

Maniac Magee



By

Jerry Spinelli

A Novel Study
by Nat Reed

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About the author: Nat Reed was a member of the teaching profession for more than 35 years. He was a full-time instructor at Trent University in the Teacher Education Program for nine years. For more information on his work and literature, visit novelstudies.org.

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Suggestions and Expectations

This 69 page curriculum unit can be used in a variety of ways. Each chapter of the novel study focuses on three or four chapters of *Maniac Magee* and is comprised of four activities:

1. Before You Read
2. Vocabulary Building
3. Comprehension Questions
4. Language and Extension Activities

A **portfolio cover** (p.7) as well as a **Checklist** (p.6) are included so that students may track of their completed work.

Every activity need not be completed by all students.

Links with the Common Core Standards (U.S.)

Many of the activities included in this curriculum unit are supported by the Common Core Standards. For instance the *Reading Standards for Literature, Grade 5*, makes reference to the following

- a) determining the meaning of words and phrases. . . including figurative language;
- b) explaining how a series of chapters fits together to provide the overall structure;
- c) compare and contrast two characters;
- d) determine how characters ... respond to challenges;
- e) drawing inferences from the text;
- f) determining a theme of a story . . . **and many others.**

Themes which may be taught in conjunction with the novel include **racial prejudice**, establishing one's **identity, homes, homelessness.**

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List of Skills

Vocabulary Development

1. Locating descriptive words/phrases
2. Listing synonyms/homophones
3. Identifying/creating *alliteration*
4. Use of capitals and punctuation
5. Identifying syllables
6. Identify *foreshadowing*.
7. Identify *personification*.
8. Use of singular / plural nouns
9. Listing compound words
10. Identifying parts of speech
11. Determining alphabetical order
12. Identification of root words
13. Identify/create *similes*
14. Identify/create *exaggeration*

Setting Activities

1. Summarize the details of a setting

Plot Activities

1. Complete a *time line* of events
2. Identify conflict in the story
3. Identify the climax of the novel.
4. Predict events

Character Activities

1. Determine character traits
2. Characteristics of protagonist
3. Relating personal experiences
4. Compare two characters

Creative and Critical Thinking

1. Research
2. Write a newspaper story
3. Write a letter to a friend
4. Complete an Observation Sheet
5. Conduct an interview / Talk Show
6. Write about personal feelings
7. Write a book review
8. KWS Chart

Art Activities

1. A Storyboard
2. Create a collage
3. Design a cover for the novel

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Synopsis

Jeffrey Lionel "Maniac" Magee might have lived a normal life if a trolley accident hadn't made him an orphan. After living with his unhappy and uptight aunt and uncle for eight years, he decides to run - and not just run away, but run. And this is where the myth of Maniac Magee begins, as he changes the lives of a racially divided small town with his amazing and legendary feats. [Courtesy of the publisher]

Author Biography

Jerry Spinelli

Born in 1941 in Norristown, Pennsylvania, Jerry Spinelli discovered his calling in 1957 when his high school football team won a big game. The town celebrated, his fellow students raced through the streets, but Jerry sneaked back home and marked the occasion in his own way. He wrote a poem. Later the town newspaper published it. "And," he reports, "I've been a writer ever since."

Married to Eileen Spinelli, who is also a writer, Jerry was for many years an editor for the Chilton Company. Now a full-time writer, he lives in Phoenixville, Pennsylvania.

Jerry Spinelli's immensely popular books include *Space Station Seventh Grade*, *Jason and Marceline*, *Who Put That Hair in My Toothbrush?*, and *Maniac Magee*, which has won more than fifteen state children's book awards in addition to the Newbery Medal. [The Publisher]



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Student Checklist

Student Name _____

Assignment	Grade / Level	Comments

Maniac Magee



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Name: _____

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Chapters 1 - 4



Before you read the chapters:

The **protagonist** in most novels features the main character or “good guy”. The protagonist of *Maniac Magee* is a most unusual character living a very different kind of life than most boys his age. Think back on some of your favorite characters from past novels you have read. What do you think makes for an especially intriguing protagonist?



Vocabulary:

Choose a word from the list to complete each sentence.

trestle	musicale	risers	pastel
suspicious	obvious	deserted	grungy

1	Everyone was surprised to find the city ____ after a famine swept through the area.	
2	When the engineers examined the railway __ they found it had been badly corroded by the elements.	
3	“I thought it was ___ that no one would be able to score a goal on Lundquist,” the reporter stated.	
4	It’s surprising that no more than a few people were ____ of John Wilkes Booth’s intentions.	
5	I can’t believe that someone could get so ___ after spending only an hour in a sandbox.	
6	The drama department of our local high school is going to put on a _____ this spring.	
7	My aunt wore a _____ dress to the ceremony.	
8	The choir director made all the shorter children stand on the ___ behind the first row of singers.	

Questions



1. Chapter One describes several very unusual events in the life of Jeffrey Magee. Describe any two of these events.

1.	
2.	

2. Describe the **setting** of the story for Chapter Three.

3. How old was Jeffrey at the end of Chapter One? _____
How old was he in Chapter Two? _____

4. Math in Action. It took Jeffrey a whole year to travel the two hundred miles from Hollidaysburg to Two Mills. The average walking speed for someone Jeffrey's age is about three miles/hour, less the time he would spend resting. About how many hours would it take Jeffrey to walk 200 miles at this rate? (Do not include his resting time)

--

5. No one knows why it took Jeffrey so long to walk this relatively short distance. Use your imagination and suggest a couple of creative possibilities.

6. Why did Amanda find it especially unusual to find Jeffrey on her street that morning?

7. Why was Amanda hauling all her books to school in a suitcase?

8. Why do you think she finally relented and loaned Jeffrey one of her books?

9. Jeffrey made quite a spectacular appearance at the varsity team's football practice. Describe his remarkable performance.

10. **Foreshadowing** is a literary device defined *as a hint or clue provided by the writer to tip the reader as to what is to come later in the story*. If the following example is an example of foreshadowing, what is the author hinting at in terms of Jeffrey's future in *Two Mills*: *If you listen to everybody who claims to have seen Jeffrey-Maniac Magee that first day, there must have been ten thousand people and a parade of fire trucks waiting for him at the town limits.*

Language Activities



A. A **simile** is a comparison using the words “like” or “as”. An example from Chapter Two is “. . . the soles of both sneakers hanging by their hinges and flopping open like dog tongues . . .”



What two things are being compared in this example?

--	--

Invent your own **similes** comparing the following items with something from your imagination:

a) the sound of a banjo

--

b) the sizzle of frying bacon on a grill

--

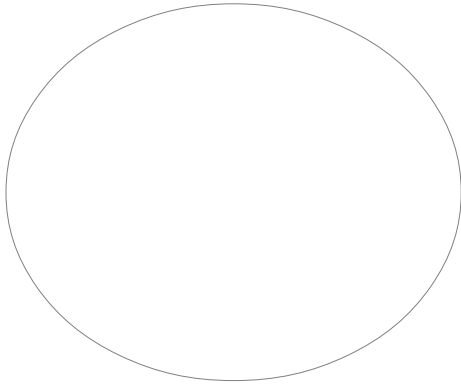
Bonus: Find another example of a **simile** in Chapter Three.

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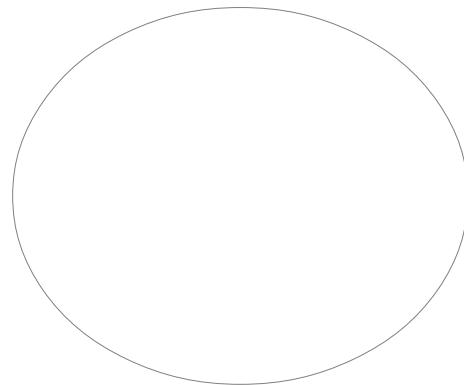
B. Copy out any three sentences from these chapters and underline the **nouns**.

C. 5 Ws and an H.

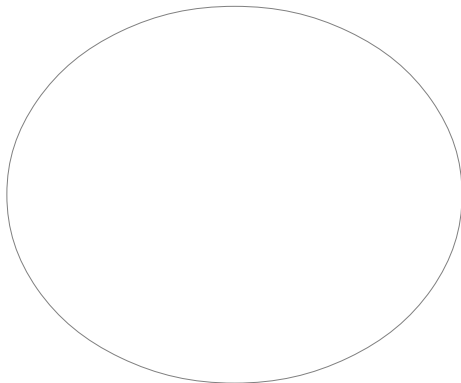
Choose an event from this section (or earlier in the novel) that you thought was really important and/or exciting. Using facts that you gleaned from reading about this event, fill in the balloons below, summarizing what you learned.



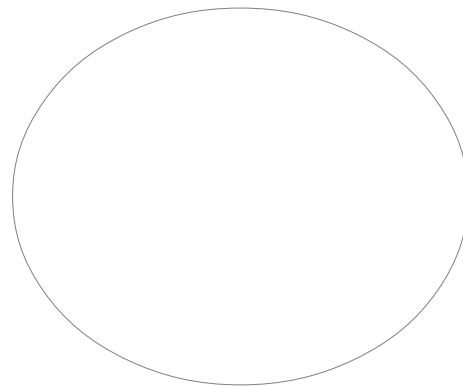
WHO?



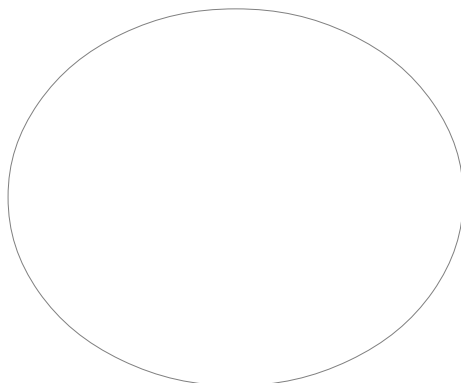
WHAT?



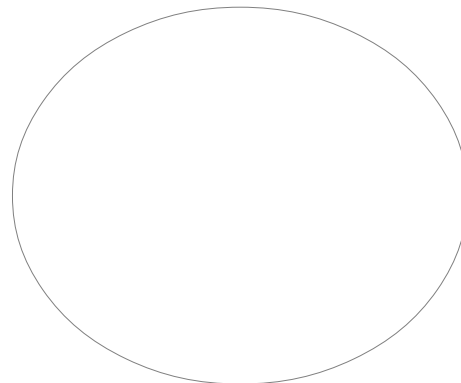
WHEN?



WHERE?



WHY?



HOW?

D. Caviar Words

The author of this novel is noted for his use of elegant, tasteful words. Someone once stated that some words have the sound of **caviar** (rich and elegant) and others are more are common (**peanut butter** words). With a colleague come up with 6 examples of each type of word. You may use any chapter of the novel to find these words.



Caviar Words	Peanut Butter Words

E. My 02¢ About Chapters 1-4.

What I Liked Best:

I Didn't Like The Part:

I Didn't Like It Because:

Extension Activities



Storyboard

A storyboard is a series of pictures that tell about an important event in a story. A storyboard can tell the story of only one scene – or the entire novel.



Complete the storyboard below illustrating the events described in the first four chapters of *Maniac Magee*. You may wish to practice your drawings on a separate piece of paper.

1	2
3	4
5	6