

NEWBERY MEDAL WINNER

**CHRISTOPHER PAUL CURTIS**



Includes AFTER WORDS™ bonus features

**ELIJAH**  
OF BUXTON

 SCHOLASTIC

→ CHAPTER I ←

## Snakes and Ma

It was Sunday after church and all my chores were done. I was sitting on the stoop of our home trying to think what to do. It was that time of day when the birds were getting ready to be quiet and the toady-frogs were starting to get louder with that chirpity sound they make most the night. I wondered if it would be worth it to go fishing for a hour afore it got dark. I got that question answered when Cooter came walking up the road waving at me.

“Evening, Eli.”

“Evening, Cooter.”

“What you doing, Eli?”

“I was thinking ’bout getting Old Flapjack and going fishing. You wanna come?”

“Uh-uh. I got something that’s more interesting than watching you fish, I got a mystery.”

This might not be so good. I ain’t trying to be disrespectful ’bout my best friend, but there’re lots of things that Cooter sees as being mysterious that most

folks understand real easy. I asked him anyway, "What's the mystery?"

"I was cutting through M'deah's truck patch and seen some tracks that I ain't never seen afore."

"What kind of tracks? Were they big?"

"Uh-uh, they's long and wiggly. I followed 'em but they disappeared in the grass."

Cooter's pretty good at tracking so maybe this *was* a mystery after all.

"Let's go."

We got to Cooter's home, opened the gate, and went 'round back to his mother's truck patch. Cooter was right!

There 'mongst the rows of his ma's beets and corn and green peas were some of the strangest markings I'd ever seen.

I studied 'em real close. They were long and skinny and in six wiggling lines. Two of 'em were a good bit thicker than the rest. They started on one side of Cooter's ma's truck patch, went clean through her vegetables, then disappeared in the grass.

I got on my hands and knees to really give 'em the eye then told Cooter, "You got me. I ain't never seen such tracks nowhere. Let's ask my pa once he comes out the field."

But afore we had the chance to ask Pa, the Preacher

came walking down the road in front of Cooter's. He ain't atall like a common preacher that's got a church or nothing, but he tells anyone that will listen that he's the Right Reverend Deacon Doctor Zephariah Connerly the Third, and that he's the most educated, smartest man anywhere 'round. 'Stead of saying all those names, me and Cooter just call him the Preacher.

He leaned on Cooter's fence and called, "Evening, boys."

"Evening, sir."

"Hot one today, why aren't you two off swimming?"

Cooter said, "We trying to solve us a mystery, sir."

"Really? And what would that be?"

I told him, "It's some kind of animal tracks we ain't never seen afore, sir."

"Where are they?"

The Preacher opened the gate, walked into the truck patch, squatted down, and peered at the tracks just as sharp as I'd done. He took a jackknife out of his pocket and dug a little scoop of dirt out of one of the tracks. He looked at it so close that his eyes started to go crossed.

I quit breathing and my blood ran cold when all the sudden he shouted, "Lord, have mercy!"

The Preacher quick stood up and looked all 'round him the way you would if someone screamed out, "Wolf!"

Me and Cooter looked too. Who wouldn't've?

**E**leven-year-old Elijah lives in Buxton, Canada, a settlement of runaway slaves near the American border. Elijah's the first child in town to be born free, and he ought to be famous just for that—not to mention for being the best at chunking rocks and catching fish. Unfortunately, all that most people see is a “fra-gile” boy who's scared of snakes and tends to talk too much. But everything 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. Now it's up to Elijah to track down the thief—and his dangerous journey just might make a hero out of him, if only he can find the courage to get back home.

A NEWBERY HONOR BOOK

WINNER OF THE CORETTA SCOTT  
KING AWARD

WINNER OF THE SCOTT O'DELL AWARD  
FOR HISTORICAL FICTION

WINNER, CANADIAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION  
BOOK OF THE YEAR

FINALIST, GOVERNOR GENERAL'S  
LITERARY AWARD

AN AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION  
NOTABLE BOOK

Includes AFTER WORDS™  
bonus interview, information, and interactivity inside