

**A Teacher's Guide and Student
Activity Packet for
Jerry Spinelli's**

MANIAC MACGEE



Written, compiled and edited by

Lori Lewis

**With selected contributions from other
storytellers and educators**

Packets such as this have been created for the purpose of allowing teachers and students to enjoy classic and/or award-winning stories/books. This packet was created under the leadership of LORI LEWIS— with contributions from several other individuals (who are all credited on the final page).

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Classroom Suggestions for *Maniac Magee*

Is it a tall tale? Is it realistic fiction? Perhaps a bit of both? Jerry Spinelli's 1990 Newbery Award winning *Maniac Magee* blends the exaggerated feats of one 12-year-old boy, namely Jeffrey Lionel "Maniac" Magee, with the reality of racial prejudice. It is also a story about love, family, home, baseball, fear and understanding.

The main character, Maniac Magee, has a strong sense of justice, a thirst for knowledge and an amazing lack of fear. He has a total absence of prejudice and is concerned over the racial problems in the town of Two Mills, the town he has chosen to be his home.

Introduce the book to students by explaining that *Maniac Magee* is a modern-day tall tale. It is a mixture of events that could happen in real life and exaggerated stories and accomplishments. Maniac's reputation grows throughout the book to heroic proportions.

The following packet of ideas for activities, discussion, and classroom work is designed with fourth and fifth grade students in mind, although sixth grade students may also enjoy the book.

Choose the activities that best suit the needs of your class. Pages may be duplicated for classroom use.

"That Wild and Wonderful Maniac Magee" is a fun crossword puzzle that offers a good review of word usage and details of the book.

"Step by Step with Maniac Magee" helps with the comprehension skill of sequencing.

"Does Anything Rhyme with *Maniac*?" provides a creative thinking opportunity to create a jump rope rhyme.

"Two Mills is Best, East or West" is a logic and mapping skills activity.

"Maniac the Magnificent!" challenges students to examine the difference between fact and legend.

Creative writing activities include a class or group discussion about superheroes and creating a new hero or legend, journal entries, newspaper articles, and other suggestions for interesting writing assignments.

Art activities offer the opportunity to create a cartoon strip and a bookstore poster based on *Maniac Magee*.

Teachers may choose to plan a "Mad About Maniac Day." Suggested activities for the day include, in addition to the student pages, a pizza lunch or special treats, a "Cobble's Knot Contest," a chance to try out some of the student-created jump rope rhymes, and playing "A Legend is Born," a game that illustrates how legends grow.

The themes of prejudice, love and hate, living and dying, winning and losing, and others are addressed through class discussion questions.

Read through the activities and suggestions and choose those best-suited for your students and your classroom situation. Feel free to add to these for additional fun and academic exploration.

That Wild and Wonderful *Maniac Magee*

by Flora Joy

The winner of the 1990 Newbery Medal was *Maniac Magee*, by Jerry Spinelli. This story is filled with a wide range of emotional experiences expressed through the adventures of Jeffrey Lionel Magee, nicknamed Maniac. The book relates episodes of love and hate, winning and losing, joining and fleeing, and living and dying. It addresses the evils of prejudice, the adventures of baseball, the plight of the homeless, and the pitfalls of fear. It is an adventure you won't want to miss! After you read it, have fun with the crossword puzzle below.

ACROSS:

2. Even today, kids talk about how Maniac hit an inside-the-park homer with a _____ instead of a baseball.

4. A girl who placed great pride in her collection of books

6. A popular food which was the prize for untying the famous knot, even though the winner was allergic to it

9. The old caretaker who died during the night after spending a wonderful Christmas with Maniac

11. What Mrs. Pickwell used to call her children to dinner

12. The huge legendary ball of string which Maniac untangled was called Cobble's _____.

14. The book that was shredded into confetti was from a set of _____.

3. In return for Grayson's stories, help, and support, Maniac taught him how to _____.

5. Jeffrey Lionel Magee's amazing demonstrations of physical feats and his wild and adventure-some antics caused people to start calling him _____.

6. John McNab was the strike-out _____ in the town's Little League.

7. Maniac needed to have an _____ in order to get a library card.

8. The whites in this story lived in the west end of town, and the blacks lived in the _____ end.

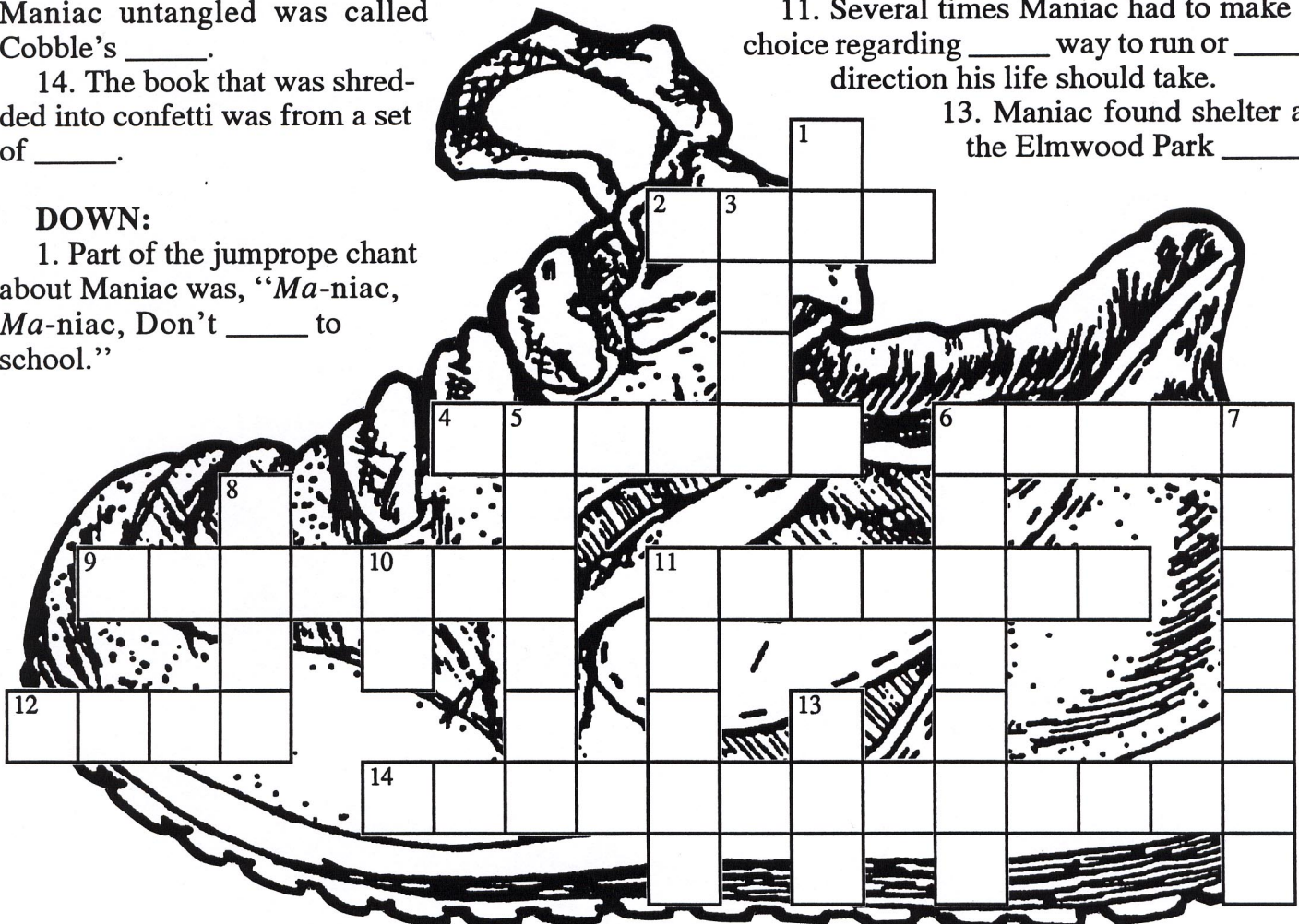
10. Two other lines of the jumprope chant about Maniac Magee were, "*Ma-niac, Ma-niac, He's _____ cool.*"

11. Several times Maniac had to make a choice regarding _____ way to run or _____ direction his life should take.

13. Maniac found shelter at the Elmwood Park _____.

DOWN:

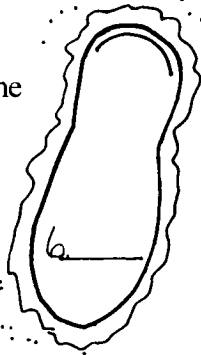
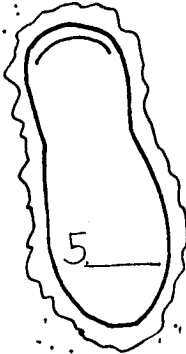
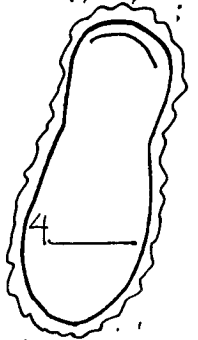
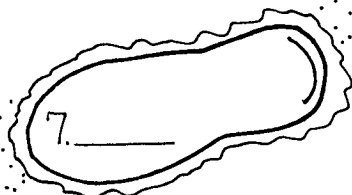
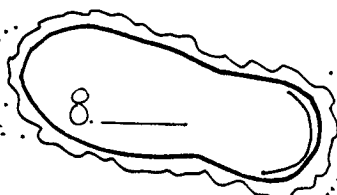
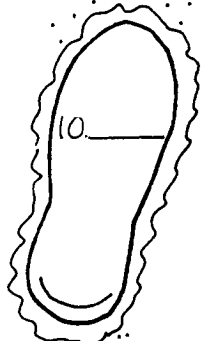
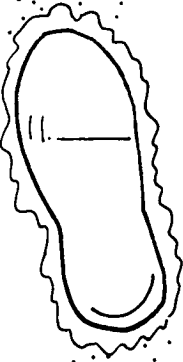
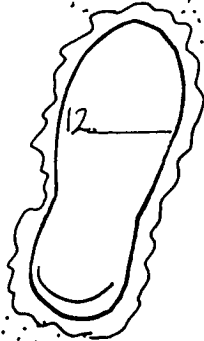
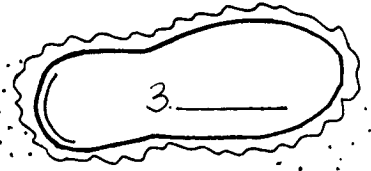
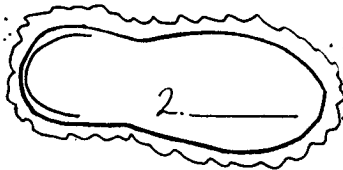
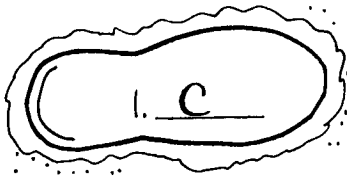
1. Part of the jumprope chant about Maniac was, "*Ma-niac, Ma-niac, Don't _____ to school.*"



STEP BY STEP WITH MANIAC MAGEE

Jeffrey “Maniac” Magee had many adventures, many happy times, and a few sad times. Read the statements below and then put them in the order they occurred. Write the letter of each occurrence in the correct “step.” The first step is done for you! *(Developed by Lori Lewis)*

Begin here →



- A. Maniac Magee unties Cobble’s Knot, but in the celebration that follows, one of Amanda’s books is torn up. Not wanting the Beales to be hurt, Maniac leaves Two Mills.
- B. When Maniac’s friend Grayson dies, Maniac once again runs away.
- C. Jeffrey Lionel Magee loses his parents in the famous Bridgeport trolley crash.
- D. Mars Bar and Amanda find Maniac once again at the buffalo shed and convince him to come back and live with the Beales.
- E. Jeffrey earns the nickname “Maniac” for his amazing athletic feats and courage.
- F. Maniac and Mars Bar find Russell McNab stranded on the trolley trestle. Reminded of his parent’s death, Maniac runs away.
- G. Jeffrey runs away from his aunt and uncle’s house. One year later, he comes to the town of Two Mills.
- H. After finding shelter in the buffalo pen at Elmwood Park Zoo Maniac is found by Grayson, an old zoo caretaker.
- I. Russell and Piper McNab, after running away from home, find Maniac cold and hungry in Valley Forge. Maniac takes them back to Two Mills and moves in with them.
- J. Amanda Beale lends Jeffrey Magee one of her books from her “library.”
- K. Amanda and Mars Bar take Maniac home from the buffalo pen to his new home with the Beales.
- L. Maniac Talks Mars Bar into visiting the McNab home. The visit is a disaster and Maniac finds himself homeless again.

DOES ANYTHING RHYME WITH "MANIAC"?

In describing the legendary Maniac Magee, author Jerry Spinelli tells of grade school girls in Two Mills who still jump rope and chant:



Ma-niac, Ma-niac
He's so *cool*
Ma-niac, Ma-niac
Don't go to *school*
Runs all *night*
Runs all *right*
Ma-niac, Ma-niac
Kissed a *bull!*

Now that *you* know Maniac Magee, think of his other feats and accomplishments that you found most interesting. Write another verse in the space below to add to the legend of Maniac Magee.

A large rectangular frame made of a thick, braided rope. The rope has a textured, knitted appearance. At the top left and top right corners, the rope forms a handle-like shape. Inside the frame, there are seven horizontal lines for writing.



TWO MILLS IS THE BEST--EAST OR WEST!



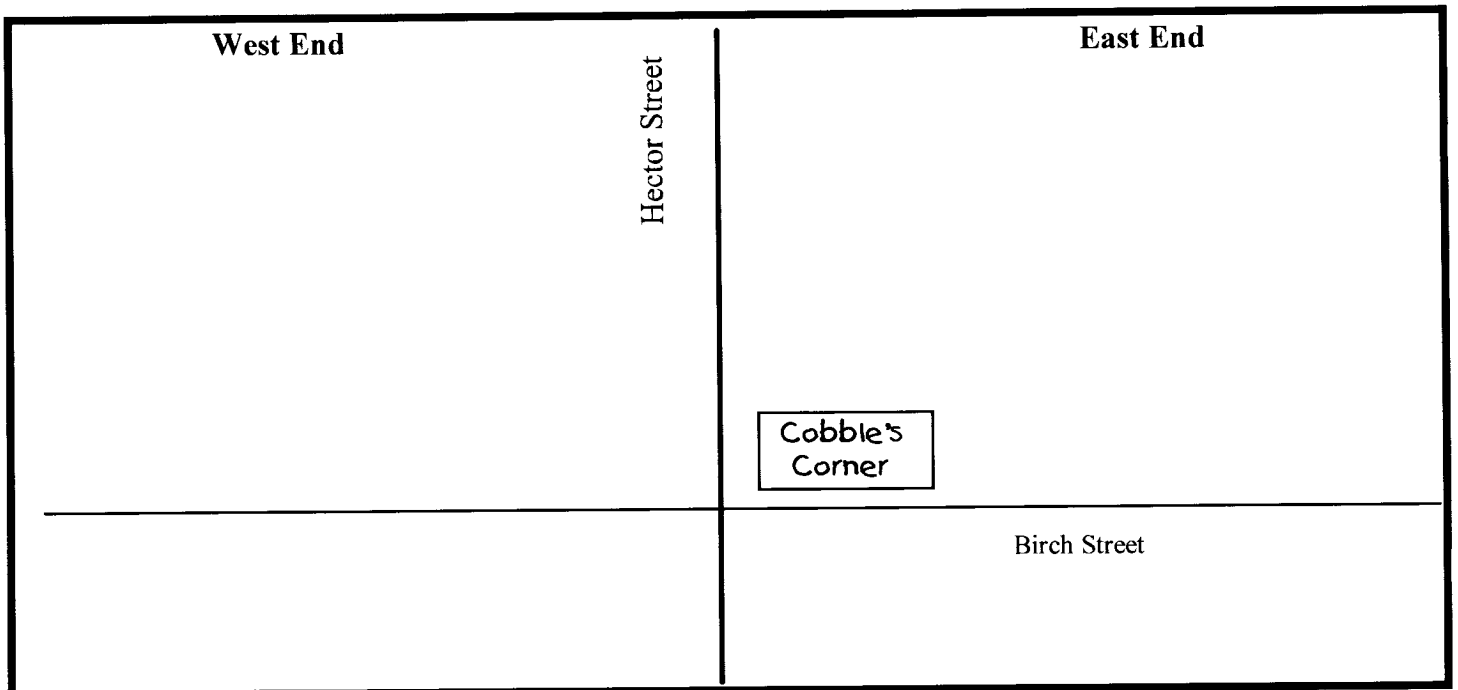
Maniac Magee comes to live in Two Mills--a town divided into the West End and East End by Hector Street. Consider who lives on the West side, who lives on the East side, and where certain landmarks are located.

1. Fill in the West End-East End chart with the following houses, families, and places listed according to which side of town they are on. If the book is not clear as to where a place is located, you decide where you think it should be. You may need to look in the book for tips. The chart and the map have been started for you.

The Beale's house (728 Sycamore), John McNab's house, Mars Bar Thompson's house, Cobble's Corner, Finsterwald's (803 Oriole), Elmwood Park Zoo, The Pickwell's house, the bandshell.

<u>West End</u>	<u>East End</u>
Elmwood Park Zoo	

2. Using the information in the chart, draw a simple map of Two Mills in the box below. Include the places and things you listed on the chart above. Remember Hector Street is the dividing line between West and East.





Maniac the Magnificent!



Maniac Magee became a legend. Many of the things said about him were true, but many were exaggerated. Below is a list of statements concerning the story you have read. In the space provided beside each statement tell whether the statement is a fact, or whether it is a part of the “legend.”

Use the letter **F** to indicate a fact; the letter **L** if it is a part of the legend. The first one is done for you.

- F** 1. Jeffrey Magee became the first person in Two Mills to make an in-park homerun by bunting a “frog-ball.”
- 2. Maniac Magee’s real name was Jeffrey Lionel Magee.
- 3. Rats watched over Maniac Magee while he was sleeping.
- 4. Maniac was the first person ever to untie Cobble’s Knot.
- 5. If someone sprinkled salt on the ground and Maniac ran over it, within two or three blocks he would be as slow as everyone else.
- 6. Maniac lived in a deer shed at the zoo and later in a buffalo pen.
- 7. Maniac had friends in both the East End and the West End of Two Mills.
- 8. Maniac Magee’s stomach was a cereal box and his heart a sofa spring.
- 9. Maniac’s favorite food was butterscotch Krimpets.
- 10. Maniac scored 49 touchdowns playing football with James “Hands” Down.

Chief creator: Lori Lewis; distributed by Flora Joy

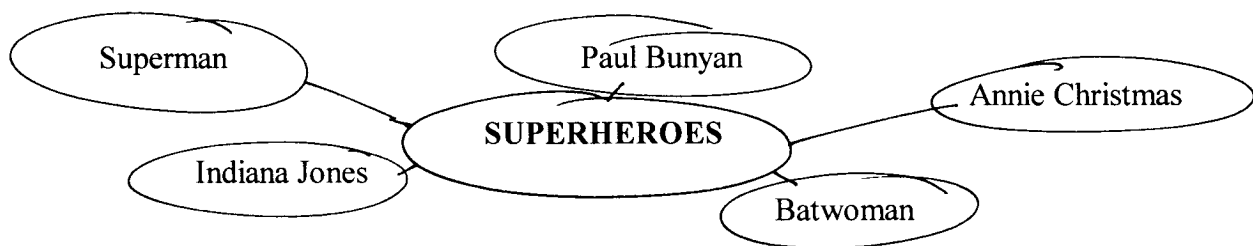
Would you like to become a legend? Think of something you are good at such as a sport, drawing, math, playing an instrument, or anything. Now take that and exaggerate it. For example, if you are especially good at snoring, part of the legend about you might be *He (or she) could snore so loud that people on the other side of the world would stop and ask “What was that noise?”*

In the space below write one exaggerated statement that might be part of the legend about you someday.

Creative Writing Ideas

The many and varied themes in *Maniac Magee* offer exciting possibilities for creative writing assignments. Choose the one(s) that best suit your class.

1. After Jeffrey Lionel Magee's parents are killed in a trolley accident, he is sent to live with his constantly fighting aunt and uncle in another town. Their fighting eventually drives Jeffrey to run away when he is eleven years old. One year later, Jeffrey finally stops in the town of Two Mills. That year between the time he left his aunt and uncle's and the day he comes to Two Mills is known as the Lost Year. Write a story about what Jeffrey did during that Lost Year. Where did he live? How did he get food and clothing? Did he have any friends? Think about what you would do if you were Jeffrey.
2. In Two Mills, Jeffrey meets a tough guy named "Mars Bar" Thompson. Mars Bar got his nickname because he is always eating one of his favorite candy bars, a Mars Bar. Near the end of the book, Amanda Beale changes Mars Bar's name to "Snickers," because she doesn't think that name sounds as tough. Think about the different kinds of candy that you like. Which one would you choose for your nickname? Why would you choose that one? Describe what it is about that candy that makes it your favorite and why it would make a good nickname for you.
3. Earl Grayson became a very dear friend to Maniac Magee. They shared many good times, discussing and playing baseball, listening to music, reading, and many other things. Earl became like a father to Maniac. Think about how Maniac might have felt when Grayson died. Write a journal entry that Maniac might have written after Grayson's funeral. Have Maniac tell how he feels about losing his friend Grayson and what Grayson meant to Maniac.
4. No one had ever been able to untie the famous Cobble's Knot. Many had tried, but none had ever succeeded. None, that is, until Maniac Magee. Imagine that you are a newspaper reporter sent to cover the story the day of Maniac Magee's attempt. Write an article for your newspaper describing the events of that day. Create an eye-catching title for your article.
5. Teacher: Read to the class a tall tale such as Paul Bunyan or Pecos Bill. Have the class describe examples of exaggerated feats of strength and heroism from the story. Discuss what elements (truth, exaggeration, gossip, etc.) create a tall tale or a legend.
In groups or on the board have students create a Superhero Web using heroes from tall tales, legends, and popular culture. (answers may be Paul Bunyan, John Henry, Indiana Jones, Superman, Batman, etc.)

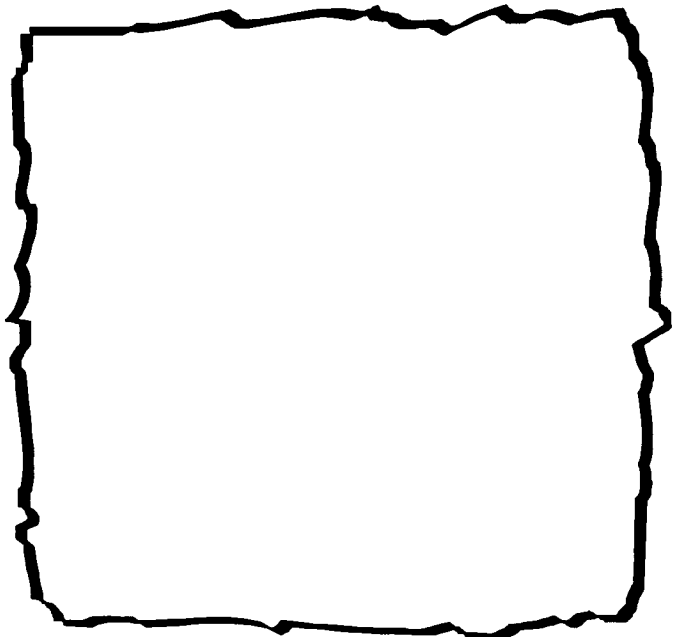
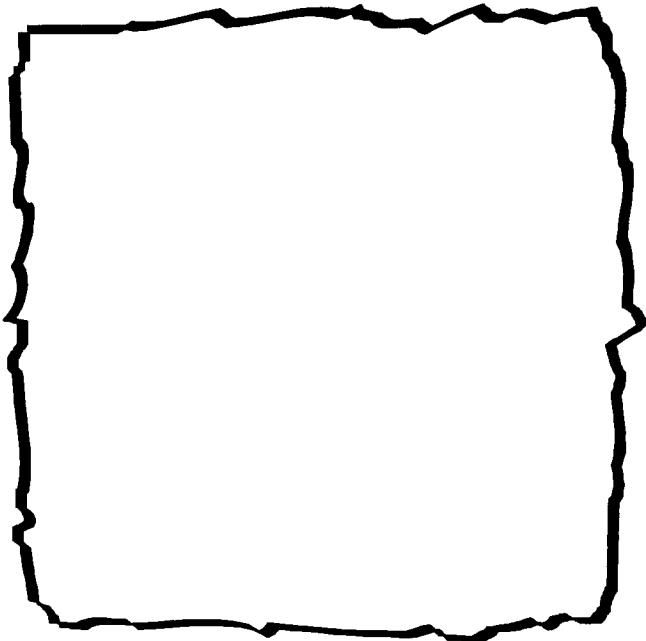
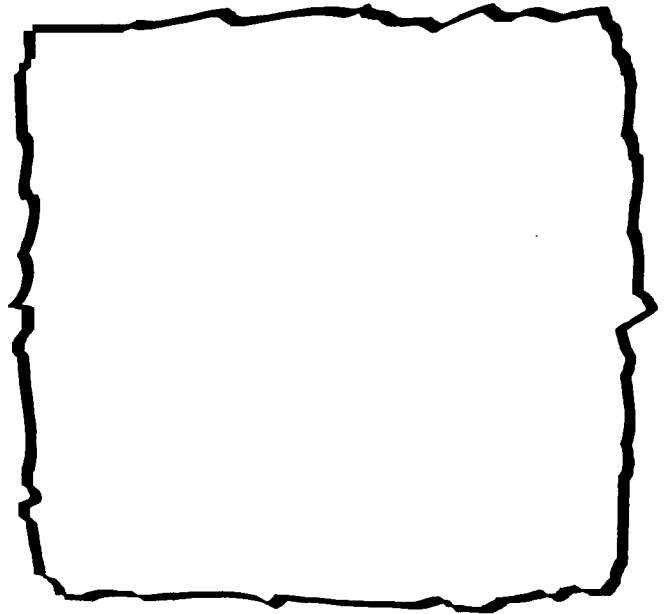
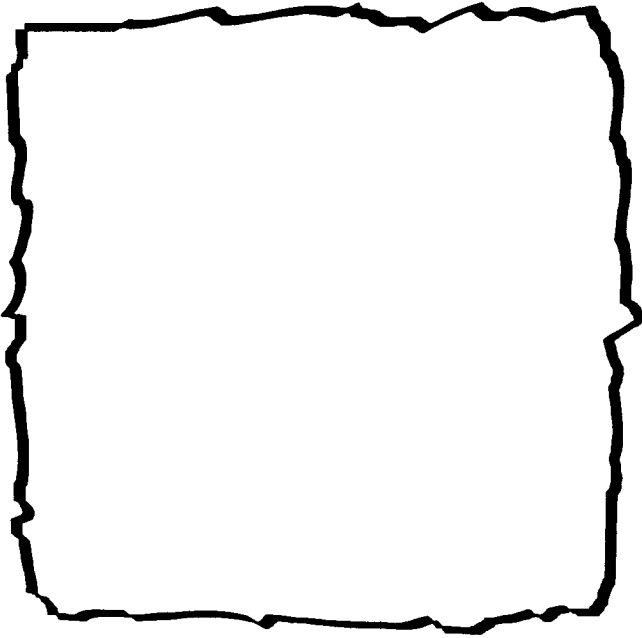


Now, ask students to write a description of themselves as a Superhero, complete with a name. What feats of courage, daring, strength, athletic or intellectual ability might they perform? What would be their "mission"? Have them describe a "typical" day for that Superhero.

Or have students write their own tall tale. Suggest topics such as "The Boy Who Could Eat 40 Hamburgers," or "The Day My Sister Scored 100 Homeruns." They might consider writing a tall tale about a friend, a parent, or even their teacher!

The Fantastic Feats of Maniac Magee

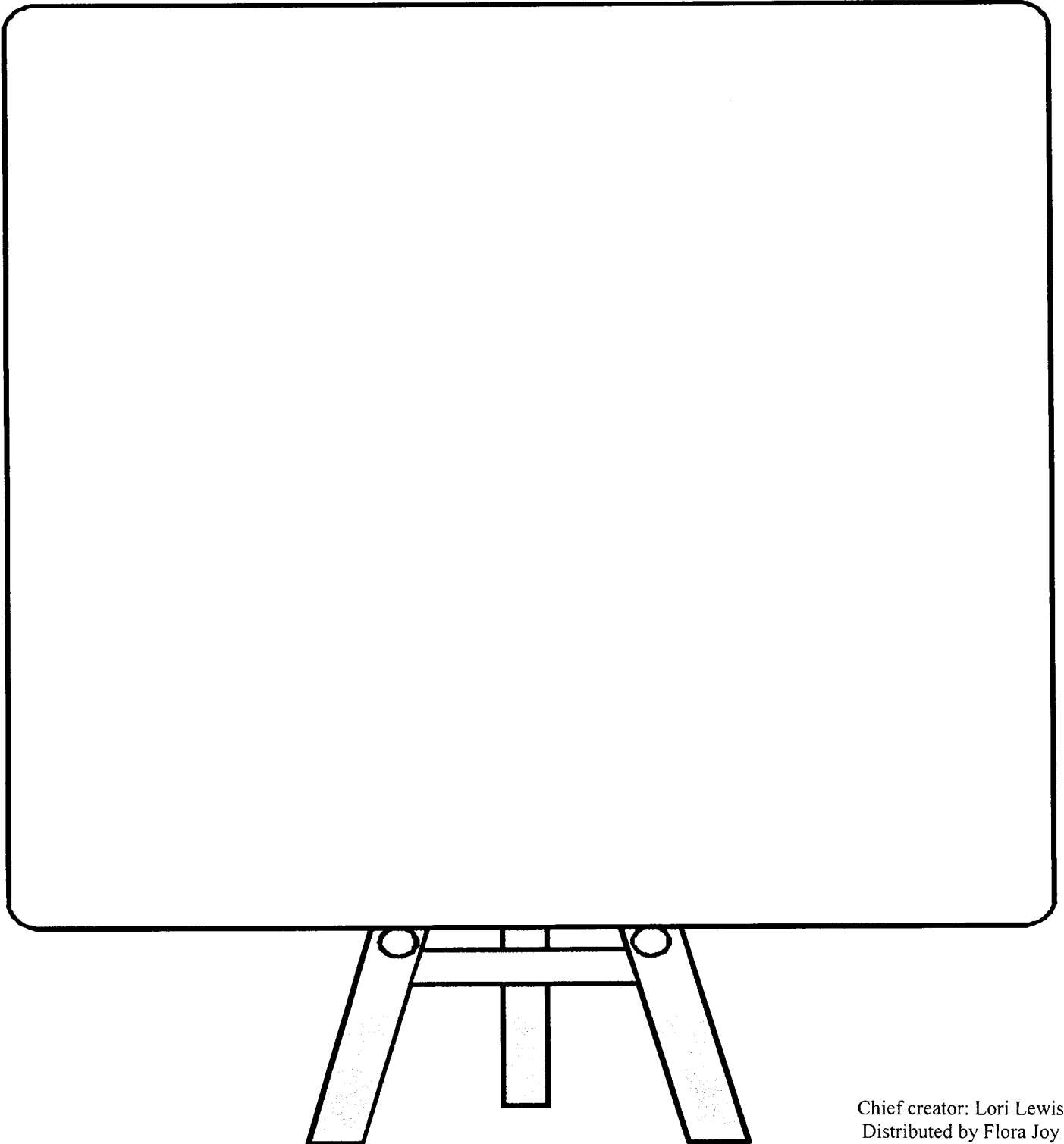
Jeffrey Magee quickly became known as “Maniac” because of the amazing feats he performed in Two Mills. Think of one of his feats that you liked and draw a four-frame cartoon strip in the boxes below illustrating that event. Write captions under each frame to tell the story. Use dialogue balloons for each character’s words. When you have finished, write a title for the cartoon and color your artwork.



MANIAC MAGEE

Advertising Adjectives

A local bookstore wants you to design a display advertising Jerry Spinelli's book, *Maniac Magee*. Use at least five adjectives to describe the book, lots of color, and your imagination to create a poster that will make people want to read this book!



Activities for Groups based on *Maniac Magee*

After reading *Maniac Magee*, try one or more of these activities with the entire class.

1. Teachers might consider having a “Mad about *Maniac* Day” after completing the book. Spend part or all of the day doing activities from this packet mixed with field-day type activities such as relay races, a softball game, or a flag football game. Call on parents for help with a pizza party or snacks--Mars Bars, Snickers, or butterscotch snack cakes would be great!
2. Give each student the opportunity to participate in a “Cobble’s Knot Contest.” Read aloud to the class the description of Cobble’s Knot at the beginning of Chapter 19. Have students get with a partner, or in groups of three or four. One person in each group will receive a piece of rope at least three feet long. Rope should be heavy--at least ½ inch in diameter. Their task will be to tie the “most untie-able” knot possible. The knot will be given to another member of the group to attempt to untie. You may choose to time the contestants. Continue until all group members have been both the “tier” and the “untier.” The fastest “untier” in each group wins. The winner may then go on to compete in the class championships. Grand prize might be a book, a butterscotch snack cake, or a Mars Bar.
3. After completing the student page entitled “Does Anything Rhyme with *Maniac*?” give the students the opportunity to try their new jump rope rhymes. In the gym or outside give jump ropes to groups of three or four and have each one try jumping to their rhyme. **Or** use one long rope for an all-class activity. Have two students be the jump rope turners while each student tries their rhyme as they jump. Be certain to rotate turners! Choose several class favorites for everyone to try. Teachers or even possibly the principal might like to take a turn at one of the favorites!
4. How do stories grow to be legends? Play “A Legend is Born” with students to find out. Choose 5 (or possibly more) students to come stand in a line across the front of the room facing the class. Give this “starter” to the first student: **“Snickers” Jones showed up one day at the local park riding a bicycle.** Student One must add something daring or outrageous to the starter, such as: **Snickers did not ride the bike the ordinary way. He pedaled with one foot while the other rested on the handlebars.** Each student in the line must add another, possibly even *more* daring feat or accomplishment to the legend of Snickers Jones. Other groups may be chosen to repeat the game with a different starter. Possibilities might include: **Everyone knew Jenny “Tootsie Roll” Brown was the toughest girl in the neighborhood. One day she....** Or **Carter “M&M” Smith had a reputation. The whole 4th grade knew he wasn’t afraid of anything. Once he....** Or **Josh “Milky Way” Stevens was the strongest boy in Pine Valley. One time....** Continue until all have participated. Vote for the most outrageous!

Class Discussion Questions for Use with *Maniac Magee*

The themes in *Maniac Magee* are many and varied. These themes offer an excellent opportunity to bring into class discussion topics such as homelessness, racial prejudice and hatred, fear, family and love. As you read the book with your class make your own notes and questions as you come across topics relevant to your particular class situation. Remember, as always, it is your responsibility to moderate the class discussion as some of the topics may lead to “heated” discussion. There are no “right” or “wrong” answers; each class will be unique.

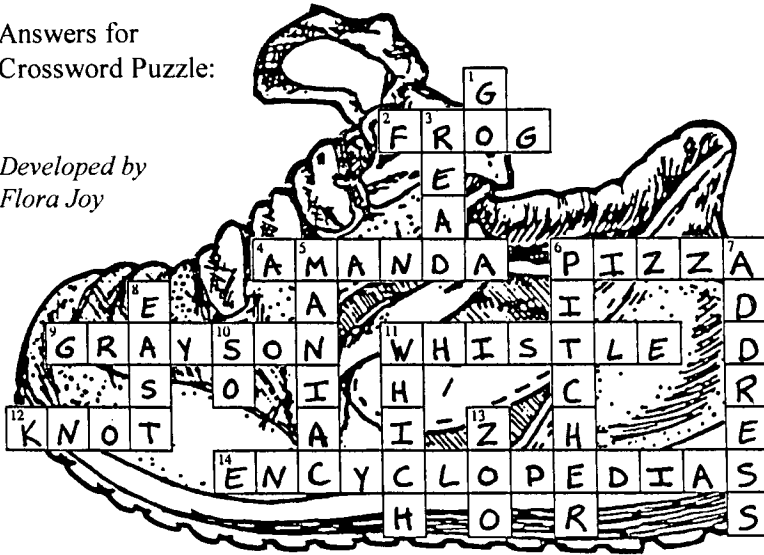
1. Jeffrey Magee ran away from home when he was eleven years old and lived on the streets, in a zoo, in people’s homes, and in backyards. Do you think that an eleven-year-old could actually survive as long and as well as Jeffrey did? What obstacles, or problems, would an eleven-year-old encounter? Where would food and clothing come from? Shelter?
2. Maniac Magee was always looking for a place that he could call his home. Think about all of the places he lived—the deer shed, with the buffaloes, in the bandshell, at the Beale’s, the McNab’s, and many other places. Why was it important to him to have a home and an address? Why is your home special to you?
3. Everyone was afraid of Finsterwald although no one really knew him. Why do you think everyone was so afraid of Finsterwald? *Try to get the class to see that it was the unknown, or lack of understanding, that caused the fear. This will lead into the prejudice questions.*
4. *Read aloud to the class Chapter 16 once more.* If Maniac Magee could see all these things, why does the book call him “blind”? Do you think the word “colorblind” could be used? In what way do you think Maniac was blind? *This will lead to the topic of racial prejudice. Continue on with the next question.*
5. Why did Maniac get called “Fishbelly” and “Whitey”? Why did the Beales not want him to see what was painted on the side of their house?
6. Hector Street was the dividing line between the East End and the West End. What caused Two Mills to be divided into two parts? Why did the people on one side not cross over into the other part of town?
7. Grayson had many questions about the people who lived in the East End. He asked, “Do they eat mashed potatoes?” and “Do they use toothbrushes?” Why do you think Grayson thought the people of the East End would be so different from him and other “white” people?*
8. Maniac Magee helped the people of the two sides of Two Mills to come together. Name some things he did to accomplish this. (*Look for answers about Maniac being friends with people from both sides, inviting Mars Bar to the McNab’s, living with the Beales, etc.*) Why do you think the two sides originally chose to be separate?
9. Russell McNab was frozen with fear on the trolley trestle high above the river. Maniac was unable to make himself help Russell and walked away. Thinking back to Maniac’s childhood, why do you think he was not able to help Russell get off the trolley track? How must Maniac have felt when he could not help?
10. In some way Maniac Magee touched the lives of everyone he met. How did Earl Grayson benefit from knowing Maniac? How did Amanda Beale benefit? Russell and Piper McNab? Mars Bar Thompson? Have *you* benefited from getting to know Maniac? How?

The author of **Maniac Magee, writing in 1990, uses the terms “black” and “white” to describe the people of Two Mills. This issue may require some discussion in your classroom prior to, or during use of, these discussion questions.*

Answers and Credits for *Maniac Magee* Packet

Answers for
Crossword Puzzle:

Developed by
Flora Joy



“Step by Step with *Maniac Magee*” (Sequencing)

1. C 2. G 3. J 4. E 5. K 6. A
7. H 8. B 9. I 10. L 11. F 12. D

Developed by Lori Lewis

“Does Anything Rhyme with *Maniac*?”

Answers will vary. Encourage a rhyme pattern although it need not be the same pattern as the original nor the following example. Allow the students to have fun with this activity.

Ma-niac, Ma-niac
He's so *right*
Ma-niac, Ma-niac
Has friends, *black and white*
Some in the *East*
Some in the *West*
Ma-naic, Ma-naic
He's *outta-sight!*

Developed by Lori Lewis and Tina Eaves

“Two Mills is the Best—East or West!”

(A mapping activity developed by Lori Lewis)

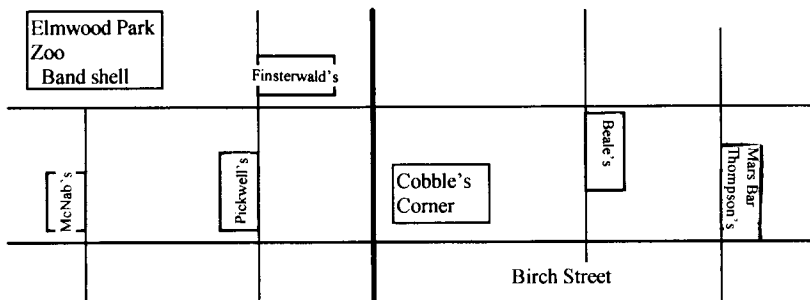
Some places are clearly described as being on the East or the West End of Two Mills. Others may require some thought. The map below is a possibility, although there will be many variations from students.

West End

John McNab's house
Finsterwald's house
Elmwood Park Zoo
Pickwell's house
the bandshell

East End

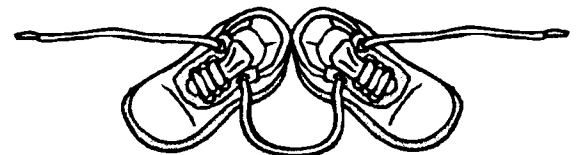
Beale's house
Mars Bar Thompson's house
Cobble's Corner



“Maniac the Magnificent!”

Distinguishing Fact from Legend activity
developed by Lori Lewis, Tina Eaves, and
Michael Odom

1. F 2. F 3. L 4. F 5. L
6. F 7. F 8. L 9. F 10. F



Other Credits for Activities in Teacher's Packet for *Maniac Magee*

Creative Writing Ideas: 1, 3, 4 developed by Lori Lewis; 2 developed by Tina Eaves and Lori Lewis; 5 adapted by Lori Lewis from *A Lesson Plan Book for Maniac Magee*, Scholastic, 1991, 32 pages.

The Fantastic Feats of *Maniac Magee*: Adapted by Lori Lewis from *A Lesson Plan Book for Maniac Magee*.

***Maniac Magee* Advertising Adjectives:** Developed by Lori Lewis and Stacey Roach.

Activities for Groups based on *Maniac Magee*: 1, 3, 4 developed by Lori Lewis; 2 adapted by Lori Lewis from *Teaching K-8*, August/September, 1991, p 88.

Class Discussion Questions: 1, 5, 7, 8, developed by Karen Cruise; 2 developed by Cindi Williams; 3, 9 developed by Cindy Shelton; 4, 10 developed by Lori Lewis.