

# The Madman of Piney Woods



By

Christopher Paul Curtis

A Novel Study  
by Nat Reed

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**About the author:** Nat Reed was a member of the teaching profession for more than 35 years. He was a full-time instructor at Trent University in the Teacher Education Program for nine years. For more information on his work and literature, visit [novelstudies.org](http://novelstudies.org).

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## Suggestions and Expectations

This curriculum unit can be used in a variety of ways. Each chapter of the novel study focuses on several chapters of *The Madman of Piney Woods* and is comprised of these different activities:

1. Before You Read
2. Vocabulary Building
3. Comprehension Questions
4. Language and Extension Activities

A **portfolio cover** (p.7) as well as a **Checklist** (p.6) are included so that students may track of their completed work.

**Every activity need not be completed by all students.**

### Links with the Common Core Standards (U.S.)

Many of the activities included in this curriculum unit are supported by the Common Core Standards. For instance the *Reading Standards for Literature, Grade 5*, makes reference to:

- a) determining the meaning of words and phrases. . . including figurative language;
- b) explaining how a series of chapters fits together to provide the overall structure;
- c) compare and contrast two characters;
- d) determine how characters ... respond to challenges;
- e) drawing inferences from the text;
- f) determining a theme of a story . . . **and many others.**

**Themes** and **topics** which may be taught in conjunction with the novel include racism and prejudice, American Civil War and slavery, importance of friends and family, sacrifice, perseverance and personal growth, courage.

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## List of Skills

### Vocabulary Development

1. Locating descriptive words/phrases
2. Listing synonyms/homophones
3. Identifying/creating *alliteration*
4. Use of capitals and punctuation
5. Identifying syllables
6. Identify *anagrams*
7. Identify *personification*
8. Use of singular/plural nouns
9. Listing compound words
10. Identifying parts of speech
11. Determining alphabetical order
12. Identification of root words
13. Identify/create *similes*
14. Identification of a *cliffhanger*

### Setting Activities

1. Summarize the details of a setting

### Plot Activities

1. Complete a *time line* of events
2. Identify conflict in the story
3. Identify the climax of the novel
4. Five W's Chart

### Character Activities

1. Determine character traits
2. Protagonists/antagonists
3. Relating personal experiences
4. Comparing two Characters

### Creative and Critical Thinking

1. Research
2. Write a newspaper story
3. Write a letter to a friend
4. Complete an Observation Chart
5. Conduct an interview
6. Write a description of personal feelings
7. Write a book review
8. Complete a KWS Chart

### Art Activities

1. A Storyboard
2. Create a collage
3. Design a cover for the novel
4. Design an Information Card

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## Synopsis

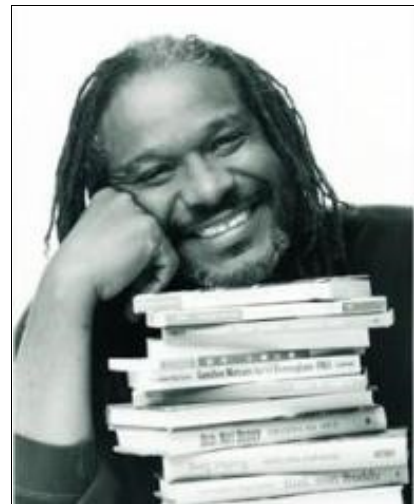
The second of a trilogy of exciting novels set in the vicinity of Buxton, Ontario Canada. Each novel, however, is a stand-alone and can be enjoyed by itself. (The other two novels are *Elijah of Buxton* and *The Journey of Little Charlie*.)

Benji and Red couldn't be more different. They aren't friends. They don't even live in the same town. But their fates are entwined. A chance meeting leads the boys to discover that they have more in common than meets the eye. Both of them have encountered a strange presence in the forest, watching them, tracking them. Could the Madman of Piney Woods be real? [Courtesy of the publisher]

## Author Biography Christopher Paul Curtis

*Christopher Paul Curtis was born in Flint, Michigan in 1953. Here he attended both elementary and secondary school. He later graduated from the University of Michigan and the University of Windsor. Christopher spent thirteen years working in a car assembly plant and assorted other jobs.*

He took a year off work to write his first novel, ***The Watsons go to Birmingham - 1963***. Other award-winning book by Mr. Curtis followed, including ***Bud, Not Buddy*** and ***Elijah of Buxton*** which were both Newbery winners as well as ***The Journey of Little Charlie***. Christopher and his wife, Kaysandra, live in Detroit. They have two children.



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## Student Checklist

Student Name \_\_\_\_\_

Assignment	Grade / Level	Comments

# The Madman of Piney Woods



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Name:

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## Chapters 1-3



### Before you read the chapters:

The **protagonist** in most novels features the main character or “good guy”. *The Madman of Piney Woods*, however, features two protagonists instead of one, Benji and Red, who live in separate towns but whose fates are strangely intertwined. List one advantage to having more than one protagonist in a novel, and one disadvantage.

↑	
↓	



### Vocabulary:

Choose a word from the list to complete each sentence.

authentic	excursion	inkling	impudent
revelatory	balderdash	carbuncle	forensics

1. The \_\_\_\_\_ on John's big toe was so painful he could barely walk.
2. We had better take this painting into an art dealer to see if it is \_\_\_\_\_.
3. The detectives determined that \_\_\_\_\_ would prove their case.
4. The words were \_\_\_\_\_ to me because my mother had already confirmed their truth.
5. “Don't be \_\_\_\_\_, you sassy girl,” the teacher exclaimed angrily.
6. I think his fanciful story is complete \_\_\_\_\_.
7. Kerry had no \_\_\_\_\_ that her cousin would be there for her party.
8. Our family takes an \_\_\_\_\_ to Yellowstone Park every summer.



# Questions



1. What is the **setting** of the novel at the beginning of Chapter One?


2. Match each name with the proper description:

1	Grandmother O'Toole
2	Spencer Alexander
3	Mr. Swan
4	Benji Alston
5	Alvin "Red" Stockard
6	Patience
7	Pilot

A	Sibling of a protagonist.
B	Best storyteller in Buxton.
C	Accused of cheating by Spence.
D	His father was a judge.
E	Very rude and opinionated.
F	Made a rather poor Reb.
G	His mother escaped slavery.

3. Why do you think Benji's mother's parents remained a mystery to the family?


4. Why do you think Benji and his friends were still playing "Civil War", even though the actual war had ended 36 years before?


5. What three things did you learn about Benji after reading Chapters 1 and 3?

1	
2	
3	

## Grandmother O'Toole

Red's Grandma is a real piece of work (but she also makes for an interesting character.)

6. a) Why do you think Red regarded his Grandmother as *a towering silo of a person*?


b) What two things did Grandma O'Toole really hate?

1		2	
---	--	---	--

c) What country was Grandma O'Toole originally from? \_\_\_\_\_

d) Why wouldn't Grandma O'Toole shop at Langston's store?


7. What prank did Benji and Spence decide to play on the builders of the tree house?


8. What do you think motivated them to do this?


9. By the time the boys went to work carrying out their prank, what was their general attitude?


# Language Activities



## A. Exaggeration

**Exaggeration** is a literary device defined as *a statement that represents something as better or worse than it really is*. We find several possible examples of exaggeration in these chapters. One such example is: *I waited forever*.

Think of an exaggerated way of describing the following

Pigs wallowing in their sty.	
A coyote's howl.	
Your choice.	

**B.** A **simile** is a comparison using the words “like” or “as”. We find an example of this in Chapter One: *I lay as still as death . . .*

In this example what two things are being compared?

--	--

Invent your own **similes** comparing the following items with something from your imagination:

a) The sound of an agitated crow.


b) your own example


## C. Anagrams

An **anagram** is a word that is formed by changing the order of the letters of another word. For example, the letters in the word **PAN** can also form the word **NAP**. Follow these directions to form the anagrams:



- a) read the clue in the right-hand column.
- b) Using the word in the left-hand column move the letters around in any order, but you must use all the letters.

Each of the words in the left-hand column are found in this section of our novel.

Word	Anagram	Clue
trace		Container.
screen		A container in which incense is burned.
nerve		Not at all.
insult		Illuminated.
spread		Curtains.
serve		Poetry.

## D. What Do You Know About the American Civil War?

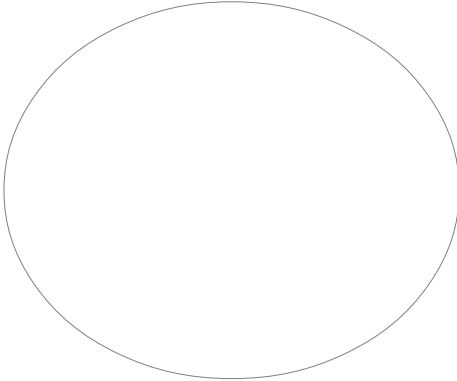
Benji and his friends had a lot of fun pretending to be soldiers in the American Civil War. This tragic conflict was fought between the years of 1861-1865 and took the lives of more 600,000 people. Using resources in your school library or on the Internet, research three interesting facts about this conflict and record the information below.



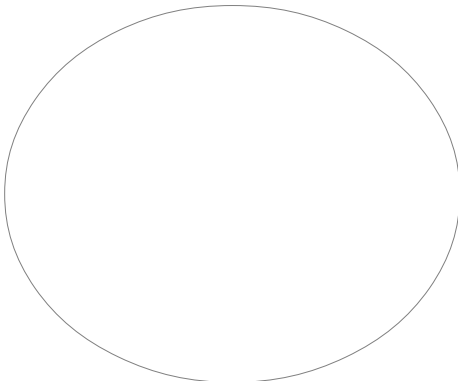
1	
2	
3	

**E. 5 Ws and an H.**

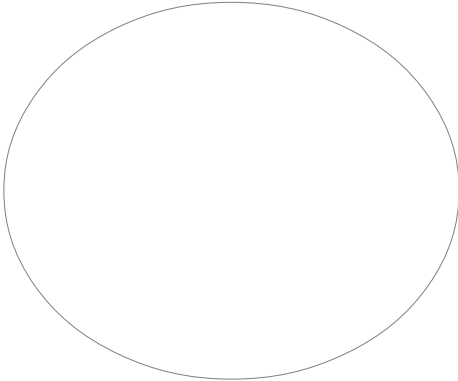
Choose an event from this section that you thought was really important and/or exciting. Using facts that you gleaned from reading about this event, fill in the balloons below, summarizing what you learned.



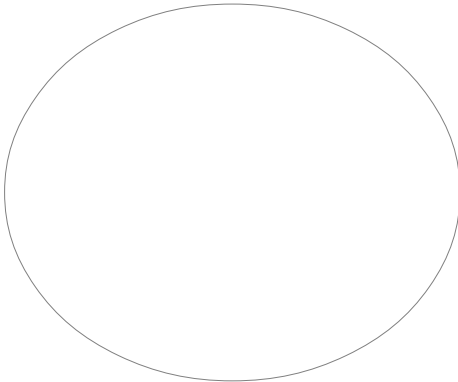
**WHO?**



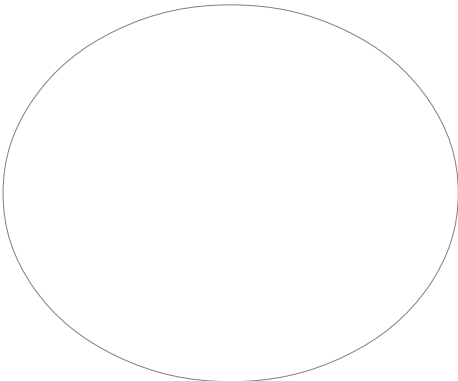
**WHAT?**



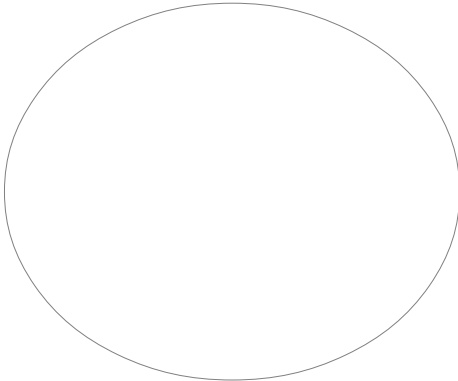
**WHEN?**



**WHERE?**



**WHY?**



**HOW?**

## F. An Acrostic Poem

There are many forms of poetry available to the aspiring poet other than the rhyming poem. An ACROSTIC poem is one example. In an acrostic poem the first letters of each line are aligned vertically to form a word. The word often is the subject of the poem. Here is an example written by the acclaimed poet, Atrocious Halitosis:

### The Firefly

Freaky-looking  
Itches me when I touch  
Restless at night  
Early or late  
Fearless  
Little  
Yellowfly



### The Acrostic Poem

Now create your own Acrostic Poem on a subject featured in this novel. Your poem must have at least four lines (and doesn't need to rhyme).

**Title:** .....


## Extension Activity



### Storyboard

A storyboard is a series of pictures that tell about an important event in a story. A storyboard can tell the story of only one scene – or the entire novel.



Complete the storyboard below illustrating the events described in the first three chapters of our novel. You may wish to practice your drawings on a separate piece of paper.

1	2
3	4
5	6