

# Figurative Language in Jerry Spinelli's Maniac Magee

*Visual Representations and Text  
Analysis by*  
Mr. Bigley and Mrs. Taylor's  
Fifth Grade Classes

# Four Examples of Figurative Language

## **Metaphor**

The metaphor states a fact or draws a verbal picture by the use of comparison. A simile would say you are like something; a metaphor is more positive - it says you are something.

**Example: You are what you eat.**

## **Personification**

A figure of speech in which human characteristics are given to an animal or an object.

**Example: My teddy bear gave me a hug.**

## **Simile**

A simile uses the words “like” or “as” to compare one object or idea with another to suggest they are alike.

**Example: busy as a bee**

## **Hyperbole**

An exaggeration that is so dramatic that no one would believe the statement is true. Tall tales are hyperboles.

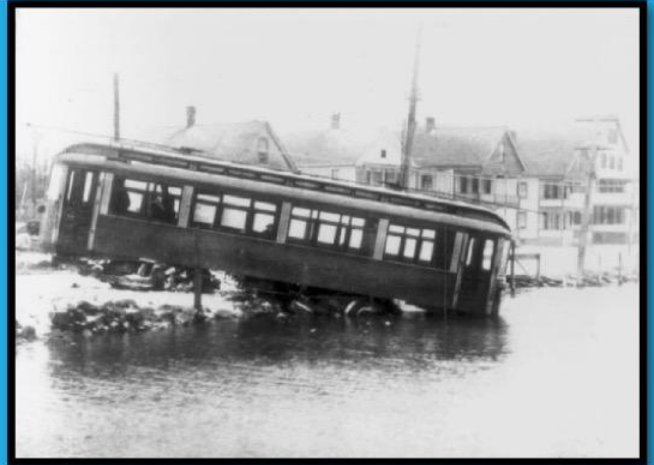
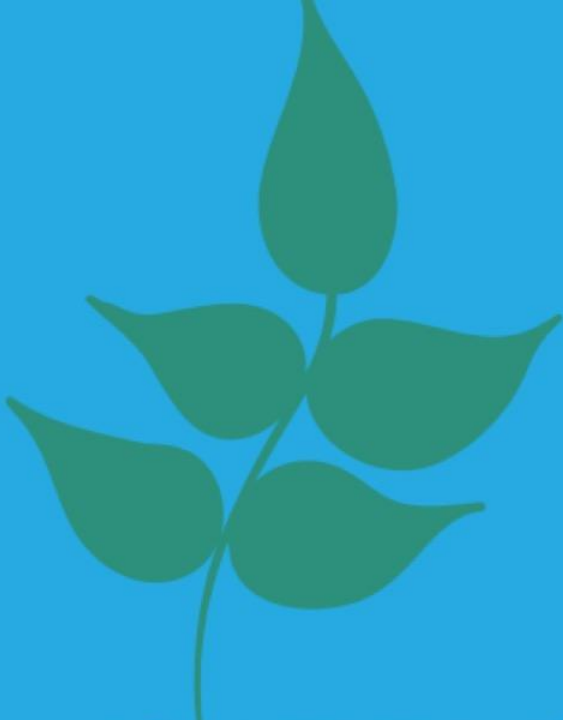
**Example: He was so hungry, he ate that whole cornfield for lunch, stalks and all.**

# Literal VS. Figurative

Students in Mr. Bigley's language art classes (working in small, collaborative groups) studied excerpts from the novel Maniac Magee by Jerry Spinelli containing figurative language.

By analyzing their assigned quote within the context of the novel, students determined what type of figurative language was being used to evoke emotion.

Working together, students created a visual representation of their quote and designed a statement to explain the literal meaning of their excerpt.



"ON THE WAY BACK HOME, THEY WERE ON BOARD WHEN THE P AND W HAD ITS FAMOUS CRASH, WHEN THE MOTORMAN WAS DRUNK AND TOOK THE HIGH TRESTLE OVER THE SCHUYLKILL RIVER AT SIXTY MILES AN HOUR, AND THE WHOLE KABOODLE TOOK A SWAN DIVE INTO THE WATER."

**Jerry Spinelli uses personification in chapter 1 of Maniac Magee by**

**“On the way back home they were on board when the P & W had its famous crash, when the motorman was drunk and took the high trestle over the Schuylkill River at sixty miles an hour, and the whole kaboodle took a swan dive into the water.”** The literal

**meaning of this quote is the trolley train went head first into the water.**

"A couple of people truly remember,  
and here's what they saw: a scraggly  
little kid jogging toward them, the  
soles of both sneakers hanging by  
their hinges and flopping open like dog  
tongues each time they came up from  
the pavement."



**Jerry Spinelli uses  
simile in chapter 2  
of Maniac Magee.**

**The literal meaning  
of this quote is,  
Maniac's shoes soles  
are flapping like a  
dog's tongue when  
he jogs because his  
shoes are worn out.**

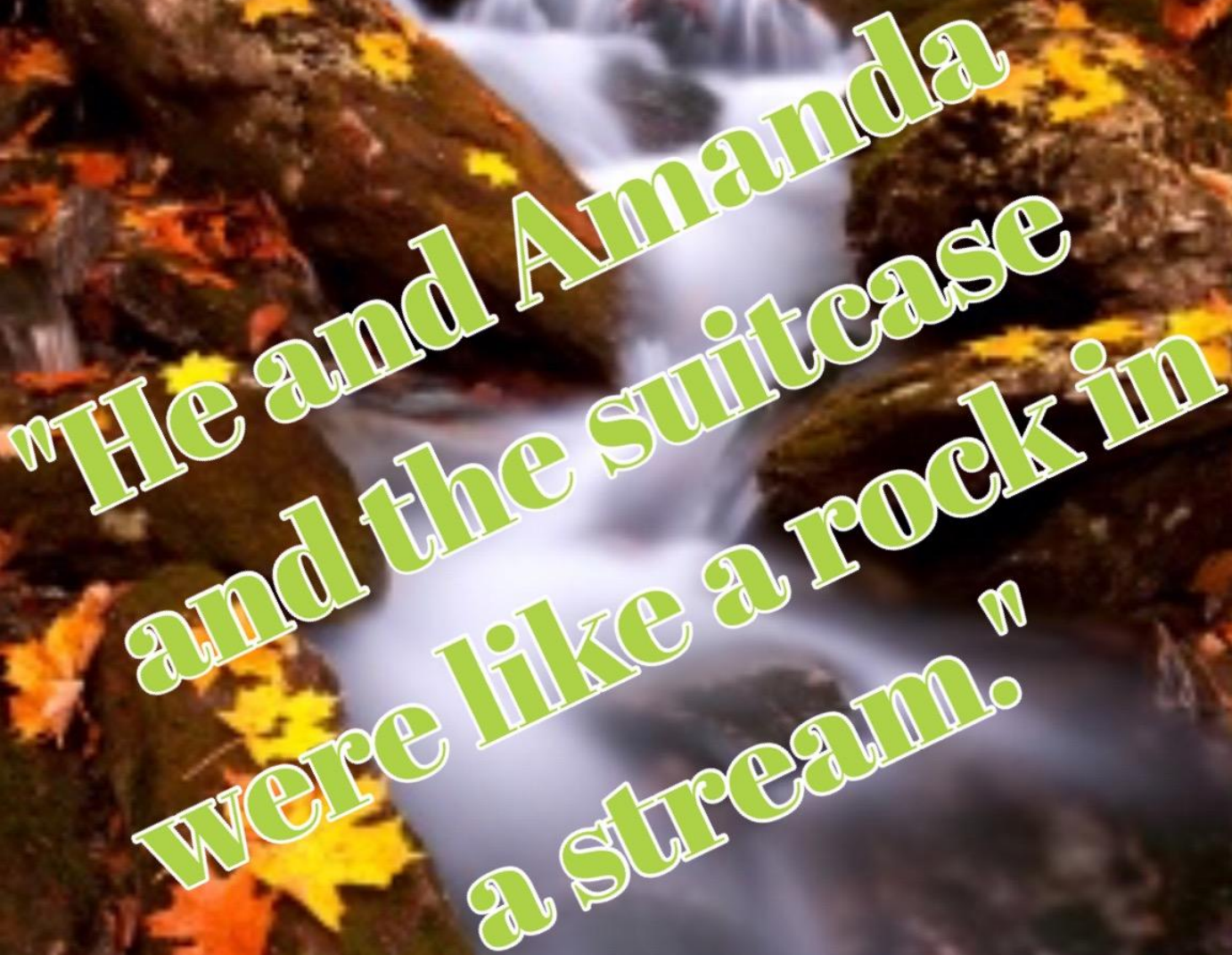


"Finsterwald's backyard was a graveyard of tennis balls and baseballs and footballs and model airplanes and one way boomerangs."



Jerry Spinelli uses metaphor in chapter 5 of Maniac Magee by turning the Finsterwalds backyard into a graveyard. The literal meaning of this quote is everybody loses their baseballs, footballs, tennis balls, model airplanes and one way boomerangs in his backyard.

They all are afraid of Finsterwalds backyard so they do not want to get their stuff out of the backyard.



"He and Amanda  
and the suitcase  
were like a rock in  
a stream."

Jerry Spinelli uses simile in chapter 3 of Maniac Magee by saying "He and Amanda and the suitcase were like a rock in a stream." The literal meaning of this quote is he and Amanda and the suitcase were stopping in the middle of a crowd causing the crowd to go around them.



"To an outsider, it wouldn't sound all that special. But to the ears of a Pickwell kid, it was magic. Somehow it had the ability to slip through the slush of five o'clock noises to reach its targets."

**Jerry Spinelli uses personification in chapter 6 of Maniac Magee by giving human qualities to a whistle. The literal meaning of this quote is that there mother's whistle is a dinner call for the children to come eat.**



**"McNab was a giant.  
He stood five feet  
eight and was said  
to weigh over a  
hundred and  
seventy pounds."**

Jerry Spinelli uses metaphor in chapter 7 of Maniac Magee by saying that John McNab was a giant and weighed over 170 pounds. The literal meaning of this quote is that the author is explaining how McNab is really big, tall, and overweight.



**"STONE WAS  
SOFTER THAN  
THE KID'S  
GLARE."**



*Jerry Spinelli uses metaphor in chapter 10 of Maniac Magee by comparing facial expressions of a human glare to stone. The literal meaning of this quote is the kid was very angry.*



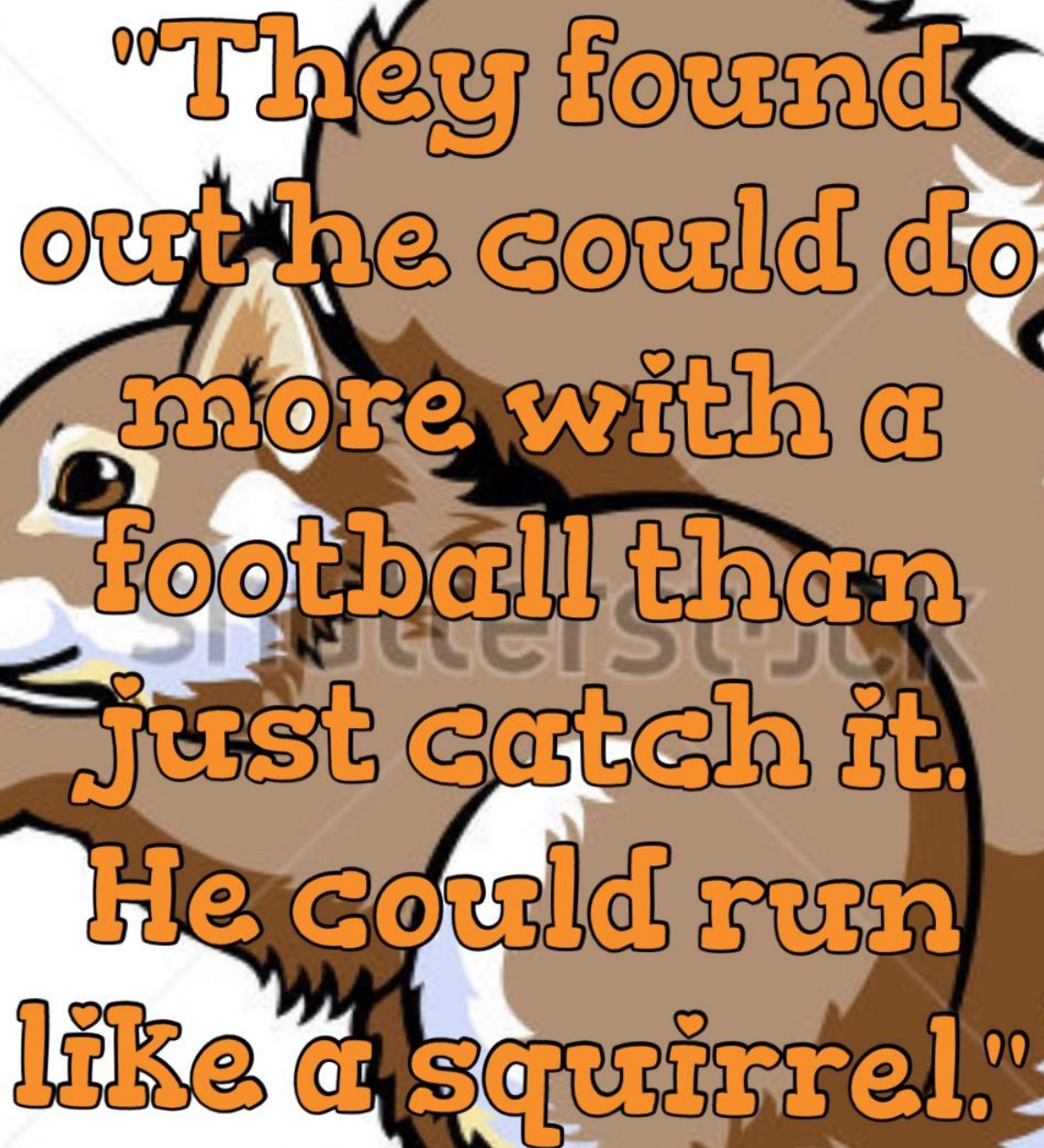
**"THE CHIN  
JUTTED OUT  
MORE. "TELL ME  
I'M BAD. "FLIES  
STOPPED  
BUZZING."**

*Jerry Spinelli uses hyperbole in chapter 10 of Maniac Magee by exaggerating that the all the flies stopped buzzing when Maniac stood up to Mars Bars. The literal meaning of this quote is that everyone stopped and looked at Maniac Magee stand up to Mars Bars because no one would ever dare to do that.*



"Amanda took the torn page from Maniac. To her, it was the broken wing of a bird, a pet out in the rain."

Jerry Spinelli uses  
metaphor in chapter 11 of  
Maniac Magee by  
comparing a birds broken  
wing to a ripped page in a  
book. The literal meaning  
of this quote is a page  
was ripped out of her  
favorite book and she was  
sad.



"They found out he could do more with a football than just catch it. He could run like a squirrel."

Jerry Spinelli uses simile in chapter 15 of Maniac Magee by comparing Maniac to a squirrel. The literal meaning of this quote is that Manic Magee can run very fast.



"To the ordinary  
person Cobble's Knot  
was as about as  
friendly as a nest of  
Yellow jackets"



Jerry Spinelli uses  
simile in chapter 20 of  
Maniac Magee by  
comparing Cobbles  
Knot to a nest of  
yellowjackets. The  
literal meaning of this  
quote is Cobbles Knot  
is very hard to untie.



*"Some say there was a faint grin on his face, kind of playful, as though the Knot wasn't his enemy at all, but an old pal just playing a little trick on him."*

*Jerry Spinelli uses personification in chapter 20 of Maniac Magee by giving Cobbles Knot human like qualities. The literal meaning of this quote is Maniac Magee was patient and looked on the bright side when trying to untie the knot.*



*"It was  
October. The  
trees rimming  
the outfield  
were flaunting  
their colors."*

*Jerry Spinelli uses personification in chapter 26 of Maniac Magee by giving trees human like qualities.*

*The literal meaning of this quote is the trees are changing colors and it is changing seasons.*

A B C D E

F G H I J K

L M N O P

Q R S T U

V W X Y Z

"vowels were something else. he didn't like them, and they didn't like him. there were only five of them, but they seemed to be everywhere."

Jerry Spinelli uses personification in chapter 27 of Maniac Magee by saying that vowels do not like him. The literal meaning of this quote is that Grayson is having trouble reading because vowels make different sounds.



"The effect was the opposite on human noses. Maniac's and Grayson's ran like faucets, and not a handkerchief in sight."



Jerry Spinelli uses simile in chapter 29 of Maniac Magee by comparing a faucet to Maniac's and Greyson's nose with there being nothing to wipe it. The literal meaning of this quote is that their noses were running like crazy with no tissues around.



"It was still dark when  
Maniac awoke on  
Christmas morning.  
Within an hour or two  
the holiday would  
come bounding down  
the stairs and  
squealing 'round the  
tinsel trees of Two  
Mills."

Jerry Spinelli uses personification in chapter 31 of Maniac Magee by giving Christmas human like qualities. The literal meaning of this quote is Christmas was about to begin and everyone would be happy.