

# MANIAC MAGEE

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## Objectives

1. *Comprehension*—Students will demonstrate understanding of the novel through written and verbal responses to sectional comprehension questions and whole-book activities which fit all learning styles.
2. *Multicultural Activities*—Students will develop an awareness of and respect for differences among people by engaging in activities relating to the novel.
3. *Writing Activities*—Students will interact with and extrapolate from the novel to complete various creative writing assignments.

## Summary of Novel

Orphaned at a young age, Jeffrey Magee begins a life of running. He runs wherever he needs to go, pausing here and there to perform incredible feats. He is soon a legend in the town of Two Mills. As Jeffrey searches for a home, he discovers the severe racial division of Two Mills—with “blacks” staying on the East End and “whites” staying on the West End. No one dares to cross Hector Street, the boundary between the sides.

Yet Jeffrey cannot understand the people’s prejudices. He freely crosses Hector Street, and earns the nickname “Maniac Magee.” Maniac befriends people from both sides of Hector Street. As he grows to love these people, Maniac attempts to bring them together to understand their common humanity and equality.

# Hector Dividing Line

## Hook

**Objective:** Students will be introduced to concepts from the novel (*i.e. segregation and racism*) through role play and discussion.

### Directions

1. Use desks or chairs to form a dividing line—Hector Dividing Line—down the middle of the room. Move other desks out of the way. Tell students that whatever they do during the activity, they cannot cross the dividing line.
2. Divide the class into two groups of thirteen or fewer students each. Assign one half of the room to one group, the Yellow Team, and one half of the room to the other group, the Blue Team.
3. Designate students in each group for the following roles: a recorder, a reporter, a leader, some encouragers (*to offer positive statements as the group works*), and some voice control monitors (*to keep voices at a whisper*).
4. Relate the following instructions and incidents to the class.

*These desks are known as Hector Dividing Line. The team on one side of the line is the Yellow Team. The team on the other side of the line is the Blue Team. The Green Team (select three members from each team as you speak) sits in the middle of the line. These people come from both teams and work and play together, as well as with their original teams. They work to bring people from the divided teams together.*

*Now, it is a common and accepted rumor that the Yellow and Blue Teams do not get along—the Teams are afraid of each other and do not like each other (whether or not individual members have even met and talked). Why, just the other day, (Yellow Team member) was playing on the jungle gym with (Blue Team member), when (two other Blue Team members) came over and told (the Yellow Team member), “You’re on the WRONG side of the playground, hanging around with the WRONG person. Why don’t you just go along now with your own kind.”*

*And that same day, freshly bathed (Blue Team member) went to carry some materials into the classroom with (two Yellow Team members). Only (the two Yellow Team members) whispered to each other the whole way and made sure (the Blue Team member) heard them say, “I can’t believe we have to go with that Blue-y” and “Yeah, that Blue-y sure smells bad!”*

5. Let the groups gather in separate parts of the room. Give each group their confidential information (pages 4–6). Remind students to keep this information secret! Let the leader of each group read the information to the rest of the group. The leader should then facilitate a group discussion. The recorder will write down the group’s

responses during the discussion. The reporter is responsible for sharing the group's responses with the class after the activity.

The Green Team plays a crucial role during the activity. They will ask questions of both teams. Sample questions are listed below, but allow these students time to think of additional questions. You will probably need to guide their discussion. (*Another option is for you to take the role of the Green Team.*) Help the Team avoid questions such as, "Why do you hate — Team members?" Questions like this one are complex and lead students to accept, without thinking about it, that they really do hate the other team. Also help them avoid questions that suggest a conspiracy, such as, "What is the — Team planning to do to the — Team?" unless the majority of the group actually is involved in a conspiracy.

*Do you like people on the — Team? Do you know any — Team members personally? If no, why not?*

*How do you feel about the — Team as a whole? about individual — Team members? Why do you feel that way?*

*What reasons do you have for excluding members of the other team? Do you think your reasons are good?*

*Why do you not cross Hector? If the answer is, "because I was told not to cross it," then WHY were you told not to? Do you agree with the reasons?*

*Would you do anything if a group of — Team members crossed onto your side?*

*What would you do? What if it were an individual — Team member?*

*How are Blue Team members and Yellow Team members different from one another? similar to one another?*

6. Give students freedom to move about on their halves of the room. Yellow and Blue Team members will approach Hector Dividing Line. The Green Team will ask them the questions they wrote down. Allow Green Team members to move about the entire room asking questions. Once the Green Team is finished asking questions, allow the reporters from the Yellow and Blue Teams a chance to share any information not covered by the Green Team's questions. With your guidance, Green Team members will then offer their plans for helping the two teams to overcome their differences and cross Hector. Let other team members join in the discussion.

## Closure

Discuss the following questions as a class. Add any questions that will help to introduce the novel.

*What did you learn from this activity?*

*How does this activity relate to what really happens?*

*What groups of people might you compare to the Yellow, Blue, and Green Teams? (Be creative!)*

*What was your favorite part of this activity? least favorite part?*

*How could the activity be changed to make it better?*

*What things will you tell your parents about this activity?*

*What do you think this has to do with the novel, Maniac Magee?*

# CONFIDENTIAL!

TO: GREEN TEAM MEMBERS

As a Green Team member, you are able to experience both sides of Hector Street. You have friends on both sides of the street and get along well with both teams. However, you cannot avoid the talk from each team about the other team. You have seen many situations like those discussed in class, incidents that discourage members of the Yellow and Blue Teams from playing and talking together simply because of their team colors. You hear each team tell jokes that make fun of the other team. You have also heard some “tough” talk about plans to “get even” if either team should dare cross Hector Street.

You have spent time with members from both teams and are not afraid on either side of Hector Street. Furthermore, you wonder why each team’s members believe the other team’s members are so different from themselves. You have decided to help bring the teams together in friendship, or at least in understanding, and to help them feel comfortable crossing Hector Dividing Line.

First, you will need to ask questions of each team that will help you to understand why they have problems and exactly what those problems are. Think of questions to ask and write them on the back of this paper. One good question to ask might be: *Do you have specific problems with the — Team? What are they?*

Second, you will need to think about the information you collect. Throw out information that does not help you understand the problems between the teams. Use your remaining information to come up with solutions—ways to help these teams understand each other and become friends. (*POSSIBILITY: Consider the incidents we discussed. How might the Yellow Team member have responded in the first incident, and how might the Blue Team member have responded in the second incident? Which responses would have helped bring the teams together in understanding, if not friendship? Which responses would have kept the teams separated or which would have increased the separation?*)