***Maniac Magee***

***Chapter 8***

***Summary and Analysis***

***Brief Summary***

After Maniac’s first day in Two Mills, the town is buzzing. People are sharing stories of the strange, flap-shoed kid and one person says he’s “gotta be a maniac.” From that moment forward, the legend is known as Maniac Magee. Although Maniac has a name, he still doesn’t have a home.

***Summary in Detail from chapter 1 to 8:***

When Jeffrey Magee first appears in the town of Two Mills, he immediately has all the makings of a legend. Jeffrey enters the town out of nowhere, without a family and, it seems, without a past. But within just the first day of his time in Two Mills, Jeffrey makes a name for himself and soon acquires the moniker Maniac.

Jeffrey’s story begins at the age of three when a high-speed trolley accident kills his parents and leaves young Jeffrey orphaned. He is then sent 200 miles away to live with his aunt and uncle, who have grown to dislike each other greatly but due to their religious convictions, refuse to get a divorce. During the next eight years, Jeffrey’s aunt and uncle create a house divided, living separately underneath the same roof. Eventually there is two of everything in the house as the two adults refuse to share anything. Unfortunately there are not two of Jeffrey so he remains the last thing that must be shared. As such, Jeffrey gets thrust in the middle of this divided house. Forced to split his time evenly between the two adults who never talk or interact with one another, Jeffrey soon grows weary of the arrangement. During the school’s Spring Musical, Jeffrey breaks, becoming hysterical during the program and finally taking off and running away from home.

A year after the fateful night of the school musical, Jeffrey shows up in the town of Two Mills, unaware that like his aunt and uncle’s home, this town is divided. Two Mills is situated near the Schuylkill River, just across from the town of Bridgeport where Jeffrey once lived with his parents before the trolley accident. Split into two sections (East End and West End), with Hector Street marking the divide, Two Mills is a town operating under an unspoken social rule of segregation. Individuals with black skin live almost entirely in the East End of Two Mills and those with white skin live almost entirely in the West End.

Jeffrey’s first day in Two Mills leaves the children of the town wild with stories, and not just because he seems to have no knowledge or regard for the unspoken social rule of segregation. One of his first encounters is with a young African-American girl named Amanda Beale. Immediately Amanda is suspicious of Jeffrey, primarily because he is hanging out in the East End regardless of his white skin, but also because he so easily greets her. But Jeffrey is also curious about Amanda, and the suitcase she is carrying with her. She is not another runaway, as Jeffrey presumes. Amanda carries her own personal library of books around with her, a collection of her most favorite positions. Although no one has ever been able to convince Amanda to part with the books she holds so dear, Jeffrey manages to persuade her into lending one to him. From Amanda, Jeffrey first learns that he may not belong in the East End.

During the remainder of that first day in Two Mills, Jeffrey encounters several other characters. One significant occurrence is intercepting a football pass from James “Hands” Down with only one hand while running through the high school field carrying his borrowed book. This begins a trend of Jeffery being surprisingly good at athletics, which surprises and angers many of the young black boys from East End.

From there, Jeffrey makes his way to the West End of town only to discover a commotion occurring at the legendary Finsterwald home, a house that had been made infamous by childhood ghost stories about its haunted property. After witnessing several high school students dangle and then drop a young child over the fence of the Finsterwald backyard, and seeing the paralyzing terror it causes the poor child, Jeffrey nonchalantly proceeds to rescue the child. After doing so, he sits on the front porch of the Finsterwald home and casually begins reading his book.

Finally, Jeffrey encounters a high school boy from the West End named John McNabb. Jeffrey encounters McNabb after the end of a Little League game while McNabb, a town bully, forces team members to bat against his fast ball, mocking and laughing as he continues to strike everyone out. When Jeffrey approaches the mound, McNabb is sure this will be an easy out, but to his chagrin, Jeffrey is able to hit each ball pitched his way. In an attempt to throw Jeffrey off, McNabb pitches a live frog at Jeffrey, but Jeffrey realizes the trick just in time to lightly bunt the frog and make a home run jaunt around the bases as the frog hops away. By the end of the first day, Jeffrey has been christened "Maniac" by the town’s youth who are wild with stories about their encounter with the unknown stranger.

Though "Maniac" has a new nickname and reputation, he still doesn't have a family or a home. He spends his first few nights in town sleeping in the deer shed at Elmwood Park Zoo, eating carrots, apples, and old hamburger buns along with the deer and reading the book Amanda Beale lent him about the Children's Crusade.

***Analysis In Detail Chapter 1 to 8:***

The narration of Maniac Magee starts off strongly in third person, making it clear that not only are we seeing Jeffery and others through the eye of a narrator, but that this is a story formed through myth and hearsay. Readers must keep this in mind while reading, understanding that some of what is seen may be exaggerated through amazement and retelling. The fact that we may not be getting the full or true story is underscored by the mention of Jeffery's "Lost Year," which readers can only speculate about, making it clear that the narrator does not know the truth of what happened during this long and important stretch of time in Jeffery's life.

During this section, we learn a lot about Jeffery's past, especially his family. Jeffery was orphaned when his parents died in a trolley accident, which the reader must keep in mind as a traumatic event for him (foreshadowing for the climax of the story). The narrator makes it clear that Jeffery is not supposed to represent an orphan who grew up poor or living on the street, but a middle-class, white kid who is put in a difficult situation. This is important to the reading of the story because Jeffery comes to see a lot of different kinds of houses, families, and lifestyles, and adapts to all of them though he is not used to having very little.

However, readers should also keep in mind the role of choice when Jeffrey becomes an orphan. Spinelli describes Jeffery's aunt and uncle in a way that is somewhat humorous but almost believable. Instead of getting divorced, Uncle Dot and Aunt Dan have made things incredibly difficult for themselves and for Jeffery by splitting or doubling everything they own so that they will not have to interact at all. The fact that Jeffery runs away from them, even when he wants a family so desperately, shows that he does not think simply living in the same house is what defines family.

That Jeffery earns the moniker of "Maniac" is interesting because this word has a couple of meanings, usually with negative connotations. A "maniac" can be another word for someone who is crazy, rooted in the word "mania" which means a mental illness marked by great excitement, hyperactivity, and delusions. However, the word "maniac" can also be used to describe someone who really enjoys or obsesses over something like a particular hobby. This meaning is a bit more positive. People seem to use the nickname with both of these definitions in mind - Jeffery may be perceived as crazy because he runs around all day with no family and no real direction, but he truly earns his name and his fame by his athletic feats and lack of fear.

Finally, an important symbol to analyze is the book Amanda Beale gives Jeffery, which interests him so greatly he reads it all in one morning; the books that characters read and enjoy are often very important to understanding the character or story better. The book Amanda gives Jeffery is on the Children's Crusade. The Children's Crusade was a crusade by European Christians to expel Muslims from the Holy Land said to have taken place in 1212. This tale parallels in some ways the plight of Jeffery and of the United States in Maniac Magee in that people are discriminated against for their identity, origin, or look. Reading and literacy in general will also be very important to this book, falling at a time when education and access to books were still limited for African-Americans.

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

***Summary Part 1:***

[Jeffrey](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/maniac-magee/characters/jeffrey-lionel-maniac-magee)’s adventures on his first day in Two Mills led to his being called “Maniac.” The whole town, both West and East ends, was buzzing about him—his amazing football interception, his rescue of [Arnold Jones](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/maniac-magee/characters), and his homerun after bunting a frog. At some point, somebody must have said, “Kid’s gotta be a maniac,” and everybody else agreed. Before long, only [Amanda Beale](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/maniac-magee/characters/amanda-beale) knows him as anything else.

***Analysis Part 1:***

Jeffrey’s unpredictable, surprising activities on his first day in Two Mills lead to the bestowal of his nickname. Jeffrey never seeks out the nickname “Maniac,” though—he doesn’t appear to see himself or his actions as heroic.

***Summary Part 2:***

However, [Maniac](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/maniac-magee/characters/jeffrey-lionel-maniac-magee) has no address. So he sleeps in the deer shed at the Elmwood Park Zoo, even sharing the deer’s apples, carrots, and stale bread. He reads and re-reads the book he borrowed from [Amanda Beale](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/maniac-magee/characters/amanda-beale). He spends the rest of his time wandering—which, for Maniac, means running, all the while carrying Amanda’s book and keeping it in perfect condition. Then, one day, his life takes a surprising twist.

***Analysis Part 2:***

Maniac wants to find a home, but he’s lived for so long without one that he seems to be more comfortable wandering—and living with zoo animals lessens the risk of losing or being abandoned by loved ones again.

***Important Quotations***

***Quotation 1:***

When he wasn't reading, he was wandering. When most people wander, they walk. Maniac Magee ran. Around town, around the nearby townships, always carrying the book, keeping it in perfect condition. (8.15)

***Explanation:***

Maniac may be wandering, but he's already got ties to his future home that he carries with him. Maybe this is the happy medium between freedom and confinement: wandering, but carrying a tie to home.