



MANIAC MAGEE STUDY GUIDE

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For the novel by
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Synopsis

The history of a kid is one part fact, two parts legend, and three parts snowball.

When Jeffrey Magee's parents die in a tragic trolley accident, he is sent to live with an aunt and uncle who hate each other. After eight years of living in a divided home, Jeffrey Magee runs away. One year later he winds up in Two Mills where he amazes everyone with his incredible stunts, earning him the nickname "Maniac."

Two Mills is a town divided by race. The white people live on the west side of Hector Street, and the black people live on the east side. But Maniac, who is white, doesn't recognize the barrier. He quickly befriends a black girl and soon finds himself invited to live with the Beales, a family on the East End.

Maniac seems to have found a warm, loving home at last, but there are some on the East End who do not want a white boy living among them. Because he fears what might happen to the Beales, Maniac runs away again.

When Earl Grayson discovers Maniac living in the buffalo pen at the Elmwood Park Zoo, he takes him into his care. Grayson is a park worker, but Maniac quickly discovers that Grayson was once a pitcher in the minor leagues. As Grayson shares tales of his short-lived baseball career, he also reveals to Maniac that he cannot read. With patience and encouragement, Maniac begins to help the old man learn to read. It seems that Maniac has found a new home living in the equipment room at the park's band shell, but an unexpected tragedy sends Maniac on the run and deep into despair.

A chance encounter with two young runaways brings Maniac back to the West End of Two Mills and the dysfunctional McNab home. There he sees the terrible effects of the racial barrier in Two Mills, and in his own small way, Maniac decides to make a difference.

Chapters 27–32

*“You don’t have to wait for a prayer. You say it when somebody says something or does something you really like.”
He hopped off the bag, thrust both hands to the ceiling, and shouted: “Aaaay-men!”*

Vocabulary:

In each of the following groups of words, four of the five words have the same or nearly the same meaning. Cross out the one word in each group that does not share a common meaning. Then pick a word from the Word Box to replace the crossed out word.

Word Box

knack	preposterous	bulldogged	thronged
acquaintanceship	dispersing	languished	pungent
stoic			

indifferent
unaffected
emotional
impassive
unconcerned

relationship
enmity
familiarity
friendship
intimacy

acid
piquant
acerbic
dulcet
sharp

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

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plausible
incredible
unreasonable
outrageous
ridiculous

declined
failed
fortified
deteriorated
wasted

teemed
swarmed
poured
dissipated
flooded

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

spreading
scattering
strewing
distributing
accumulating

deficiency
skill
aptitude
talent
expertise

forced
coerced
pressured
compelled
yielded

7. _____

8. _____

9. _____

Extended Metaphor:

1. An *extended metaphor* is a metaphorical comparison that continues at length, and the comparison is shown in several ways. Read the following passage from Chapter 27:

The old man showed an early knack for consonants. Sometimes he got *m* and *n* mixed up, but the only one that gave him trouble day in and out was *c*. It reminded him of a bronc some cowboy dared him to ride in his Texas League days. He would saddle up that *c*, climb aboard and grip the pommel for dear life, and ol' *c*, more often than not, it would throw him. Whenever that happened, he'd just climb right back on and ride 'er some more. Pretty soon *c* saw who was boss and gave up the fight. But even at their orneriest, consonants were fun.

What is the general comparison found in this passage?

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Thinking About the Story:

6. The first book Grayson read from cover to cover was *The Little Engine That Could*. How might this story be significant to Grayson's accomplishment? How is Grayson like his favorite story, *Mike Mulligan's Steam Shovel*?

7. At the end of Chapter 28, the author writes:

Something deep in [Grayson's] 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.

Explain what it was that Grayson felt.

8. What did it mean that Maniac painted "101 Band Shell Boulevard" outside the equipment room door?
9. The author writes, "To anyone else, it was a ratty old scrap of leather, barely recognizable as a baseball glove, fit for the garbage can." But Maniac treated the old glove like a valuable object. In what way was Grayson himself like his old baseball glove?

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10. What bothers Maniac about the funeral?

Dig Deeper:

11. Why do you think Maniac called it the best Thanksgiving dinner he ever had?

12. In his prayer, Maniac called the equipment room “this warm house” and referred to he and Grayson as “our own little family.” What does this tell you about how Maniac views “home” and “family”?

13. Read 1 Thessalonians 5:16–18. These verses tell us to give thanks in all circumstances. Can you think of a situation in which it would be difficult to give thanks? Relate one of those circumstances and how you could be thankful in it.

14. Read Ecclesiastes 4:9–12. How are Maniac and Grayson like these verses?

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Hyperbole:

1. H; 2. F; 3. H; 4. H; 5. F; 6. F; 7. H; 8. F; 9. H; 10. H; 11. F

Questions:

1. Someone had written “FISHBELLY GO HOME” on the side of the house. The children were trying to keep Maniac from seeing it, but Maniac got home before Mrs. Beale had finished scrubbing it away.
2. Amanda thought that if Maniac could untie Cobble’s Knot, he’d be a hero “and *nooo*-body’ll mess with you then.”
3. One large pizza each week for a whole year.
4. The confetti was all that was left of Amanda’s treasured volume of the encyclopedia. Someone had gone into the Beales’ house and ripped it to shreds.
5. Maniac decided to leave the Beales’. He wanted to make sure that they didn’t get hurt anymore because of his presence.

Thinking About the Story:

6. Maniac hugged her and told her than he loved her. Answers will vary. Maniac must have understood that her correction showed that she loved him and cared about him. Answers will vary.
7. Maniac couldn’t see that some people didn’t like him, and even hated him, because he was different and because he was white. Answers will vary.
8. At first Maniac didn’t understand what the ragpicker was saying, but later he couldn’t sleep and he started running earlier and went farther. After the message on the wall, he acted depressed and wanted to leave. After someone destroyed the encyclopedia he walked out of town. Maniac seemed to blame himself in some way. Answers will vary. Maniac is probably right that some of these things happened because he was there, but he was not the *cause*—he didn’t *make* them happen and they weren’t necessarily foreseeable.

Dig Deeper:

9. Proverbs 4:24— We should refrain from dishonest and corrupt talk.
Ephesians 4:29— Our speech should not be unwholesome, but rather should be helpful for building others up according to their needs and should benefit those who listen.
Ephesians 5:4—Instead of obscenity, foolish talk, and coarse joking, we should speak words of thanksgiving.
10. Being disciplined shows love and belonging; we accept it and respect the one who gives it fairly. Discipline produces righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. Discipline from God is also an indication that one has been accepted as a true child of God.
11. It would have been scandalous because it was against the Pharisee’s law for a Jew to associate with a Gentile or visit him. Peter was given a vision in which he was told that he should not call any man impure or unclean. This passage reveals that God does not show favoritism, “but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right.”

Chapters 22–26

Vocabulary:

Answers will vary. Responses should be similar to the following:

1. amble, wander, stroll, meander, saunter
2. strained, worn, tattered
3. vital, vigorous, sturdy, alive, animated, lively, energetic
4. stockpile, inventory, reserve, reservoir
5. flattery, fabrication, fiction, invention, fantasy
6. complain, grumble, mutter, murmur

Point of View:

1. Most of Maniac Magee is written in third-person.
2. The opening four paragraphs of Chapter 22 are written in second-person point of view, as if the reader were the baby buffalo at the Elmwood Park Zoo. There is no necessary reason for using second person point of view; however the section provides a good transition to “Part II” of the story. It sets up Maniac’s present situation without having to provide too many details. As an objective observer—the buffalo—the reader is comfortable with knowing no more than the scene that is presented. Instead the scene engages the imagination, allowing readers to fill in the blanks between the end of Chapter 21 and the beginning of Chapter 22.