

# Maniac Magee

Jerry Spinelli

Teacher's Guide

Written By Laurie Rozakis, Ph.D.

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## Synopsis

### Before the Story

The narrator says that it is hard to separate the truth from the myth about Maniac Magee. After his parents die, Jeffrey Lionel Magee's life becomes legendary, as he accomplishes athletic and other feats which awe his contemporaries.

### Part 1, Chapter 1

Maniac Magee was born Jeffrey Lionel Magee in a house in Bridgeport, not in a dump as rumored. His parents died in a trolley crash when he was three years old. The toddler was sent to live with his nearest relatives, Aunt Dot and Uncle Dan. The couple hated each other and should have divorced, but instead split up all their possessions in two camps and stopped talking to each other. Eight years later, Jeffrey started screaming during a school play, yelling "Talk! Talk!" at them. Then he bolted from the auditorium.

### Chapter 2

No one knows how he gets from Hollidaysburg to Two Mills and so this period is called "The Lost Year."

### Chapter 3

School girl Amanda Beale is the first to stop and talk to Maniac. She is suspicious because he is white, but he is wandering through the black section of town. The East End is for blacks; the West End is for whites. Because Amanda is carrying a suitcase, Maniac asks her if she is running away. She opens her suitcase and shows him that it is filled with books. She calls it her "library." He begs her to lend him a book and she finally relents.

### Chapter 4

The legend starts later that same day, when Maniac runs onto the field during football practice and intercepts the ball during a play.

### Chapter 5

The legend builds when some high school kids dump Arnold Jones into the dreaded Finsterwald's yard. Arnold quakes in horror, a condition called "finsterwallies." According to legend, Maniac rescues Arnold, placing him on the Finsterwald's front steps. Arnold runs away, but Maniac stretches out on the steps. People are shocked at his bravery.

### Chapter 6

Mrs. Pickwell calls her family for dinner, using her distinctive whistle. Maniac sneaks in and has dinner with the enormous family.

### Chapter 7

Next, he is spotted at a Little League game. Maniac comes to the plate and hits John McNab's cap to center field. Maniac gets a home run on every pitch that McNab throws. The crowd goes wild. Furious, McNab throws a frog at Maniac, who bunts it, and makes it around the bases yet again.

### Chapter 8

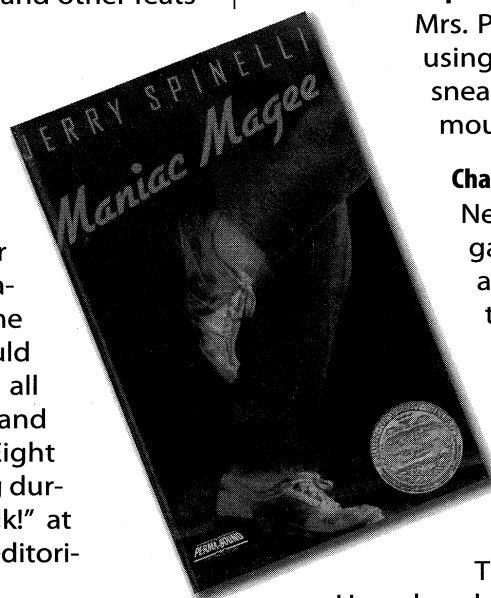
The legend gets its name: Maniac. Homeless, he lives in the deer shed at the zoo.

### Chapter 9

McNab and his gang, the Cobras, hunt Maniac. They are shocked to see him running on the rail. They chase him to the East End, where they figure he will be attacked.

### Chapter 10

Fierce Mars Bars Thompson offers Maniac a bite of his candy bar. Maniac does the unthinkable and takes it. Kids are shocked at this affront, but mainly that a white kid would put his lips where a black kid's had been. Befuddled, Mars takes Maniac's book and refuses to give it back. A neighborhood woman intercedes, gets the book back, and tells Maniac to get along. The book, which belongs to Amanda, is slightly damaged.



## Chapter 11

Still determined to return Amanda's book, Maniac wanders through the East End. Ambushed by Mars Bars and his gang, Maniac is rescued by Amanda. She invites him to her home.

## Chapter 12

Maniac meets Amanda's mother and Amanda's younger siblings, Hester and Lester. Mr. Beale comes home for dinner and later, offers to drive Maniac home. On the drive, Maniac admits that he is homeless. The Beales take him in, giving him Amanda's room.

## Chapter 13

Maniac fits into the house smoothly, helping with chores without being asked. Hester and Lester behave better, even agreeing to take a bath. The Beales discover that Maniac is allergic to pizza.

## Chapter 14

Maniac loves his new life with the Beales. Hands Down drafts Maniac for the football team, even though Maniac is young and small. Maniac is a huge success as an athlete. Inside the house he is known as Jeffrey; outside, he is Maniac.

## Chapter 15

Maniac becomes famous all over the East End as the white kid living with the Beales and as a great athlete. He loves everything about his new life – but everything does not love him back.

## Chapter 16

Maniac is blind to all the dislike building up around him, especially racial tensions.

## Chapter 17

One hot August day, Maniac is cooling off in the fire hydrant when a black man points to him and says, "Whitey." The man orders him to move on. Hester and Lester come to Maniac's defense and tell the man – Old Ragpicker – to leave Maniac alone. A few days later, someone chalks "Fishbelly Go Home" on the Beales' front door.

## Chapter 18

Maniac feels that he should leave, but Amanda wants him to stay. They have a fight and Maniac leaves. Amanda is frantic until he comes home, very late that night. Amanda tells Maniac about Cobble's Knot.

## Chapter 19

According to the legend, Mr. Cobble found a huge knot dangling from the flagpole in front of his grocery store. He offered a prize to anyone who could untangle it. Time passed, no one undid the knot, and the grocery store became a pizza parlor. The prize is now one pizza a week for a year. Amanda wants Maniac to untangle the knot so that he will be a big hero and no one will mess with him. He agrees to give it a try.

## Chapter 20

Maniac works on the knot, attracting much attention. By dinnertime, he has untied it.

## Chapter 21

Cobble's Corner is a madhouse of excitement. The joy is shattered when someone takes Amanda's prized A volume in her set of encyclopedias and destroys it. The racially-motivated act is designed to drive Maniac away and it works: Maniac leaves town.

## Part II, Chapter 22

Maniac ends up at the zoo, with the bison. He is in terrible shape. Grayson, an old man, takes him to the band shell and gives him some Cup-A-Soup. Maniac tells his story and Grayson takes him out for more food.

## Chapter 23

Grayson takes Maniac to his home, the Two Mills YMCA. He showers and Grayson buys him some new clothes. Maniac threatens to run away if Grayson forces him to attend school.

## Chapter 24

Grayson is shocked when Maniac tells him that the Beales live the same way that white people do. Grayson drops Maniac off at the equipment room. Grayson reveals that he wanted to be a baseball player when he was a child.

## Chapter 25

Grayson explains that he made it to the minor leagues, as a pitcher.

## Chapter 26

Grayson teaches Maniac how to play baseball. Meanwhile, Grayson gives Maniac some money every day for sweets, but Maniac uses the money for books. Maniac is educating himself on a wide variety of topics. Grayson asks Maniac to teach him to read.



**Chapter 27**

Maniac learns that Grayson had a miserable childhood and was on his own by age fifteen. Maniac teaches Grayson to read. The elderly man is an avid learner. The first sentence he reads is "I see the ball."

**Chapter 28**

Grayson brings many comforts to Maniac's little shack, so it is soon quite cozy.

**Chapter 29**

They have a wonderful Thanksgiving together, the best that Maniac can ever remember. They give thanks for their bounty. They listen to polka music and end up dancing happily. Maniac paints a house number, 101, outside their shack. He calls it "One oh one Band Shell Boulevard."

**Chapter 30**

Grayson moves in with Maniac and they have a marvelous Christmas. They decorate the shack and a second tree in the forest.

**Chapter 31**

On Christmas, Grayson and Maniac bring some gifts to the animals at the zoo, showing the true Christmas spirit of sharing. Maniac makes a book for Grayson about his life, called *The Man Who Struck Out Willie Mays*. Maniac is delighted with Grayson's two gifts to him: a brand new baseball and Grayson's own, historic mitt.

**Chapter 32**

Maniac awakens one morning to find that Grayson has died in his sleep. Maniac is the only mourner at the funeral. The minister is late and rather than wait with the rude attendants, Maniac once again strikes out on his own.

**Part III, Chap. 33**

Angrily, Maniac paints out the number 101 on the shack, leaves it, and drifts around. It is January and bitterly cold. He ends up in Valley Forge, where he takes refuge in one of the cabins.

**Chapter 34**

Maniac meets two runaways, young boys, in a close-by cabin. Maniac is shocked to discover the boys are Piper and Russell McNab, Big John McNab's brothers.

**Chapter 35**

When Maniac enables Big John to save face over the baseball incident, Big John brings Maniac home with him. Maniac is shocked at the filthy house and

McNab's drunken father. He is equally shocked that the McNabs are blatant racists.

**Chapter 36**

Maniac cuts a series of deals with Piper and Russell to get them to attend school on a regular basis. He does feats of bravery as well.

**Chapter 37**

Due to his acts of bravery, Maniac's legend grows around the white part of town. They give him the most perilous challenge of all: they dare him to go to the East End, the black part of town.

**Chapter 38**

Maniac runs into Mars Bar and they decide to race to see who is the "baddest." Maniac wins the race, and wonders if he would have been better off losing to enable Mars to save face. Mars hates Maniac now, not because he is white but because Maniac beat him in a race.

**Chapter 39**

The McNabs are building a bunker to protect themselves from what they feel is an imminent attack by the blacks.

**Chapter 40**

Maniac goes to the Pickwells' house and has a wonderful time, as he had anticipated. He continues to act as a father to the two McNab boys, while he yearns to have a father himself. One day he commits the ultimate McNab transgression: he grabs the boys' toy guns and destroys them. For this, he is thrown out of the house.

**Chapter 41**

Maniac takes Mars to the Pickwells', so he can see the best the whites offer.

**Chapter 42**

Then Maniac brings Mars Bar to the McNab house. The visit is a disaster. Mr. McNab immediately leaves the room, refusing to have anything to do with a black person. Maniac decides that it's time to go home, but he remembers that he doesn't have one.

**Chapter 43**

Maniac sleeps in the zoo and in a different porch or backyard every night.

**Chapter 44**

Maniac keeps meeting Mars, until it becomes apparent that Mars is following him. One day, Maniac and Mars come upon Russell McNab trapped on

the trolley track, frozen with fear. One false step and the child will plunge to his death below. Maniac walks away.

## Chapter 45

Mars chases Maniac, shocked that he did not rescue Russell. Maniac explains that his parents died in a trolley accident and he was terrified himself, reliving the accident. Mars rescued Russell himself and brought him to his home. There, Mars' mother cleaned the two McNab boys and comforted them. Mars invites Maniac to come live with him and his family, but Maniac refuses.

## Chapter 46

Amanda Beale comes to the zoo and forces Maniac to come back to live with her family. He agrees, realizing that at long last, he is finally going home.

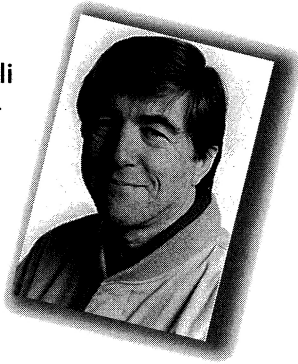
## Timeline

1941	December 7, America enters World War II Jerry Spinelli born
1948	State of Israel founded
1950	Korean War begins
1952	Elizabeth II crowned Queen of England Car seat belts introduced Polio vaccine invented
1954	Supreme Court issues Brown v. Board of Education, making segregation illegal
1955	Disneyland opens McDonald's corporation founded
1956	Sabin invents oral polio vaccine
1957	Dr. Seuss publishes The Cat in the Hat
1958	NASA established
1960	First televised U.S. presidential debate

1961	Peace Corps founded Berlin Wall built Alan Shepard is first American in space
1963	President Kennedy assassinated Jerry Spinelli graduates from Gettysburg College
1964	Jerry Spinelli earns his M.A. from Johns Hopkins University
1967	First Super Bowl First heart transplant Six Day War in Middle East
1969	Neil Armstrong is the first human on the moon
1974	President Nixon resigns
1979	Sony introduces the Walkman
1981	First woman appointed to the U.S. Supreme Court Pac-man video game is very popular
1982	Jerry Spinelli publishes his first young adult novel, Space Station Seventh Grade
1983	Sally Ride becomes first woman in space
1989	Berlin Wall taken down
1990	Nelson Mandela is freed in South Africa Jerry Spinelli publishes Maniac Magee
1991	Collapse of Soviet Union Maniac Magee wins the Newbery Medal
1997	Scientists clone sheep

## Author Sketch

Born February 1, 1941, in Norristown, PA, Jerry Spinelli earned his B.A. from Gettysburg College in 1963 and his M.A. from Johns Hopkins University the following year. Spinelli had a twenty-three year career as a writer and editor with the Chilton Company, a magazine publisher, in Radnor, PA, before becoming a full-time freelance writer. Spinelli's young adult novels cover such controversial topics as racism and sex.



Spinelli published *Space Station Seventh Grade*, his first young adult novel, when he was forty-one years old. The main character, thirteen-year-old Jason Herkimer, has many common teenage experiences: he falls in love with a cheerleader, struggles with pimples, and tries to get along with his parents and stepfather. However, the issue of racism enters the story through Jason's friend, Peter Kim, a Korean-American, and through an episode that takes place in an African-American neighborhood. Spinelli followed *Space Station Seventh Grade* with many well-received young adult novels.

When asked if he does research for his writing, Spinelli says: "The answer is yes and no. No, in the sense that I seldom plow through books at the library to gather material. Yes, in the sense that the first 15 years of my life turned out to be one big research project. I thought I was simply growing up in Norristown, Pennsylvania; looking back now I can see that I was also gathering material that would one day find its way into my books."

Spinelli lives with his wife and fellow writer, Eileen, in West Chester, Pennsylvania. While they write in separate rooms of the house, the couple edits and celebrates one another's work. Their six children have given Jerry Spinelli plenty of clever material for his writing.

## Critic's Corner

*Maniac Magee*, published in 1990, grapples with the topic of racism. The novel received the top award for young adult fiction, the Newbery Medal. It was also awarded the Boston Globe/Horn Book Award, the D. C. Fisher Award, the Pacific Northwest Readers' Choice Award and the Carolyn Field Award. Not surprisingly, the novel received enthusiastic reviews. The *New York Times Book Review*, for example, said that the novel "has the tone of a story that has come down through the years." *Publishers Weekly* called the novel a "humorous yet poignant tall tale."

Spinelli himself describes the novel as "a blending of tall tale and actuality," in which truth and fiction merge "to the point where it makes no difference which is which." This novel centers on Jeffrey Lionel Magee, an orphan who earns the name "Maniac" through his extraordinary running speed, abrupt appearances, and talent for hitting baseballs.

Many critics have noted that Spinelli presents adolescents as they are, suffering from acne and filled with pubescent curiosity. John Keller, writing in *Horn Book*, remarked: "Jerry has listened and observed, and, in language that is never self-consciously literary, he illuminates that rough magic children carry around with them." A family man who draws on real-life events to both teach and entertain, Spinelli, as Keller wrote, "is a man who shines forth with the desire to be a writer, a man whose great drive is to share his vision of the world with his readers. As he creates the honest and accurate worlds reflected in so many of the passages of his novels, he is also a man whose enthusiasm for what he does is infectious."

## Other Books by Jerry Spinelli

Space Station Seventh Grade (1982)  
Who Put That Hair in My Toothbrush? (1984)  
Night of the Whale (1985)  
Jason and Marceline (1986)  
Dump Days (1988)  
The Bathwater Gang (1990)  
There's a Girl in My Hammerlock (1990)  
School Daze: Report to the Principal's Office (1991)  
Fourth Grade Rats (1991)  
The Bathwater Gang Gets Down to Business (1992)  
Who Ran My Underwear Up the Flagpole? (1992)  
Do the Funky Pickle (1992)  
Picklemania (1993)  
Tooter Pepperday (1995)  
Crash (1996)  
The Library Card (1997)  
Wringer (1997)  
Blue Ribbon Blues (1998)  
Knots In My Yo-Yo String: The Autobiography of a Kid (1998)  
Stargirl (2000)  
Daddy and Me (2003)  
Loser (2003)  
Milkweed (2003)  
Misha (2004)

## Bibliography

Booklist, June 1, 1990, p. 192.  
Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books, July, 1984, p. 213; September, 1988, p. 21; September, 1990, p. 16.  
Horn Book, June, 1984, pp. 343-344; March, 1987, p. 217; May, 1988, p. 355; July/August, 1991, pp. 433-436; September, 1991, pp. 594, 599.  
Kirkus Reviews, May 1, 1984, pp. 51-52.  
New York Times Book Review, April 21, 1991, p. 33.  
Publishers Weekly, November 28, 1986, p. 78; April 29, 1988, p. 77; September 27, 1991, p. 58.  
Washington Post Book World, January 13, 1985, p. 8.

## General Objectives

1. To analyze the novel's title
2. To understand tall tales
3. To explore the exaggerated parts of the story
4. To understand the novel's setting
5. To describe the novel's plot
6. To recognize the novel's theme
7. To learn about racism
8. To understand how the legend built around Maniac
9. To explore the ways that kindness can be shown
10. To understand how Maniac finds a home

## Specific Objectives

1. To understand how Jeffrey is orphaned
2. To explore why Jeffrey is sent to live with Aunt Dot and Uncle Dan
3. To analyze why he runs away from them
4. To explore why Maniac and Amanda become friends
5. To analyze why Maniac leaves town after he untangles Cobble's Knot
6. To see how Grayson becomes a surrogate father to Maniac
7. To sympathize with Maniac's sorrow over Grayson's death
8. To understand how Maniac functions as a surrogate father to the McNab boys
9. To compare and contrast life in the Pickwell home to life with the McNabs
10. To understand why the people in the East End and West End distrust each other and live apart

## Literary Terms and Applications

For a better understanding of Jerry Spinelli's style, present the following terms and applications to the novel:

**tall tale** a folk tale that exaggerates the main events or the characters' abilities. Tall tales came from the oral tradition, as pioneers sitting around the campfires at night tried to top each other's outrageous stories. Twain's short story "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County" is a famous tall

tale. Maniac Magee fits into the tradition of the tall tale because it contains wildly exaggerated events, such as Maniac's skill at sports and his ability to run like the wind.

humor parts of a story that are funny. Spinelli incorporates subtle touches of humor in *Maniac Magee*. For example, on page 182, it is humorous that Amanda wants to change Mars Bar's name to Snickers. "How bad can you act if everybody's calling you"—she said it loud- 'Snickers'?" This humor helps relieve the tragedy of Maniac's life and the bitter prejudice that some of the characters feel against people of other races.

dialogue the conversation in fiction or drama. It is the exact words a character says. In a story or novel, quotation marks are used to point out the dialogue. One of the key elements in *Maniac Magee* is the dialogue, because Spinelli uses it to reveal character. For instance, on page 130, Maniac builds his story to this climax: "It was"—Maniac paused for dramatic buildup—"the stopball." This dialogue shows how cleverly Maniac thinks on his feet and how aware he is of the importance of allowing others to save face.

## The Importance of Setting

Most novelists set their works in fictional settings; however, all but one of the places in *Maniac Magee* is real. For example, Bridgeport, PA – where Maniac was born — is a real town. The population is primarily white: white non-Hispanics account for 89.4% of the population, Hispanics, 3.8%, and blacks, 2.7%. About a quarter of the residents trace their ancestry to Italy, another quarter to Ireland, and about 15 percent to Germany. Other towns that Spinelli mentions in *Maniac Magee* are real as well, including Conshohocken, East Norriton, West Norriton, and Plymouth. The only town that is fictional is Two Mills, the town divided along racial lines. This fictional town bears a striking resemblance to the actual town of Norristown, PA. In both cases, The West End is home to the white population; the East End is home to the black population. People rarely cross between the two sides of town and even less often settle across racial lines. Even though the town of Two Mills is imaginary, it feels as real as any of the actual towns described in the novel. Despite this verisimilitude, *Maniac Magee* could be set in any area whose population is divided by racial lines.

## Cross-Curricular Sources

### Novels

Joan Bauer, *Hope Was Here*  
 Meg Cabot, *The Princess Diaries*  
 Jenny Carroll, *Shadowland*  
 Sarah Dessen, *Dreamland*  
 Laurie Halse Anderson, *Speak*  
 Davida Wills Hurwin, *A Time for Dancing*  
 E. L. Konigsburg, *Silent to the Bone*  
 Gail Carson Levine, *Ella Enchanted*  
 Lois Lowry, *Gathering Blue*  
 Louise Rennison, *Angus, Thongs and Full-Frontal Snogging*  
 Jacqueline Woodson, *If You Come Softly*

### Videos/DVDs

*The Breakfast Club*  
*Fast Times at Ridgemont High*  
*Ferris Bueller's Day Off*  
*Revenge of the Nerds*  
*Sixteen Candles*

### Audiocassettes

*Stargirl*, read by John Ritter (Books on Tape)  
*Maniac Magee*, read by S. Epatha Merkerson (Books on Tape)

### Internet

Spinelli's official web page  
[www.jerryspinelli.com.newbery\\_001.htm](http://www.jerryspinelli.com.newbery_001.htm)  
 Educational Paperback Association information on Jerry Spinelli  
<http://www.edupaperback.org/showauth.cfm?authid=74>  
 Authors Online Biography: Jerry Spinelli  
<http://www2.scholastic.com/teachers/authorsandbooks/authorstudies/authorstudies.jhtml>  
 Jerry Spinelli biographical information  
<http://www.twbookmark.com/authors/23/1607>  
 Webquest on *Maniac Magee*  
<http://library.thinkquest.org/J001776/magee.html>





## Themes and Motifs

A study of the central issues and situations in Jerry Spinelli's *Maniac Magee* should include these aspects:

### Themes

- acceptance
- athletics
- fear
- death
- race
- tall tales
- reading
- homelessness
- racism
- love

### Motifs

- making a new life because of changing circumstances
- coping with becoming an orphan
- leaving an intolerable situation
- reading as important to all aspects of life
- succeeding at sports
- dealing with prejudice and racism
- finding surrogate parents
- educating yourself through voracious reading
- being a good friend
- being homeless

## Meaning Study

Below are words, phrases, sentences, or thought units that have particular meaning in the novel. Explain the meaning of each. Chapter and page numbers indicate the context from which the item is taken.

1. But that's okay, because the history of a kid is one part fact, two parts legend, and three parts snowball. (Before the Story)  
(From the very beginning of the novel, Spinelli explains that he is writing a tall tale. Be sure that students understand that a tall tale, part of America's oral tradition of storytelling, involves wild and wildly humorous exaggeration. Students can also explore how even the most straight-forward tale becomes exaggerated and distorted through retelling, as is no doubt the case with many of the stories that have been handed down through the years in students' own families.)

2. Before the puzzled faces of Mr. and Mrs. Beale, he opened the front door and looked at the three cast-iron digits nailed to the door frame: seven two eight. (Chap. 12, p. 44)  
(The house number has great significance for Maniac because it indicates that he has a home. It shows that he belongs somewhere and that someone cares for him.)
3. Inside his house, a kid gets one name, but on the other side of the door, it's whatever the rest of the world wants to call him. (Chap. 14, p. 53)  
(People's names reflect their parents' hopes for their future. Nicknames, however, often fulfill very different traits. "Maniac," for instance, is a far cry from "Jeffrey," the child's birth name. "Maniac" implies someone who is totally out of control, while "Jeffrey" implies an ordinary child destined for a prosperous, if mundane, future. Many of the other names in the novel have equal significance, such as "Mars Bar/Snickers" and "Big John.")
4. Maniac kept trying, but he still couldn't see it, this color business. (Chap. 16, p. 58)  
(Under the novel's considerable humor, Spinelli presents a very serious exploration of racism. The town of Two Mills is divided along racial lines, evidence of great prejudice.)
5. "I'm reading!" yipped the old man. (Chap. 27, p.102)  
(Maniac teaches Grayson to read, delighting both parties. From Amanda's personal library to Maniac's self-education through reading to Grayson's delight in finally learning to read, Spinelli reinforces the importance of reading. As the novel shows, reading brings great pleasure as well as information and even tolerance.)
6. "A-men," the old man whispered into the corn-meal and baseball-scented darkness. (Chap. 28, p. 105)  
(Maniac has never heard the word "amen" before. He realizes that this blessing shows something that you really like, something that gives you pleasure. This scene also shows us the pleasure in the little things that are really the big things: family, love, and a home.)

7. 101. (Chap. 29, p. 109)  
(In careful strokes, Maniac paints the number 101 on the outside of the door of the shack. The number symbolizes the fact that the shack has become a home, just as readers saw earlier at the Beales' home.)
8. What had he thought? (Chap. 42, p. 166)  
(In his innocence, Maniac thought that he could wipe out racism by bringing Mars Bar to meet the McNabs. Maniac and readers come to understand that people often cling tenaciously to their prejudices and their hatreds.)
9. Thinking, it's time to go home now. Then remembering that once again he had no home to go to. (Chap. 42, p. 166)  
(Spinelli paints a graphic portrait of home as a psychological as well as physical shelter. Having a home is one of the fundamental underpinnings of survival. Maniac has no home. As a result, he often suffers from hunger, exposure, and neglect. Symbolically, he has no one to care for him, no one to love and shelter him, as is done in a family and a home.)
10. He knew that finally, truly, at long last, someone was calling him home. (Chap. 46, p. 184)  
(Amanda comes after Maniac in the zoo, where he is living, to force him to return to her family to live for good. Maniac is overjoyed at finally belonging to a family, a good family filled with love, laughter, and acceptance.)

## Comprehension Study

Answer the following questions in your own words. There is not always a right answer. Your judgment is important and you should be ready to defend your answers by referring to passages in the book.

### Questions 1-5 (Literal Level)

1. What happened to Maniac's parents?  
(They died in a trolley accident when Maniac was three years old.)
2. How does Maniac come to be homeless?  
(He runs away from his Aunt Dot and Uncle Dan because they are fighting with each other so much.)
3. What is written on the Beales' home to scare Maniac away?  
(The vandal writes "FISHBELLY GO HOME." Since Mrs. Beale has already started scrubbing when Maniac and Amanda arrive home, it reads: "ISHBELLY GO HOME")
4. What does Maniac teach Grayson?  
(Maniac teaches Grayson to read; the elderly man had been illiterate.)
5. At the end of the novel, who takes Maniac in and gives him a permanent home?  
(The Beales, a black family, take him in and give him a home.)

### Questions 6-8 (Interpretative Level)

6. Name one amazing feat that Maniac accomplishes.  
(He manages to untie Cobble's Knot. Even more important, however, he brings a measure of racial harmony to the community of Two Mills.)
7. Why does Maniac write "101" over the door of the shack that he shares with Grayson?  
(To Maniac, having a house number indicates that the residence—no matter how humble—is a real home.)
8. What does the author mean when he says that Maniac is "blind, sort of"?  
(Maniac does not understand racial prejudice. He doesn't understand that he is white any more than the East Enders are black. He does not understand how people can hate him just because of his race.)

### Questions 9 and 10 (Critical Level)

9. What do the Christmas gifts for the animals at the zoo symbolize?  
(The gifts symbolize the true Christmas spirit of selfless giving, expecting nothing in return.)
10. Did you find the ending realistic? Why or why not?  
(Students are likely to agree that the ending is realistic because the Beales have been kind to Maniac all along and he fits well with their family. He helps care for the younger children, for example, and everyone is fond of him.)

**Questions 11-12 (Creative Level)**

11. Decide how Maniac's life would have been different if his parents had not died.
12. Working with a small group of classmates, tell another adventure in Maniac's life. Make the story more and more exaggerated as group members add details.

**Across the Curriculum**

**Art/Music**

1. Sing the school girls' chant about Maniac Magee. Then make up your own song or chant about his exploits.
2. Draw a picture or diagram of a trolley and explains how the vehicle operates.
3. Listen to some polka music, as Maniac and Grayson do on Thanksgiving. Dance to it!
4. Make a map showing Maniac's path from his birthplace in Bridgeport, Pennsylvania, to the imaginary town of Two Mills.
5. Create a model of the shack where Maniac and Grayson live.

**Language Arts**

1. Write a tall tale about a real person you know. Exaggerate events to make the tale fun and exciting.
2. Create your own personal library, as Amanda does, by listing 25 books that you would like to own.
3. Write a newspaper story about the exploits of Maniac Magee.
4. Pretend you are Maniac. Write a thank-you note to the Beale family for taking you in and making you one of their own.
5. Maniac loves his new life with the Beales. Write a poem listing at least ten things that you love about your life. These can be everyday things such as sneakers, silence, and solitude, or special things such as holidays and pets.

6. On Christmas, Maniac makes a book entitled *The Man Who Struck Out Willie Mays* as a gift for Grayson. Interview an elderly relative or neighbor to elicit a story about their past. Make the story into a book for the person.

**Social Studies/Geography**

1. Explain the rules of baseball. Then argue that baseball does or does not deserve its title as "America's pastime."
2. Maniac Magee is a runaway child. Find out what provisions exist in your community or state to take care of homeless children.
3. Maniac is from Pennsylvania, Spinelli's home state as well. Make an atlas for Pennsylvania, including at least ten state facts, such as population, educational level, state flag, state motto, and so on.
4. Make a timeline showing the history of bigotry in America. Include landmark laws that were passed to reduce or eliminate prejudice, such as the Civil Rights Act.
5. Research Willie Mays to find out why he was important. Present your findings as a poster or other visual display.
6. Maniac takes refuge in a cabin at Valley Forge. Make a timeline showing the historic events at Valley Forge during the Revolutionary War.

**Speech/Debate**

1. In a roundtable discussion, discuss why Maniac Magee is such an appealing character.
2. Working with some classmates, enact the scene in which Maniac Magee joins the Pickwells for dinner.
3. Debate whether or not Maniac's name accurately describes his character and exploits.
4. Role-play a scene in which Maniac and Amanda discuss their favorite books.
5. Recast one chapter in the novel as a skit. Include dialogue, simple costumes, sound effects, scenery, and background music.

## Science/Math

1. Maniac is allergic to pizza. Create a booklet showing common allergies, including allergies to food, insects, and household products.
2. Make a menu for a Thanksgiving feast for your family. List the items and the amounts of each food.
3. Grayson brings Maniac many small items to make his shack comfortable. Imagine that you were living on your own. List what essential items you would need and calculate their cost.
4. Describe how you would solve the puzzle of Cobble's Knot.
5. Maniac lives at the zoo for part of his childhood. Research one of the zoos in your state and explain its attractions. How are the animals displayed?

## Alternate Assessment

1. Write a character sketch for Amanda or Mars Bar.
2. Imagine what life is like for Maniac a decade in the future. Working with some classmates, perform a skit in which you show how things have changed for him.
3. Read another novel by Jerry Spinelli and compare and contrast it to Maniac Magee.



## Vocabulary Test

Complete the crossword puzzle with the following words from Maniac Magee.

### Word Bank

legacy  
wretch  
befuddled

pandemonium  
blemish  
robust

glum  
urchin

blarney  
runt

### Down

- 1. pimple, flaw or defect
- 2. strong, powerful
- 4. sad, depressed
- 6. small, weak person
- 7. uproar, confusion
- 8. confused

### Across

- 3. inheritance
- 5. miserable person
- 8. nonsense
- 9. imp, brat

## Comprehension Test A

### Part I: Matching (20 points)

Match each description with a name from the list. Place the letter of your answer in the blank provided at left.

- |                           |                      |
|---------------------------|----------------------|
| A. Aunt Dot and Uncle Dan | F. Hester and Lester |
| B. Piper and Russell      | G. Mars Bar          |
| C. Amanda                 | H. Finsterwalds      |
| D. the Pickwells          | I. Jeffrey Magee     |
| E. Grayson                | J. McNabs            |

- \_\_\_ 1. The elderly man who makes a home with Maniac in a shack
- \_\_\_ 2. Maniac's real first name
- \_\_\_ 3. The white family that builds their own bunker against attack
- \_\_\_ 4. Amanda's younger brothers
- \_\_\_ 5. The huge family that always has room for one more around the dinner table
- \_\_\_ 6. Big John McNab's younger brothers
- \_\_\_ 7. The house everyone fears
- \_\_\_ 8. The first girl Maniac meets when he arrives at Two Mills
- \_\_\_ 9. The boy whom Maniac beats in a race
- \_\_\_ 10. The people who take Maniac in when he is three years old

### Part II: Sentence Completion (20 points)

- 1. Maniac Magee was born in a house in Bridgeport, not in a (haystack, dump) as rumored.
- 2. His parents died in a (airplane, trolley) crash when he was a toddler.
- 3. Amanda carries (books, food) with her all the time.
- 4. The ("jimmylegs," "finsterwallies") is a make-believe condition caused by shock.
- 5. Mrs. Pickwell calls her family for dinner by (yodeling, whistling) for them.
- 6. McNab throws a (frog, snowball) at Maniac, who bunts it, and makes it around the bases yet again.
- 7. Maniac is allergic to (oranges, pizza).
- 8. Maniac is delighted with Grayson's two Christmas gifts to him: a brand new baseball and Grayson's own, historic (mitt, hockey stick).
- 9. After Grayson dies, Maniac ends up in (Valley Forge, Old Sturbridge Village) where he hides in one of the cabins.
- 10. Russell McNab is trapped on a trolley (car, track).

## Comprehension Test A (Page 2)

### Part III: True/False (20 points)

Mark the following statements either T for true or F if a part is false.

- \_\_\_ 1. Aunt Dot and Uncle Dan have a happy marriage and Maniac likes living with them.
- \_\_\_ 2. The legend of Maniac starts when he runs onto the field during football practice and intercepts the ball.
- \_\_\_ 3. Mr. and Mrs. Pickwell have a small family of two children.
- \_\_\_ 4. When Maniac is first homeless, he lives at the zoo.
- \_\_\_ 5. Maniac becomes a big hero when he untangles Cobble's Knot.
- \_\_\_ 6. John McNab is very small but fierce.
- \_\_\_ 7. To scare Maniac away, a vandal writes "Fishbelly Go Home" on the Beales' door.
- \_\_\_ 8. Grayson asks Maniac to teach him to cook.
- \_\_\_ 9. Maniac and McNab race to see who is the "baddest" of all. McNab wins.
- \_\_\_ 10. Maniac is thrown out of the McNabs' house when he destroys some toy guns.

### Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Explain what function Grayson serves in Maniac's life.
2. Describe two realistic events from the novel and two non-realistic events. Then analyze what the non-realistic events added to your enjoyment of the novel.
3. Analyze how Maniac's experiences at Valley Forge in the winter paralleled the experiences of the Continental Army at Valley Forge during the Revolutionary Army.
4. Compare and contrast Maniac's life with the Beales to his life with the McNabs.



## Comprehension Test B

### Part I: Motivation (20 points)

Write a reason or motivation to complete each sentence.

1. Maniac goes to live with his Aunt Dot and Uncle Dan because
2. Maniac runs away from Aunt Dot and Uncle Dan because
3. He enjoys eating at the Pickwells' home because
4. McNab throws a frog at Maniac during a baseball game because
5. Maniac lives at the zoo because
6. McNab and his gang, the Cobras, chase Maniac to the East End because
7. Everyone is shocked when Maniac takes a bite from Mars Bar's candy because
8. Maniac runs away from Amanda's home because
9. The McNabs build a bunker in their home because
10. Maniac takes Mars Bar to the Pickwells' house because

### Part II: Identification (20 points)

Briefly describe each person, place, or thing and explain why it is important in the story.

1. Cobras
2. "I see the ball."
3. Grayson's mitt
4. house numbers
5. the zoo



## Comprehension Test B (Page 2)

### Part III: Matching (20 points)

Complete each of the following descriptions with a name from the list that follows. Place the letter of your answer in the blank provided at left. Use each name only once.

- |  |                           |
|--|---------------------------|
| ____ 1. Amanda's younger brothers              | A. Grayson                |
| ____ 2. Maniac's real name                     | B. The Pickwells          |
| ____ 3. What Amanda wants to call Mars Bar     | C. The Beales             |
| ____ 4. The huge family that feeds everyone    | D. Piper and Russell      |
| ____ 5. The house no one will enter            | E. The McNabs             |
| ____ 6. The first people who take Maniac in    | F. Jeffrey Magee          |
| ____ 7. John McNab's younger brothers          | G. Hester and Lester      |
| ____ 8. The old man who shelters Maniac        | H. Snickers               |
| ____ 9. The racist white family                | I. Finsterwalds           |
| ____ 10. The family Maniac ends up living with | J. Aunt Dot and Uncle Dan |

### Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Explain why Maniac Magee won the highest award in children's literature, the Newbery Medal.
2. Describe two ways that the setting affected Maniac.
3. Explain how Maniac tried to reduce or eliminate racism. How successful was his attempt?
4. Compare and contrast the McNab and Pickwell families. Show how they are the same and different.

## Answer Key

### Vocabulary Test

#### Down

1. blemish
2. robust
4. glum
6. runt
7. pandemonium
8. bedfuddled

#### Across

3. legacy
5. wretch
8. blarney
9. urchin

## Comprehension Test A

### Part I: Matching (20 points)

- |      |       |
|------|-------|
| 1. E | 6. B  |
| 2. I | 7. H  |
| 3. J | 8. C  |
| 4. F | 9. G  |
| 5. D | 10. A |

### Part II: Sentence Completion (20 points)

- |                      |                 |
|----------------------|-----------------|
| 1. dump              | 6. frog         |
| 2. trolley           | 7. pizza        |
| 3. books             | 8. bat          |
| 4. "finsterwallies." | 9. Valley Forge |
| 5. whistling         | 10. track       |

### Part III: True/False (20 points)

- |      |       |
|------|-------|
| 1. F | 6. F  |
| 2. T | 7. T  |
| 3. F | 8. F  |
| 4. T | 9. F  |
| 5. T | 10. T |

### Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Answers will vary.

## Comprehension Test B

### Part I: Motivation (20 points)

1. he has been orphaned; his parents die in a trolley crash when he is three years old.
2. he cannot stand their constant fighting and how they have split into two camps
3. they are warm and loving and have plenty of food
4. he is furious at Maniac for showing him up and wants to humiliate him
5. he is homeless and has no where else to live
6. they figure he will be attacked by the blacks who live there
7. no one eats Mars Bar's candy and no white

child would put his lips where a black child's lips had been

8. a vandal writes " Fishbelly go home" on the house and Maniac does not want to get the Beales into trouble.
9. they are racists and believe the blacks are going to rise up and attack them
10. Maniac wants Mars Bar to see the best the whites offer; he is trying to reduce prejudice and racism.

### Part II: Identification (20 points)

1. The Cobras are a gang, headed by John McNab. They are fierce and no one messes with them on the West End. They represent white trash, the lowest common denominator.
2. "I see the ball" is the first sentence that Grayson learns to read. It shows his enormous effort and accomplishment. This part of the book also reinforces the importance of reading.
3. Grayson's mitt is one of the gifts that Grayson gives to Maniac on Christmas. As far as Maniac is concerned, it is the best gift of all because it not only represents Grayson's accomplishments as a minor league baseball player, but also shows that the elderly man regards Maniac as a son and is bequeathing his legacy to him.
4. Maniac studies the house numbers at the Beales' and paints "101" outside the shack that he shares with Grayson. House numbers signify a home, permanence, and a family.
5. Maniac lives at the zoo when he has no where else to live. On one level, it is a disgrace that a child could be homeless and thus forced to live in the zoo. On another level, it is a scathing commentary on American life that Maniac would sometimes prefer to live in the zoo than among racists.

### Part III: Matching (20 points)

- |      |       |
|------|-------|
| 1. G | 6. J  |
| 2. F | 7. D  |
| 3. H | 8. A  |
| 4. B | 9. E  |
| 5. I | 10. C |

### Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Answers will vary.

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