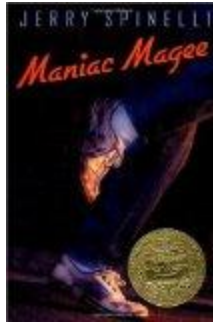


# Maniac Magee (Newbery Medal Book) by Jerry Spinelli



## Wonderful And Full Of Wonder

Maniac Magee is a folk story about a boy, a very excitable boy. One that can outrun dogs, hit a home run off the best pitcher in the neighborhood, tie a knot no one can undo. Kids gotta be a maniac, is what the folks in Two Mills say. Its also the story of how this boy, Jeffrey Lionel Maniac Magee, confronts racism in a small town, tries to find a home where there is none and attempts to soothe tensions between rival factions on the tough side of town. Presented as a folk tale, its the stuff of storytelling. The history of a kid, says Jerry Spinelli, is one part fact, two parts legend, and three parts snowball. And for this kid, four parts of fun. Maniac Magee won the 1991 Newbery Medal.

They say Maniac Magee was born in a dump. They say his stomach was a cereal box and his heart a sofa spring.

They say he kept an eight-inch cockroach on a leash and that rats stood guard over him while he slept.

They say if you knew he was coming and you sprinkled salt on the ground and he ran over it, within two or three blocks he would be as slow as everybody else.

They say.

But before anyone said any of those things, Jeffrey Magee was just a normal boy. At least he was until he was orphaned and ran away to Two Mills a year after. No one knows why it took him a year to get to Two Mills. No one knows where the truth ends and the myth begins.

This is what we do know: Finsterwald is gone now but kids will never sit on those front steps. Two Mills still has a Little League and a band shell. Cobble's Corner is still at the corner of Hector and Birch and the man

behind the counter still has the clump of string. And grade school girls still sing about Jeffrey Magee, though they might not know him by that name.

If you want to know about Maniac, just run your hand under your movie seat and be very, very careful not to let the facts get mixed up with the truth in Maniac Magee (1990) by Jerry Spinelli.

Maniac Magee was the 1991 Newbery winner and recently selected as number 17 in Betsy Bird's 100 Greatest Children's books poll over at her blog A Fuse 8 Production. It is also a surprisingly rich story given its 184 pages (paperback edition).

Part legend, part tall tale, Spinelli spins a yarn here about an ordinary boy who, through his own ingenuity and maybe a bit of luck, does extraordinary things--things that have the power to change the lives of those around him. But at its core, Maniac Magee is a story about a boy looking for a place to call home and a family of his own.

Spinelli skillfully captures the wonder of youth in his writing here. Maniac Magee is a wonderful, fun story that is more than ready for a book discussion.

Possible Pairings: The Graveyard Book by Neil Gaiman, Claudette Colvin: Twice Toward Justice by Phillip Hoose, You Don't Know Me by David Klass, Holes by Louis Sachar, The Invention of Hugo Cabret by Brian Selznick

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