***Maniac Magee***

***Chapter 20***

***Summary and Analysis***

***Brief Summary:***

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 16-20:***

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.

***Summary and Analysis Part by part:***

***Summary Part 1:***

From the moment [Maniac](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/maniac-magee/characters/jeffrey-lionel-maniac-magee) takes Cobble’s [Knot](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/maniac-magee/symbols/knots) in his hands, everybody knows that the knot is in big trouble. Maniac spends a long time examining the knot, sometimes with a playful little smile on his face. When Maniac doesn’t untangle the knot within moments, the gathered spectators eventually grow bored and wander off, everyone except [Amanda](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/maniac-magee/characters/amanda-beale). Gradually, throughout the day, people drift back, both black and white (Cobble’s Corner is on Hector, the boundary between the West and East Ends). By now, Maniac has discovered the end of the knot. The crowd regathers, with Cobble selling pizza at a fast clip. A little kid offers Maniac some butterscotch Krimpets.

***Analysis Part 1:***

The position of Cobble’s Knot at the intersection of the black and white communities in Two Mills is significant—it suggests that Maniac’s success could even have a unifying effect on the community at large. Also, this is the first time that Maniac’s love of butterscotch Krimpets (a storebought pastry) is established—a lighthearted trait that shows that Maniac is a normal kid in many ways.

***Summary Part 2:***

At this point, to everybody’s surprise, [Maniac](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/maniac-magee/characters/jeffrey-lionel-maniac-magee) takes a nap. Maniac knows the hardest part is yet to come: he needs to figure out the right path to untangling the knot, or else he’ll just make it worse. After 15 minutes, he wakes up and starts again. By dinnertime, Cobble’s knot has been reduced to a pile of string.

***Analysis Part 2:***

Maniac’s careful, measured approach to the knot shows that he understands the seriousness of the task. The knot symbolizes the difficulties of other problems in Maniac’s life that require a mature, thoughtful approach—such as the divides in Two Mills.