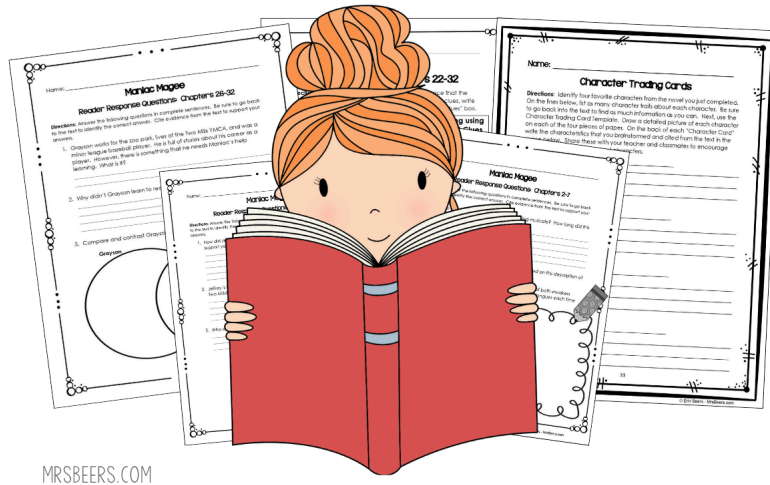


3 Maniac Magee Novel Study Activities I Use With My Students

November 17, 2025 by [Erin Beers](#)

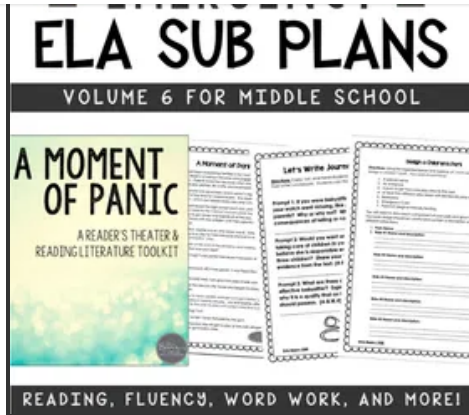
MANIAC MAGEE

NOVEL ACTIVITIES



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Looking for some engaging activities for your Manic Magee novel study unit? I've taught Jerry Spinelli's book with several of my middle school classes over the years. The characters and circumstances really draw students into the story, and it is a great book to connect with [hard-to-reach reluctant readers](#). This post offers some different ways to share and discuss the novel beyond the standard reader response questions. I hope it inspires you to try some new things with your class!



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Story Overview

Maniac Magee follows Jeffrey Lionel Magee as he navigates life after his parents die in a train accident. He is initially sent to live with his aunt and uncle, who do nothing but argue, which leads Jeffrey to run away in an epic quest to find the best place to start his life over. It is his "running" and the adventures along the way that finally lead him to his forever home. Your students will cheer for Jeffrey at every turn as he tackles adversity and leads with his heart to help those around him.

I love this novel so much that I created [my own Maniac Magee Novel Unit](#) that is available for purchase on TPT.

MANIAC MAGEE

A CCSS NOVEL UNIT FOR GRADES 4-8

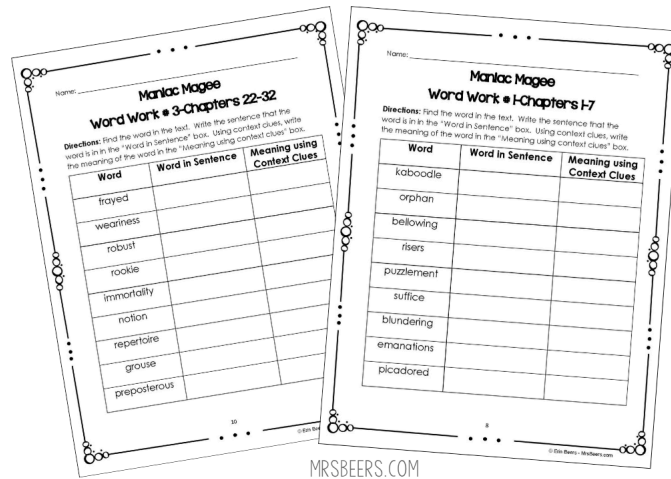


Vocabulary, Word Word, and Context Clues

Reading comprehension is directly tied to vocabulary and the awareness of contextual clues. This is why all of my novel units include vocabulary worksheets for students to identify the meaning of words they should know at their reading level.

MAGEE

VOCABULARY & CONTEXT



For my Maniac Magee novel study, I have about 40 words, and I ask students to write out the sentence the word is used within the text. They are then asked to define the word using the context clues provided in the same sentence or paragraph.

Some examples of the vocabulary words I highlight in Maniac Magee include "kaboodle," "emanations," "armory," "robust," "preposterous," and "beseeching."

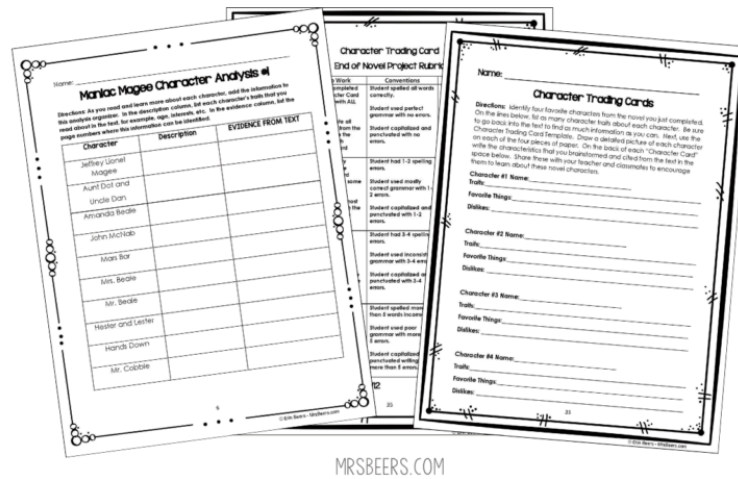
This simple assignment not only helps students learn to utilize context clues on their own, but it also creates a deeper connection of the word to the story. In some cases we will complete the first half of each worksheet together in class, with students completing the other half on their own.

Character Analysis Activities

I like to share basic introductions of key characters before students encounter them in the text. This helps them identify important turning points in the story and raises their overall awareness of the different characters within the story.

MANIAC MAGEE

CHARACTER ANALYSIS



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For each of the primary characters, I ask students to identify traits of each character using evidence from the text. This can include information such as their age, interests, wardrobe, and personality. The key here is getting students to visualize each character as they are reading and perhaps imagining them if they were standing before them today.

Another fun character analysis activity is to have your students create “character cards” of the main figures. With this, students create a more complete biographical overview of each character and draw a portrait sketch to complete the card.

The character card trading activity was inspired by my son's love of baseball cards. I usually bring in some of his cards to use as examples for this project. Students really enjoy creating these, and it is the perfect way to help them connect more deeply with the characters in the book.

Class Discussion Topics

Like all great novels, Maniac Magee has several scenes and themes that will spark meaningful classroom discussions. Depending on where you are in the book, you can

Here are a few discussion starters that are included in my Maniac Magee novel study:

- From what point of view is this novel written? Is the narrator first person or third person? What are some things we don't know since the story is written from this point of view?
- How does the setting of [insert chapter setting] impact the events of the chapter? How would a different setting change the outcome?
- What are some characteristics that Maniac exhibits throughout the novel that you look for in a close friend?
- END: Now that Maniac has finally found his home, how do you think the rest of his life will turn out? What education or career will he pursue?

Novel Study Goals

My goal with every novel unit is to teach students the skills they need to gain greater independence as aware, engaged, and effective readers of text. Maniac Magee is the perfect book for students to connect and empathize with the main character of the book. Understanding how the setting, characters, and author's purpose work together is the ultimate goal here.

I still utilize the standard reader response questions to gauge comprehension and make sure the class is on the same pace, but what happened in the story is often just the tip of the iceberg.

In addition to the novel study activities I highlighted above, my Maniac Magee Novel Study Unit features all of the essential reading comprehension components as well as some other great activities. Here is the full list...

- Vocabulary & Context Clue Worksheets
- Chapter-by-Chapter Reader Response Questions
- Character Analysis Worksheets
- Story Map Activity
- Reflection Journal Prompts

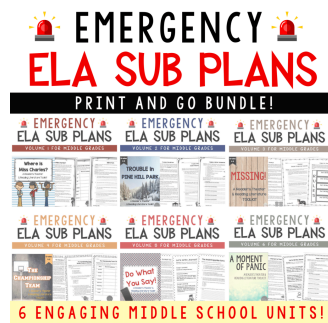
Hopefully you found a few ideas here that will help you read this book with your class. Check out the following links for more examples of novel study activities I use with my middle school students...

- [Wonder Novel Study Activities](#)
- [Crash Novel Study Activities](#)
- [Brian's Winter Novel Study Activities](#)
- [Bud, Not Buddy Novel Study Ideas](#)

📁 [Novel Study](#)

- < [The Little Yellow Leaf – Middle School Read Alouds](#)
- > [Thanksgiving ELA Ideas for Middle Grades](#)

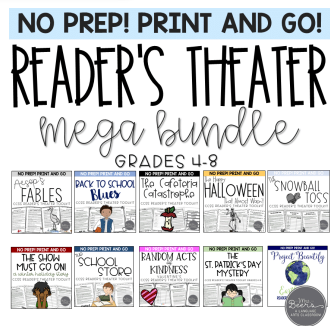
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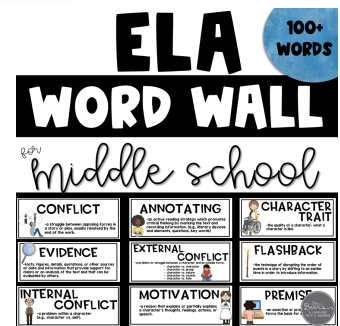
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Meet the Teacher!



Hello, I'm Erin. 2026 is my 26th year teaching language arts in middle school. I currently teach 7th grade but have also taught 4th grade, 5th grade, and reading intervention.

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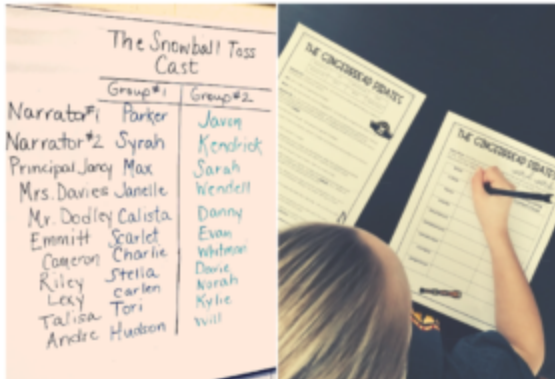
[A St. Patrick's Day Reader's Theater for Middle School](https://mrsbeers.com/3-maniac-magee-novel-study-activities/)

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