

Deza Malone  
from *Bud, Not Buddy*  
is back!

# The MIGHTY Miss MALONE

Newbery Medal-winning author  
Christopher Paul Curtis

**Educators Guide**

## About the Book

Set in Gary, Indiana, and Flint, Michigan, 11-year-old Deza Malone and her family suffer adversities and celebrate triumphs as they struggle to deal with the Great Depression.

The nation is in the middle of the Great Depression, but Deza Malone is happy. She loves school, has a best friend and a loving family, and is on her way to achieving her goal of reading every book in the Gary library. Then life takes a turn when her father says that he is going to Flint, Michigan, in search of work. Times are tough, and Deza, her mom, and her brother, Jimmie, end up in a shantytown outside Flint. Jimmie, an outstanding singer, gets an offer to perform and disappears from the camp. Mrs. Malone manages to find work, enroll Deza in school, and settle them in a rooming house. Deza lives on hope that they will find Father and Jimmie.

Newbery Award-winning author Christopher Paul Curtis has written a heart-wrenching, suspenseful new classic about one unforgettable family.



Grades 4–7

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## Pre-Reading Activity

Ask students to use materials in the library or sites on the Internet to read about everyday life for the working class during the Great Depression. What happened when people lost their jobs? How did parents feed their families? Have students write a letter that one parent might have written to President Roosevelt expressing their desperate family situation. Then write a return letter from the president that offers words of hope.

## Vocabulary/Use of Language

The vocabulary in the novel isn't difficult, but students should be encouraged to jot down unfamiliar words and try to define them using clues from the context. Such words may include: *grandiose* (p. 4), *exalted* (p. 4), *patriarch* (p. 4), *disposition* (p. 10), *verbose* (p. 11), *epiphany* (p. 23), *pulverize* (p. 70), *unconsoled* (p. 131), *integrity* (p. 143), *relented* (p. 144), *peril* (p. 144), *missive* (p. 146), *percolating* (p. 193), and *calamity* (p. 209).

## Thematic Connections

**FAMILY AND RELATIONSHIPS**—Ask students to describe the Malone family. Discuss the purpose of the “Chiefs and Children’s Chow Chats.” Which family member is the first to lose sight of this purpose? Compare and contrast Deza and Jimmie’s relationships with their parents. How does the fishing trip change the Malone family?

**ACHIEVEMENT**—Deza is an outstanding student, and Jimmie is a very good singer. Ask students to discuss why it takes Mr. and Mrs. Malone longer to appreciate Jimmie’s talents than it does to recognize Deza’s abilities. How does Deza continue to achieve in spite of the grades she receives in Flint? Discuss Jimmie’s reason for not wanting his mother to know that he is singing in a nightclub. How does she come to accept his achievement?

**SURVIVAL**—Discuss how the Great Depression impacts the families of all the novel’s characters. How do the Malones possess better survival skills than the Carsdales? Talk about life in the camp outside Flint. How do people help one another?

**PREJUDICE**—The Malones come face to face with racial bigotry. Ask students to discuss how the librarian displays prejudice when she tells Deza and Clarice that Joe Louis is “credit to your race.” (p. 75) What does Mrs. Malone mean when she says, “You have to know which battles are worth fighting.” (p. 83) How is Deza a victim of prejudice in the Flint school? Discuss how she deals with it.

**HOPE**—Ask students to explain what Mrs. Needham means when she tells Deza, “If we lose you, we’ve lost this country. If we can’t get you to your true path, it’s the failure of everyone from President Roosevelt right down to me.” (p. 38) Discuss how Deza accepts the responsibility for the hope that Miss Needham places on her. How does Mrs. Malone realize that Deza represents hope for the family and her people? Discuss how Jimmie returns hope to the family. What is the symbol of hope at the end of the novel?

## Curriculum Connections

**LANGUAGE ARTS**—When the Malones move to Flint, Deza doesn’t get to say good-bye to Clarice Johnson or Mrs. Needham. Ask students to write a good-bye letter from Deza’s perspective.

Ask students to discuss the meaning of the phrase, “Every cloud has a silver lining.” Then ask them to write an essay about the silver lining in the cloud over the Malone family. Have them consider the character who contributes most to the silver lining.

**SOCIAL STUDIES**—Ask students to use books in the library or sites on the Internet to research life in Hoovervilles or shantytowns during the Great Depression. Then ask them to write a radio documentary about these camps and interview people like the Malones who were forced to live this way.

Have students find out the Top 10 New Deal programs started by Franklin D. Roosevelt to help people recover from the Great Depression. Then ask each student to select one program to research in depth. What was the focus of the program? Who did it employ? How long did the program last? In what part of the nation did the program take place? Instruct students to prepare a creative presentation for the class. Include photographs, if possible.

**SCIENCE/HEALTH**—Many of the people who lived in camps, or shantytowns during the Great Depression suffered from illnesses caused from starvation and malnutrition, exposure to bad weather, and poor hygiene. Ask students to find out diseases caused by these conditions. What are the symptoms and the treatments? Make a brochure called “Heath Hazards of the Great Depression.”

**ART**—Deza’s mother has a birthday party for Deza and invites other residents in the rooming house where they live in Flint in 1937. Think about the gifts that Deza receives, and the kinds of things she values. Then ask students to make a birthday card that she might receive from her mother or some of the residents.

# Post-Reading Activity

## CONNECTING WITH *BUD, NOT BUDDY*

The Malone family lives by a motto, “We are on a journey to a place called Wonderful.” (p. 11) Discuss how this motto is one of hope. In *Bud, Not Buddy*, Bud’s mother once told him, “When one door closes, don’t worry, because another door opens.” (p. 43) How is this a message of hope? Ask students to discuss how Bud and the Malone family find hope at the end of their journeys. Compare and contrast the obstacles they face.

Bud is being groomed as a band member at the end of *Bud, Not Buddy*. Make Little Jimmie Jones the lead singer. Design a poster that features Bud and Jimmie.

Family is extremely important to the Malones. Bud has been in search of family. Stage a dialogue between Jimmie and Bud where they discuss family.

## Internet Resources

### THE GREAT DEPRESSION

[www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/general-article/rails-added-obstacles/](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/general-article/rails-added-obstacles/)

This site provides an article about added obstacles for African Americans.

### HOOVERVILLES

[www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/presentationsandactivities/presentations/timeline/depwwii/depress/hooovers.html](http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/presentationsandactivities/presentations/timeline/depwwii/depress/hooovers.html)

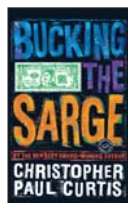
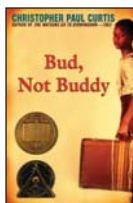
This site provides pictures of Hoovervilles from across the country.

### JOE LOUIS

[www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/fight/peopleevents/p\\_louis.html](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/fight/peopleevents/p_louis.html)

The site gives an introduction to the life of Joe Louis, which supports the film *The Fight*.

## Also Available:



[RandomHouse.com/teachers](http://RandomHouse.com/teachers)

## About the Author

Christopher Paul Curtis was born in Flint, Michigan, and spent 13 years after high school on the assembly line of Flint’s historic Fisher Body Plant #1, and wrote during his breaks. He went to college part-time and graduated from the University of Michigan. His first novel, *The Watsons Go to Birmingham*—1963 was both a Newbery Honor and a Coretta Scott King Author book, and his second novel, *Bud, Not Buddy* received both the Newbery Medal and the Coretta Scott King Author Award. Curtis says that his writing has been greatly influenced by his family members. He makes his home in Detroit.



Lin Z. Jones, UM Photo Services.