

Teacher Guide

Grades 5–6

Maniac Magee

Jerry Spinelli

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MANIAC MAGEE

by
Jerry Spinelli

Teacher Guide

Written by
Monica L. Odle

Note

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Please note: Please assess the appropriateness of this novel for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading and discussing it with them.

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Novel Units, Inc.
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Skills and Strategies

Critical Thinking

Brainstorming, research, inferences, drawing conclusions, compare/contrast, predictions

Comprehension

Sequencing, summarizing, cause/effect

Writing

Poetry, news article, essay, letter, obituary, book review, summary

Listening/Speaking

Oral presentation, class discussion

Vocabulary

Definitions, parts of speech, synonyms/antonyms

Literary Elements

Theme, figurative language, point of view, setting, character analysis, conflict, symbolism

Across the Curriculum

History—1960s Civil Rights Movement, Children’s Crusade of 1212, Valley Forge; Science—buffaloes; Literature—legends/tall tales; Health—allergic reactions; Art—brochure, sketch, sculpture, painting, diorama, map; Music—polka; Sports—professional baseball leagues; Community Service—collections for homeless shelter

Before the Story–Chapter 6

The narrator introduces the legend of Maniac Magee and then describes how 11-year-old Jeffrey Lionel “Maniac” Magee arrived in Two Mills, Pennsylvania. Readers learn about Jeffrey’s first encounter with Amanda Beale, who grudgingly lends him one of her beloved books. Jeffrey also makes an appearance at the high-school athletic fields, impressing James “Hands” Down with his football skills. Next, Jeffrey rescues Arnold Jones from the feared Finsterwald’s backyard, stunning onlookers. Finally, Jeffrey partakes in a quick meal at the Pickwells’ house.

| Vocabulary |
|---------------|
| sprinkled |
| monument |
| trestle |
| accurate |
| strict |
| chorus |
| boast |
| vicinity |
| varsity |
| commotion |
| hoisted |
| paralyzed |
| circumstances |

Discussion Questions

1. What can the reader gather about Maniac Magee from the section titled “Before the Story”? (Answers will vary. Readers can gather that Maniac Magee is a legendary kid who achieved incredible things in Two Mills. Though there are many stories about where Maniac came from and what he did, his true accomplishment lies in the fact that kids from different sides of town can now play together peacefully and comfortably.)
2. What questions does the “Before the Story” section raise? Why do you think the author introduces a character and his story by referencing events without completely describing them? (Answers will vary. Readers may wonder why the narrator references Finsterwald, the band shell, or a group of strings without explaining how these people, places, and things relate to the main character and story. The author is creating interest in the main character by leaving “blank spaces” in his narrative. Readers must continue reading to find the answers to their questions.)
3. How do Jeffrey Magee’s aunt and uncle behave? Why do you think Jeffrey runs away from them? (Aunt Dot and Uncle Dan do not love each other but refuse to divorce. They advise Jeffrey to live completely separate lives. The only thing they share is their nephew. Answers will vary, but it is likely that Jeffrey runs away because he is tired of feeling split between two people. Perhaps he also feels that their hatred for each other has become more important than him.)
4. What do you think Jeffrey does during “The First Year”? Why do you think he stays in Two Mills? (Answers will vary.)
5. What can you observe about Amanda Beale from her interaction with Jeffrey? (Amanda is passionate about books, as evidenced by the collection she carries to and from school every day. She is tough and street-smart, as she tests Jeffrey’s intentions and presence in her section of town. She is friendly, as evidenced by her openness and honesty with Jeffrey, a boy she has just met. Lastly, Amanda is intelligent and serious about school, as evidenced by her quick thinking, and concern about being late.)
6. Which characters are introduced as the narrator relates Jeffrey’s three other appearances on his first day in Two Mills? (The reader is introduced to Brian Denehy, a high-school football quarterback; James “Hands” Down, a high-school football receiver; Finsterwald, a man feared by children in the West End; Arnold Jones, a child who gets lowered into Finsterwald’s yard; and Mrs. Valerie Pickwell and her large family.)

7. Why are the high-school boys amazed when Jeffrey pulls Arnold Jones from Finsterwald's backyard? *(No kid in Two Mills purposely enters Finsterwald's property, yet Jeffrey enters Finsterwald's backyard casually and emerges carrying Arnold Jones. The high-school boys likely view Jeffrey's actions as selfless and brave.)*
8. How is Jeffrey different from other Two Mills residents? *(Jeffrey can do impressive things, such as running on the train rail and catching and punting a football using only one hand. Townspeople also note that he is extraordinarily friendly. Amanda perceives that he is an honest and determined boy by the way he doggedly asks her for a book and promises to return it. Most notably, Jeffrey does not seem to recognize the racial division in Two Mills.)*
9. Who are the Pickwells? Why does Jeffrey go unacknowledged at their dinner table? *(The Pickwells are a large family that lives in the West End of Two Mills. The family members are accustomed to having extra people at the dinner table since they "were always helping out somebody" [p. 21]. Consequently, when facing her "small nation," Mrs. Pickwell either doesn't notice or chooses not to comment on the extra child, likely concluding that he is a friend of one of her children. The children each conclude that one of their siblings must know the stranger.)*
10. **Prediction:** How will Jeffrey survive in Two Mills?

Supplementary Activities

Literary Devices: Create a chart for figurative language used in the novel. Examples:

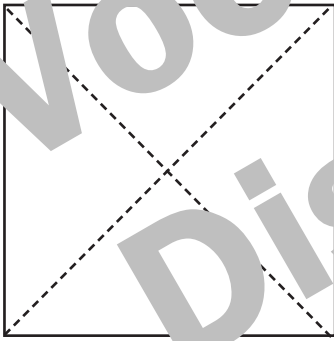
Similes—"the soles of both snakes...flopping open like dog tongues" (p. 9); "The book came flapping like a wounded duck..." (p. 13); "Arnold Jones's teeth...chattering like snare drums" (p. 18); "he kicked him out of there like a sack of flour" (p. 19); "...he took off like a horse" (p. 19); **Metaphors**—the "Dog" hands: big mitts (p. 14); Finsterwald backyard: a graveyard (p. 16); Arnold Jones: a mouse (p. 18)

2. Writing—Imagine that you are going to give Maniac one of your own books. Which book would you lend Maniac. Then, in a one- to two-page persuasive essay, convince Maniac that he should read the book you chose for him.

Vocabulary Mobile

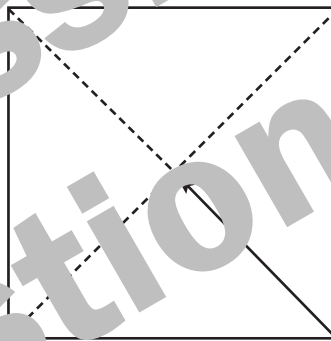
Directions: Working in groups of five, choose at least five words from the vocabulary lists in this guide, and make a triangle for each. Cut a nine-inch square out of white construction paper. Fold the paper in half diagonally (from corner to corner). Unfold the paper. Fold the paper in half again (Figure A). Then, cut one line from the outer corner to the center of the paper (Figure B). Slide one cut piece on top of the other to form a triangle shape resembling a pyramid, but without a base (Figure C). Glue the pieces together. On one side, write a vocabulary word, its definition, a synonym, and an antonym (if applicable). On another side, write a sentence using the vocabulary word. On the third side, draw a picture to illustrate the vocabulary word. All groups should combine their triangles and hang them in the classroom as a mobile.

Figure A



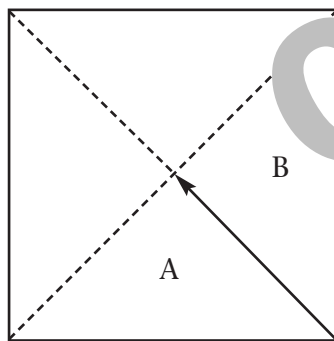
1-Fold in half diagonally.
2-Fold in half vertically.

Figure B



Cut from corner to center in direction of arrow.

Figure C



Slide one cut piece (A) to top of the other cut piece (B).

Story Map

