

Maniac Magee



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Author	Spinelli, Jerry
Publisher	Little, Brown Books for Young Readers
Copyright	1990
Lexile	820L
Genre	Realistic Fiction
Synopsis	Jeffrey Lionel "Maniac" Magee might have lived a normal life if a freak accident hadn't made him an orphan. After living with his unhappy and uptight aunt and uncle for eight years, he decides to run--and not just run away, but run. This is where the myth of Maniac Magee begins, as he changes the lives of a racially divided small town with his amazing and legendary feats.
Themes	Economic Disadvantage, Family Relations
Protagonist	Male, Orphan
Note	Over the years, these books have been published in multiple editions. The page numbers in your book may be different than the ones on the lesson plan.
More Information	www.scu.edu/character      

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Maniac Magee, Day 1



Key Paragraph

Page 8:

And another question: Why did he stay here? Why? Two Mills?

Of course, there's the obvious answer that sitting right across from the Schuylkill is Bridgeport, where he was born. Yet there are other theories. Some say he just got tired of running. Some say it was the butterscotch Krimpets. And some say he only intended to pause here but that he stayed because he was so happy to make a friend.

Writing Prompt

Based on the information from today's reading why do you think Maniac stopped running? **Write an argument to support your claim. Use logical reasoning and evidence as you write. Use words phrases and clauses to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among claims. Establish a formal style. Provide a concluding statement that supports the argument you presented.**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Maniac Magee, Day 2



Key Paragraph

Page 12-13

"Can I have a book?" he said.

"They're mine," she said.

"Just to read. To borrow."

"No."

"Please. What's your name?"

Writing Prompt

Jeffery is trying to convince Amanda to lend him a book. They are obviously her most prized possession. He doesn't belong in there and he doesn't have any connection. However, he is slowly finding a connection with Amanda.

Write an argument in which you pretend you are Jeffery trying to get Amanda to loan you a book. **Introduce your claim (what you want). Support your claim with logical reasons and evidence (why should she let you borrow the book). Use words, phrases, and clauses to create cohesion and clarify relationships between your reasons and your evidence. Provide a concluding statement that supports your claim (restate why she should let you borrow the book)**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Maniac Magee, Day 3



Key Paragraph

Page 29:

He started reading Amanda Beale's book his second day in town and finished it that afternoon. Ordinarily, he would have returned it immediately, but he was so fascinated by the story of the Children's Crusade that he kept it and read it the next day. And the next.

Writing Prompt

How does the author continue to develop the character of Jeffrey, who is now called Maniac? Does he seem likeable? Trustworthy? Interesting? Responsible?

Choose a characteristic that you think Maniac Magee has. Write an argument essay in which you introduce that characteristic and its relevance to Maniac. Introduce your claims and acknowledge an alternate or opposing claim. Organize your reasons and evidence logically. Support your claims with logical reasoning and evidence using accurate sources. Use words and phrases to create cohesion and clarify relationships in the writing. Establish and maintain formal style. Conclude with a statement that supports your claim.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Maniac Magee, Day 4



Key Paragraph

Page 37:

The lady looked down at Maniac. A little of the glare lingered in her eyes. “You better get on, boy, where you belong. I can’t be following you around. I got things to do.”

Writing Prompt

Why is the lady telling Maniac to get going? Why would she have to follow him around? Why was he not welcome in that part of town? Why doesn’t Maniac know he is not welcome? Do you consider the unknown woman a Samaritan?

In what ways does the unknown woman become a Samaritan to Maniac and to others not from the East End? Write an argument in which you state your claim. Acknowledge the opposing viewpoint and organize your reasons logically. Support your claim with relevant evidence, accurate and credible sources. Use words, phrases, and clauses to clarify relationships. Maintain formal style. Provide concluding statement that supports your argument.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Maniac Magee, Day 5



Key Paragraph

Page 43:

Mr. Beale made a U-turn right there and headed back. Only Mrs. Beale was still downstairs when they walked into the house. She listened to no more than ten seconds' worth of Mr. Beale's explanation before saying to Maniac, "You're staying here."

Writing Prompt

In what way does Mr. and Mrs. Beale's decision to let Maniac stay demonstrate courage? How does their decision show respect to Maniac and his situation?

Write an argument in which you defend the decision the Beales make as a family? Introduce your claim and acknowledge the counter claim. Organize your reasons in a logical fashion. Use words, phrases, and clauses to create cohesion in your writing. Provide a concluding statement in which you support the argument you presented.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Maniac Magee, Day 6



Key Paragraph

Page 46:

Other strange things happened in the house.

Such as: the yellow bucket and sponge spent more time gathering dust in the cellar and less time in Mrs. Beale's hands. Because, with Maniac around, Hester and Lester lost their interest in crayoning everything in sight. And therefore, sometimes for fifteen minutes in a row, Mrs. Beale was seen doing something she hadn't done since the little ones were born: nothing...

Writing Prompt

How has the family changed since Jeffrey's been around? How does his presence add to the life of the Beale family? In what ways do you add to your family life? The author alludes to race issues of the time, the east end and the west end. Not crossing the street, etc.

Maniac/Jeffery wants to belong. He appreciates people and being connected with them. He doesn't see black versus white, he sees people. He contributes to the home he is living in, much like the rest of us do. Write and argument in which you agree or disagree with this statement, "In most cases people are people and regardless of color, they want to belong and contribute."

Introduce your claim and acknowledge the opposing viewpoint. Organize your reasons logically. Support your claims with relevant evidence using credible sources. Use words and phrases that create cohesion. Provide a conclusion that supports your claim.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Maniac Magee, Day 7



Key Paragraph

Page 57:

Maniac Magee was blind. Sort of.

Oh, he could see objects, all right...He could see these things, but he couldn't see what they meant. He couldn't see that Mars Bar disliked him, maybe even hated him. When you think about it, it's amazing all the stuff he didn't see. Such as, big kids don't like little kids showing them up...

Writing Prompt

"I lost my sight, but I never lost my vision." Unknown.

When the author states that Maniac was 'blind' to a certain degree, what is he talking about? What is the difference between what different people 'see' and having vision? Do you think Maniac had a vision of what things are supposed to be like for people?

Write an argument in which you support or oppose the "vision" that Maniac had towards others. Introduce your claim. Acknowledge opposing viewpoints and organize your reasons/evidence logically. Support your claims with logical reasons and evidence. Use words, phrases and clauses to promote cohesion. Provide a concluding statement that follows forms and supports the argument presented.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Maniac Magee, Day 8



Key Paragraph

Page 69:

Hardly a week went by without somebody taking a shot at the Knot, and losing. And each loser added to the glory that awaited someone who could untie it.

Page 73:

And then, around dinnertime, a huge roar went up, a volcano of cheers. Cobble's Knot was dead. Undone. Gone. It was nothing but string.

Writing Prompt

Amanda believes untying the knot will get people to like Jeffrey and respect him. Why do human beings respect people who have unusual gifts? Do you think that earning respect with change how people feel?

Can you be respected and still not liked? Can you be liked and not respected? Write an argument in which you defend one of the positions above. Introduce a claim and acknowledge the opposing claim. Support the claim with logical and relevant evidence. Use accurate sources and information. Use words and phrases to create cohesion. Establish and maintain formal style. Provide a concluding statement that supports your claim.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Maniac Magee, Day 9



Key Paragraph

Page 76:

So he turned and walked down Hector, right down the middle of the street, right down the invisible chalk line that divided East End from West End. Cars beeped at him, drivers hollered, but he never flinched. The Cobras kept right along with him on their side of the street. So did a bunch of East Enders on their side...And then they were calling at each other, then yelling, then cursing. But nobody stepped off the curb, everybody kept moving north, an ugly, snarling black-and-white escort for the kid in the middle...And that's how it went...Maniac Magee walked—not ran—right out of town.

Writing Prompt

What is happening in this scene and why do you think Maniac wanted to walk, not run out of town? Why is there so much conflict? Does walking show more respect for yourself than running?

Optional: This is hugely metaphorical as it exemplifies quite literally the racial divide. Do you think there is still a racial divide in this country? In your town? Explain your answer.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Maniac Magee, Day 10



Key Paragraph

Page 88:

“Well, they were my family. I had a mother and a father and a little brother and sister and a sister my age and a dog. My own room, too.”,,,

...“I was never in a house of theirs.”

“Well I am telling you it is the same. There are bathtubs and refrigerators and rugs and TV’s and beds.

Writing Prompt

In today’s reading Grayson is amazed at the similarities between him and the Beale Family and families in general. Do you think this type of ignorance is what contributes to race issues, social issues, and class issues?

Write an argument in which you agree or oppose the need to know people before you judge them based on color or class. Introduce claim(s), acknowledge alternate or opposing claims, and organize the reasons and evidence logically. Support claim(s) with logical reasoning and relevant evidence, using accurate, credible sources and demonstrating an understanding of the topic or text. Use words, phrases, and clauses to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among claim(s), reasons, and evidence Establish and maintain a formal style. Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the argument presented.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Maniac Magee, Day 11



Key Paragraph

Page 98:

He showed them to the old man. Ancient, back broken math books, flaking travel books, warped spellers, mangled mysteries, biographies, music books, astronomy books, cookbooks.

“What’s the matter?” said the old man. “Can’t you make up your mind what kind you want?”

The kid laughed. “I want them all.” He threw his hands out. “I’m learning everything!”

Writing Prompt

In what way is Maniac’s love of learning infectious? Can you be self-taught? Do you need a basic understanding to be self-taught? Is self-taught more meaningful to people than other types of learning?

Write an argument in which you claim how people have an ability to be self-taught. Introduce claim(s), acknowledge alternate or opposing claims, and organize the reasons and evidence logically. Support claim(s) with logical reasoning and relevant evidence, using accurate, credible sources and demonstrating an understanding of the topic or text. Use words, phrases, and clauses to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among claim(s), reasons, and evidence. Establish and maintain a formal style. Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the argument presented.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Maniac Magee, Day 12



Key Paragraph

Page 105:

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.

Writing Prompt

Why do you think Grayson was feeling unburdened for the first time in thirty-seven years?

Reading could be considered a fundamental freedom. Write an argument in which you support or oppose the freedom that comes with one's ability to read and write. Introduce claim(s), acknowledge alternate or opposing claims, and organize the reasons and evidence logically. Support claim(s) with logical reasoning and relevant evidence, using accurate, credible sources and demonstrating an understanding of the topic or text. Use words, phrases, and clauses to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among claim(s), reasons, and evidence. Establish and maintain a formal style. Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the argument presented.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Maniac Magee, Day 13



Key Paragraph

Page 114:

The boy could not take his eyes off the glove. The old man could not take his eyes off the boy. The record player finished “Christmas Polka” and clicked off, and for a long time there was silence.

Five days later the old man was dead.

Writing Prompt

In writing, authors often juxtapose events in the chapter specifically for effect. This is part of the craft of writing. What impact did it have on you as the reader to have just read about how wonderful Christmas was and then read that the old man was dead? What feeling did this leave you with? What impression?

Write an argument in which you support the effect and effectiveness the author uses to grab the reader. Introduce claim(s), acknowledge alternate or opposing claims, and organize the reasons and evidence logically. Support claim(s) with logical reasoning and relevant evidence, using accurate, credible sources and demonstrating an understanding of the topic or text. Use words, phrases, and clauses to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among claim(s), reasons, and evidence. Establish and maintain a formal style. Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the argument presented.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Maniac Magee, Day 14



Key Paragraph

Page 127:

He waited while they bickered over what to do. Valley Forge was a good five or six miles from Two Mills. These kids might not have made it to Mexico, but they had come a long way and stayed out overnight, and someone somewhere must be worried sick about them.

Writing Prompt

Maniac has a certain sense of Responsibility to the boys. He knows someone worries about them. What do you think contributes to his desire to help them?

Write a 1-2 paragraph argument in which you defend Maniac's need to help the boys. Introduce claim(s), acknowledge alternate or opposing claims, and organize the reasons and evidence logically. Support claim(s) with logical reasoning and relevant evidence, using accurate, credible sources and demonstrating an understanding of the topic or text. Use words, phrases, and clauses to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among claim(s), reasons, and evidence. Establish and maintain a formal style. Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the argument presented.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Maniac Magee, Day 15



Key Paragraph

Page 137:

What a wonderful thing, this importance. Waiting for them the moment they awoke in the morning, pumping them up like basketballs, giving them bounce. And they hadn't even had to steal it! They loved it. The more they had, the more they wanted.

Writing Prompt

How does it make a person feel to know someone important? What is it mean to be important? How does Maniac treat people? How does Maniac make people feel? Do you also think that makes him likeable?

In thinking about Maniac as a character he has had an interesting life and he rarely shares much about himself to others. Do you think it is important to be interesting to others or to be interested in others? Write a 1-2 paragraph argument in which you state your claim and acknowledge alternate or opposing claims, and organize the reasons and evidence logically. Support claim(s) with logical reasoning and relevant evidence, using accurate, credible sources and demonstrating an understanding of the topic or text. Use words, phrases, and clauses to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among claim(s), reasons, and evidence. Establish and maintain a formal style. Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the argument presented.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Maniac Magee, Day 16



Key Paragraph

Page 141:

Thus began a series of heroic feats by Maniac Magee. At twenty paces, he hit a telephone pole with a stone sixty-one times in a row...

Writing Prompt

Do you think Maniac's feats are truly heroic? For what reason is Maniac taking the challenges the boys give him? Does that make his actions heroic?

Write an argument in which you support or oppose Maniac's "heroic" actions. Introduce claim(s), acknowledge alternate or opposing claims, and organize the reasons and evidence logically. Support claim(s) with logical reasoning and relevant evidence, using accurate, credible sources and demonstrating an understanding of the topic or text. Use words, phrases, and clauses to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among claim(s), reasons, and evidence. Establish and maintain a formal style. Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the argument presented.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Maniac Magee, Day 17



Key Paragraph

Page 151:

Once it was done, they'd be ready. Let the revolt begin. Let the 'rebels' s they called the East Enders, come. Let 'em bust through the newly installed bars over the plywood on the windows. Let 'em bust through the steel door. They'll find themselves staring down the barrel of a little surprise...one of these days they are gonna revolt...

Writing Prompt

Comment on the reasonableness of the McNab brothers' fear of black people. Where do you think the brothers received their ideas and fear about people unlike themselves? What has Maniac's experience been of black people? Do you think it takes more courage to just accept all people for who they are?

Write a one-paragraph argument in which you support or oppose the courage it takes to accept others. Introduce claim(s), acknowledge alternate or opposing claims, and organize the reasons and evidence logically. Support claim(s) with logical reasoning and relevant evidence, using accurate, credible sources and demonstrating an understanding of the topic or text. Use words, phrases, and clauses to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among claim(s), reasons, and evidence. Establish and maintain a formal style. Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the argument presented.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Maniac Magee, Day 18



Key Paragraph

Page 168:

East End and West End, black and white would only begin when the alarm clocks rang. For now, before sunrise, there were no divisions, no barriers. There were only the people, the families, the town. His town. As much his town as anyone's.

Writing Prompt

How does the fact that Maniac travels and stays with different families influence his perspective? How is Maniac's perspective unique? What is the author trying to tell the reader? Do you think experiences help shape your opinions?

Write a one paragraph argument in which you support your oppose the need for different experiences with different groups of people. Introduce claim(s), acknowledge alternate or opposing claims, and organize the reasons and evidence logically. Support claim(s) with logical reasoning and relevant evidence, using accurate, credible sources and demonstrating an understanding of the topic or text. Use words, phrases, and clauses to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among claim(s), reasons, and evidence. Establish and maintain a formal style. Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the argument presented.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Maniac Magee, Day 19



Key Paragraph

Page 173:

With the drenched, mud-footed kid clawing at him, he turned without a word, without a gesture, and left the platform and went downstairs. Shortly he appeared on the sidewalk below. He crossed Main and continued walking slowly up Swede, Piper screaming after him from the end of the platform.

Writing Prompt

Why do you think Maniac didn't go after Russell? Do you think he was obligated to assist in this situation?

Write an argument in which you support or oppose Maniac's decision to walk away from the platform. Introduce claim(s), acknowledge alternate or opposing claims, and organize the reasons and evidence logically. Support claim(s) with logical reasoning and relevant evidence, using accurate, credible sources and demonstrating an understanding of the topic or text. Use words, phrases, and clauses to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among claim(s), reasons, and evidence. Establish and maintain a formal style. Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the argument presented.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Maniac Magee, Day 20



Key Paragraph

Page 184:

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 that finally, truly, at long last, someone was calling him home.

Writing Prompt

Discuss the evolution of Mars Bar and Maniac's friendship. How did you like the book? What are your thoughts and feelings about how it ended? What lessons did some of the characters learn in the novel?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Maniac Magee, Final Writing Project



Write a 5-paragraph argument paper.

Maniac had interactions with characters, which were significant and influential either for the positive, or negative. Throughout the novel you have created Character Profile Charts for the following characters

Jeffery and Amanda—day 2, 6, 7, 20

Maniac and Grayson—day 10, 11, 12, 13

Maniac and the McNab's—day 15, 16, 17

Maniac and Mars—17, 18, 19, 20

Choose one of the character who you felt was the most significant.

Write a 5-paragraph argument in which you state why you felt this character was the most significant to Maniac and to the novel.

Introduce your claim and acknowledge the alternate or opposing claims.

Support your claim with logical reasons and relevant evidence (use the Character Interaction Chart)

Use words, phrases, and clauses to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among the claims, reasons, and evidence.

Maintain formal style.

Provide concluding statement or section that follows form and supports the argument you presented.