

# Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

## Bud, Not Buddy

by

### Christopher Paul Curtis

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### Book Information

Christopher Paul Curtis, Bud, Not Buddy  
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Ten-year-old Bud, a motherless boy living in Flint, Michigan, during the Great Depression, escapes a bad foster home and sets out in search of the man he believes to be his father--the renowned bandleader, H.E. Calloway of Grand Rapids.

**Award:** ABC (Assoc. of Booksellers for Children) Choice Aw; ALA Notable/Best Books; Book Sense Book of the Year Award/Honorees; Coretta Scott King Award/Honors; Golden Kite Award/Honor Book; Newbery Medal; Parent's Choice Award/Honor Book; Publishers Weekly Best Book; SLJ Best Book; State Award; Young Reader's Choice Award/Nominee

**Topics:** Adventure, Runaway; Canadian Content, Canadian Content (All); History, Depression Era America; People, African American; Power Lessons Vocabulary, Grades 7 & Up; Read Now with Power Up Recommended Lists, Take Charge; READNOW - Demco Media Turtleback Books, Demco Media - Read Now Grades 6-8; Recommended Reading, AI's Book Club (Internal Only); Recommended Reading, Book Sense 76 - Top Ten; Recommended Reading, California Recommended Lit., English, 3-5; Recommended Reading, California Recommended Lit., English, 6-8; Recommended Reading, Canadian Children's Book Centre's Our Choice; Recommended Reading, Children's Literature Choice; Recommended Reading, Coop. Children's Book Center; Recommended Reading, Junior Library Guild Selection; Recommended Reading, NCSS/CBC Notable Social Studies; Recommended Reading, NY Times Editor's Choice

### Main Characters

Bud Caldwell a ten-year-old orphan boy who is searching for his father  
Bugs and Jerry other kids from the orphanage  
Deza Malone a homeless girl living in Hooverville  
Grace Thomas a vocalist with the Calloway band  
Herman E. Calloway an elderly musician who is Bud's grandfather  
Lefty Lewis an elderly railroad worker from Grand Rapids  
Mr. & Mrs. Amos the foster care parents who lock Bud in their shed  
Todd Amos the twelve-year-old son of the foster care parents

### Vocabulary

**ax** musicians' slang for their instrument  
**depression** a time of reduction in economic activity, creating financial hardship for many people

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**flyer** an advertising circular

**lam** sudden or hurried escape, usually from the law

**stiffed** to be refused payment for services rendered

### Synopsis

Ten-year-old Bud Caldwell has been living at an orphanage in Flint, Michigan since his mother died four years ago. Bud never goes anywhere without his cardboard suitcase, which holds his most prized possessions: photographs of his mother, five flyers for Herman E. Calloway's jazz band, and a sack of small rocks with an unusual code written on them. Now that school is over he is going to a foster care family, the Amoses, for the summer. During his first night with the Amoses, however, Bud gets into a fight with their son Todd and is locked outside in a shed. Bud escapes from the shed, recovers his suitcase, and runs away.

After being threatened by a man at a soup kitchen, Bud encounters another runaway orphan named Bugs. Bugs persuades Bud to accompany him to Hooverville, a hobo town of cardboard houses, and jump on a train headed west. While waiting for the train at Hooverville, Bud befriends a homeless girl named Deza and begins to realize that the man on his jazz posters, Herman E. Calloway, might be his father. The next day Bud misses the train and encounters a police raid on Hooverville. Since he does not want to return to the orphanage or a foster home, he decides to walk to Grand Rapids to find his father.

At 2:30 in the morning, Bud is discovered by a passing motorist named Lefty Lewis. Lefty realizes how dangerous it is for Bud to be walking alone at night and offers him a ride. Bud hesitantly accepts, but then sees a crate full of bottles of blood in the back of Lefty's car. Assuming Lefty is a vampire, Bud locks him out and tries to drive away. Luckily, Bud does not know how to drive and Lefty is able to explain that he is delivering the blood to the Flint hospital. After meeting Lefty's family and eating breakfast the next morning, they depart for Grand

Rapids. On the way they are stopped by a police officer who is looking to arrest labor union activists. Lefty is transporting flyers supporting the unions, but they are not discovered.

Bud is dropped off at a club owned by Herman Calloway, whom Lefty thinks is Bud's father. Bud enters the club and realizes that Herman Calloway is an old man. Undaunted, Bud announces to everybody present that he is Herman Calloway's son. Everybody seems to find this humorous, except Mr. Calloway, and they explain to Bud that Herman cannot possibly be his father. The vocalist for the band, Miss Thomas, feels sorry for Bud and persuades Herman to let Bud stay with them as a band assistant. That night Bud sleeps in Mr. Calloway's daughter's bedroom. His daughter left home eleven years ago, and Mr. Calloway had not heard from her since.

The other band members make Bud feel at home, nicknaming him "Sleepy LaBone" and giving him a recorder and saxophone to practice on. Mr. Calloway, however, is still cold and unapproachable to Bud. After one of the band's shows, Mr. Calloway asks Bud to pick up a rock for him and after doing so, Bud sees him write a code on the rock. Bud shows Mr. Calloway his rocks, which are nearly identical, and Mr. Calloway accuses Bud of stealing them from his house. Bud swears they came from his mother, Angela Janet, and Mr. Calloway is stunned to hear his daughter's name. After Bud reveals his mother's picture from his suitcase, nobody doubts that Herman Calloway is Bud's grandfather. Bud is accepted into Mr. Calloway's life, and Bud feels that his mother's spirit, alive inside of him, has returned home.

### Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

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## Initial Understanding

What influences did Bud's mother leave with her son that help him throughout the book?

*Bud remembers his mother reading him stories and telling him the moral of the stories. This helps him go to sleep at night no matter what place he is in. Also, the smells of the apartment and his mother come back to him to help him relax and forget about his troubles. Bud goes to the library, where he feels comfortable because his mother used to take him there. He also must be able to read and write fairly well for his age because of the types of books the librarian says she used to put out for him when his mother brought him to the library years before. From Bud's manners the reader can see that Bud's mother taught him to be polite. In reading over how the picture of Bud's mother came about, the reader can see that Bud's mother did not like dirt or germs, so Bud was probably very clean.*

## Literary Analysis

What attitudes toward Black Americans in the 1930's are shown or explained in this book?

*Even though Black Americans had their freedom according to the Constitution, many places still had rules that discriminated against them. The band has to include a White person, and the club listed in his name because Black Americans could not legally own property in Michigan at that time. To get jobs, the White member of the band does the booking so that people would not realize they were hiring a Black band. Some people in Owosso put up signs stating that they do not want Blacks on the streets after dark and especially do not want strangers in their town. Lefty Lewis also has to take blood to the hospital in Flint because Black people could only get blood transfusions from other Blacks.*

## Inferential Comprehension

How do "Bud Caldwell's Rules and Things to Have a Funner Life and Make a Better Liar Out of Yourself" help him to cope with difficult situations?

*The rules help Bud find some humor in situations which otherwise could make a child cry or cause anyone to be depressed. Coming up with a set of rules to follow helps Bud make sense of things that happen that are beyond his control. Bud's rules give him guidelines for solving problems and become the closest thing he has to a parent telling him how to handle things.*

## Constructing Meaning

Bud's mother told him, "when one door closes another door opens." What does this mean? How does Bud experience this in the story?

*Students may explain that when something goes wrong there is always another way out. When something happens to disrupt plans or ideas fall through, it always seems there is another plan or way to do things. After Bud misses the train, he finds another way to get out of Flint. Also, when it seems he is going to be sent back to the Home, the band takes him in as a helper.*

## Teachable Skills

**Comparing and Contrasting** Bud displays many strengths, especially for a young person. Have students read another book set in the Depression and compare the main character's strengths with Bud's. Books to choose from include *Nothing to Fear* by Jackie F. Koller, *Dust for Dinner* by Ann Turner, and *Arly's Run* by Robert Newton Peck.

**Recognizing Details** Bud makes up a set of rules for dealing with life. Have students create rules not listed in the book for dealing with situations that they either have encountered or that Bud might have come up against. In groups, make a list of ten "rules and things for having a funner life" that might have been added to Bud's list.

**Recognizing Setting** *Bud, Not Buddy* takes place in America during the Great Depression of the

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1930's. Instruct students to research the Great Depression. Have groups or individuals give reports on various topics such as soup kitchens, cardboard jungles (Hooverilles), strikes, union activities, orphanages, farm problems, the stock market crash, the Swoot-Hawley Tariff Act of 1930, the Dust Bowl, and others. One possible source is *The Great Depression: An Eyewitness History*, by David F. Burg.

**Responding to Literature** Herman Calloway leads a band that plays various types of music, including jazz, during the 1920's and 1930's. Search the Internet or library to find recordings of groups and types of songs popular at that time. What were some of the song titles? How do they reflect the attitude of America during the Depression? Play some of the music that Bud would have heard his grandfather's group play.