

## WRINGER

- 1998 Newbery Honor Book  
1998 Notable Children's Books (ALA)  
1998 *Horn Book* Fanfare  
1997 Children's Editors' Choices (*Booklist*)  
1997 Best Books of the Year (*School Library Journal*)  
1997 Josette Frank Award  
(Bank Street College of Education)  
1998 Notable Children's Books in the  
Language Arts (NCTE)  
1997 Children's Books (NY Public Library)  
1997 Pick of the Lists (American Bookseller Association)  
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## JOANNA COTLER BOOKS

### MANIAC MAGEE

- 1991 Newbery Medal  
1990 *Boston Globe-Horn Book* Award  
1991 Notable Children's Books (ALA)  
1991 Best Books for Young Adults (ALA)  
1990 Children's Editors' Choices (*Booklist*)  
**Trophy 0-06-440424-2 • \$4.95**

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by Joseph Krumbold  
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# ACTIVITIES ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

## Language Arts

Chapter 17 of *Maniac Magee* begins “It was a hot day in August” and goes on to list observations about just how hot it was, such as “so hot, the dogs were tripping on their own tongues.” Reread this section (page 59) and then add your own fanciful expressions to describe just how hot a hot day can be. The class can also create a list of exaggerated descriptions of a very cold day, with each person contributing a line.

*Wringer* begins and ends with fictitious newspaper articles, but the idea for the story came from real articles the author had read. Write your own story inspired by a newspaper article. You can write about the main event described in the article, or—as in *Wringer*—expand on a story that the article mentions in passing.

## Social Studies

Blacks and whites live in separate parts of town in Two Mills as they did—and often still do—in many communities in the United States. Research the history of racial segregation and integration in your own community.

*Maniac Magee*'s Grayson says he doesn't have any stories. But once he starts talking it turns out he has many, including exciting tales about having been a pitcher in the minor leagues. Interview a senior citizen about what life was like when he or she was younger. Tell one of their stories to the class.

People who shoot for sport, as in *Wringer*, often come into conflict with people who support animal rights. Other subjects of controversy surrounding animals include their use in medical and scientific research and the use of their furs in fashion. Find out about an animal rights issue that has affected your own community. Stage a debate representing both sides of the issue.

## Science

Palmer borrows a book about pigeons from the library and learns many interesting facts about their behavior (pages 89–90). Choose an animal that you would like to know more about, research it, and prepare a scrap book with interesting facts and pictures to share with the class.

## Math

“Sure two hundred miles is a long way, especially on foot, but the year that it took him to cover it was about fifty-one weeks more than he needed—figuring the way he could run, even then” (page 8). Based on this quotation, about how many miles on average could Maniac run per day “even then”? [Answer: at least  $200 \div 7$ , or 28.6] If he continued to run at this rate, how long would it take him to cross the country? [Answer: about  $3,000 \div 28.6 =$  about 105 days]

If 5,000 pigeons are shot, and each one brings in five dollars, how much money does the Pigeon Shoot raise (page 153)? [Answer: \$25,000] Suppose you were in charge of coming up with a different fundraising activity. Figure out what you would sell and what you would have to charge in order to raise as much money.

## Drama

Both books have a lot of dialogue. Choose a chapter from one book and stage it as a dramatic scene. You may need to add dialogue to fill out your scene, so think about what else the characters might have said.

## Art

Choose a scene from one of the books that you think expresses something important about the main character. Create a poster based on this scene.





## *A Guide to Teaching Jerry Spinelli*

# MANIAC MAGEE

# WRINGER

### THEMES

Courage  
Friendship  
Meeting Challenges  
Turning Points

### READING SKILLS AND STRATEGIES

Draw Conclusions  
Evaluate Fact and Nonfact  
Identify Problems and Solutions  
Identify Steps in a Process

In these award-winning novels Newbery medalist Jerry Spinelli presents almost mirror images of courage: *Maniac Magee*, a mythic tale about what fearlessness can accomplish, and *Wringer*, an intimate portrayal of a struggle to overcome fear.

Through different writing styles, Spinelli explores common and complex emotions, including the yearning to belong and the necessity at times to stand apart.



## BEFORE READING

Ask students to recall any tall tales or legends they have read. Then read aloud the book's preface, which ends with the advice "... be very, very careful not to let the facts get mixed up with the truth" (page 2). Ask students if they can put this advice into their own words. What is the difference between facts and truth? Discuss how there can be truth in a story even if some of its details are untrue or exaggerated.

## STRATEGIES FOR READING

### Evaluate Fact and Nonfact

"[The] history of a kid is one part fact, two parts legend, and three parts snowball" (page 2). *Maniac Magee* is a work of fiction, not fact. But even within the fictional world some details seem very unlikely (Maniac had an eight-inch cockroach on a leash) and some very concrete (his parents died in a trolley accident). As students read the book, have them note which parts of Jeffrey's or Maniac's story are probably "facts" and which parts are legend or "snowball."

### Identify Steps in a Process

Maniac's greatest feat was bringing East End and West End kids together. As students read, have them identify the steps that lead to this accomplishment.

## SHARING THE BOOK: QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

- Maniac Magee is always running—and often he's running away. He runs from his aunt and uncle, from the Beales' home, from Grayson's funeral, and from the bridge over the Schuylkill River. What do you think makes Maniac run?
- "The East Enders stayed in the east and the West Enders stayed in the west and the less they knew about each other, the more they invented" (page 159). Explain this statement. What examples can you find from the book that illustrate this observation?
- How does Jeffrey's behavior at the school play foreshadow events that come later in the story (pages 6–7)?
- Review what the East End man, called the "Old Ragpicker," says to Maniac (pages 60–61). Which parts of what he says seem true, and which parts seem unfair?
- What does having an address mean to Jeffrey? How do you know it is important to him?
- Describe the relationship between Grayson and Jeffrey. What support do they provide for each other?
- Explain this metaphor at the end of Chapter 23: "In that bedeviled army there would be no more recruits. No one else would orphan him." What is the "bedeviled army?" Who are the "recruits?" Why does Jeffrey feel this way? What decision does he come to at the end of this chapter and what makes him change his mind (page 123)?
- Jeffrey doesn't go to school, so why does he work so hard to make sure that Piper and Russell McNab do? Why does Jeffrey think "... to abandon the McNab boys would be to abandon something in himself" (page 155)?
- Describe the relationship between Maniac and Mars Bar. How does it change over the course of the book? How is their trust established?
- Compare the Pickwells and the Beales. Why does Jeffrey think the families are alike (page 154)?
- Think about the incidents at the trolley trestle. What exactly happened? Why do you think each person there—Maniac, Mars Bar, Russell, Piper—acts the way he does?
- How is Amanda able to accomplish what no one else has and make Maniac come home? (pages 182–184)



## BEFORE READING

Palmer LaRue dreads turning ten years old and having to become a wringer. Wringers are boys who wring the necks of wounded birds at the community's annual Pigeon Day shoot. Ask volunteers for examples of times in their own lives when they felt pressure by family, friends, or community to do something they felt was wrong. Discuss how they handled these experiences. Then read aloud the first chapter of *Wringer*. Ask students to describe Palmer's feelings and explain how his constant dread is affecting his life.

## STRATEGIES FOR READING

### Identify Problems and Solutions

As students read have them identify problems, large or small, that Palmer encounters. Instruct them to make a three-column chart. In the first column have them record the problem; in the second—Palmer's solution; and in the third—the solution they think would be best.

### Draw Conclusions

As students read have them think about why the different characters act the way they do. Have them write down questions about characters' actions or behavior, (for example, *Why does Henry follow Beans and Mutto?*) Then have them exchange questions with a partner and try to answer their partner's questions, drawing conclusions based on clues given in the book.

## SHARING THE BOOK: QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

- Does Palmer really have to become a wringer when he turns ten? Dorothy says he doesn't if he doesn't want to. Palmer says she doesn't understand because she's a girl. "I *can't* not be a wringer... You *have* to be a wringer. That's how it always was." Who do you think is right? Explain why (pages 130–131).
- Some people, including Palmer's father and the wringmaster, defend the pigeon shoot because it raises money for the park. Do you think this is a good argument? Why or why not? (pages 57, 153–154)
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of receiving The Treatment (page 21)? Why do you think the boys seek it out?
- Palmer's mother says Beans has "a mean streak" (page 7). Palmer's father says he's "a pip" (page 27). Until the end of the novel, Palmer would follow Beans anywhere (pages 61–62). Explain each person's perspective. How would you describe Beans?
- Why do you think Dorothy tries to ignore the guys when they tease, treestump, and attack her? (examples, pages 36, 109–113)
- After Palmer feeds the pigeon for the first time he keeps asking himself "Why did I do that? But he knew why. He just did not *want* to say, not even to himself" (page 78). What do you think it is that Palmer doesn't want to say? Why do you think Palmer risks his reputation to care for Nipper?
- His sleeve rolled up, about to receive The Treatment, Palmer suddenly says "no" (page 178). What is he saying no to? What makes him suddenly able to refuse?
- Palmer's mother says his father has been changing (page 193). What do you think she means by this? How do these changes show in his father's actions?
- How is Pigeon Day as he nears ten different from how Palmer remembers it when he was very young? Why do you think he remembers certain details differently (pages 210–211)?
- Explain this quotation: "of boys and pigeons, it is the boy who, so to speak, wears the collar... it is never the pigeon, but the boy, who is lost" (page 222). Do you agree or disagree that pigeons have more freedom than boys? Explain.
- Why do you think the author chooses to end the story with a question from a child in the crowd asking for a pigeon as a pet (page 228)?

## MEETING THE AUTHOR



Photo by Chuck Cully

### An interview with Jerry Spinelli

**Q** Where did the idea for *Maniac Magee* come from?

**A** *I get my ideas from everyday life, memories, and imagination—and that probably covers everything. Maniac Magee was a patchwork quilt of memories and observations that I stitched together, some of it dreamed up and some of it based on people I've known and situations I've been in. For example, I did meet a sixth grade girl in New York City once who brought her books to school every day in a suitcase. She became the basis for Amanda Beale. To me, what the story is really about is childhood recollected. When you're an adult looking back on childhood, there's a quality about it that seems indistinguishable from Homeric myth. Lots of things seem special, grand, or huge as one's memory grows.*

**Q** Did your own childhood inspire aspects of *Maniac Magee*?

**A** *I grew up in a town like Two Mills, with a kind of division of black and white, although I simplified it for the book. Maniac's attitude of not really buying into segregation and discrimination is reflective of mine. In terms of his athletic prowess—I wish I were that good.*

**Q** And what sparked *Wringer*?

**A** *I would read about a pigeon shooting event in the newspaper every year. I recognized there was a story there, but I wasn't sure for several years how to get into it. Then I realized the best way to do it was by way of one of the kids.*

**Q** Have you ever had a pet pigeon?

**A** *No. I did have a series of pet rats and a chinchilla. When I was writing *Wringer* I went down to a park and sat on a bench and watched the pigeons and took notes. I don't do a lot of research. You don't need to go into a library and dust off books to get into a kid's experience.*

**Q** How did you start writing for children?

**A** *I don't sit down and think I'm writing for kids. I'm writing about them. Basically I try to interview the story and get it to tell me how it wants to be told. That's what I write for.*

**Jerry Spinelli** lives in West Chester, Pennsylvania, with his wife, Eileen, who is also an author. He graduated from Gettysburg College.