

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

*Maniac Magee***Before Reading the Book****Reading Strategy: Browsing**

When you browse through a book, you look at the illustrations and text on the front and back covers. You leaf through the book and read the chapter titles. As you browse through *Maniac Magee*, jot down any questions you have. For instance, why do you think the author has divided the book into parts and chapters?

**Writing in Your Literature Response Journal**

**A. Write about one of these topics in your journal. Circle the topic you chose.**

1. Look at the list of questions you wrote down after browsing through *Maniac Magee*. Choose one of the questions to write about.
2. Describe the most famous kid in your school or your neighborhood. You don't have to know him or her, just the stories. What is this kid supposed to have done? Why is he or she so well known? Do you think all the stories are true?
3. What does the word *home* mean to you? How is it different from *house*? Where is the place that you are most "at home?" Describe it.
4. Write about racism—either what you've noticed or actually experienced. Where do you think racism comes from? How can we stop racism?

**B. What were your predictions, questions, observations, and connections about the book? Write about one of them in your journal. Check the response you chose.**

Prediction       Question       Observation       Connection

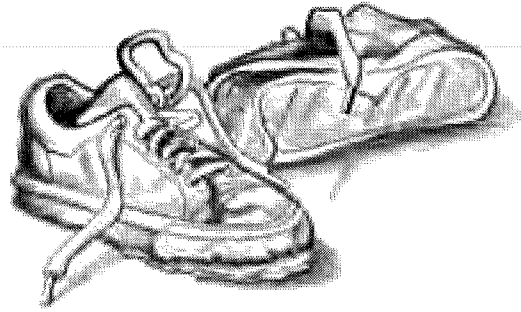
## Group Discussion

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

### *Maniac Magee*

## Before Reading the Book

### For Your Discussion Group



- \* Who are you? Take some time to answer the question as honestly as you can in your Literature Response Journal. Then make a list of all the different groups you are part of—including your gender, religion, ethnicity, and interests. Do people ever assume things about you just because you are a girl, a Catholic, or Hispanic, or because you like to read books? What assumptions do they make?
- \* Come together as a group and talk about what you wrote. Discuss the differences between who you are and how you're treated sometimes because of certain stereotypes. As always in your literature groups, be respectful of other people's experiences and opinions.
- \* Now go back and look at yourself again. Do you ever assume things about other people based on their religion or where they live or the color of their skin? Talk about these assumptions with the group and about what you all can do to stop stereotyping other people.

Write down any other questions your group has.

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Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

*Maniac Magee***Before the Story and Chapter 1****Reading Strategy: Permission to Be Confused**

A lot of books are confusing when you first start to read them. You don't know who the characters are or what's happening. This book, which starts at ninety miles an hour, might make you feel especially confused. Don't worry if the story doesn't make sense to you yet. Eventually it will. Good readers have faith that any confusion will soon be cleared up. For now, hold on to your hat and enjoy the ride!

**Writing in Your Literature Response Journal****A. Write about one of these topics in your journal. Circle the topic you chose.**

1. Think about which parts of the story are confusing so far. Make a list of questions to return to as you read. Share your questions with your literature circle, too.
2. Has something very exciting or scary or wonderful ever happened to you—something that made you rush home and want to tell everybody everything all at once? If so, try imagining you feel that way right now, but instead of letting the words tumble out of your mouth, see if you can let them pour out onto paper. Write as much as you can and as fast as you can. Like Jerry Spinelli, have fun with the words!
3. What do you think about what Jeffrey does after “Talk to the Animals”? Have you ever felt that way? What prompted those feelings? What did *you* want to say?

**B. What were your predictions, questions, observations, and connections as you read? Write about one of them in your journal. Check the response you chose.**

Prediction       Question       Observation       Connection

## Group Discussion

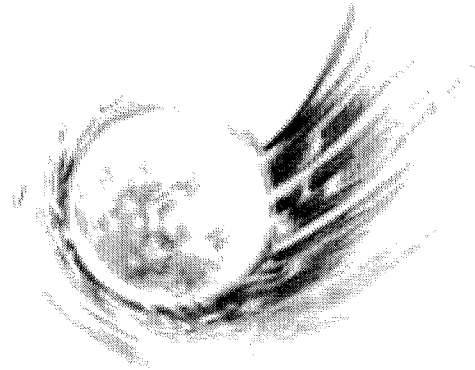
Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

### *Maniac Magee*

## Before the Story and Chapter 1

### For Your Discussion Group

“. . . the history of a kid is one part fact, two parts legend, and three parts snowball. And if you want to know what it was like back when Maniac Magee roamed these parts, well, just run your hand under your movie seat and be very, very careful not to let the facts get mixed up with the truth.”



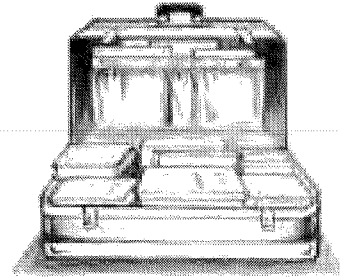
- \* Each group member should write down three things that he or she has done or that has happened to him or her. One of the things should be 100% true, the next should be an exaggeration but *sort of* true, and the last should be a wonderful lie—it *could* be true, it *should* be true, but it's not.
- \* Take turns sharing the three things with the rest of the group. See if anyone can guess which is which—which is true, which is exaggerated, and which is an outright lie. Then discuss what you learned about each other. What did you learn from the exaggerations and lies? Were any of the lies believable, and if so, why did you believe them? Can there be truth in lies?
- \* Finally, talk about the passage from *Maniac Magee* that appears above. What does it mean? What do you think about the passage?

### Writer's Craft: The Music of Language

Someone once said that all writing aspires to music. As important as the meanings of words are, their sounds and rhythms can create emotion in a reader. Read aloud the section at the beginning of *Maniac Magee* entitled “Before the Story.” Savor the vowels and the syllables as you say each word, and make sure you honor the pauses at the end of sentences and at the end of paragraphs. Can you feel the excitement and the energy, the waterfalls of words, and then the dramatic stops?

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

*Maniac Magee*  
**Chapters 2–6**



**Reading Strategy: Making Connections**

All readers put themselves into a story. For instance, a character may remind you of someone you know, or certain feelings and situations in the book may seem familiar to you. What's familiar to you in the story so far?

**Writing in Your Literature Response Journal**

**A. Write about one of these topics in your journal. Circle the topic you chose.**

1. What kinds of personal connections have you made to the book? How have you responded to the use of nicknames, Finsterwald's place, the Pickwell's dinner, or Amanda's suitcase?
2. Jerry Spinelli loves lists. Have you noticed? Look at the lists of books in Amanda's suitcase or the list of all the people at the Pickwell's dinner table. How does Jerry Spinelli make these lists so funny? Try writing some lists as if you were the author. Record in detail what's in your backpack, inside your locker, on top of your bureau or under your bed. Remember, like all writers, you can always bend the truth a little.
3. What do you notice about Maniac's running? Write everything you've noticed, even those things you think might be obvious. Do you have any questions about his running?

**B. What were your predictions, questions, observations, and connections as you read? Write about one of them in your journal. Check the response you chose.**

- Prediction     Question     Observation     Connection

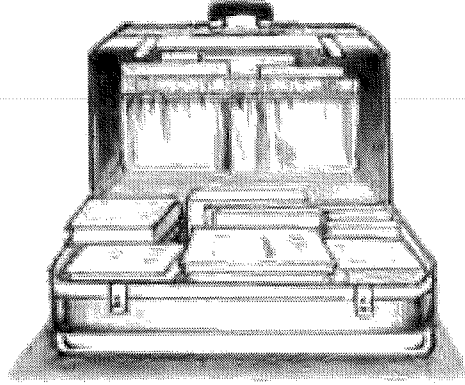
## Group Discussion

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

### *Maniac Magee* Chapters 2–6

#### For Your Discussion Group

- \* Some books are so much fun that we may find ourselves reading them aloud to our family and friends because we want to share the laughter. What's your favorite scene so far? Share it with the group.
- \* Each person should share a favorite scene or passage. It's all right if two or more people share the same one.
- \* After discussing everyone's choices, talk about what you like most about the book so far. You may find you want to focus on the passages that you read aloud. How does the writing contribute to your enjoyment of these passages?



#### Writer's Craft: Word Derivations

*"fin-ster-wal-lies (fin'ster'wal-ez) n. [Two Mills, Pa., W. End] Violent trembling of the body, especially in the extremities (arms and legs)"*

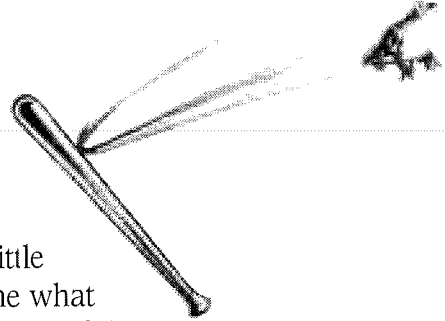
Where do new words come from? As Jerry Spinelli's made-up dictionary definition for "finsterwallies" shows, they are often **derived** from particular places and events. In eighteenth-century England, the Earl of Sandwich didn't want to stop gambling long enough to eat and so, to save time, he would just put some meat between two pieces of bread and call it a meal. Today, of course, we call that a "sandwich."

A good dictionary will always show you how to pronounce a word, what part of speech it is, and where it comes from (its **derivation**). Look through a dictionary and find out where some of your favorite words come from.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## *Maniac Magee*

### Chapters 7–13



### Reading Strategy: Visualizing

Jerry Spinelli loves details. He likes to show you every little moment in a scene. Such writers make it easy to imagine what they are describing: the baseball players coming up to bat as if they were “walking a gangplank,” the pitcher, McNab, “breathing like a picadored bull.” If you don’t find yourself seeing what Spinelli is writing, read more slowly and stop occasionally to shut your eyes until you can bring the picture into focus. See it in your imagination!

### Writing in Your Literature Response Journal

**A. Write about one of these topics in your journal. Circle the topic you chose.**

1. Visualize the baseball diamond, all the kids, and Magee with Amanda’s book in his hand. What color is the book? Write your own description of the scene.
2. It seems like every kid in this story has a nickname or “tag.” Which “tags” are your favorites? What are some of your friends’ nicknames? Do you have one? If so, how did you get it?
3. Have you ever been the new kid in town? Has a new kid ever come to your school? How are new kids usually treated? What’s typical about the way everyone reacts to Maniac Magee? What’s special or unique about the way he reacts and is treated?

**B. What were your predictions, questions, observations, and connections as you read? Write about one of them in your journal. Check the response you chose.**

- Prediction    
  Question    
  Observation    
  Connection

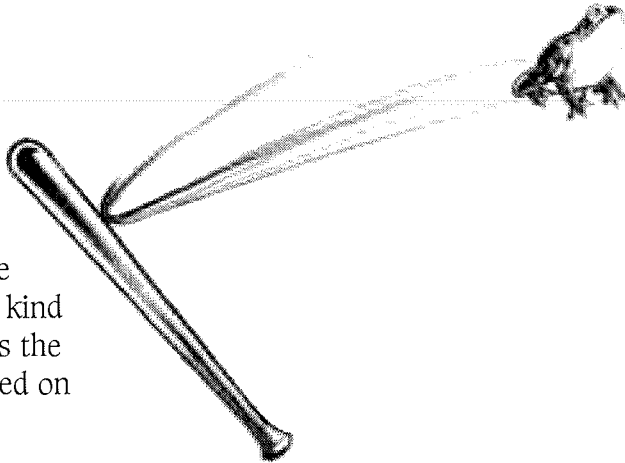
## Group Discussion

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

### *Maniac Magee* Chapters 7–13

#### For Your Discussion Group

- \* Jerry Spinelli tells us a lot about what Maniac does but doesn't really indicate what he thinks about Maniac or what kind of person his main character is. He lets the readers decide that for themselves based on Maniac's actions.
- \* Have each person divide a piece of paper down the middle into two vertical columns. On one side, write "Character's Actions" and on the other write "Interpretation." Under the "Character's Actions" side, write down one thing you see Maniac doing in the story. For instance, you might write that he begs and bugs Amanda for a book. Go to the "Interpretation" side. What do you think this fact means about Maniac? What does it tell you about him? One person might say that it means he's really smart and cares about continuing to learn, even if he isn't in school. Someone else might say that Maniac really needs a friend and doesn't want Amanda to disappear. Write down what you think. Each person in the group should record at least five facts and interpretations about Maniac.
- \* Using your facts and interpretations, talk as a group about what kind of person you think Maniac Magee is. Is he stupid or smart? Does he care about others, or is he inconsiderate? What are some of his characteristics?



#### Writer's Craft: Verbs

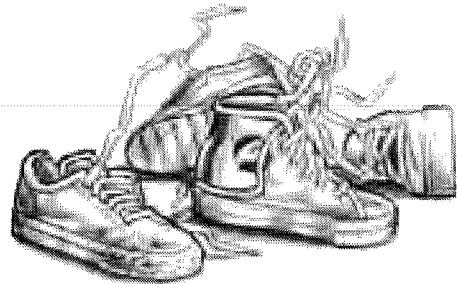
*"He windmilled, reared, lunged, fired. . ."*

Verbs are like hearts—they pump energy into the rest of the sentence. Without them, of course, there is no sentence. When verbs are dull, no matter how exciting the rest of the words, the sentence seems flat. Jerry Spinelli uses great verbs—*windmilled, reared, lunged, fired*. What other verbs can you find in the book that surprise and dazzle you?



Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

*Maniac Magee*  
**Chapters 14–21**



**Reading Strategy: Listening to Tone**

You can probably always tell when your mother is mad at you. She can say, “Oh, I can’t believe you did that,” in a tone that tells you she’s frustrated, but that it doesn’t really matter. But if she were to say those words with a different tone in her voice, you would know you were in big, big trouble. You can feel an author’s tone from the choice of words, the rhythms of the sentences, and the subject matter.

**Writing in Your Literature Response Journal**

**A. Write about one of these topics in your journal. Circle the topic you chose.**

1. Jerry Spinelli often sounds very funny and light-hearted in *Maniac Magee*, but have you noticed different tones in his writing? Do other feelings ever poke through the laughter? In which part of the book did you notice this?
2. Repetition—repeating a word or phrase over and over—can make writing more energetic and powerful. Look at how Jerry Spinelli uses repetition in Chapters 15 and 16. Write a paragraph or two using that kind of repetitive phrase. You might use “I love . . .” or “I know . . .” or “I wish . . .” or another phrase of your very own.
3. *Bullies!* In both the East End and the West End, there are bullies. What do you think makes someone a bully? Have you ever had to deal with one? Describe what happened. Have you ever felt like being a bully yourself? Tell why.

**B. What were your predictions, questions, observations, and connections as you read? Write about one of them in your journal. Check the response you chose.**

- Prediction     Question     Observation     Connection

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## *Maniac Magee*

### Chapters 14–21

#### For Your Discussion Group

- \* Sometimes an author includes a detail that points to a deeper meaning in the story. In *Beauty and the Beast*, for instance, the beast has a rose in his castle. That rose is symbolic of his heart. When the rose dies, he will die, too. Therefore, the rose is not just a rose.
- \* Consider with your group the following three details and think about what else they might be telling you about Maniac Magee. What are they symbolic of?
  1. Maniac's skill at untying knots
  2. how Maniac walks down the middle of the street after he unties the knot
  3. Maniac's running
- \* Why does Maniac leave the Beales? Talk together about the different reasons.

#### Writer's Craft: Hyperbole

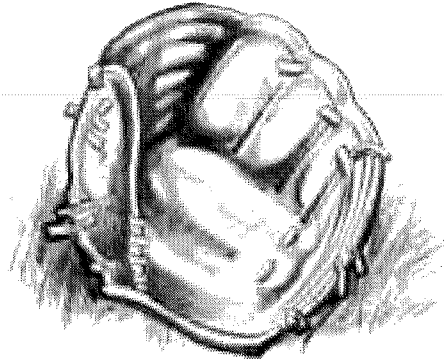
**Hyperbole** is a word that means intentional exaggeration. Lots of writers use hyperbole for effect. In fact, if you've ever been telling a story and decide to make the time you spent stuck on the airplane a little longer and a little scarier, you've used hyperbole, too. By now, you've probably noticed that Jerry Spinelli *loves* hyperbole. What are some examples of hyperbole that you've seen in the book?



Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

***Maniac Magee***  
**Chapters 22–26****Reading Strategy: Asking Questions**

Jeffrey Magee learns a lot by asking questions. It is especially important to ask questions, all kinds of questions—big ones, stupid ones, obvious ones, profound ones—when you read. The more questions you ask about the story as you read, the more carefully you will read and the more involved you will become. Write down your questions in your notebook, and talk about them later in your literature circle.

**Writing in Your Literature Response Journal****A. Write about one of these topics in your journal. Circle the topic you chose.**

1. Maniac Magee asks Grayson lots and lots of questions. What questions would you like to ask Maniac? How do you think he might respond? What do you want to know about him? Write a list of questions in your journal.
2. Have you ever had a friendship with an older person? What do you notice about Maniac Magee's relationship with Grayson? What does it remind you of? How would you compare it to your friendship with someone older?

**B. What were your predictions, questions, observations, and connections as you read? Write about one of them in your journal. Check the response you chose.** Prediction     Question     Observation     Connection

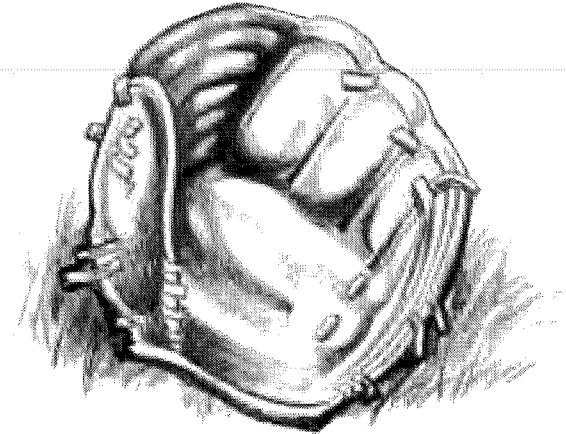
## Group Discussion

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

### *Maniac Magee* Chapters 22–26

#### For Your Discussion Group

- \* One of the best things about reading a book with a group is that some people may know about things others do not. Find out if everyone in your group understands all the baseball talk—the pitchers, the majors, the minors, the scouts, the rules of the game. If someone doesn't know much about baseball, clue him or her in. Make sure you do it in a way that is respectful of the fact that there are some things that people don't know. For instance, you may know about baseball, but not about soccer.
- \* Talk together about the scene where Grayson questions Magee about black people. Is this scene realistic? Tell why or why not. Why do you think Jerry Spinelli included this scene in the book? Does it tell you anything about the larger world in which Jeffrey lives?



#### Writer's Craft: Dialogue

Whereas the first part of *Maniac Magee* is filled with freewheeling descriptions of Maniac's exploits, the second is largely made up of the quiet and very natural conversations between the boy and his new friend Grayson. In order to make those conversations feel real, Spinelli writes the words in the way the characters would actually talk—“*But call me Grayson, like ever'body.*” There are many short, simple sentences that capture the genuine kind of back and forth banter between two people. Note, too, that Spinelli does not find it necessary to indicate who is speaking all the time—to always say “he said.” He trusts the reader to follow the dialogue and always know who's talking.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

*Maniac Magee*  
**Chapters 27–32**



**Reading Strategy: Noticing the Author's Style**

As you read, one thing you may find yourself noticing without even realizing it is the author's style—the particular way she or he puts words together. You may observe that the writer uses lots of comparisons, or none at all, tells the story mostly with dialogue, or never tells you what the characters said. Sometimes an author will even change her or his style from book to book, or within a book.

**Writing in Your Literature Response Journal**

**A. Write about one of these topics in your journal. Circle the topic you chose.**

1. Compare Jerry Spinelli's styles in Part I and Part II. How are the styles similar? How do they differ? Use sample passages from the book to support your judgment.
2. Do you remember how you learned to read? Why do you think Grayson never learned? Why is Jeffrey able to teach Grayson to read?
3. On Thanksgiving Day, Jeffrey says grace. What is he thankful for? Does anything surprise you about what he says? Explain what it is and why it surprised you. What are you grateful for?

**B. What were your predictions, questions, observations, and connections as you read? Write about one of them in your journal. Check the response you chose.**

- Prediction     Question     Observation     Connection

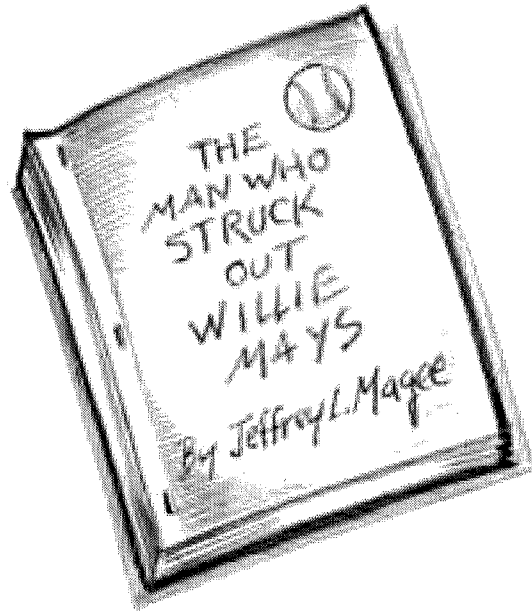
## Group Discussion

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

### *Maniac Magee* Chapters 27–32

#### For Your Discussion Group

- \* Talk about holidays and the way Magee and Grayson celebrate Thanksgiving and Christmas. What is typical about their festivities? What is unusual? How do their celebrations compare to the way most people celebrate the holidays? Make a list of everything Maniac and Grayson have given each other since they met.
- \* Were you prepared for the end of Part II? How did it make you feel, and why? What upsets Maniac so much at the funeral?

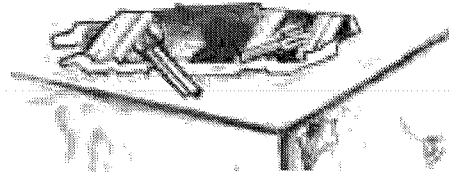


#### Writer's Craft: Comparisons

When Grayson is learning to read, Spinelli compares his troubles with the letter *c* to trying to ride a bucking bronco. Sometimes elaborate comparisons can make the story confusing—you can forget for a minute whether you are reading about an old man learning to read or a cowboy at a rodeo. That's part of the fun of comparisons in writing; they let you have both images in your mind at once. They make you feel just how hard and wild learning to read is and how tough and persistent Grayson is—more so than if all you saw in your imagination was a man sitting at a table with a book. What other comparisons do you notice Jerry Spinelli using?

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

*Maniac Magee*  
**Chapters 33–38**



**Reading Strategy: Making Predictions**

As a character, Maniac Magee is pretty unpredictable; it's hard to imagine what he might do next. By now, you may be wondering what is going to happen at the end of the story. Where do you think it's going? What makes you think so? When you ask yourself those questions, you often begin to pay closer attention to what's happening right now in the book. You try to find clues that will help you figure out what is going to happen next.

**Writing in Your Literature Response Journal**

**A. Write about one of these topics in your journal. Circle the topic you chose.**

1. What do you think will happen to Maniac's relationships with the McNabs, Mars Bar, and/or the Beales? Explain what kinds of questions, clues, and personal experience you used to make your predictions.
2. Look at the first sentence of Chapter 34. How does it make you feel? What if Spinelli had described a warm, spring day? Would it have made you feel the same way? Write about a time when you were sad or angry or happy, but do not describe how you felt. Instead, describe the weather and make it express your mood.
2. What is Maniac Magee's most powerful memory? Why is it so powerful? Is it something he saw or just imagined? What is your most powerful memory? Write about it.

**B. What were your predictions, questions, observations, and connections as you read? Write about one of them in your journal. Check the response you chose.**

Prediction     Question     Observation     Connection

## Group Discussion

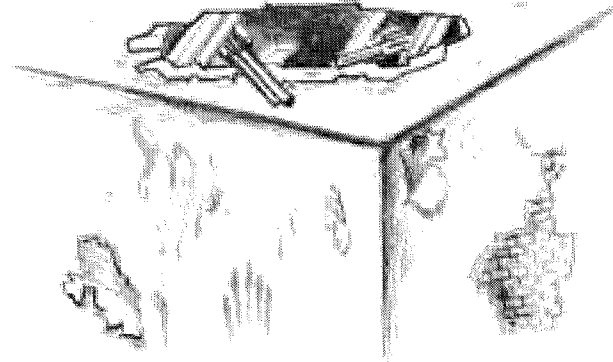
Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

### *Maniac Magee* Chapters 33–38

#### For Your Discussion Group

*"No one else would orphan him."*

- \* The quote above appears on the last page of chapter 33 (page 123). Reread the chapter, and then discuss the following questions: What does Maniac mean when he thinks that? How many times has he been orphaned? What do you think could heal that terrible feeling inside him?



- \* Again and again, Maniac does things that all the other kids are scared to do. Go back to the beginning of the book. Make a list of all the things he should be scared of but isn't. Examine your list. What does this tell you about Maniac? Why isn't he scared of these things? Is there any thing that he *is* scared of? What is it?

#### Writer's Craft: Semi-colons

*"They weren't raisins; they were roaches."*

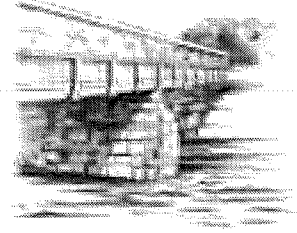
If two sentences express ideas that are closely related, you can use a semicolon to separate them. As you read, notice how often Jerry Spinelli uses semicolons. Write two separate and complete sentences for the sentence above. Say the original sentence several times. Pay attention to the flow of the sentence. Then repeat the two new sentences several times. How does the flow of the two sentences compare to the original sentence?



Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

*Maniac Magee*

## Chapters 39–46

**Reading Strategy: Summarizing**

So much happens in *Maniac Magee*. The book is crammed with detail and activity. To keep the story straight in your head, at the end of each chapter ask yourself, “What is the most important thing that happened in this chapter?” For instance, after Chapter 43, you might note to yourself, “Maniac is sleeping at different houses all over town.” Many other things are happening in this little poetic chapter, but summarizing can help you keep track of the main events of the story.

**Writing in Your Literature Response Journal**

**A. Write about one of these topics in your journal. Circle the topic you chose.**

1. Summarize one of the chapters in this section. Reread the chapter, and then jot down what happened. Remember to list the events in the order in which they occurred in the story.
2. Copy into your journal one of your favorite paragraphs or passages from the book. As you write, become aware of the length of the sentences and the feel of the words. Why did you choose this passage? What do you like about it? What do you like about the writing?
3. What is the biggest problem in your life? Do you think Maniac could solve it? How would he solve it? Write a scene where you imagine Maniac in your home and in your town.

**B. What were your predictions, questions, observations, and connections as you read? Write about one of them in your journal. Check the response you chose.**

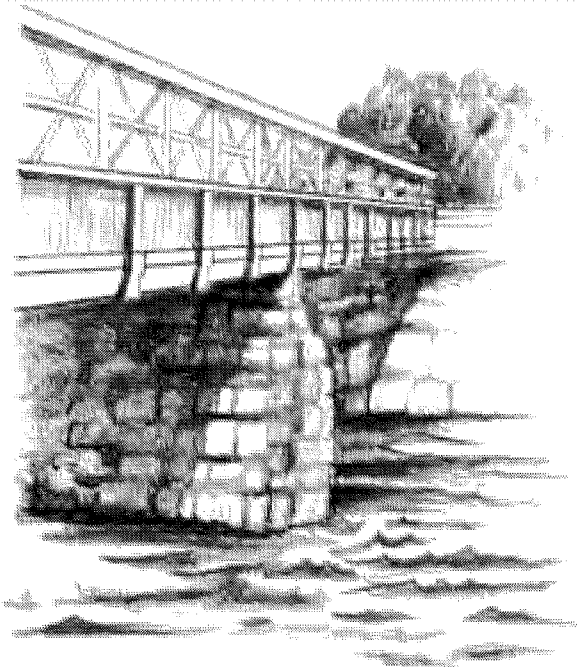
Prediction       Question       Observation       Connection

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

*Maniac Magee*  
**Chapters 39–46**

**For Your Discussion Group**

- \* Talk about the relationship between Mars Bar and Maniac. Why does Mars initially not like Maniac? How do they manage to become friends?
- \* Individually, make a list of all the “knots” that Maniac unties during the course of the story. What are all the problems that he solves both for other people and for himself, from the beginning of the story to the end? Then share and combine your lists. Which knot do you think was hardest for Maniac to untie, and why?



**Writer’s Craft: Clichés**

A sly fox, a busy bee, a silly goose. We are so used to hearing these words together that we could almost fill in the blanks if one of them were missing. Phrases that are this predictable and tired are called **clichés**. Compare them to the way Jerry Spinelli combines words:

*“One morning in early July, cruising down the appleskin hour, Maniac thought he heard footsteps other than his own.”*

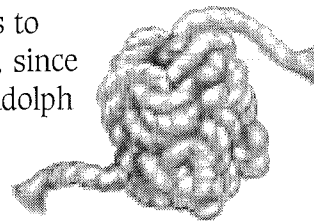
*“The appleskin hour.”* You can almost see the soft pinks and whites curved around the horizon. Have you ever heard the sky described that way before? The challenge for a writer is to say things in ways that seem both perfect and fresh. Do you think Jerry Spinelli accomplishes that? Is his language ever clichéd?

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## *Maniac Magee*

### After Reading

When parents pick a name for their baby, they have many things to consider. What famous people have had that name? For instance, since the rise and fall of Nazi Germany, few people call their children Adolph anymore. The meaning of the name is important, too—does it mean wisdom or heartache? Parents must think of all the associations or **allusions** connected to the name they choose.



A writer also thinks about what to name characters, and sometimes places. He or she may make deliberate references to other stories, famous characters, or historical events. For instance, when Jerry Spinelli calls the bully Mars Bar, it's both funny to imagine him with a candy bar sticking out of his mouth, and frightening to envision him as Mars, the Roman God of War.

In *Maniac Magee*, Jerry Spinelli makes a number of allusions to other stories. Reading these stories will tell you more about what he intended with this story. You'll know more about what happens in the book and why. The allusions may be as direct as the name of a book or a famous place, but sometimes you may have to do some research to realize what Jerry Spinelli is referring to.

Research the following topics to shed more light on *Maniac Magee*. Write about them in your literature response journals, and then discuss them in your literature circle.

- \* Maniac borrows a book from Amanda about the Children's Crusade. What is the Children's Crusade? What does it have in common with *Maniac Magee*?
- \* Why does Jerry Spinelli have Maniac read *Lyle, Lyle Crocodile* to the Beale children the first night? What is that book about? What does it tell you about Maniac?
- \* In Part III, Maniac ends up in Valley Forge. What happened at Valley Forge? Why does Spinelli choose to put Maniac there at that point in the story?
- \* Research the Gordian Knot. How does it change your understanding of the end of Part 1?
- \* Read about the Roman god Mars. Why does Jerry Spinelli use Mars Bars to allude to this Roman god?