

A Guide for Using

Maniac Magee

in the Classroom

*Based on the novel written by
Jerry Spinelli*

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Introduction

A good book can touch our lives like a good friend. Within its pages are words and characters that can inspire us to achieve our highest ideals. We can turn to it for companionship, recreation, comfort, and guidance. It can also give us a cherished story to hold in our hearts forever.

In *Literature Units*, great care has been taken to select books that are sure to become good friends!

Teachers who use this unit will find the following features to supplement their own valuable ideas.

- Sample Lesson Plans
- Pre-reading Activities
- A Biographical Sketch and Picture of the Author
- A Book Summary
- Vocabulary Lists and Suggested Vocabulary Activities
- Chapters grouped for study, with each section including:
 - *quizzes*
 - *hands-on projects*
 - *cooperative learning activities*
 - *cross-curricular connections*
 - *extensions into the reader's own life*
- Post-reading Activities
- Book Report Ideas
- Research Activities
- Culminating Activities
- Three Different Options for Unit Tests
- A Bibliography of Related Reading
- An Answer Key



We are confident that this unit will be a valuable addition to your planning, and we hope that as you use our ideas, your students will increase the circle of “friends” they have in books!

Book Summary

Maniac Magee

by Jerry Spinelli

Harper Trophy (HarperCollins Publishers), 1990
(Can, UK: HarperCollins Pub. Ltd; Aus: HarperCollins)

Jeffrey Lionel Magee becomes an orphan at three years old when the trolley on which his parents were passengers fell off a trestle and into a river. He is sent to live with his Aunt Dot and Uncle Dan, a couple who live in the same house but never speak and have separate living quarters. After eight years of silence, Jeffrey rebels and leaves to begin the adventure of life on his own.

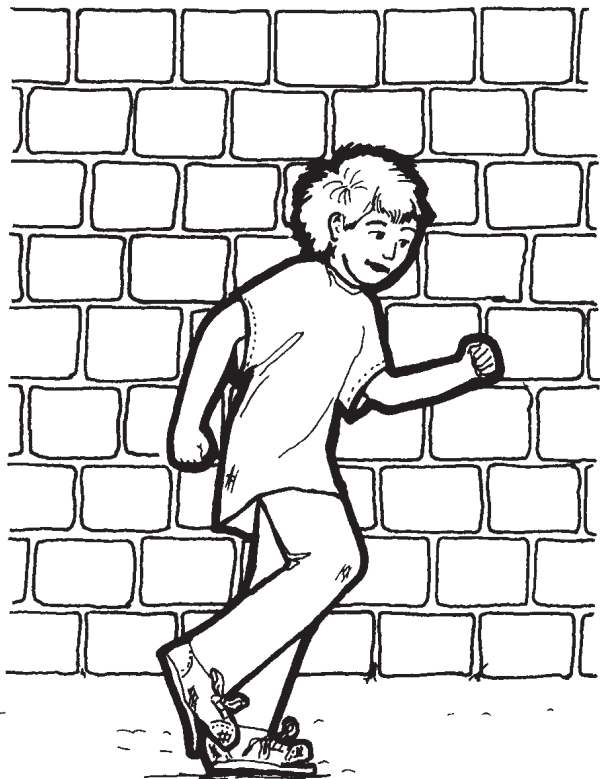
This story of Jeffrey, nicknamed “Maniac” because of his audacious undertakings, basically consists of his attempts to find a home with people who are loving and caring. Due to his unusual circumstances, Maniac often thinks differently from other children his age. He does not go to school because he hates the idea of leaving there at 3:00 p.m. and having nowhere to go. He does not believe there should be a separation of people based on race just because others say so. He does not feel he should give up experiences in his life because people say they are dangerous or unrealistic.

Maniac first lives with the Beales, a black family that treats him as a member of their household. He loves them dearly—so much, in fact, that he leaves their warm environment when he feels he is creating trouble for them because he is white.

Next, Maniac stays with a zoo keeper, Grayson, an old man whose youth was spent as a minor league baseball player. Grayson teaches Maniac about pitching, while the boy gives the old man some new views on racial equality. Together they discover their own capacity for love. Five days after their “best Christmas,” Grayson dies.

On his own again, Maniac stays for a time with the militaristic McNabs. He tries to bring some sense of order to this dysfunctional group, but the task is too great. He even attempts to introduce a militant black youngster, Mars Bar, into this bastion of white supremacy.

Near the end of the novel, Mars Bar and Maniac become uneasy friends. Then they learn to respect each other and have concern for each other’s welfare. Maniac moves back into the Beale home with the community’s blessing. At last Maniac has found the family he has been searching for.



Vocabulary Lists

On this page are vocabulary lists which correspond to each sectional grouping of chapters. Vocabulary activity ideas can be found on page 10 of this book.

SECTION I

Chapters 1–11

legacy	mirage
trolley	hallucination(s)
trestle	samaritan
musical	phantom
theory (theories)	stupefied
obvious	pandemonium
infamous	lumber(ed)
suffice	finicky
emanations	

SECTION II

Chapters 12–21

hemisphere	rant(ing)
storm	gawk(ed)
allergy	eon(s)
shinny (shinnied)	contortion(s)
vow(ed)	dainty(daintily)
unbeknownst	antsy
propel	maze
hydrant	coil(ed)

SECTION III

Chapters 22–32

lean-to	grouse
spree	disperse(ing)
claptrap	languish(ed)
puzzlement	pungent
notion	reluctant
rookie(s)	enchantment
immortality	stoic
flaunt(ing)	vague(ly)
geezer	pallbearer

SECTION IV

Chapters 33–39

nonperishable	portal
desolation	compromise
gaunt	exuberance
besech(ing)	sanctuary
retaliate(d)	reprisal(s)
urchin(s)	ecstatic
autopsy	ludicrous
carrion	maraud(ing)
prone	

SECTION V

Chapters 40–46

extort	obedience
goad(ed)	nonchalantly
shenanigans	surge(d)
frenzy(ied)	gauntlet
chaotic	illusion
endure	merging(s)
zany	dovetail(ed)