

Maniac Magee

by Jerry Spinelli

THEME Adventurers

Maniac Magee is a boy who goes on an adventure to find a home and a family. His journey takes him from one end of town to another, to a zoo, and to a band shell, among other places. The book helps students explore the Big Question: *Who goes seeking adventure and why?*



This book will help students think about some important issues, including homelessness and racism.



Realistic fiction is a story that could take place in real life. It includes characters, settings, and plot events that are realistic.

SUMMARY

This book tells the story of Maniac Magee, an orphaned boy who runs away from his depressing and angry relatives. During his search for a new home, he meets a girl who is crazy about books, a bully, a washed-up minor-league baseball player, and some adults who occasionally feed and house him. He discovers he has amazing talents, including the ability to untangle knots, teach someone to read, and run very fast. At the end, he is welcomed into one of the families in town.

Other books by Jerry Spinelli

- *Crash*
- *There's a Girl in My Hammerlock*

SNEAK PREVIEW

Match Students and Books

This book will appeal to students who

- like reading about kids their own age
- enjoy reading about kids who do amazing things
- like books about important issues

Comprehension Skills and Strategies

- prior knowledge
- cause and effect
- draw conclusions
- character/plot
- background knowledge
- story structure
- ask questions
- critical thinking

Vocabulary Strategy

- context clues

How to Use the Book

Students may work independently, as partners, or in a small group. The book may be divided into three parts for reading.

Before Reading

BUILD BACKGROUND

PRACTICE
PAGE

6

Show students the cover of *Maniac Magee* and read the title. Then read the introduction to the book aloud. Ask: *What kind of kid is Maniac? What do you think you'll learn about him?* Tell students to skim the book and read a few paragraphs here and there to get an idea of what the story will be about. Students can use **Student Practice Page 6** to describe their family members.

INTRODUCE VOCABULARY

PRACTICE
PAGE

7

Use **Student Practice Page 7** to introduce vocabulary or to assess students' understanding of the words before they read. If necessary, provide additional practice with the words. For example, ask students to say or write a new sentence for each word.

Words to Know

trolley
suspicious
infamous
mirage
hallucination
emanations
allergic
incubating
desolation
disgrace

Reading the Book

PART 1 • PAGES 1–76 In Part 1, Jeffrey (Maniac) Magee runs away from his aunt and uncle's home in Hollidaysburg after freaking out during the spring musicale. He meets Amanda Beale, a girl who carries a suitcase full of books with her. She lends him a book. Later that day, he intercepts a pass intended for the local football star, hits a home run off a baseball pitcher, and saves a boy from the Finsterwald's backyard. He meets a bully named Mars Bar who tears a page from Amanda's book. He offers to fix it for Amanda, and he goes to stay with her family. This upsets some neighbors, and someone paints racist graffiti on the house. Amanda convinces him he could be a hero if he untied the famous Cobble's Knot, which he does. He is showered with confetti, which turns out to be made from the pages of Amanda's favorite book. Maniac Magee runs away to avoid hurting Amanda and her family any more.

COMPREHENSION SKILL Cause and Effect

PRACTICE
PAGE

8

On **Student Practice Page 8**, students complete a graphic organizer by filling in causes and effects from the novel. Review with students what they have learned about cause and effect.

- An **effect** is what happens. A **cause** is why it happens.
- An effect may have more than one cause, and a cause may have more than one effect.

COMPREHENSION STRATEGY Ask Questions

Remind students that good readers ask questions as they read to make sure they understand what is happening. Asking what happened and why helps readers stay engaged. Tell readers that if they cannot answer their questions, they can reread or read on to see if they are answered later in the book.

Reader Response

See **Teacher’s Guide Page 8** for a possible response to the question, “Have you ever felt like you did not belong? What did you do about it?”

PART 2 • PAGES 79–118 In Part 2, Maniac Magee meets Earl Grayson, a washed-up baseball pitcher who works as a groundskeeper. Maniac teaches the old man to read and then writes down the stories the old man tells him about his days playing minor league baseball. The old man dies in his sleep and Maniac runs away again.

COMPREHENSION SKILL Draw Conclusions

PRACTICE
PAGE
9

On **Student Practice Page 9**, students draw conclusions about characters in the novel from what they say, do, and think. Review with students what they have learned about drawing conclusions.

- A **conclusion** is a sensible decision you make after you think about facts and details that you read.
- **Drawing conclusions** may also be called making inferences.
- Use your prior knowledge to help you draw conclusions.

COMPREHENSION STRATEGY Background Knowledge

Remind students to stop and think about what they already know as they read. Good readers use what they know about how people behave and how people show their feelings to understand characters in stories.

Reader Response

See **Teacher’s Guide Page 9** for a possible response to the question, “Why are home and family so important?”

PART 3 • PAGES 121–184 In Part 3, Maniac meets up with the people from Part 1. He lives with the McNab family in their squalid home and tries to keep the younger boys in school. He invites his African American friend Mars Bar to a party at the McNabs, which turns into chaos. Magee runs away again. At the end of the book, he comes across one of the McNab boys stuck on the trolley trestle. Reminded that this is how his parents died, he panics and walks away. Mars Bar saves the boy. He then tells Amanda that Maniac is hiding in the buffalo pen. She convinces him to come live with her family.

PRACTICE
PAGE

10

COMPREHENSION SKILL Character/Plot

On **Student Practice Page 10**, students write answers to questions about the plot of the novel. Review with students what they have learned about character and plot.

- You can learn about characters by paying attention to that they say and do.
- The plot is the pattern of events in the novel.
- A story begins with a problem and builds through the middle with events called rising action. The character confronts the problem directly at the climax, and the story ends with the resolution.

COMPREHENSION STRATEGY Story Structure

Remind students that a story has a certain structure and that good readers pay attention to the parts of a story so they can follow what happens. Remind students about the parts of a story: a problem, rising action, climax, and resolution. Tell them to figure out the problem and see how or if the character solves it.

Reader Response

See **Teacher's Guide Page 10** for a possible response to the question, "Which character in the novel is your favorite? Explain why you like this character."

After Reading

COMPREHENSION CHECK**PART 1 • PAGES 5–76**

- 1. How does Jeffrey come to be on his own?** His parents are killed in a trolley accident and he is sent to live with his aunt and uncle who do not talk to one another. He goes berserk at a school musicale and runs away. (Cause and Effect)
- 2. What does Jeffrey learn about the two parts of Two Mills? How does he end up in the East End?** They are divided racially—whites in the West End and African Americans in the East End. Jeffrey, who is white, meets Amanda, who is black. (Character/Plot)
- 3. How does Jeffrey become known as Maniac?** He becomes known for his daring feats and his ability to run really fast. (Character)
- 4. Why does the author say "Maniac Magee was blind. Sort of"?** Maniac does not see why some people think it is wrong that a white boy would go to live with a black family. (Draw Conclusions)

PART 2 • PAGES 79–118

- 5. What do we learn about Maniac Magee in Part 2?** We learn that Maniac loves to read (he spends the money the old man gives him on books at the library) and is able to teach Earl to read. He encourages Earl to tell the stories about his minor league baseball career. (👁️ Character/Plot)
- 6. How is living with Earl Grayson like having a family?** Maniac works with Earl, they celebrate holidays together, and they care for each other. (👁️ Draw Conclusions)

PART 3 • PAGES 121–184

- 7. Who discovers Maniac’s hiding place at Valley Forge? What happens next?** John McNab’s brothers discover him. Maniac bribes them with free pizza (from untangling Cobble’s Knot) and takes them home. (👁️ Character/Plot)
- 8. How does Mars Bar save the day in the novel?** He rescues Russell McNab who is stuck on the trolley trestle where Maniac’s parents were killed. Then he tells Amanda where Maniac is hiding, and she goes and brings him back to her house to live. (👁️ Character/Plot)

CRITICAL THINKING

- 1. What kinds of homes and ways of living does Maniac experience in the novel? How important is home to Maniac?** Possible response: He sees a cold, unfriendly home in which his aunt and uncle do not speak. He sees the loving black home of the Beales. He and Earl make a home even though they are homeless. He sees the horrible home of the McNabs. Maniac searches for a home throughout the book. (Analyzing)
- 2. Will Maniac stay with the Beales? Why or why not?** Answers will vary. Some students will say yes because he is welcomed there. Others will say no, he seems to solve problems by running away from them. (Evaluating)

ASSESSMENT

Use the Selection Test on **Student Practice Page 11** to assess students’ understanding of the book. See **Teacher’s Guide Page 11** for answers.

PRACTICE
PAGE
11

Who's in Your Family?

Directions In *Maniac Magee*, Jeffrey goes on an adventure to find a family. Take some time to think about your family. In the first column of the chart, there is a family member listed. Write “yes” in the second column if your family includes this member or “no” if it does not. In the third column, write a brief description of the members of your family. **Answers will vary.**

	Included in your family?	Description
Mother		
Father		
Brother		
Sister		
Dog		
Cat		

Words to Know**Directions** Read the definitions. Write a word to finish each sentence.**trolley**, *n.* an electric streetcar**suspicious**, *adj.* having a thought or feeling; suspecting**infamous**, *adj.* having a very bad reputation**mirage**, *n.* an optical illusion in which a distant scene appears closer than it really is**hallucinations**, *n.* imaginary things seen or heard**emanations**, *n.* things that come forth or spread out from a source**allergic**, *adj.* having an allergy, an unusual reaction to certain substances**incubating**, *v.* growing or developing**desolation**, *n.* a ruined, lonely, or desperate condition**disgrace**, *n.* loss of honor or respect; shame

- Walking past the bakery, we caught the sweet **emanations** of cupcakes.
- Both my brothers are seriously **allergic** to strawberries.
- The medicine produced weird **hallucinations**.
- Grandpa was **suspicious** when the man came to the door the third time.
- Joey became **infamous** around town after he stole a jacket from the store.
- Our student council spent weeks **incubating** the idea of a school picnic.
- You can still see the rails of the old **trolley** system.
- People who travel in the desert tell of seeing a **mirage** of water in front of them.
- After an embarrassing loss, our basketball left the court in **disgrace**.
- Before the hikers were finally rescued, they were living in **desolation**.

Some words have more than one meaning. Use the **context**, or the words around it, to figure out which meaning is best. Read the following sentence from *Maniac Magee*. Write two meanings for the word in dark type. Circle the meaning that fits in the sentence.

When he had gone through about half of them, he figured it was time to **tackle** the encyclopedia A.

- _____ **to try to deal with** _____
- Sample answers: to grab or seize, to throw to the ground, or fishing equipment**

Why Did That Happen?

Directions As you read Part 1 of *Maniac Magee*, look for cause-and-effect relationships. In the boxes below, write why each event happens.

This is what happens...	This is why it happens...
Jeffrey goes to live with his Aunt and Uncle.	1. His parents are killed in a trolley accident.
Jeffrey has dinner at the Pickwell's house.	2. He is homeless and Mrs. Pickwell feeds anyone who comes to the table.
Jeffrey gets to be known as Maniac.	3. He catches a pass, rescues a kid from the Finsterwald's back yard, hits a home run off the star pitcher, and runs like a maniac.
Maniac sleeps in the deer shed at the zoo.	4. He is homeless.
Someone writes racist graffiti on Amanda's house.	5. People in the East End think that since he's white, Maniac belongs in the West End.
Maniac wins a year's supply of pizza.	6. He unravels Cobble's Knot.
Maniac runs away.	7. He realizes he is causing problems for Amanda's family.

Reader Response Text to Self

8. Have you ever felt like you didn't belong? What did you do about it?

Responses will vary, but should indicate an awareness of what it means to be lonely and/or different from others.

Understanding the Characters

Directions As you read Part 2 of *Maniac Magee*, draw conclusions about the characters from what they do, say, and think. Use the words you read and what you know about people to draw your conclusions. **Responses will vary. Samples are shown.**

What Characters Do, Say, and Think	What This Shows About the Character
1. Maniac tries to feed the baby buffalo a carrot.	He understands that children need care, even though he doesn't realize that the buffalo is too young to chew a carrot.
2. Earl takes Maniac to the band shell instead of the hospital.	He wants to take care of the boy himself. He wants a friend.
3. Earl is surprised to learn that the Beales eat and live just the way everyone else lives.	Earl has never known African Americans and believes lies and rumors about them.
4. Maniac teaches Earl to read.	Reading and learning are really important to Maniac.
5. Earl thinks he has no stories to tell.	He thinks he is not important.
6. Maniac paints an address on the door of the band shell.	He thinks of the band shell as home, so he gives it an address.
7. Maniac runs away before the minister gets to the cemetery.	Maniac can't bear to be at the burial of his friend as it represents yet another family that he has lost.

Reader Response Text to World

8. Why are home and family so important to people? **Responses will vary, but might include the idea that home is a place where people get what they need and can be safe. Adults care for and love children in a family.**

Tell the Story

Directions As you read Part 3 of *Maniac Magee*, think about the plot of the story and how it affects the characters. Then answer the questions below.

1. What is the problem, or conflict, in *Maniac Magee*?

Jeffrey Magee wants to find a home and a family.

2. What does Jeffrey do first to try to solve this problem? What characters try to help him solve his problem?

He first runs away and tries to live on his own. Amanda, Mrs. Beale, the Pickwells, and Earl try to help him find food and shelter.

3. What events lead to the most exciting part of the story?

Maniac beats Mars Bar in a foot race and taunts him into crashing a party at the McNab's house. The party is a disaster and Maniac runs away and moves into the buffalo pen again. He starts running every day and Mars Bar joins him.

4. What happens at the climax of the novel?

Maniac is unable to rescue Russell McNab, who is caught on the trolley trestle where his parents died. He walks away and Mars Bar saves the boy.

5. What is the resolution of the novel?

Mars Bar tells Amanda that Maniac is living in the buffalo pen. She goes there and persuades him to come back to her family.

6. What do you think the big idea, or theme, of the novel is? Explain your idea.

Having a home and belonging to a family group is one theme of the novel. Students might also identify the idea that stereotypes are usually wrong and harmful as a theme.

Reader Response Text to Self

7. Which character is your favorite? Explain why you like this character.

Responses will vary. Students should give a reason for their opinion.

Selection Test

Directions Circle the letter of the best answer.

1. What kind of writing is *Maniac Magee*?
 - A science writing
 - B realistic fiction
 - C fantasy
 - D historical fiction
2. What is Cobble's Knot?
 - A baseball slang for a foul ball
 - B a giant ball of tangled string
 - C the name of one of Amanda's books
 - D Mrs. Pickwell's casserole
3. Why does Mrs. Beale get angry at Jeffrey?
 - A He stops doing his homework.
 - B He writes graffiti on the house.
 - C He talks trash at home.
 - D He brings Mars Bar to the house.
4. Which of these does Jeffrey *not* do at the Beales?
 - A sleep in a bed
 - B wash the dishes
 - C bathe Hester and Lester
 - D go running in the morning
5. How do Maniac and Earl meet?
 - A They meet after watching McNab pitch a game.
 - B Earl rescues Maniac after he has fallen from a fence.
 - C Earl works at the tire factory with Mr. Beale.
 - D Both Earl and Maniac like to get books at the library.
6. How does Maniac get all the books he has in the equipment room?
 - A Amanda drops them off for him.
 - B He steals them from Earl's room.
 - C He buys them at the library.
 - D Earl doesn't want them any more.
7. What does Maniac paint on the door of the band shell?
 - A a picture of his parents
 - B the word *Help*
 - C an address
 - D Earl's phone number
8. Maniac stays in a very famous place. What was it?
 - A the Grand Canyon
 - B Bethany Church
 - C the White House
 - D Valley Forge
9. How does Maniac take care of Russell and Piper?
 - A He bribes them into going to school.
 - B He helps them clean up the house.
 - C He takes charge of building the block shelter.
 - D He teaches them how to cook and clean.
10. Who does Maniac go to live with at the end of the novel?
 - A Mars Bar
 - B Aunt Dot and Uncle Dan
 - C Amanda
 - D Russell and Piper