

Maniac Magee Study Guide

Maniac Magee by Jerry Spinelli

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Plot Summary

Maniac Magee by Jerry Spinelli is a young adult novel published in 1990. The novel received critical acclaim (upon release) and in 1991 won the prestigious Newbery Medal. Maniac Magee is the story of Jeffery Lionel Magee, a homeless drifter who finds his way to the racially divided community of Two Mills, Pennsylvania. Upon arrival, Maniac amazes the town with his feats of athleticism and bravery and is soon deemed a legend. While creating a name for himself, Maniac meets the Beale family who bring him into their home amidst racial criticism. Although ensuing racial tensions force Maniac to leave the Beale's household, a series of relationships and events unite Two Mills and Maniac with his newfound family.

Jeffery Lionel Magee aka "Maniac Magee" is an orphan whose parents died in a trolley accident when he was three. Without a home, he moves in with his aunt and uncle who dislike each other to the point of not communicating. While living with them, Maniac runs away during a school musical never to return. After a year, he mysteriously shows up in Two Mills. The town is racially divided with white people living in the West End of town and black people living in the East End of town.

While walking in the East End on his first day in town, Maniac meets a girl named Amanda Beale carrying a suitcase. Mistaking her for a runaway, Maniac approaches Amanda and discovers she is carrying her prized collection of used books. Although Amanda loves her books and is protective of them, she reluctantly allows Maniac to have one.

Maniac continues making a scene around town every step of the way. Maniac catches a football pass and punts it back during a high school gym class. Then, he breaks the pitching streak of burly John McNab at the little league field. Next, Maniac saves a boy caught in the backyard of the mysterious Finsterwald house. After a day of antics, it's safe to say the legend has begun.

Later, as Maniac is walking around the East End neighborhood, he meets Mars Bar Thompson, the neighborhood's bully. Mars questions why Maniac is in the neighborhood and steals Amanda's book. Maniac desperately tries to retrieve the book and is unsuccessful. In the middle of the scene, Amanda shows up and scolds Mars while demanding he return the book. She brings Maniac into her home where he is introduced to the Beale family. Amanda's family consists of her mother, father, and unruly brother and sister. After it is discovered Maniac is homeless, Amanda's family welcomes the orphan into their home. Maniac loves his new family but soon discovers the neighborhood isn't as welcoming as the Beales are.

After a run in with a bitter old gentleman and a racial slur being painted on the Beale home, Maniac decides he must move out. In one last attempt to earn the good wishes of the community, Maniac unties the infamous Cobble's Knot. The Cobble's Knot has been tangled for years and the town rejoices in Maniac's feat. In the middle of the



celebration, Amanda realizes the falling confetti is made from one of her precious books. Maniac takes this incident as the final straw and moves out of the Beale's home.

With no place to go, Maniac begins living in the buffalo pen at the zoo. A maintenance worker named Grayson discovers Maniac one evening while making his rounds. Grayson, a former minor league baseball player, looks after Maniac and helps him find an empty baseball closet to live in. In return, Maniac provides companionship and helps Grayson learn to read. The two develop a very close bond, but after celebrating the holidays together Grayson dies.

Depressed and freezing, Maniac goes to a Valley Forge historical site to wither away. One morning, he discovers two children are also living at the site. The two boys, Piper and Russell, have run away to escape school and their chaotic home life. Maniac, sensing someone must be looking for the boys, tricks them into going back home. When they return to Two Mills, Maniac soon discovers the boys are the brothers of John McNab, the pitcher. The McNab home is dirty and in a state of utter chaos. In addition, the family is preparing for what they believe to be an impending East End rebellion. For the sake of Piper and Russell, Maniac lives in the McNab home. All the while, Maniac attempts to keep the two young boys under control and keep them in school.

During the time Maniac lives with the McNabs, he talks Mars into coming to a McNab birthday party. The party ends in disaster and Maniac virtually gives up hope for an East End/West End reconciliation.

After the party debacle, Maniac moves back to the zoo and continues to live his typical nomadic lifestyle. While running one morning, he realizes that Mars is following him. This continues until one day an hysterical Piper McNab approaches the two boys. Maniac and Mars follow Piper to a train trestle where Russell is trapped and fearful of an approaching train. Maniac, remembering the tragic accident that killed his parents, blacks out and leaves the scene.

Two days later, Maniac finds Mars in the buffalo pen where he is sleeping. He questions why Maniac fled the scene at the train trestle. Mars also informs Maniac he saved Russell that day. After Mars saves Russell, the McNab boys befriend him and go to his East End home for the evening. The town of Two Mills has taken a major step toward a peaceful coexistence. After telling the story, Mars begs Maniac to come to his home to meet his mother. Although Maniac is overjoyed by the news, he is cautious about letting others into his life. He has experienced so much heartache in such a short time and is content to stay aloof. Falling back to sleep, Maniac is awakened by Amanda Beale. Amanda demands Maniac return home to live with the Beales. Maniac agrees to go and walks to the Beale's home knowing he now has everything he's ever dreamed of.



Chapters 1 – 5

Summary

Chapter 1. Jeffery Lionel Magee aka “Maniac Magee” was born into a two-parent family in a town named Bridgeport. When Jeffery was three years old, his parents were killed in a tragic P&W trolley accident on a return trip from the city. The newly orphaned boy moved to Hollidaysburg, Pennsylvania, with his Aunt Dot and Uncle Dan. Jeffery’s aunt and uncle are in an unhappy relationship consisting of them splitting their possessions to the maximum extent possible. Eight years later, Maniac is still living with his Aunt Dot and Uncle Dan and is set to perform with his school’s chorus. Aunt Dot and Uncle Dan show up at Jeffery’s Spring Musical and, true to form, sit at opposite sides of the auditorium. As the music begins, Jeffery’s voice is normal and blends in with his fellow classmates. As the music ends, however, the crowd hears Jeffery screaming from the top riser. Maniac screams and points to his Aunt Dot and Uncle Dan. He screams, “Talk! Talk, will ya? Talk! Talk! Talk!” Abruptly, Jeffery runs out of the school and into the night. The legend of “Maniac Magee” has begun.

Chapter 2. A year passes without a definitive answer as to where Jeffery “Maniac Magee” has been. While this lost year is a mystery, Jeffery shows up in the town of Two Mills, 200 miles from Hollidaysburg. There is great mystery surrounding why Maniac ended up in the town of Two Mills and speculation runs rampant. A few locals recall Maniac jogging through town with tattered sneakers and saying hi to strangers as if he knew them.

Chapter 3. Maniac meets a girl named Amanda Beale on her way to school. Maniac notices Amanda because she is carrying a suitcase and mistakenly thinks she is a runaway too. Maniac walks up to Amanda and greets her with his signature, “Hi.” Amanda immediately notices Maniac doesn’t fit into her East End neighborhood scene because he is a white kid in an area where everyone else is black. After a series of questions, Maniac realizes Amanda’s suitcase doesn’t contain her belongings. Rather, it contains Amanda’s most prized possession, her collection of books. As the two examine her book collection, Amanda realizes she is going to be late for school. She closes the suitcase and Maniac begs her to let him take a book. Amanda agrees to give him a book so he will leave her alone and she can go to school.

Chapter 4. Sometime after the book exchange with Amanda, Maniac shows up at a local high school athletic field. Maniac is discovered as he catches a sixty-yard football pass thrown by the school’s quarterback, Brian Deheny. After the amazing catch, Maniac runs up the field, turns, and punts the ball in a perfect spiral over a group of confused gym students and directly into the hands of the receiver, James “Hands” Down.

Chapter 5. Maniac’s antics continue as he is spotted at 803 Oriole Street, the house of the notoriously mean and mysterious Finsterwald. A group of high school boys have



thrown young Arnold Palmer over Finsterwald's fence. As Arnold lies paralyzed with fear, a type of seizure (in the text called finsterwallies) overcomes him and his teeth and body shake uncontrollably. Out of nowhere, Maniac shows up, sticks Amanda's book in between Arnold's teeth, and takes him to Finsterwald's front steps. Arnold comes to and runs off, leaving Maniac reading a book.

Analysis

Maniac Magee is an orphaned boy in Pennsylvania who falls upon a series of unfortunate circumstances in life. Despite his trials and tribulations, the first five chapters foreshadow that Maniac will become a larger-than-life figure who is deemed a legend. His strange habits, such as a love for Krimpet snack cakes and running, intimate to the reader that his character is quite unique. His unbelievable athleticism and fearlessness illustrate he has the character traits of a hero.

Amanda Beale, a main character in the novel, is introduced. Notice Amanda's interest and concern that Maniac is a white kid in a black neighborhood. The issue of racism will come up as a major theme of the novel.

Vocabulary

bulging, smatter, Krimpets, suspicious, glared, grungy, hurled, punt, commotion, infamous, hoist, Aztec, goggle, maw, chattering, clamoring, mirage, emanations, carcass



Chapters 6 – 10

Summary

Chapter 6. An hour after the incident at Finsterwald's house, a woman named Mrs. Pickwell steps outside her front door and blows a whistle through her pursed lips, to let her "small nation" of children, family, and friends know dinner is ready. After the group sits down at the ping-pong table to eat a spaghetti dinner, the children begin to ask who the new dinner guest is. As the children return to the dining room to get one more look at the guest, they notice he's gone. They step out the back door and see Maniac, book in hand, running down the steel rails.

Chapter 7. Maniac's next location is the Little League field where a baseball game has just ended. A burly 12-year-old pitcher by the name of John McNab is gloating that he has broken the little league record by striking out sixteen batters with his signature fastball. Although the game is over, McNab makes the remaining players take turns swinging. Reluctantly, the kids are stepping up to bat, each time being struck out by McNab. Maniac steps up to the plate and prepares to bat. McNab pitches once and the ball is returned straight back to him by Maniac, narrowly missing McNab's head. A second pitch, a slow lollipop, is poled by Maniac. This time, McNab is getting upset and puts all of his strength into his pitch only to be disappointed to watch the ball land in deep left center field. McNab pitches four more times and Maniac responds with a home run each time. An angry McNab begins aiming for Maniac's head, belt, and knees. McNab pitches a fast frog ball and Maniac bunts it. As Maniac is halfway to second, McNab takes action by chasing the frog and attempting to herd it into a foul ball. McNab's attempt is unsuccessful and soon he is racing to home against Maniac in an attempt to tag him out. Maniac crosses home plate first and continues jogging past a cheering crowd. All the while, McNab is yelling for Maniac to never return.

Chapter 8. After Maniac's first day in Two Mills, the town is buzzing. People are sharing stories of the strange, flap-shoed kid and one person says he's "gotta be a maniac." From that moment forward, the legend is known as Maniac Magee. Although Maniac has a name, he still doesn't have a home.

Chapter 9. An angry John McNab has decided he is going to find Maniac and beat him up since he couldn't successfully strike him out. Armed with a group of friends called the Cobras, McNab finds Maniac running on the railroad tracks. Maniac notices the group throwing stones at him and begins to run past the rails and down a boulevard of faces staring out a window. Maniac finds the voices are growing faint and the boys are laughing and have stopped at Hector Street, the border between the predominately black East End and the predominately white West End. The boys know Maniac will be in danger if he crosses the border into the East End and feel regardless of whether they are able to catch him, Maniac will get the beating they feel he deserves.



Chapter 10. Maniac makes his way through the streets of the East End, noticing there are more kids out than the day he met Amanda in the neighborhood. Soon, he is confronted by a troublemaker named Mars Bar Thompson who asks him where he's going. Maniac replies that he is headed to Sycamore Street, the street Amanda lives on, and asks for help to find it. Mars refuses to help him and attempts to take Maniac's book. Upon retrieving the book, Mars notices a page has been ripped. The discussion between the boys begins to get heated when suddenly a woman arrives and puts a broom between the two. The woman demands Mars give Maniac back his book's first page and Mars reluctantly gives it back crumpled. The woman recommends Maniac leave before he finds himself in a situation she can't get himself out of.

Analysis

Now that the author has established Maniac will be a legend, the story begins. Maniac continues his journey around town by sneaking into dinner at the Pickwell's home. The Pickwells are kind and generous people, which Maniac recognizes. Although the Pickwells are the first welcoming family Maniac meets, he will come across many wonderful people throughout the story. The inherent kindness of these characters revitalizes him and restores his faith in people.

Maniac continues to the baseball field where he meets his first antagonist, a hateful and mean John McNab. Sensing McNab's feeling of superiority, Maniac challenges McNab's strikeout record and wins, much to McNab's dismay. This act marks the first of many times Maniac will use his talents and strengths to change people's opinions of themselves and others.

McNab and his gang of friends attempt to even the score by finding and beating Maniac up. Their attempt is thwarted, however, when Maniac crosses the invisible line separating the white West End and the black East End. The invisible line symbolizes the separation that exists in the town; a separation so clear that it can be portrayed by a line of division between the neighborhoods.

Upon crossing the invisible line, Maniac meets the story's second antagonist, a character named Mars Bar Thompson. Mars makes it clear that Maniac is not welcome in the East End neighborhood. Maniac has yet to realize Mars doesn't want him in his neighborhood because he is white.

Vocabulary

twanged, whizzing, whiff, gangplank, flinched, lollipop, picadored?, reared, pandemonium, gleam, lumbered, wander, townships, clanked, befuddled, fish belly



Chapters 11 – 15

Summary

Chapter 11. Maniac runs around in an attempt to find Amanda's house on Sycamore Street. He is met again by Mars and a group of his friends. Mars attempts to get Maniac's book despite his resistance. Maniac is backed up against a wall by the boys and clutches the book, fearing the worst. Suddenly, Amanda's voice is heard above the crowd asking if the boy is Jeffery. When she confirms it is indeed Jeffrey, she asks why her book is ripped. Mars attempts to blame Maniac but Amanda knows better. Amanda abruptly starts kicking Mars and he runs off behind a crowd of laughing basketball players. Amanda and Maniac go to Amanda's house to attempt to fix the damaged book.

Chapter 12. As Maniac and Amanda walk into her home, they are greeted by Mrs. Beale, Amanda's mother, who is scrubbing a mess that Amanda's brother Lester (age 3) and sister Hester (age 4) have made. Maniac greets Amanda's mother with a handshake and she informs him that Amanda has told her all about him.

Over the course of the evening, Maniac soon finds out how destructive Amanda's brother and sister can be and why she guards her books so carefully. As Maniac reads and wrestles with Amanda's brothers and sisters, they develop an instant connection with their new friend. Mr. Beale, Amanda's father, offers to take Maniac home and he lies about where his home is. Mr. Beale quickly realizes that Maniac is lying because he asks Mr. Beale to stop at a house in the East End not the West End. Knowing Maniac, a white boy, wouldn't live in a home on the East End, he quickly discovers Maniac is homeless. Mr. Beale goes back home with Maniac and, after a short discussion with Mrs. Beale, it is decided that Maniac will now be living with them.

Chapter 13. As Maniac gets settled into his new home, the Beale household becomes a much calmer and happier place. Maniac helps with the younger siblings by playing with them, reading to them, untying the knots in their shoes, and taking baths with them. In turn, Mr. and Mrs. Beale's job becomes easier and they aren't always cleaning and battling with the younger children. In addition, Maniac pleases his new family by helping around the house. At the end of the chapter, it is discovered Maniac has an allergy to pizza, a food he had never tried until now.

Chapter 14. Maniac is adjusting well to his new life. As he grows to love his new family and neighborhood, he begins to question why the East Enders call themselves black.

As summer winds away, Maniac is often seen playing stickball, basketball, and football in the vacant lot of his neighborhood. One day, he runs into the same receiver, "Hands" Down, he had seen at the high school field months before. "Hands" asks Maniac to play football with a group of high school students and soon everyone discovers Maniac is a talented athlete. Catching on to his talent, kids from all around come up to him and ask



if he is The Maniac. He is called Maniac so much that Hester and Lester begin to call him Maniac, too. Mrs. Beale, however, assures Maniac he will always be Jeffrey to her. Maniac finds comfort in that.

Chapter 15. Maniac's fame is spreading all over the East End. Little kids are coming to him for help untying their shoe knots. Bigger kids meet him to play sports and to witness firsthand what an amazing athlete he is. "Hands" serves as Maniac's resident "trash talker" and soon passes his abilities to Maniac who begins to trash talk as well. When Maniac mistakenly trash talks Mrs. Beale, she slaps him for his impolite language. Maniac begins to sob and begs Mrs. Beale to forgive him.

Analysis

Although Maniac narrowly escapes a beating from Mars, the two meet again later. Right before a fight breaks out, Amanda rescues Maniac by stopping Mars. This marks the first time Amanda and her family will protect Maniac from the dangers of the outside world.

Upon going to Amanda's house, Maniac develops an instant connection with her younger siblings. The innocence of childhood is portrayed in the children who love Maniac just as he is. The relationship between Hester, Lester, and Maniac symbolizes friendship and affection in its most simple form. The three love and cherish each other with seemingly no regard for racial differences. This relationship allows the reader to understand Maniac's point of view by comparing him to an innocent, unadulterated child.

Maniac cherishes his time at the Beale's home and feels secure in knowing he is part of a family. He has an identity and a place to belong. Although the book infers the community is questioning whether Maniac belongs in the East End, there is an overwhelming sense the Beale household is seemingly unaware. The opinions of the outside world are kept at bay and the home is overflowing with happiness and love.

During this time, Maniac also develops ties with the neighborhood by showcasing his sports talents and building an identity with the neighborhood kids. Maniac's amazing athleticism causes the neighborhood to take note and they begin to idolize him for his talents rather than his skin color. Although Maniac vaguely begins to understand racial differences are a source of tension, he fails to fully understand the concept.

During this time, the nickname of Maniac Magee is gaining popularity. Despite this, Maniac asks Mrs. Beale to continue to call him Jeffery. In a rare sentimental moment, the normally guarded Maniac explains it's because his name is the only thing he has left from his parents.

Vocabulary

cringed, screeched, sauerkraut, quiver, hemisphere, plunking, blotches, gingersnap, stickball, juked, aardvark



Chapters 16 – 20

Summary

Chapter 16. In Chapter 14, Maniac questions why the East Enders call themselves black. The question presents itself again as Maniac is termed “blind” because of his failure to understand the tensions that exist around him. He doesn’t understand age or racial discrimination and is confused by the premise of skin color. The end of the chapter culminates with an allusion to the fact that Maniac is about to understand discrimination.

Chapter 17. It’s a hot August day and an open fire hydrant on the corner of Green and Chestnut cools Maniac and his neighbors. As they enjoy the water, a loud voice is heard above the crowd. The voice comes closer to Maniac and he is face to face with a black man pointing straight at him. The man calls Maniac “Whitey” and tells him that he needs to go home. Maniac calmly tells the man he lives in the neighborhood on Sycamore Street. The man, named Old Ragpicker, continues to yell at Maniac telling him to go home. Ragpicker turns to the neighbors and calls to them, telling them “the sheep lie not with the lion.” Essentially, he’s saying Maniac doesn’t belong in the neighborhood and should stay in his own neighborhood. Visibly shaken, Maniac returns home where he struggles to sleep. One morning while out running, he is met by Hester, Lester, and Amanda who attempt to keep him from going back to the house. Maniac senses something is wrong and as he pulls up to his house, he notices Mrs. Beale is scrubbing the house’s brick. Upon closer inspection, Maniac notices a message written in chalk on the house. It says, (F)ISHBELLY GO HOME.

Chapter 18. Maniac decides that he must leave the Beale’s home. Amanda is frantic and tries to question how he will survive away from home. For every question that Amanda brings up, Maniac has an answer. He eventually leaves the Beale’s home. Lunchtime and dinner time pass and Maniac still hasn’t returned. Amanda searches East End, West End, and Bridgeport without finding him. Maniac finally shows up in the evening, much to Amanda’s surprise.

The next day, a young child comes to the Beale’s house to ask Maniac to help him with a knot. As Amanda watches Maniac tackle the knot, an idea pops into her head. She hints to Maniac she has an idea that would make it okay for him to stay with the Beales. The idea is centered around the infamous Cobble’s Knot.

Chapter 19. Cobble’s Knot is located at the Cobble’s Corner Grocery store. The knot had been discovered in the unsuccessful store one morning by Mr. Cobble and he had created a publicity stunt aimed at finding the person who could un-tie it. The winner would be treated to one large pizza for a week. Amanda thinks if Maniac un-ties the knot, he will be hailed as a hero and be accepted in the neighborhood. Maniac is skeptical but agrees to take on the challenge.



Chapter 20. The chapter begins with Amanda and Maniac showing up to Cobble's Corner Store. The knot is brought out and is revealed to be an interconnected mess of rope with barely a space to stick a finger through. Maniac carefully inspects the knot and spends the first hour flaking off accumulated debris and crust from the knot. Although a crowd of spectators and a group of preschoolers had been watching him, the crowd shrinks as time goes by. Maniac remains undeterred and continues to work and slowly the crowd returns. The crowd is notably mixed with kids, adults, blacks and whites. Finally, Maniac finds the end of the rope and agrees to eat a snack and take a short fifteen minute nap. Maniac returns to his task with careful deliberate movements. By dinnertime, Maniac has accomplished his task. The Cobble's Knot is undone!

Analysis

Although Maniac is seemingly unaware of the complexity of racism and its existence in Two Mills, he soon understands. When Ragpicker approaches him on the streets and tells him to leave, Maniac begins to realize racism's powerful hold on Two Mills. Although troubled by the old man's words, Maniac continues to live with the Beales until a racial slur motivates him to leave. Although he loves the Beales, Maniac feels a responsibility to keep them safe and protect their family just as they protected him. The burden of leaving the family for the sake of their best interest weighs heavily on Maniac.

Maniac is later convinced by Amanda that untying the Cobble's Knot will change the neighborhood's perception of him and make him a hero. Although reluctant, he gives the challenge his all and draws a great deal of attention from both the East and West End neighborhoods. This event marks a major milestone in the book. Before this time, the reader has been exposed to friendly relationships between Maniac and East Enders such as James "Hands" Down and the Beale family. However, friendly, amicable relationships between both neighborhoods have ceased to exist. When Maniac uses his talents to untie the knot, he peacefully brings both neighborhoods together and unites them, if just for a brief moment. Blacks, whites, young and old gather peacefully around the knot and prove unity isn't an impossible feat.

Symbolically, the knot represents the racial unrest of Two Mills with its complex and seemingly impossible implications. Maniac has proven to the town that he is capable of untying the Cobble's Knot and bringing the community of Two Mills together.

Vocabulary

croaking, ranting, jabbed, incubating, curiosity, lopsided, contortions, pickpocket, spectators, zeps, frizzy, starbursts



Chapters 21 – 25

Summary

Chapter 21. There is quite a commotion around Cobble's Corner in celebration of Maniac untying the knot. In the midst of the confetti and streamers, Maniac notices Amanda is visibly upset and runs away. Maniac picks up a piece of paper and notices the confetti is made out of Amanda's prized volume A of her encyclopedias. He runs after Amanda and finds her at home sobbing and hovering over the cover of the mangled book. Maniac decides he can no longer allow Amanda or her family be hurt by him. He heads out the door and travels to the corner of Hector Street where he finds McNab and the Cobras waiting for him. Knowing the boys won't cross the invisible line that separates the East and West End, Maniac travels North on Hector between the curbs that separate the neighborhoods. By this time, Mars and a group of his friends are also trailing Maniac on their side of the curb. This continues until Maniac walks straight out of town.

Part 2

Chapter 22. Without a home to go back to, Maniac goes back to the zoo's buffalo pen. He sets a routine, which includes leaving during the day and returning back to the pen later. One night, a zoo and parks employee, Grayson, is making his rounds and discovers Maniac has fallen on the ground. Grayson hoists Maniac into his truck and takes him into a baseball equipment room. He carefully touches Maniac's hand and slowly he awakens. After feeding Maniac, Grayson attempts to learn a little more about this mysterious stranger. When Grayson finds out Maniac had been living in the East End, he scrapes dirt from Maniac's skin to determine if he is white or black. Maniac talks Grayson into taking him to buy some butterscotch Krimpets and the two take off.

Chapter 23. Grayson buys Maniac a box of thirty butterscotch Krimpets and the two head back to Grayson's home, the Two Mills YMCA. Grayson takes Maniac into a locker room and points him to a shower. Later, Grayson buys clothes for Maniac and talks to him about what his next moves will be. Maniac suggests he could get a job with Grayson at the park and live in the baseball room. Grayson suggests Maniac go to school. Maniac replies he's not going to school because he doesn't have an address. To Maniac, an address is much more than a physical place but rather a feeling and a place to belong – an indication of a root system.

Chapter 24. Grayson and Maniac make their way back to the band shell (also known as the baseball room). After Grayson jokingly mentions eating an evening meal, Maniac talks Grayson into taking him to a diner. As Maniac enjoys his supper, Grayson begins to question Maniac's life with the Beales on the East End. The ensuing conversation portrays Grayson's ignorance to cultures different from his own. Maniac takes no offense to Grayson's questioning and assures him people on both ends live similarly. The two return to the baseball room and Grayson offers to let Maniac sleep on the floor



of his room at the YMCA. On guard because of his bad luck with parents, Maniac declines but is warmed by Grayson's kindness.

Chapter 25. The next morning, Grayson reveals at one time he played minor league baseball. Maniac is surprised by this news and begs Grayson to share his stories about playing baseball. Grayson reluctantly agrees and talks about his life as a pitcher with the Bluefield Bullets in Bluefield, West Virginia. After telling his story, Grayson agrees to let Maniac tag along with him at work under the pretense he is Grayson's nephew. As they work, Grayson continues telling Maniac about getting a chance to strike out famous baseball player Willie Mays and also about missing a chance at the Majors because of an "off" night. Grayson says he played in a Mexican league until he could no longer play baseball at the age of 40. With a loss of direction, Grayson turned to working at the zoo and parks department and has worked there ever since.

Analysis

Although Maniac is successful at untying the knot and is momentarily treated as a hero, the strength of racism proves to be too much to overcome. The breaking point comes when Maniac sees Amanda's beloved book torn to shreds to be used for confetti. Maniac can deal with the neighborhood disliking him for being white but he can't allow them to hurt the Beales. He takes his minor victory at Cobble's Corner and momentarily abandons his wish for peaceful racial coexistence.

As Maniac leaves town, he walks in the middle of the road that separates the East and West End neighborhoods with both of the antagonists, Mars and McNab, following him the entire way. The symbolism lies in the fact that Maniac doesn't belong on either side. He's lost and missing the sense of belonging he yearns for.

Maniac returns to the zoo and meets another of the novel's main characters, Grayson. Grayson discovers Maniac when he is cold, weak, and almost at his breaking point. The relationship between the two is reciprocal in different ways. Grayson serves as a protector and father figure to Maniac. Maniac brings joy to Grayson's life and passively helps him to understand the ignorance of his prejudice. After learning Grayson played minor league baseball, Maniac connects with Grayson's love of the game and uses it as a means to learn more about this guarded man. Once again, Maniac uses his love and talent for sports as a way to connect with others.

When asked by Grayson why he doesn't go to school, Maniac replies it's because he doesn't have an address. An address is incredibly important to Maniac and serves as more than a physical house. To Maniac, an address symbolizes a sense of belonging and a place where one is surrounded by people who love him. Throughout the novel, there is a sense that Maniac has a personal purpose to obtain an identifying address. The death of his parents and subsequent homelessness has instilled in him a great desire to find an address to permanently call home.

Vocabulary

bugles, coiled, leering, mosey, scrawny, butterscotch, squawked, forearm, claptrap, prompt, beamed, maddening, grizzled, snorted, weariness, robust, fidgeted, superintendent, rookie



Chapters 26 – 30

Summary

Chapter 26. Grayson continues to share stories of his life as a pitcher and his talks soon transition into baseball “lessons” for Maniac. Although Grayson is much too old to actually pitch, he teaches his signature move, the stopball, to Maniac. As summer turns into fall, Grayson begins to realize a collection of books is gathering in the band shell and questions Maniac. Maniac reveals he has been taking the money Grayson gives him and has been using it to buy books at the library’s used book sale. The chapter culminates with Grayson admitting he doesn’t know how to read and asking Maniac to help him learn.

Chapter 27. Maniac finds out Grayson’s parents had been alcoholics and the had been put into special classes where he spent his time cutting paper and playing games rather than learning to read. At the age of 15, Grayson had run away to play ball in Bluefield and consequently never finished school. Maniac sympathizes with Grayson and begins to teach Grayson to read with simple picture books and a blackboard from Woolworth’s. Soon, Grayson is reading due to Maniac’s patience and persistence.

Chapter 28. Grayson’s reading ability is blossoming and one night he reads *The Little Engine That Could* to cover for Maniac. As Grayson finishes the book, a smile comes over Maniac’s face and he shouts “A-men!” hugging Grayson tightly. Maniac makes Grayson a corn muffin with his toaster oven and serves him apple juice as a celebratory snack. Maniac suggests that Grayson stay over for the night and the old man reluctantly agrees.

Chapter 29. It is now November and football season is in full swing. Grayson and Maniac head to the Two Mills football game where Maniac is delighted to see his old friend “Hands”, who close the game with a 73-yard touchdown pass. Upon returning home to the baseball room, Grayson and Maniac prepare a Thanksgiving dinner using the toaster oven. The two claim it is their favorite Thanksgiving of all time. As they stuff themselves and listen to Grayson’s polka music, Maniac has an idea. He asks Grayson for paint and paints a number on the outside of the tiny band shell room. He writes 101 Band Shell Boulevard. Maniac officially has an address!

Chapter 30. It’s now December and Christmas is around the corner. Grayson has moved out of the YMCA and is now living with Maniac at 101 Band Shell Boulevard. The two have opulently decorated their home for Christmas. Most impressive of all are two Christmas trees the pair decorated. The first tree in their home is overloaded with tinsel and balls. The second, which was decorated in a nearby wooded area, is filled with natural decorations such as pinecones and Queen Anne’s lace. Christmas spirit is overflowing at 101 Band Shell Boulevard and beyond.



Analysis

Grayson and Maniac begin to bond over their mutual love for baseball and Maniac develops a respect for Grayson's pitching ability. Feeling proud of Maniac's respect and feeling he has an identity, Grayson finally opens up to Maniac and admits he doesn't know how to read. This is a major milestone for the normally guarded and reclusive Grayson. Symbolically, this represents the idea it's never too late to learn or change perceptions. Grayson has spent his entire life not knowing how to read and believed he wasn't capable of learning. The walls have come down for this gentle old man and this foreshadows the idea perceptions may eventually change for the people of the East End and West End.

For the first time since living with the Beales, Maniac has a sense of belonging and a purpose. He decides he is going to help Grayson learn how to read and he is successful in his mission. The relationship between the two truly solidifies proving again that Maniac's reciprocal relationships provide as much for him as they do for the recipients of his friendship.

As the holidays approach, the season is filled with joy. These two loners have found a family in each other and they celebrate accordingly. Maniac is at the height of his happiness when he steps outside to paint an address on his band shell closet. He has found exactly what he's been looking for since the death of his parents: an address.

Vocabulary

grounders, shag fungoes, grappled, contrary, blarney, peculiar, geezer, grouse, warped, pommel, slink, preposterous, thronged, mammoth, polka, crèche, Queen Anne's lace



Chapters 31 – 35

Summary

Chapter 31. In the early morning hours, Grayson and Maniac venture out to the woods to find their Christmas tree beautifully covered with snow. Next, they head to the zoo to visit the animals. Back at home, they exchange gifts between themselves. Maniac gives Grayson a cap, a pair of gloves, and a book he wrote himself entitled *The Man Who Struck Out Willie Mays*. Maniac receives Grayson's prized baseball glove from his stint in the minors and a brand new ball. In addition, Maniac receives a box of Krimpets and a pair of gloves. The young boy is overcome with happiness and the gift exchange is a very special moment between the two. The chapter alludes to the fact that Grayson will be found dead 5 days later.

Chapter 32. Maniac wakes up one morning to find Grayson is dead. The book chronologically skips to the January day of Grayson's funeral. Subsequently, Maniac is the only mourner surrounded by a funeral home director and a few indifferent pallbearers. The group anxiously awaits the arrival of the minister, who is late. Maniac, overcome with grief, takes off running.

Part 3

Chapter 33. Maniac returns briefly to the baseball closet to pick up a few essentials including books and Grayson's baseball glove. He spends the next series of days roaming the area around Two Mills and returning to the buffalo pen each night. He continues indefinitely with this way of life and one day finds himself in Valley Forge sleeping in a replica of an army shelter. Hungry and weak, Maniac lies in the shelter for two days waiting to die.

Chapter 34. On his second night in the shelter, Maniac hears two little voices from a nearby cabin. The next morning, he steps out to investigate and finds two eight-year-old boys in the next cabin. Maniac discovers the boys are heading to Mexico and have stolen food from a local grocery store to live off of. Maniac lies to the boys and tells them he is a pizza delivery boy there to inform them that they have won a pizza contest. The boys fall for Maniac's lie and follow him to Cobble's Corner pizza parlor under the assumption Maniac will feed them and tell them a shortcut to Mexico. After the boys have eaten their pizza, they tell Maniac that he is welcome to stay at their house for the night. As they walk, Maniac spots John McNab heading straight toward him. The boys cling tightly to Maniac and he soon realizes the boys are McNab's brothers.

Chapter 35. John's brothers, Russell and Piper, convince him Maniac wasn't kidnapping them but rather had been helping. Maniac is granted permission to stay over and when he goes into the McNab's house he finds it in a state of utter chaos. As Maniac walks through the house, he finds trash piled on the floor, paint peeling from the walls, and gaping holes in the ceilings. A burly tattooed father, Big John, shows up with



hamburgers and the boys fight bitterly over them. The remainder of the night consists of a visit from the Cobras who drink beer and smoke with the younger kids while playing football in the house. Maniac finally drifts off to sleep while asking himself, "Who's the orphan here, anyway?"

Analysis

Christmas has arrived and Maniac and Grayson celebrate with a special gift exchange. Grayson gives Maniac his baseball mitt from the minors and the young boy is touched by Grayson's generosity and selflessness. Maniac has found an address and a father figure in Grayson. However, Maniac's pinnacle of happiness is short-lived.

Grayson dies 5 days later and Maniac is in a state of shock. Rather than report his death, Maniac spends the day with the man he looked at as a father figure. Grayson's death is yet another shocking blow to a boy who has lost virtually everything important to him.

At Grayson's funeral, Maniac is the only mourner. This further solidifies the idea that Grayson and Maniac were both alone in the world without each other.

In a state of depression, Maniac struggles to survive and has all but given up hope. Upon finding two rough and tumble boys, Russell and Piper, Maniac is once again given a small purpose and a reason to return to Two Mills. Maniac attempts to get the boys back home where they are safe and soon discovers they are the brothers of John McNab. Although he is stepping right back into the problems that led him to leave Two Mills, Maniac feels he's right where he needs to be. He understands Russell and Piper are in need of guidance and direction and their situation leads him to wonder who the orphan of this situation really is.

Vocabulary

meandering, gaped, pallbearers, corps, spade, solitary, spring, Schuylkill, satchel, beseeching, grimly, succession, embedded, snickered, satchel, urchins, lambasting, carrion



Chapters 36 – 40

Summary

Chapter 36. Maniac makes a deal with the boys stating if they go to school for a week he will show them the shortcut to Mexico. A week comes and goes and Maniac offers them a new deal. This pattern continues for a few weeks. Although school is tough for the boys, they are beginning to like all of the attention they are receiving because of giving Maniac shelter. One day, Maniac presents the boys with the same offer but Russell and Piper add a stipulation. They want Maniac to stand in Finsterwald's backyard for 10 minutes in exchange for them going to school for a week. Maniac agrees and extends the dare by offering to knock on Finsterwald's door. The neighborhood cringes in fear for Maniac and watches him go up to Finsterwald's porch and knock. A person answers and a conversation, inaudible to the crowd, takes place. Maniac returns unharmed and faces a crowd of amazed kids.

Chapter 37. At Piper and Russell's request, Maniac continues to do a number of daring feats throughout February and March. The dares range from hitting a telephone pole sixty one times in a row to climbing into the pen to give the baby buffalo a kiss. Piper and Russell, the masterminds of the feats, are enjoying the recognition they are receiving. To Maniac, the dares are part of a successful attempt to keep the boys in school. One day, Maniac is faced with his biggest challenge yet. He's asked to venture back into the East End.

Chapter 38. Maniac agrees to go to the East End and is sent off by a crowd of thirty kids at the corner of Hector Street. Maniac walks four blocks past Hector and is greeted by a taller, meaner Mars Bar. Mars challenges Maniac to a race. Children and adults show up to witness this monumental race and Bump Gilliam, a friend of Mars, starts the race. As they run, Maniac contemplates what will happen if he wins the race but his thought process is too slow. Before Maniac knows it, he beats Mars. The crowd goes wild for "White Lightning" and Maniac feels pure joy and exuberance in that moment. That feeling quickly fades and Maniac heads off. As he's leaving, he runs into Hester and Lester who lead him to the Beale's home on Sycamore Street.

Chapter 39. After a tearful yet joyful reunion with the Beales, Maniac takes off early the next morning. When he returns to the West End, Russell and Piper are genuinely happy for his safe return. As Maniac walks into the McNab's house, he sees a group bringing cinder blocks into the living room. McNab is creating a "pillbox", a type of fortress, in his house. He's also securing the windows with bars, creating a steel door, and barricading the house. When Maniac questions why they are doing this, George McNab states he is trying to prepare for an impending East Enders' revolt. McNab fears the East Enders will take over the city by summer looting and killing all in their path.

Chapter 40. Maniac takes a long run to digest what he's just witnessed and returns back to the West End for a dinner at Mrs. Pickwell's.



Feeling refreshed, Maniac returns to the McNab house to find the boys have eased up on their demanding feats. As the weather warms and May approaches, it is getting nearly impossible for Maniac to keep Piper and Russell in school. Although life at the McNab's house is chaotic, Maniac feels responsible for taking care of the boys and making sure they are okay.

One day, Maniac finds Russell and Piper playing with Grayson's baseball mitt and using it like a football. This is the final straw for Maniac and he leaves the house for good. Russell and Piper find Maniac at the library and beg him to come back for their birthday party. Maniac agrees and asks if he can bring a guest.

Analysis

As Maniac lives in the chaotic McNab household, he begins to convince Russell and Piper to go to school regularly. Once again, we see a reciprocal relationship. Maniac fulfills his purpose to help the boys and the boys love the recognition they get from housing Maniac and "convincing" him to complete their daring feats.

One such feat is going into the backyard of Finsterwald's house and knocking on his front door. The unwarranted fear surrounding this home plays into the idea that people fear what they don't know or understand. Although Finsterwald has never given the children a reason to be scared of him, they base their opinions on fictional stories. Maniac serves as an example of facing one's fears and discovering people as they truly are. This theme continues in a grander scale later on.

Maniac is slightly fearful as Russell and Piper dare him to return to the East End. He doesn't fear being in the East End but rather is worried about the repercussions the Beales may face by his being there. He runs into Mars and accepts his challenge for a race and wins. The race symbolizes Maniac's stand toward East End resistance. He will not allow the East Enders to bully or belittle him or the Beales ever again.

Old feelings are reignited as Maniac spends time with his beloved Beale family. Feeling a sense of responsibility toward Piper and Russell, he leaves the Beale's home and heads back to the West End. Upon finding the McNabs building a fortress in preparation for an East End revolt, Maniac heads to the Pickwell's for dinner. Eating with the Pickwells reminds him that caring people exist in the West End and reignites his wish for a peaceful East End/West End integration. His optimism is soon tested when he discovers the unruly Piper and Russell playing with his prized mitt from Grayson. Although visibly upset, Maniac keeps calm and asks if he can bring a guest to the boys' upcoming birthday party. Although the guest isn't revealed, one can't help but believe that Maniac's perseverance is in full force.

Vocabulary

agony, pelting, finsterwalled, devour, scoffing, perilous, forlorn, scowl, pipsqueaks, exuberance, reprisals, ludicrous, trowels, grapped, pillbox, extort



Chapters 41 – 46

Summary

Chapter 41. Maniac shows up for Russell and Piper's birthday party with none other than Mars Bar. Maniac convinces Mars that he should go with him to the party to prove he is as tough as he claims. Crossing from the East End to the West End is a major feat and he assures Mars doing this will prove he's the toughest around. Mars agrees to cross into the West End and Maniac takes him first to the Pickwell's home. The Pickwells serve the boys dinner and boost Mars' ego by cheering in awe as he stops traffic with the evil in his eyes.

Chapter 42. The air is thick as Mars steps foot into the home of the hateful McNabs. George McNab gets up from his chair and leaves the party while the boys stay downstairs and begin to play games. The boys play Rebels, whites versus blacks. As Mars watches cautiously, a Cobra jumps out from a hole in the ceiling and startles him. The other Cobras laugh and a fight nearly ensues. Maniac summons all of his strength to get Mars out of the house.

Chapter 43. Maniac continues to live in the buffalo pen and travels all around the city keeping a distance from the P&W trolley trestle reminding him of the accident that killed his parents. Over the time he's lived in Two Mills, he's learned to recognize the unique characteristics of the backyards of both the East and West Ends. Eventually, he begins to sleep in the backyards.

Chapter 44. As Maniac runs every morning, he begins to sense someone is traveling with him. Although he soon realizes the person following him is Mars, the two never speak. One morning as Maniac and Mars are cruising Main Street, Piper McNab frantically runs to Maniac. Unable to understand what he's saying, Maniac and Mars follow Piper to a tall platform of the P&W Trolley Terminal. On the trestle, high above the river, Russell is paralyzed in fear at the realization of how high he is above the water. A train is making its way down the trestle and Piper is growing ever more frantic and begging Maniac to save his brother. Maniac calmly turns around and leaves the scene as if he is unaware of the whole situation.

Chapter 45. Maniac is awakened in the night by Mars Bar who has found him at the zoo. Mars begs Maniac to tell him why he chose to walk away from Russell. Maniac explains his parents had been killed in a trolley accident and he blacked out. With an understanding of why Maniac did what he did, Mars claims he saved Russell and the boy, overtaken with emotion, wouldn't let him go. Mars takes Russell and Piper to his home in the East End where they are welcomed and taken care of by Mars' mother. Before Mars' father returns the boys home, Piper and Russell beg Mars to play Rebels with them saying they will let him be on the white side. Maniac chuckles at the thought. Mars continues by saying his mother wants to meet the famous Maniac Magee. Maniac declines and Mars leaves upset.



Chapter 46. Maniac is awoken once again by Amanda who was sent by Mars to get him. Amanda, in her typical sassy way, demands Maniac apologize for making her sneak out to retrieve him. She continues by saying Maniac should get up so he can go home forever. Maniac resists but Amanda will not take no for an answer. Maniac gets up and heads home with Amanda and Mars by his side. Maniac receives what he has wanted for so long, a call to come home!

Analysis

Maniac and Mars' arrival at the party is the climax of part three. Bringing a black kid into the West End is brave but bringing Mars into the McNab home is monumental. True to form, John McNab leaves the party and refuses to come out of his room.

The youngest children seem to be unaffected by Mars and their behavior is similar to Hester and Lester Beale's reaction to Maniac.

Although the party ends with a near fight, the event is important for several reasons. First, it proves Maniac has the capability of bringing people from both neighborhoods together albeit unsuccessfully. Before this occasion, it would have been unheard of for an East Ender to step foot into a West Ender's home. Secondly, the event is important because it revolves around both neighborhoods' main antagonists, Mars and McNab. The two have a powerful hold on the opinions and actions of the masses and Maniac recognizes that. If he can unite these two characters, Maniac will have faced his most difficult challenge.

Maniac continues with his normal routines and begins to notice Mars is following him on his daily run. Although unsure as to why he is following him, it can be asserted Mars is developing an interest and fascination with Maniac. Maniac's bravery in regard to standing up against discrimination captures the attention of Mars who desperately wants to be known as "brave" also.

When Piper approaches Maniac to tell him Russell is in danger and stuck on the train trestle, Maniac freezes and essentially blacks out. Maniac is brave and perseverant to anything and everything but the train trestle. Memories of his parents' death and his subsequent abandonment prove to be more than he can mentally overcome in that moment.

When Maniac wakes up to find Mars looking over him, the young loner is startled. Upon learning that Mars saved Russell on the train trestle and the two have become friends, it becomes clear that Maniac's wish has come true. He has taken the town's two most hateful antagonists, Mars and McNab, and gained a slight edge in his quest for peaceful coexistence. Maniac finds joy in the news but still yearns for an address and family of his own.

Maniac is startled yet again by Amanda's voice. She has come to take him back home to the Beale's. Reluctant and guarded by his previous experiences, Maniac resists but soon succumbs to Amanda's request. Maniac, Amanda, and Mars take off into the night.



Maniac now has a family and has succeeded in his quest for unity in the town of Two Mills. For this, he is, and will forever be, a legend.

Vocabulary

goad, nonchalantly, sham, stogie, gabble, lob, gauntlet, illusion, trestle, enchanted, dovetailed, drenched, grogged, hoarse, emu, pry, shuddered, rasping, lean-to



Characters

Maniac Magee

Jeffery “Maniac” Magee is the main character of the novel. At a young age, Maniac’s parents die in a tragic accident. Alone and orphaned, the boy spends the majority of the novel searching for an address and a family of his own.

Although damaged and bruised by the death of his parents and his own personal roller coaster of ups and downs, Maniac finds self worth in his abilities to connect with others and unite people. A kind hearted soul and a talented athlete, Maniac’s personal journey comes to a close when he finds the address that he’s dreamed of.

Amanda Beale

Amanda, an African American girl living in the East End, is Maniac’s first friend and consequently his best friend. She can best be described as a smart and sassy young lady with a big heart and a passion for books. To Maniac, Amanda is like a sister and he views her family as his own.

Mrs. Beale

Mrs. Beale serves as a mother figure in Maniac’s life. This kind hearted cook takes Maniac in and treats him as if he is her child. When she slaps Maniac for using crude language, he sobs and begs for her forgiveness. Mrs. Beale’s love and approval is extremely important to Maniac.

Earl Grayson

Grayson, as he is known to Maniac, is an older gentleman who works for the parks and zoo department. Grayson takes Maniac under his wing and serves as a father figure to him. The bond between the two loners transcends both of their tendencies to be guarded. As a former minor league baseball player, Grayson’s love of sports further solidifies his bond with Maniac. Grayson’s passing at the end of part two marks one of the lowest moments of Maniac’s life.

Mars Bar Thompson

Mars Bar, one of the stories antagonists, is an African American boy living in the East End. Known as the toughest and meanest boy of the East End, Mars regularly bullies Maniac and antagonizes him for being a white kid in a black neighborhood. Maniac



persistently stands up to Mars and, in the end, Mars respects Maniac's bravery and serves as a catalyst for uniting the East End and West End.

John McNab

John, another antagonist, is a burly Caucasian boy who is spiteful and hateful to those who attempt to cross him. With quick wit and peaceful resistance, Maniac is able to thwart John's constant bullying. John's wild and unruly younger brothers, Piper and Russell, unknowingly unite the East and West Ends when Mars saves one of them from a train trestle accident.



Objects/Places

Address

Throughout the novel, Maniac openly discusses his longing for an address.

Maniac notes the address of the Beale's home when they invite him to stay with them. When Grayson asks Maniac why he doesn't go to school, he states it's because he doesn't have an address. Once Grayson and Maniac settle into their home in the baseball closet, Maniac proudly paints the address on the outside building.

For Maniac, an address symbolizes a sense of belonging and a permanent home.

Butterscotch Krimpets

Krimpets are Maniac's favorite snack and they are the only food he consistently eats throughout the novel. He receives them as a Christmas gift and eats them while tackling the Cobble's Knot.

Two Mills, Pennsylvania

Two Mills is the town where the story predominately takes place. The town is racially divided into the predominately black East End and the predominately white West End.

Finsterwald's House

This home is a type of haunted house for the children of Two Mills. No one dares to go into the backyard or front porch and the house is shrouded with mystery. Maniac performs a series of stunts at the house and proves that the unknown doesn't have to be scary.

Books

Throughout the novel, books are brought up regularly. Amanda Beale has an immense passion for reading and for books. As a result, Maniac also develops a love of reading. Grayson learns how to read during the story using the children's books from the library's used book sale.



101 Bandshell Boulevard

This is the address of the home Grayson and Maniac shared in the baseball closet. This address is full of love and the time spent here marks the happiest moments in Maniac's life.

Sports

Maniac, a talented athlete, regularly plays sports in the neighborhood. His talent catches the attention of the town and hoists his legacy in the minds of the townspeople. Sports mentioned throughout the novel include baseball, football, and stickball. Consequently, sports unite Maniac with Grayson and other characters in the story.



Themes

Racism

Racism is a major theme in the novel "Maniac Magee". The East End and West End neighborhoods of Two Mills are deeply divided. The two ends are so divided many people never cross into the opposite end out of fear and ignorance. Although there are people in both ends of the town who are not prejudiced, those that are sway the opinions and drive the fear of the masses. Maniac is different because he is color blind in regard to race. He serves as a catalyst for change in a community desperately needing to be enlightened.

Friendship

Throughout the novel, a number of great friendships transcend age and race differences to promote change. The best example is the relationship between Maniac and Amanda. Their bond exemplifies the strength of friendship and the idea that two people can overlook differences to focus on the similarities that unite them. Maniac and Grayson's friendship is special for different reasons. Although the two had a drastic age difference, their love for baseball and sports unite them. These strong friendships serve as a model for unity and mirror Maniac's wish for the community of Two Mills.

Unity

Throughout the text, Maniac attempts to unite the racially divided town of Two Mills. Three major events mark this quest for unity. First is the gathering of both neighborhoods at the Cobble's Knot. Second is Mars' attendance at Russell and Piper McNab's birthday party. Third is Piper and Russell's visit to Mars' home after he saves the two boys. Maniac's quest for unity proves successful and, as a result, he is able to live with the Beale family without fearing major repercussions.

Perseverance

Perseverance an important theme in the novel "Maniac Magee". Perseverance is especially important to the character of Maniac, who has two main goals or purposes throughout the text: to help others and to help himself. Consequently, Maniac learns these purposes are quite reciprocal and during his quest he is faced with many challenges such as racism, homelessness, and death. Despite all of this, Maniac's perseverance guides him and keeps him pushing toward his purpose. The reader is left feeling empowered and feels nothing is impossible with perseverance.

Sports

Sports proves to be an important and unique kind of theme in the novel "Maniac Magee". Sports unite characters in the novel and break down the walls that separate race and age. Maniac's athleticism allows him to bring attention to his strengths rather than his skin color. Initially, the theme is presented as Maniac amazes Two Mills with a spectacular football catch and baseball strike out. As the novel continues, his athleticism helps him fit into the East End community during the time he lives with the Beales. As a culmination of the theme, Grayson and Maniac's mutual love for baseball allows them to open up and negate their tendencies to be guarded.



Style

Point of View

Maniac Magee is told through the eyes and voice of an omniscient third person narrator. The use of he, she, and it leads the reader to believe the narrator is familiar with the legend of Maniac Magee but isn't personally involved in the story. The fact that the narrator interweaves the thoughts and feelings of the character into the story adds an omniscient element to the text.

This point of view works well for the story because it allows the reader to analyze the characters and story independently without being swayed by the opinions of a first person narrator. As the reader devours the text, he emotionally connects with the characters and rides an roller coaster of ups and downs with the characters.

Setting

Maniac Magee primarily takes place in the town of Two Mills, Pennsylvania. In the beginning of the novel, Maniac's birthplace of Bridgeport is mentioned. Maniac's aunt and uncle live in Hollidaysburg, Pennsylvania and the town is briefly mentioned as well.

The time period is vague partially to allow the story to transcend beyond time. It is assumed the novel takes place in recent times. The characters drive cars, watch TV, and eat pizza. Although the segregation of the town is more extreme than most would find in modern day towns, the reader is left to believe the time setting of the story is fairly recent.

Language and Meaning

The novel is easy to read and full of colorful, unusual language allowing the reader to create mental pictures while reading. Some terms such as zeps and krimpets are regional terms that are sometimes challenging to comprehend. Moderate to difficult sports terms may also pose a challenge to those who are sports novices.

Structure

Maniac Magee is divided into 46 short chapters and three separate parts. Each of the three parts feature a rising action, a climax, and an ending. Stories written this way are sometimes called episodic plots.

The first part chronicles Maniac's past and his entrance into Two Mills. It continues by identifying the antagonists, Mars Bar Thompson and John McNab. This part also elaborates on Maniac becoming a member of the Beale family.



The second part tells the story of Grayson. Maniac's relationship with Grayson is chronicled in great depth until his death.

The third part focuses on Maniac's life after Grayson. It discusses Maniac moving into the McNab's home and struggling to unite the East and West End. Maniac Magee culminates with the townspeople beginning to unite rather than segregate from one another.



Quotes

Of course, to be accurate, he wasn't really Maniac then. He was Jeffrey. Jeffrey Lionel Magee. (Chapter 1)

Amanda was suspicious. Who was this white stranger kid? And what was he doing in the East End, where almost all the kids were black? (Chapter 3)

Nobody (except Amanda Beale) had any other name for him, so pretty soon, when they wanted to talk about the new kid, that's what they called him: Maniac. The legend had a name. (Chapter 8)

I don't think I'm bad. I'm not saying I'm an angel either. Not even real good. Somewhere in between, I guess. (Chapter 10)

For the life of him, he couldn't figure why these East Enders called themselves black. He kept looking and looking, and the colors he found were gingersnap and light fudge and dark fudge and acorn and butter rum and cinnamon and burnt orange. But never licorice, which, to him, was real black. (Chapter 14)

Maniac was blind. Sort of. (Chapter 16)

A tiny idea was beginning to worm its way into Grayson's head; he could barely feel it as it brushed by all the claptrap in his brain. He ignored it. He said, "What about school?" (Chapter 23)

Two days later, while playing pepper in the Legion infield, the old man said to the kid, "So why don't you go ahead and teach me how to read?" (Chapter 27)

The old man gave himself up willingly to his exhaustion and drifted off like a lazy, sky-high fly ball. Something deep in his heart, unmeasured by his own consciousness, soared unburdened for the first time in thirty-seven years, since the time he had so disgraced himself before the Mud Hens' scout and named himself thereafter a failure. (Chapter 28)

If Thanksgiving was wonderful, Christmas was paradise. (Chapter 30)

Maniac went over. "Grayson." He shook the old man. "Grayson?" He took the old man's hand. It was cold. "Grayson!" He didn't run to the Superintendent's office. He didn't run to the nearest house. He knew. (Chapter 32)

The second evening came and went. Maniac never stirred. Knowing it would not be fast or easy, and wanting, deserving nothing less, grimly, patiently, he waited for death. (Chapter 34)



He knew he should be feeling afraid of these East Enders, these so-called black people. But he wasn't. It was himself he was afraid of, afraid of any trouble he might cause just by being there. (Chapter 38)

Mars Bar stared with growing astonishment at Maniac, whose wide, unblinking eyes were fixed on the trestle, yet somehow did not seem to register what was there. Nor did he seem to hear Piper pleading. (Chapter 44)

Maniac said nothing. He was quite content to let Amanda do the talking, for he knew that behind her grumbling was all that he had ever wanted. He knew finally, truly, at long last, someone was calling him home. (Chapter 46)



Topics for Discussion

Topic 1

What are the circumstances that led to Maniac being orphaned? Why do you think he left his Aunt and Uncle's home never to return? Do you think the town of Two Mills held special significance for Maniac? Is that why he settled there?

Topic 2

Describe the first time Amanda and Maniac meet. Why do you think Amanda was so suspicious of Maniac? Do you think Amanda would have given away one of her books to just anyone?

Topic 3

Discuss the Beale family and their relationship with Maniac. What are the family dynamics? Compare and contrast them to the Pickwell family of the West End.

Topic 4

Describe Maniac's amazing sports abilities. What role do sports play in this novel? How would the text have been different if there wasn't such a heavy emphasis on sports? Do you think this novel is appealing to both genders?

Topic 5

Discuss the reciprocal nature of Maniac's relationships. What does Maniac do for others and what do the characters do for him? What important roles do Grayson and Mrs. Beale play in Maniac's life?

Topic 6

Why is the Finsterwald's house such a mystery? Are there any valid reasons for the children to avoid the house and yard? What does Maniac do to dispel this myth? Is there a lesson to be learned?



Topic 7

Discuss how Maniac single handedly changes the opinion of a community deeply rooted in racism. If the novel had a sequel, what changes do you think would take place over time?

Topic 8

Analyze Mars Bar Thompson. What are his character traits? Do you think Mars' mother was the woman who saves Maniac on the first day? How does he serve as a catalyst for change in the community of Two Mills?