

Focus ON READING

Vocabulary

READING
COMPREHENSION

Maniac Magee

Jerry Spinelli

ACTIVATE PRIOR KNOWLEDGE

Reproducible Activities

Focus Your Reading

Vocabulary Words to Know

Study the following words and definitions. You will meet these words in your reading. Be sure to jot down in your word journal any other unknown words from the reading.

accurate—free from mistakes

suspicious—not trusting

hauling—pulling with great effort

vanished—gone from sight or existence

commotion—noisy excitement and confusion

emanation—emission; something that comes out from a source

flinched—drawn back as in pain

flared—spread outward

lumbered—moved in an awkward, heavy way

fascinated—powerfully attracted to something

Things to Know

Here is some background information about this section of the book.

A **legend** is a popular story that may not be completely true.

A **legacy** is something received from the past.

A **trolley** is a streetcar electrically powered from overhead wires.

The **Schuylkill River** is a river in Pennsylvania that flows by the city of Philadelphia.

A **Samaritan** is a person that helps strangers in distress.

A **punt** in football is a ball kicked by the top of the foot before the ball, dropped from the hands, hits the ground.

A **bunt** in baseball occurs when the batter taps the ball without swinging the bat.

A **four-bagger** in baseball is another name for a home run.

Build Your Vocabulary

Read the sentences below. On the line, write your definition of the word in bold type. Then, on another sheet of paper, use that word in a new sentence of your own.

1. “Of course, to be **accurate**, he wasn’t really Maniac then. He was Jeffrey. Jeffrey Lionel Magee.”
accurate: _____
2. “Amanda was **suspicious**. Who was this white stranger kid? And what was he doing in the East End, where almost all the kids were black?”
suspicious: _____
3. “She slammed the suitcase shut and started **hauling** it along.”
hauling: _____
4. “But the ball never quite reached Hands. Just as he was about to cradle it in his big brown loving mitts, it **vanished**.”
vanished: _____
5. “Later on that first day, there was a **commotion** in the West End.”
commotion: _____
6. “Another swears it was a mirage, some sort of hallucination, possibly caused by evil **emanations** surrounding 803 Oriole Street.”
emanations: _____
7. “[The ball] was in the air, riding on a beeline right out to McNab’s head, the same line it came in on, only faster. McNab froze, then **flinched**, just in time.”
flinched: _____
8. “His nostrils **flared**, he was breathing like a picadored [speared] bull.”
flared: _____
9. “He **lumbered** off the mound after the frog, which was now hopping down the third-base line.”
lumbered: _____
10. “Ordinarily, he would have returned it sooner, 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.”
fascinated: _____

Check Your Understanding

Short Answer

Write a short answer for each question.

1. Why did Jeffrey run away from Aunt Dot and Uncle Dan?
2. What does Maniac have in common with Amanda Beale?
3. How does Maniac impress the high school football players?
4. Why does Amanda tell Maniac not to return the book to her house?
5. What are two amazing things that Maniac does at Finsterwald's house?
6. How does Maniac get a free spaghetti dinner in Two Mills?
7. What does John McNab look like?
8. What makes John McNab famous in Two Mills?
9. What are three reasons why Jeffrey gets the nickname Maniac?
10. Where does Maniac spend his first few nights in town, and how does he spend his time?

Focus Your Reading

Vocabulary Words to Know

Study the following words and definitions. You will meet these words in your reading. Be sure to jot down in your word journal any other unknown words from the reading.

runt—a person or an animal that is small

pelting—hitting or striking

instincts—strong reactions or motivations that seem automatic rather than thought out

befuddled—to be confused

glare—an angry stare

finicky—extremely fussy in taste and standards

cringed—drawn back as in fear

scowling—exhibiting a look of displeasure

hoisted—lifted up

quiver—to slightly shake or tremble

Things to Know

Here is some background information about this section of the book.

A **cobra** is a poisonous Asian or African snake. The cobra rears up and flares out its hood threateningly when it is going to strike.

A **snapping turtle** is a large, aggressive freshwater turtle.

The **Mars Bar** is a candy bar with caramel and nougat topped by almonds and coated with chocolate.

A **vulture** is a large bird that feeds on dead animals.

A **hemisphere** is the northern or southern half of the earth divided by the equator, or the eastern or western half divided by the prime meridian.

Build Your Vocabulary

Read the sentences below. On the line, write your definition of the word in bold type. Then, on another sheet of paper, use that word in a new sentence of your own.

1. “John McNab had never in his life met a kid he couldn’t strike out. Until the **runt**.”
runt: _____
2. “. . . yells behind him now, war whoops, stones **pelting** the water, stinging his back . . .”
pelting: _____
3. “He was at the Oriole Street dead end, but his **instincts** said no, not the street, too much open space. He stuck with the tracks.”
instincts: _____
4. “Maniac was **befuddled**. ‘I don’t know. One minute you’re yelling at me, the next minute you’re giving me a bite of your candy bar.’”
befuddled: _____
5. “There wasn’t an eleven-year-old in the East End who could stand up to Mars Bar’s **glare**.”
glare: _____
6. “Judging from that morning, she was pretty **finicky** about her books. What would make her madder—to not get the book back at all, or to get it back with a page ripped out? Maniac **cringed** at both prospects.”
finicky: _____
cringed: _____
7. “Suddenly his world was very small and very simple, a brick wall behind him, a row of **scowling** faces in front of him.”
scowling: _____
8. “She **hoisted** the bike to the sidewalk and walked it over.”
hoisted: _____
9. “Maniac’s lip started to **quiver**, and right there, with the car idling in the middle of the street, Maniac told him that he didn’t really have a home, unless you counted the deer shed at the zoo.”
quiver: _____

Check Your Understanding

Short Answer

Write a short answer for each question.

1. Why does Maniac still want people to know his name is Jeffrey?
2. How does Mr. Beale find out that Maniac is homeless?
3. Why does Mrs. Beale call Maniac “the book boy”?
4. What does Maniac do that bothers Mrs. Beale?
5. Why does Maniac think people are lucky to be “a face staring out from a window”?
6. What are some things that Maniac likes about living with the Beales?
7. What impresses the preschoolers about Maniac? The high schoolers?
8. How does Maniac change Hester and Lester?
9. Why does John McNab look for Maniac?
10. What surprises Mars Bar about Maniac?

Focus Your Reading

Vocabulary Words to Know

Study the following words and definitions. You will meet these words in your reading. Be sure to jot down in your word journal any other unknown words from the reading.

veering—changing direction

vacant—empty or unoccupied

propel—to drive forward

hibernating—being inactive or dormant

slithered—slid like a snake

incredible—unbelievable

contortion—twisted expression

pitiful—deserving sympathy

opponent—one with an opposite position
in a contest

distraction—something that takes your
attention away from what you're doing

Things to Know

Here is some background information about this section of the book.

Niagara Falls are large waterfalls that are on the border between New York and Ontario, Canada.

A **prairie dog** is a member of the squirrel family. This rodent lives in underground burrows chiefly in the central and western United States.

The **Wonders of the World** are seven works of art and architecture regarded by ancient Greek and Roman observers to be the most outstanding structures of antiquity. Included among them are the Pyramids of Egypt and the Hanging Gardens of Babylon.

Albert Einstein, a German-American physicist, developed the theory of relativity. He is considered to be the most well-known scientist of the 20th century.

Yellow jackets are small wasps that can sting painfully and repeatedly.

Build Your Vocabulary

Read the sentences below. On the line, write your definition of the word in bold type. Then, on another sheet of paper, use that word in a new sentence of your own.

1. “He could see Mars Bar’s bike **veering** for a nearby puddle to splash water on him.”
veering: _____
2. “It was so hot, if you stood still too long in the **vacant** lot, the sun bouncing off a chunk of broken glass or metal could fry a patch on your hide.”
vacant: _____
3. “He learned how to jump in front of the gusher and let it **propel** him halfway across the street.”
propel: _____
4. “Well, what’re you gonna do for a pillow, huh? . . . I’ll use a **hibernating** gopher.”
hibernating: _____
5. “As Amanda watched Maniac tackle the knot, an idea **slithered** into her brain.”
slithered: _____
6. “He got out a pair of scissors and was about to snip it off, when he noticed what an unusual and **incredible** knot it was.”
incredible: _____
7. “It was made of string, but it had more **contortions**, ins and outs, twists and turns and dips and doodles than the brain of Albert Einstein himself.”
contortions: _____
8. “Here and there a loop stuck out of the knot, maybe big enough to stick your pinky finger through, **pitiful** testimony to the challengers who had tried and failed.”
pitiful: _____
9. “. . . he knew he was finally facing a knot that would stand up and fight, a worthy **opponent**.”
opponent: _____
10. “To accomplish that, he needed to clear his head, to flush away all **distraction**, especially the memory of the butterscotch Krimpets, which had already hooked him.”
distraction: _____

Check Your Understanding

Short Answer

Write a short answer for each question.

1. How does Mars Bar show that he dislikes Maniac?
2. What happens to Maniac at the block party?
3. Why does Amanda tell Maniac not to listen to the man who tells him to go home?
4. How does Maniac plan to live if he leaves the Beales' house?
5. What is Amanda's plan to make Maniac more popular?
6. What is the legend of Cobble's Knot?
7. Why doesn't Amanda Beale celebrate the untying of Cobble's Knot?
8. Does Maniac feel he belongs in the East End or the West End?
9. Why does Amanda think her encyclopedia has been torn up?
10. Does Maniac get a good reception when he is leaving town?