

1993

Spinelli, Jerry. *Maniac Magee*. Little, Brown, 1990.

SUMMARY:

Jeffery Lionel Magee, alias Maniac Magee, becomes homeless after he runs away from his aunt and uncle's loveless home where he lived after his parents died. Maniac becomes famous for the impossible feats he can do, such as untangling the hardest knots, running the fastest, and hitting balls the furthest. In his search for a home and love, Maniac takes the reader on a journey that is a reality for too many children today.

QUESTIONS:

Name three ways Maniac is different from the typical kid. What are three ways he's like many of the kids you know?

When you're very young, adults are always telling you not to talk to strangers, and for very good reason. How is talking to strangers a positive or negative thing (or both) in this book?

Why do you think the author uses very short chapters in this book?

Do you think there are young people like Maniac who are alone and homeless? Have you seen, heard, or read (fiction or nonfiction) about other homeless young people? Compare their plight to Maniac's. Is the portrayal of Maniac realistic?

Is morning or evening your favorite time of the day? Why?

Some nicknames are friendly and some are hurtful. Why do you think people give different nicknames to people they know or don't know?

JOURNAL STARTER:

I wish that all of the kids in our town/school would get along better . . .

ACTIVITIES:

Get together with at least two other friends and practice the jump rope chant about Maniac written in "Before the Story."

Draw a picture of the gigantic knot as described in Chapter 19.

Get the picture books mentioned throughout the book (*Lyle, Lyle Crocodile*; *The Story of Babar*; *Mike Mulligan and His Steam Shovel*; and *The Little Engine that Could*) and read them to someone in a primary grade.

Give names and titles to the three parts of the book.

Research the role that children have played in the Civil Rights struggle.

INTEREST LEVELS: Grades 5-8

BOOKTALK:

[Hold up volume A of the encyclopedia] This book is filled with facts. [Hold up *Maniac Magee*] This book by Jerry Spinelli, is filled with “facts,” too. And some of them are easier to believe than others. Jeffrey can hit a ball farther than anybody else, he can run faster and untie a knot better than anybody else on either side of his town, and he knows just about everything that’s in this book [point to encyclopedia]. That’s what makes him a maniac. Or so some people think. But in reality, is he actually all that different from you . . .or you . . . or you? Or are you just like . . . *Maniac*?!? Put on your sneakers and run, don’t walk, to the library to check out this book.

READ-ALIKES:

Curtis, Christopher Paul. *Bud, Not Buddy*. Delacorte Press, 1999.
McKissack, Pat. *Run Away Home*. Scholastic, 1997.
Myers, Walter Dean. *Me, Mop, and the Moondance Kid*. Delacorte, 1988.
Woodson, Jacqueline. *Locomotion*. Putnam, 2003.

RELATED WEB SITES:

Jerry Spinelli.com: www.jerryspinelli.com
A Guide to Teaching Jerry Spinelli:
<http://www.harperchildrens.com/hch/parents/teachingguides/spinelli.pdf>
Carol Hurst’s Children’s Literature Site – *Maniac Magee*:
<http://www.carolhurst.com/titles/maniacmagee.html>
ClassZone – Language Arts Novel Guides – *Maniac Magee*:
<http://www.classzone.com/novelguides/litcons/maniac/guide.cfm>

OTHER RECOGNITION:

Newbery Medal, 1991
Winner of a Children’s Choice Award in the following states and region:
Delaware, 1994; Hawaii, 1996; Kansas, 1993; Massachusetts, 1993; Missouri, 1993;
Nevada, 1993; New Mexico, 1993; New York, 1992; North Dakota, 1992;
Ohio, 1993; Pacific Northwest, 1993; Pennsylvania, 1992; Rhode Island, 1992;
Vermont, 1992; Virginia, 1993; West Virginia, 1993; Wisconsin, 1991;
Wyoming, 1992.

MOVIE TIE-IN: *Maniac Magee*. Nickelodean, 2003.
<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0246063>