then ask yourself what role the setting plays. Is the setting (and this can be time, place, or both) crucial to the plot? Does the setting develop the central character? How are other characters impacted by the setting – or how do they impact it? Is the setting symbolic in any way? Is it a source of conflict? Does the setting emphasize a theme?

It’s also worth noticing how well the author creates the setting. When you’re reading, do you feel you’re in that time and place? Can you see, hear, smell, taste, and touch things almost the way the characters do? Do you feel transported? The answers to these questions depend on the author’s skill, style, and focus. If the author isn’t giving you a lot of details about setting, but you still enjoy the book, why might this be? In other words, if you can eliminate poor writing as a cause, why might the author choose to not emphasize setting? What might they be emphasizing instead?

When you write a story, consider these same questions. How important is your setting to your story? What about the setting is important? Give your characters a place to be at home or a place to explore or a place to fear (it all depends on your story). We don’t just see our settings – we also hear, smell, touch, and sometimes even taste them. Remember to also give details that show the reader where they are in time (especially if they’re at a time that isn’t the present).

Setting can also be important in nonfiction. If you're telling a true story, you need to let your reader know where and when it took place. Often we learn a lot about other times and places from reading well-written nonfiction, and a good nonfiction writer will always take time to establish any important setting.

When writing fiction or nonfiction, the more you can pull your reader into the story, the more interesting it will be. When reading, notice a story's setting. Try to answer why you think the author chose that setting. Notice what about the setting they emphasize. Notice what words the author uses to help you experience the setting fully.

Summary

- Setting is the time and place of a story.
- Settings can be divided into fantastical, realistic, and historical.
- Settings can play various roles in literature, including forwarding the plot, aiding in character development, setting a tone or mood, emphasizing a theme, or acting symbolically.
- When creating your own setting, give readers details they'll need to experience the setting well, including the time period (if appropriate).



Reading

Read chapters 4 and 5 (“Kidnappers and Slavers!” and “Sharing the Fish”) of *Elijah of Buxton*.



Questions

1. Why are the children sent home from school early?

2. What is the one thing the Preacher doesn't talk much about?

3. Why does Mrs. Brown always wear black?

4. Why is Mr. Leroy always looking for more paid work?

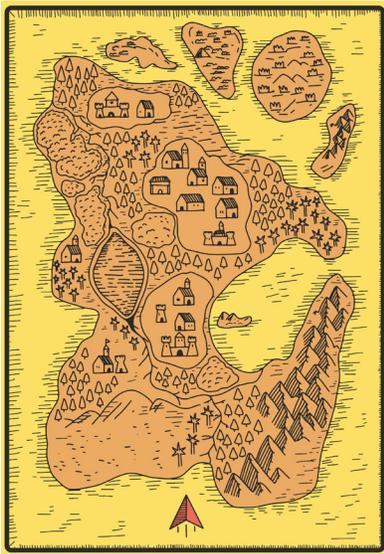
5. Why does Mrs. Holton have to hire Mr. Leroy to clear her land and build her house?

Lesson: Close Reading of *Elijah of Buxton*: Setting

Over the next two weeks, you will write a literary analysis of *Elijah of Buxton* focusing on setting. This is your second literary analysis this year – the first was your comparison/contrast paper on the main characters in “A New England Nun” and “The Revolt of ‘Mother’.” Although this paper is on one book, I’m still using the term “literary analysis” rather than “book report,” but don’t let that worry you. It’s a slightly more intimidating term, and I use it because often book reports are summaries of books, and I don’t want you summarizing. Simply listing the various settings in *Elijah of Buxton* would not be an

interesting paper. Instead, you will apply some analytical skills.

As I did with the previous analysis, I'm going to help guide you in today's lesson and in some lessons next week. With the previous paper you analyzed two characters – their personalities, their qualities, how the writers developed them, how they interacted with other characters – then compared them. In this paper, you're going to look at how setting interacts with and impacts other elements of a story: plot, characters, theme, mood, etc. Because the historical nature of this setting is crucial to the story, you are going to look at that as well. Here are some questions to consider:



- How does the setting encourage characters to act in certain ways?
- How does the setting restrict characters' actions or outlook?
- How does the setting support character development?
- Do characters act differently in different settings? Why?
- What are the significant differences between settings?
- How is the time period significant?
- What specific historical facts does Curtis use? Why?
- Does the setting contribute to conflict? How?
- How are elements of the setting used in important plot points?
- How does the author use setting to underscore important themes (messages)?
- In what ways does setting contribute to the mood?

Today I'm going to walk you through the first five chapters, answering some of these questions, and show you how you can start organizing this information into workable notes for your paper.

Chapters 1-5

Here is how I prefer to approach a literary analysis. I would do the daily reading the first time straight through, just as if I were reading any book. When I first read a book, I don't like part of my mind trying to analyze it. I want to get lost in the story, so I allow myself to do that. When I am ready to work on my composition, then I would go back to the chapters and pull the relevant information.

The first scene in the book concerns the Preacher terrifying Elijah and his friend Cooter with his story of hoop snakes. This scene serves a few functions. It's enjoyable and funny, so it makes the reader want to continue. It develops key elements of three characters, two of which (Elijah and the Preacher) will be central to the book. We learn that the Preacher

can tell a tall tale convincingly, and Elijah is what his mother refers to as “frag-ile.” Since we know that any writer worth reading (as Christopher Paul Curtis most certainly is) gives a lot of thought to the opening of their story, and since we know setting will be important to this story because it’s in the title, it’s worth thinking deeply about how Curtis is using setting here.

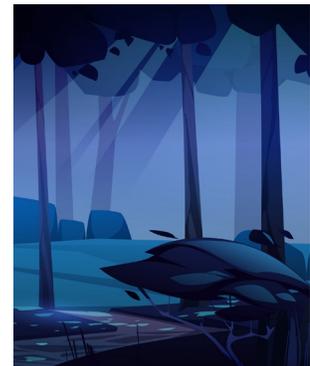
The story starts outside. We’re in Buxton of course, but we don’t know much about it yet. We do know there are houses with fences and vegetable gardens. One of the vegetable gardens has an odd set of tracks in it. This is our setting. Then the Preacher interprets this setting for the boys with his story about hoop snakes. The hoop snakes become part of the setting, even though they’re not real. But they’re real in the boys’ minds. Suddenly the setting becomes dangerous, and the boys scream and run to their houses. Both boys run from (what they perceive as) a dangerous setting to a safe one – their homes.

Now let’s step back to the overall setting of this book. Buxton is a town created (historically as well as in this story) specifically as a refuge for formerly enslaved people. People escape to Buxton, either via the Underground Railroad or on their own, from slavery in America to freedom in Canada. They go from a dangerous setting to a safe one. A reader might not know that the first time they pick up this book, but it doesn’t matter. Curtis has created a funny scene with a deeper, serious purpose: it mirrors a theme in the book of moving from a dangerous place to a safe one.

While Buxton is a safe home, outside of Buxton is not necessarily safe. When the Preacher leads Elijah off into the woods to compare the Preacher’s shooting and Elijah’s stone-throwing, Elijah tells us, “it was where me and Cooter’d been warned not to go, off toward the way where some of the white people that didn’t like us lived.” To drive home the point, Elijah’s father had told him it was full of bears, bats, and snakes. Like with the hoop snakes, animals are symbolic of the dangers in the world. Again, there are safe settings and settings that aren’t safe. Except this one truly isn’t safe – it’s not invented snakes in the boys’ minds.

But animals in the settings aren’t always bad news. When Elijah is fishing using stones, this setting helps develop his character. It shows us what he excels at. It also shows us how thoughtful and observant he is. Elijah doesn’t randomly hurl stones at the fish, hoping to hit a few. He has a careful plan, and he understands what will lure the fish in and what will scare them away.

Some settings in this story hold secrets. The Preacher says he found his “mystery pistol” out in the same woods Elijah has been warned against. Something happened out there that gave him that mystery pistol, but no one knows what. Another secret in the woods is the patch of earth that Mrs. Brown brushes at in the middle of the night. Is her child buried there? Buxton has a cemetery, so that seems unlikely. It must be related to her dead child somehow, but it’s another mystery the woods keeps to itself. These mysteries make the woodland setting ominous, another way Curtis draws a sharp distinction between Buxton proper and the land surrounding it.



Historically, Buxton had certain rules about people’s houses. They had to sit back from the road a certain distance, have a fence and a garden, be a certain size, etc. Curtis brings this history into his story. But as Elijah points out, once inside a house, they looked very different depending on the people who lived there. He describes his house and that of the Browns’. This is another example of setting as character development. Notice more instances of it as you read further.

Organizing Information

I’ve thrown a lot of information at you about setting in the first five chapters of *Elijah of Buxton* (and there’s more you can find in these chapters on your own). As you continue reading, you will find more information about the setting and how it relates to other elements. You need to organize this information as you find it, so it will be easier to access when you begin your paper.

There is no one right way to do this. I tend to prefer simple charts:

P#	Summary	Setting	What it affects	How it affects
2-9	hoop snakes	outside	characters	fear
2-9	hoop snakes	home	characters	safe place

Insight: The Preacher tells the boys the tracks are from hoop snakes, terrifying them and sending them home. This story of fleeing to safety echoes the fleeing to safety from America to Buxton.

43-46	fishing	secret lake	character	develops Elijah
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Insight: Elijah has a rare talent that he has developed into a useful skill – chucking rocks with deadly accuracy and speed. The way he interacts with the setting also shows us he is thoughtful and observant.



These are a couple of examples from my discussion, above. The page numbers are so you can refer back to the text later for details, and possibly to quote from the book in your paper. Remember that when you write the paper you will need to support yourself from the book. The summary is so you’ll know which scene it’s from. Setting tells us the setting, because as you take notes you may want to group your information later by setting. “What it affects” would be limited to aspects like character, plot, etc. and “How it affects” tells how the setting affects the “what.” As with setting, I might want to group information by these last columns later, depending on what I find in my reading.

After all the entries on one scene, I would write a short paragraph on my insights about that scene – my analysis. This will be the meat of your paper (along with supporting details from the story).

This is how I would do it. You may find another way you like better. It’s important to include

enough information that you can understand the notes with a brief glance and that you can find the scenes again in the book. If you prefer to do that in a different way, please do. Play around with it and see what works best for you.

Summary

- A literary analysis is an examination of some aspect of literature. Some book reports are also a literary analysis, but not all book reports are literary analyses, and not all literary analyses are book reports.
- One type of literary analysis is to examine how one aspect of a story (in this case, setting) interacts with other aspects of a story (for example, characters, mood, and theme).
- First, read the book or chapters straight through, as you would any book. Then go back and examine each scene thoughtfully.
- When you identify a scene you think will be important for your paper, try to identify the function of that scene in the story as a whole (at least, as much as you know of the story).
- Find a way to organize your information as you go along. I use a chart with headers, but you should use what works best for you.
- However you organize your information, it is important to keep track of page numbers so you can easily find the scenes in the book for providing support later in your paper.

