Before the Story

Jerry Spinelli uses repetition (repeating word or phrase) in Before the Story.

The repetition of “They say,” especially the last “They say” tells readers not to believe everything other people say. Gossip is most often untrue and most often unkind.

Ass u me = If you “assume” things about other people, you make a fool out of yourself and the other people. We shouldn’t “assume” things about other people.

Even the main character’s nickname, Maniac, is unkind. It means a crazy person.

Part I: Chapter 1

Jerry Spinelli begins to dispel (get rid of) the lies, and tell us the truth about Jeffrey Lionel Magee.

He was orphaned at age three, when his parents died in a drunk driving accident.

His parents were trolley passengers driven by a drunk motorman, and the trolley went over the tracks into the Schuylkill River. (Skull + kill in name of river may be to remind us parents died there.)

His Aunt Dot and Uncle Dan take in Jeffrey, but hate each other, and stayed married only because they were Catholic. After eight years of living with a couple who hate each other and share nothing, Jeffrey runs away. When chorus is singing “Talk to the Animals”, Jeffrey yells, “Talk” while he runs away.

Jeffrey is an eleven-year-old runaway and dropout.

Chapter 2

He runs from Hollidaysburg where his aunt and uncle lived to Two Mills. Two Mills is also divided by hate, but racially divided, whites in the West End, and blacks in the East End. “ … two hundred miles is a long way, especially on foot, but the year it took him to cover it was about fifty-one weeks more than he needed – figuring the way he could run …” (hyperbole or exaggeration) There are fifty-two weeks in a year, and the author writes Jeffrey could run two hundred miles in a week. He runs for a year known as the Lost Year.

The repetition of, “Some say,” reminds us not to believe what some people say.

On pg. 9, Spinelli uses hyperbole, “If you listen to everybody who claims to have seen Jeffrey-Maniac Magee …, there must have been ten thousand people and a parade of fire trucks waiting for him at the town limits. Don’t believe it.”

On pg. 9, the author uses a simile, “the soles of both sneakers hanging by their hinges and flopping open like dog tongues each time they came up from the pavement.”

End of Chapter 2, Jeffrey’s use of the word, “Hi,” tells readers he is friendly and not prejudiced.

Chapter 3

Jeffrey first meets Amanda Beale, who is a black girl. He “assumes” she is running away because she has a suitcase. Amanda has a suitcase full of books because her younger brother and sister would draw all over them and/or Bow Wow, the dog, could chew them.

She values her books, so protects them by taking them in a suitcase to school. Amanda calls her books her “library”.

When Amanda asks Jeffrey, “Where do you *live*?” she is assuming he has an address, a home. She doesn’t understand why a white boy is in East End. When Amanda says, “*Maybe* you better go and ask your mother and father if you live here or not.” She is assuming he has parents.

When Amanda says to Jeffrey, “You can’t even be *here*.” She means he is white and “belongs” in West End.

“She tore a book from the suitcase, hurled it at him … and dashed into school. The book came flapping like a wounded duck and fell at Jeffrey’s feet. It was a story of the Children’s Crusade.” simile

Chapter 4

Jeffrey appears at the high school field during eleventh grade gym class. The ball thrown to James Down, “Hands,” is caught by Jeffrey instead. “But the ball never quite reached Hands. Just as he was about to cradle it in his big brown loving mitts, it vanished. Metaphor for James Down’s hands. “Nobody laid a paw on him.” Paw is a metaphor for hand. On the soccer field, Jeffrey punts the ball … spiraling … perfectly

Jeffrey did all of these athletic feats with only one hand because he had a book in his other hand.

Chapter 5

803 Oriole Street is the home of Finsterwald’s, a home everyone fears.

“Finsterwald’s backyard was a graveyard of tennis balls and baseballs and footballs and Frisbees and model airplanes and one-way boomerangs.” Metaphor

“And no kid on a snow day would ever shovel that sidewalk, not for a zillion dollars.”

Hyperbole or exaggeration

“Never let yourself be near Finsterwald’s and high school kids at the same time.” a reminder of bullies

“So there’s Arnold Jones … flopping and kicking and shrieking like some poor Aztec sacrifice …” simile

“He’s paralyzed, a mouse in front of the yawning maw of a python.” Metaphor

“Arnold Jones’s teeth. They’re chattering like snare drums.” Simile

“Another swears it was a mirage, some sort of hallucination, possible caused by evil emanations surrounding 803 Oriole Street. (a mirage is a hallucination or an imagined vision of something that isn’t there) Emanations = something coming from something else or a consequence of something else

“The phantom Samaritan stuck the book between his teeth, crouched down, hoisted Arnold Jones’s limp carcass over his shoulder, and hauled him out of there like a sack of flour. (“like a sack of flour” is a simile)

The phantom Samaritan is Jeffrey; a metaphor, and it’s an allusion to the Bible story of the good Samaritan. A good Samaritan is someone who helps a stranger or someone else in need.

“When Arnold came to and discovered him, he took off like a horsefly from a swatter.” Another simile