***Maniac Magee***

***Chapter 27***

***Summary and Analysis***

***Brief Summary:***

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.

***Critical Study(21-27):***

Part II begins from the perspective of a baby buffalo seeing a "new, funny-smelling, hairy-headed animal" (79). The buffalo sees Jeffery "Maniac" Magee living in the zoo after having run away from the Beale home in East End and, one night, falling so badly that he can't get up. The perspective then shifts, again not focusing directly on Jeffery, but instead tracking an "old man" (80) as he finds Jeffery lying there and takes him back to the "band shell" (80) or baseball equipment room.

The man, [Earl Grayson](https://www.gradesaver.com/maniac-magee/study-guide/character-list#earl-grayson), talks to Jeffery once he wakes up, asking him a few questions and then taking him to get butterscotch Krimpets. After buying the food, Grayson takes Jeffery to the YMCA where Jeffery takes a long, hot shower and puts on some of Grayson's clothes (Grayson has disposed of his old clothing, which smelled like the buffalo pen, while he showered). Maniac decides that he will start living in the baseball equipment room. He tells Grayson, when asked, that he will not be going back to school because school is like a home where they don't let you stay, so he would not be going to school if he didn't have a home.

During dinner, Grayson drills Jeffery on the things black people do, with Maniac repeating over and over that black people do things just about the same as white people - "They're just regular people, like us" (88). Grayson seems to not quite believe this, accepting Maniac's description of black houses with "Ain't that somethin'... ain't that somethin'..." (89).

When they get back to the baseball shed, Grayson invites Maniac to stay with him at the YMCA, but Maniac turns this down, thinking of "the bad luck he always seemed to have with parents" (89). He does, however, ask for a bedtime story, but all Grayson will give him are a few curt answers about what he does at the zoo and the fact that when he was a kid he wanted to be a baseball player.

In the morning, Grayson comes back for Maniac and reveals that he used to actually play baseball as a pitcher in the Minor League! Grayson has to go to work for the morning, but at lunch, Maniac presses him for stories about his time playing baseball. For the rest of the day, Maniac tags along with Grayson, helping him with the work he has to do and listening to story after story - a routine they begin to carry on every day. One day, Grayson even tells Maniac the story of his shot at the Major League, which he blew with a terrible pitching streak while being watched by a recruiter.

During this time, Grayson also starts to teach Maniac how to pitch a baseball well (though we've already seen Maniac's athletic prowess during his time in East End). Grayson even shows him his infamous "stopball," which stops right before the batter can hit it. Grayson also bugs Jeffery to go to school during this time, and Jeffery reveals one day that in the mornings (until lunch, when Grayson has been taking him to help around the zoo) he has been buying old books from the library and reading them, trying to learn everything. Grayson is impressed by Maniac's desire for learning, and makes a revelation of his own a few days later - that he can't read, but would like to learn.

Following Grayson's request, the relationship between the old man and the boy shifts. Grayson begins to talk about the educational troubles he had growing up with parents who were often drunk and a school system that didn't believe he could succeed. Jeffery, in turn, teaches him the library and then starts him on books for young children. Just like learning to play baseball, Maniac encourages Grayson to "keep your eye on it... don't be anxious... just make contact" (102), and finally, with jubilation, Grayson reads a whole sentence.

Part II of [Maniac Magee](https://www.gradesaver.com/maniac-magee) gives us even more information on the variety of people to be found in a given city and Jeffery's ability to get along with virtually all of them. Not only do we see him living amicably with a family of buffalo, but an unlikely friendship begins between Jeffery and the old, uneducated groundskeeper of the zoo, Earl Grayson. Through Jeffery's openness and attention to Grayson, we find that he is a much more complex person than one might have believed, a former baseball pitcher who lights up when thinking about the game and has a hidden desire to learn.

Unconventional learning - begun based on desire, carried out with the cheap materials available, and not done within the bounds of any formal school - is paralleled in the lives of Jeffery and Grayson. Grayson tells Jeffery about teachers' not-so-hidden remarks about his inability to succeed based on his low socioeconomic standing and his parents who were drunks, both leaving him without even the ability to read and setting him up only for jobs using his body. School has failed Jeffery in a different way - he sees its role in society as a kind of second home, a place where kids go during the day before returning to their families. Because the role of school in society has made Jeffery feel alienated, he has begun to educate himself, but one must still wonder why the school system hasn't gone looking for him so that his brilliant mind can benefit from formal education. In these examples, Spinelli shows the failure of the American education system to truly and fairly educate all students, regardless of their background, as desegregation laws for schooling were meant to effect.

Using the strategy of many great teachers, Grayson uses where he is to get him where he wants to be - that is to say, he uses baseball as a means of learning how to read. Spinelli writes, "the kid was a good manager, and tough. He would never let him slink back to the showers, but kept sending him back up to the plate. The kid used different words, but in his ears the old Minor Leaguer heard: 'Keep your eye on it... Hold your swing... Watch it all the way in... Don't be anxious... Just make contact'" (102). Spinelli artfully demonstrates how perseverance pays off in both sports and education, making the struggle and joy of reading apparent to other young, sports-loving readers while painting a lovely picture of how comfortable and motivated Grayson felt with Jeffery as a teacher.

Something odd about this section is how disconnected Jeffery is able to make himself from the world. It seems as if he has been taught that nobody - not his parents, his aunt and uncle, the school system, or the people of East End - will be able to keep him for long, so he is able to drift without really looking back. Throughout these five chapters, Jeffery hardly even refers to his time as a child or at the Beales, instead focusing on his day-to-day attention to his growing body of knowledge and his relationship with Grayson.

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

***Summary Part 1:***

When [Grayson](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/maniac-magee/characters/earl-grayson) was a kid, his parents were often drunk and left him alone. At school, he was put in classes that didn’t teach him much of anything. One day, he heard the teacher whispering to the principal that she didn’t believe this bunch would ever learn to read; so he stopped trying. At just 15, he ran away. That was when he joined the minors.

***Analysis Part 1:***

Grayson suffered a neglected childhood and was a runaway much like Maniac. In that sense, his failures in baseball are a culmination of a life in which others didn’t recognize much potential in him.

***Summary Part 2:***

[Grayson](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/maniac-magee/characters/earl-grayson) arranges to work part-time for a while. Then he and [Maniac](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/maniac-magee/characters/jeffrey-lionel-maniac-magee) buy a stack of picture books, like Mike Mulligan’s Steam Shovel and The Little Engine That Could. They also buy a small blackboard and chalk. It takes Grayson three days to learn the alphabet. Within a couple weeks, he learns to sound out unfamiliar words.

***Analysis Part 2:***

Maniac, however, readily sees potential in Grayson. While Maniac refuses to attend school because of his lack of a home, he and Grayson create an unlikely home-school hybrid.

***Summary Part 3:***

[Grayson](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/maniac-magee/characters/earl-grayson) masters consonants pretty quickly, but vowels are sneaky and confusing. [Maniac](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/maniac-magee/characters/jeffrey-lionel-maniac-magee) is a great coach, however. The elderly baseball player hears Maniac’s encouragement as though he’s saying “Keep your eye on [the ball].” One day, Maniac writes a sentence on the board, and Grayson successfully sounds it out. They cheer in celebration.

***Analysis Part 3:***

Grayson hears Maniac’s patient coaching as if the kid is a baseball coach, suggesting that for Grayson, learning to read is healing old wounds of failure. Maniac’s coaching instinct is part of his ability to see the potential in everyone.