

Dear Mr. Spinelli,

Hector Street - the long divide. Until now, I can still imagine a long, wide, and desolate divide because sometimes I feel like I am standing there. In your novel, *Maniac Magee*, only a few had the courage to cross from one side to the other. Those were the characters that did not recognize or accept any difference between races. Outward appearance meant nothing. For Jeffrey Magee and Amanda Beale and her family, the divide was invisible.

Last year, I started wearing a head cover, or *hijab*. Of course, it was my choice. Naturally, as a Muslim I was excited to cover. I could see myself growing up. My modesty and identity were all wrapped up in this elegant piece of material. My older friends were already wearing *hijab*, and they looked so beautiful. Wearing *hijab* as a young Muslim woman ensures that people will respect me for my mind and not my appearance. There was just one problem; no one ever told me that others would judge me based on my religious beliefs. Many times I wished that my divide was invisible, but as I walk through the mall in my head cover, I sense the divide. At first I was innocent; I didn't know how to interpret the less than friendly stares. Then the comments began: "Aren't you hot?" Lastly came the changes in behavior: some people went from smiles to disapproval. Sadly, discrimination is real.

Maniac Magee was white, but I don't think he ever considered that a problem even while in a black neighborhood. He judged people based on their character alone. I just loved it when he took a big bite out of Mars Bar's chocolate. It was like he took a big bite out of the long divide. Maniac breaks all the rules. Actually, he lives by the rules that I believe to be important.

When you decided to write this story you must have sensed that this was a common problem. Realistically, I do not think my divide will disappear anytime soon, but Mr. Spinelli your courageous story allowed me to see that not all people discriminate. I found hope. Now as I look through the crowds, I believe there are some people who mirror the characters in your book. I am always looking for the Jeffrey Magees or the Beales, but no matter who I see, I smile and hope they smile back. Like Maniac, I choose to throw caution to the wind.

Thank You,

Maryam Salah