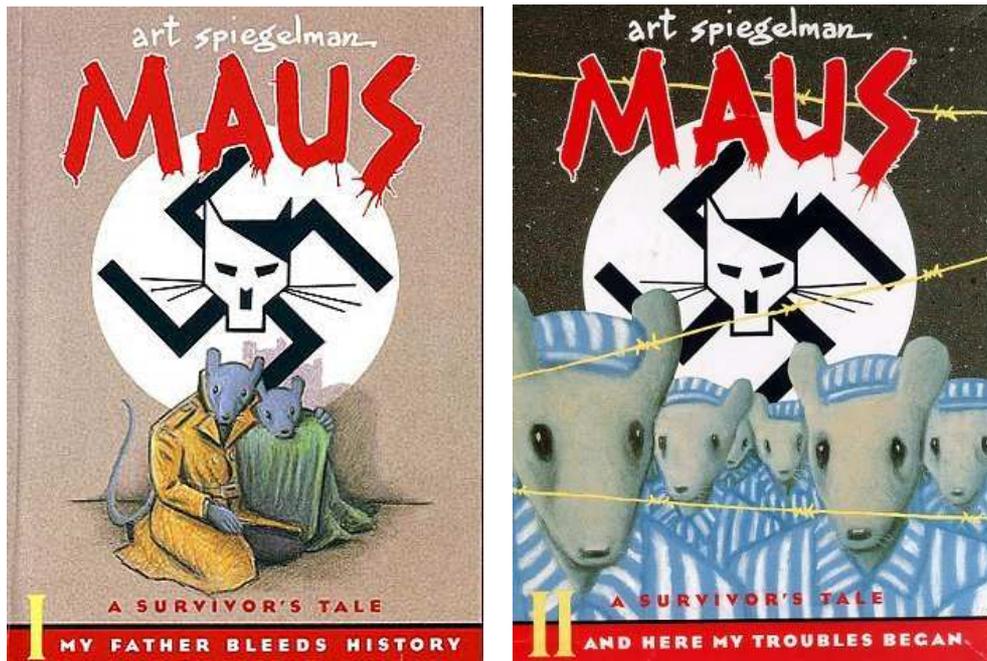


Maus: A Survivor's Tale Volumes 1 & 2

By: Art Spiegelman

Graphic Novel Published by Pantheon Books in 1986
Combined 295 pages



Concept Analysis

By: Amanda Cope and Laura Decker

A Brief Synopsis

The child of Jewish Holocaust survivors, Art Spiegelman grew up under constant reminder of his parent's experiences of WWII. Following his mother's suicide, Spiegelman seeks to record what is left of these experiences, by interviewing and drawing his father's history. What results is the Graphic Novel *Maus: A Survivor's Tale*, volumes I and II. Here Art chronicles both the complex history of his parents and their gripping story of courage, resourcefulness, and luck. Interwoven with his father's memoirs is Spiegelman's own perspective, as he seeks to make sense of his father in light of his father's experiences. As the story flips between past and present, we see both the immediate effects and long term scars of Nazi terror. Additionally, *Maus: A Survivor's Tale* illustrates the social and political climate of WWII Europe, including both the help and aid given to the

Jews by some, the cruelty and racism of others, and the majority turning blind eyes to the plight of those targeted by Nazi terror.

Maus is one of the most well-known and well-recognized graphic novels. It has received numerous awards and accolades, including a 1992 Pulitzer prize and an Eisner award. The graphic novel format of *Maus* is essential to communicating the emotional significance of both his father's memoir and Spiegelman's own perspectives. *Maus* is an excellent multicultural text for ninth graders, and the graphic novel format of the book makes it effective for teaching struggling readers and English language Learners.

Enduring Question: What Does it mean to be Human?

Throughout *Maus*, Spiegelman symbolically illustrates his characters as animals, or as people wearing animal masks. And yet, through this artistic representation, we are constantly reminded of the very human costs of genocide, racism, war, pain, and loss. Spiegelman's artistic choice begs the question, what does it mean to be human? Many surrounding questions splinter off of this main one, and are explored in depth and from multiple viewpoints in *Maus*. For example, in reading *Maus*, we are confronted with the reality that humans do terrible, evil things. Do these atrocities lessen our humanity? Or must we accept that part of humanity is the capability and even desire to commit great evil? And if we define all humanity as people regardless of race, creed, gender, or nationality, why and how does one human group so dehumanize another?

Often, *Maus* presents differing and even contradictory definitions of what it means to be human, and students will have to closely examine the perspectives and motivations behind these differences. However, central to nearly every definition of humanity put forth in the novel is the issue of memory. Repeatedly, humans are defined by their capacity to remember. The Nazis remember their hatred of the Jews. The Jews remember their mistreatment by Nazis and Nazi sympathizers. Spiegelman's father remembers his life. Art Spiegelman remembers his childhood and his mother. The book itself is an attempt to record a memory so that it cannot be lost. Indeed, the story is an overwhelming cry for humanity to never forget the horrors of the holocaust, and yet even this marker of humanity is shown to be fragile and as falling prey to age, grief, and the often equally powerful desire to forget.

As with many holocaust narratives, Spiegelman puts humanity on trial for the atrocities his parents, and so many others witnessed during WWII. However, what makes this novel unique is its inclusion of all people, including Spiegelman's

father and the author himself, in this questioning. And while *Maus* fails perhaps to give us a clear answer to our enduring question of what does it mean to be human, it does illustrate human complexity, leading readers to question themselves and society. This activity of questioning is perhaps the most valuable thing *Maus* has to offer, because it is only through a confrontation with our definitions of humanity that we can truly come to an understanding of the holocaust and its effects on mankind as a whole.

Background Knowledge

The prior knowledge that students bring to a written work allows them to make connections with the text. This prior knowledge needs to be integrated into discussions of background and historical information to help scaffold student understanding of the experiences presented in the novel. For instance, can a student understand the implications of women wearing a veil in the Middle East without first building context and background for this cultural apparel?

The unfortunate thing about activating this background knowledge is that these students will soon not be able to have the same experience. Not long ago, students might have been able to meet with living survivors of the holocaust. Now though there are fewer and fewer living survivors, and many of their memories have been lost to time, age, and death. Because of this, *Maus* provides a powerful opportunity for students to experience a complex memoir from a real holocaust survivor. Moreover, the detailed social and historical information and perspectives in the book will help students understand the context of the events, while connecting to them personally through the graphic novel format and the powerful characterization. This personal connection is essential to emphasize in teaching *Maus*, because it is one way we can help combat the destructive voices and increasing influence of those who disbelieve the reality of the Holocaust.

To truly understand World War II, a short introduction of World War I is necessary. At the end of WWI, Germany was torn to pieces and with the addition of the Great Depression, it was truly impoverished and struggling. Germany's poverty became a selling point for the Nazi party, and in many ways, Jews were blamed or scapegoated for the economic depression in Germany.

Hitler rose quickly through the political realm, soon becoming the country's leader. During his reign he began to not only conquer countries, but he committed genocide by trying to wipe out the Jewish race.

During WWII, political alliances were divided between the Allies and the Axis groups. The Allies included Britain, America, Soviet Union, and were called the big three. The Axis included Germany, Italy, and Japan. The global nature of alliances and war is what made the global nature of World War II.

Before the end of the war, Hitler had killed approximately 6 million Jews. Students need to understand this before they can jump into the text. They need to understand because otherwise they will not see where Vladek is coming from.

The war ended soon after the Atomic bomb was dropped by the United States on Japan. Germany surrendered 16 December 1944.

Below is a list of resources: (This background knowledge would best be taught in conjunction with the history department's discussion of World War II, and provides an excellent opportunity for collaboration).

- Digital Histories. <http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/modules/ww2/index.cfm> This had a lot of ideas on videos one could show as well as lesson plans. However, it did have a very broad scope it cover the entire war, which may not be logical to cover in an English class. If you are working in a school with cross curricular teaming, this would be a good source to share between courses.

- The War. http://www.pbs.org/thewar/edu_lesson_plan.htm This site provides lesson plan ideas for several of the key parts of the war, including the Holocaust.

- The best History Sites. <http://besthistorysites.net/index.php/ww2> This is an annotated Bibliography of its own. It has links to several different lesson plans which teachers can use.

- Below are two lesson plans discussing the war and the introduction of the war.

- <http://teacherlink.ed.usu.edu/tlresources/units/byrnes-literature/FARMER/underww.html>

- http://tps.govst.edu/projects/slynch/instructional_design.htm

Part of the background knowledge students will need is vocabulary: Nazis, Auschwitz, Gestoppo, and ghetto. Some of the pictures in the novel show Vladek wearing a Star of David sewn into his sleeve. Students will need to know why the star was used and what it symbolized for Jews under Nazi power.

Issues Related to the Study of Literature

Themes

The Prevalence and Destructive Power of Racism

Questions of race weave a unifying thread throughout *Maus*. The novel clearly outlines how Nazis used hateful propaganda and racist policies to marginalize and then exterminate the Jews, who they considered an inferior race.

The story shows how underlying racism mixed with incredible fear moved many Poles and other Europeans to refuse aid to the Jews, or to turn them into the Nazis. However, just as Vladek is being hunted as though vermin by the Nazis because he is a Jew, his own actions and opinions represent deep racism toward other groups, including blacks. When Art confronts his father about this hypocrisy, Vladek merely shoves off the criticism by responding with surprise that his son doesn't agree that the Jews are better than blacks. In this way, *Maus* hedges nothing when it comes to racism and its prevalence, while carefully cataloging the ways in which racism was fostered and weaponized against the Jews as part of the Holocaust.

Additionally, the illustrative set up of *Maus* adds to the discussion of racism, because of the depiction of the characters as animals. Essentially, the Jews are drawn as mice, the Nazis as cats, and the Poles as pigs. There is some thought that these broad characterizations represent their status and roles in the story. However, these roles are complicated when there are mice, cats, and pigs who behave contrary to their expected characterizations. Moreover, the animal metaphors do not clearly delineate goodness or badness, as there are good mice and bad mice, good pigs and bad pigs, and good cats and evil cats. Thus, race is shown to be somewhat irrelevant as a measure of character, though Vladek does base much of his trust based on racial lines. All of this is complicated by the fact that occasionally, animals will don different masks, masquerading as an animal they're not, either to manipulate others or to hide their identities. This portrayal demonstrates race to be somewhat of a construct, as does the fact that sometimes the characters are shown to be human beings wearing various animal masks.

The Inevitability of Survivor's Guilt

Throughout *Maus*, Vladek must face his guilt of having survived the concentration camps and the Holocaust, when so many others, including his own first son, did not. This guilt is shown to be inevitable, and something that touches all of the Holocaust survivors characterized in detail in the book. The book carefully illustrates the difficulty and internal turmoil this guilt causes Vladek, as he searches for answers and to make meaning from his experiences when there are no answers and little meaning can be made of the Holocaust horror and Vladek's trauma. And while it seems Vladek uses bluntness to deal with his pain, there are moments when his guilt is triggered and he is left hopeless, ill-equipped to deal with his guilt and loss.

The issue of survivor's guilt is tackled again in the book, when Art's mom Anja commits suicide unexpectedly. Both father and son are left wondering why she was able to survive the camps, but not suburban life, and both wonder if it was their fault that she died, or if there was something they could have done to keep her alive. This episode mirrors the same feelings the Holocaust survivors feel with

regards to all those who died, and also draws our attention to some of the more difficult questions regarding what could citizens and nations do to stop the Holocaust, or to prevent it from even happening. The novel reveals all people who escaped the concentration camps, for any reason, to in some way be survivors with an inherited guilt, one which blankets humanity. This concept could be analyzed in the context of Carl Jung's collective unconscious ideas, which may provide insight into Art Spiegelman's personal guilt at being a survivor in the sense that he didn't die like his older brother, nor did he have to endure the camps. Jung's ideas might also inform some of students' personal responses to the book and the Holocaust in general.

Familial Guilt and Its Implications For Future Relationships

Art's family is not one characterized by warm, loving relationships. Rather, he and his father fight constantly, and are nearly always in conflict over issues of race, culture, religion, and frugality. In many ways, this fractured family relationship is in direct response to Art's parents having survived the Holocaust, and also the effects of guilt felt on many fronts. First, the two share guilt over the death of Anja, Art's mom. They fight about her whether either of them could have saved her, or where the blame should be placed for her death, and the treatment of her personal affects once she had died.

Art is riddled with family guilt. He feels guilty for not visiting his father enough, especially as his father ages and needs more help. However, he struggles to be around his father because they fight so much over issues of culture and generation. Art's relationship with his father is also complicated by Art's constant feelings of guilt at being the surviving child of his parents, after their first son died in the Holocaust, and because he didn't survive the Holocaust, and therefore cannot fully understand his parents for their experience. Art struggles to relate to his father, because for Vladek, nearly everything is influenced by his experiences in the camps, but for Vladek, nothing is.

Means of Survival and Their Implications

Perhaps more than anything, *Maus* truly is a survivor's tale. The book thoroughly displays the mix of luck, courage, hard work, and intelligence it took for Vladek and Anja to survive their Holocaust experiences. In many cases, they have to resort to cunning, lying, stealing, hiding, masking their identities, begging, and illegal activities to maintain their lives. Issues of morality and the possibility of the Holocaust demanding a shifted morality for its victims are examined in the graphic novel, as is the overwhelming message that for Vladek, his own life and the life of his wife came before anyone else's, though he sometimes gives aid to other people who he feels might somehow provide a useful alliance later on. And

while Vladek himself tries to remain a good, moral person in spite of his experiences, he tells of many Jews and Poles who do not, even manipulating and profiteering off of their fellow victims and those trying to hide or escape from the Nazis.

The implications of having to adopt a survivalist mode of thinking for so long and in such horrific conditions are deep and wide ranging for Vladek and Anja. Eventually, the stress, trauma, and memory of the Holocaust pushes Anja to the breaking point, long after she is safe again and in the United States. For her, the survivalist mentality had in some ways protected her from having to think about the horror too much, because she had been able to think only of surviving day by day, moment by moment. It is only after she is safe that the real horror sets in, and it overwhelms her, moving her to commit suicide. For Vladek, the drive to survive is ingrained so deeply into his consciousness that following his liberation from the concentration camps and the end of the war, he still operates as though he need to survive. Indeed, this survivalist nature never fully leave Vladek, and even in his old age, quirks like not wasting even the smallest bit of food, or reusing paper that's already been written on, or collecting clothes that he does not need, just in case, all demonstrate his thinking as though he is still under constant threat. This thinking and behavior creates conflict between Vladek and his son Art, because it not only seems unreasonable to Art, but also functions as a constant and guilt-making reminder of his father's experiences in the camps.

Connecting this theme to the way students characterize and define their own morality might really help inform and enrich their understanding of the text. Discussing questions of morality in various contexts might provide a fruitful analytical activity.

Memory-Its Power and Frailties

Maus is a memoir of both the Holocaust, and of a son's attempts to live and cope with his Holocaust survivor father. These two elements provide a rich complexity and layering of perspective that helps make *Maus* a more complete picture of the Holocaust and its implications. In the story, Art is trying desperately to record his father's Holocaust experience before it is too late and the old man either loses his memory to age and/or illness, or dies, taking his memories with him. This need to record the memories lends both an urgency and finality to the novel, because it reminds us that these powerful stories are carried by such a frail mechanism, the human memory. this duality of power and frailty is constantly explored in *Maus*, and becomes especially apparent as we are brought to sometimes question the validity of some of what Vladek is saying. For example, there are times when it seems Vladek is not being wholly truthful about Anja's motivations and behavior. Since she is dead, and since Vladek burned her diaries

after her death, we have no way of knowing whether or not Vladek's representation of her is truthful or not. This instance emphasizes the fleeting nature of memory, because it is lost once someone dies.

That said, Vladek's memories are certainly powerful, and his stories are given weight and bearing because they come directly from the source, rather than having been handed down as an oral tradition. This need to record the horrors of the Holocaust from the perspective of a living victim serves as the main justification for the memoir itself. It also puts enormous pressure on Art, because of course this recording falls to him, since Vladek won't write down his own story, and destroyed his wife's journals when she did.

The question of memory and what memories need to be kept, and what might drive us to want to forget are powerful themes in *Maus*. Liking the text to books like *The Giver*, by Lois Lowry might help students analyze this difficult and complex issue. Discussion questions like, "do we need a memory keeper in our own society?" Or, "What happens when we as a nation or a people forget?" Might really help students better understand Both Art's need to record his father's history, as well as Vladek's conflicted feelings about having his own recorded.

Aging and Its Connection to Loneliness

Another theme explored in *Maus: A Survivor's Tale*, is the issue of aging and its connection to loneliness. Part of the memoir concerns itself with the difficulty of caring for an aged parent, especially one who's difficult to get along with or be around for any length of time. Vladek is in poor health and experiences constant bodily aches and pains. He struggles to do many household tasks, including upkeep in the yard and home, and yet, he refuses any help because he feels he can do things better himself. The old man is constantly grumpy and frustrated, and it seems the older he gets, the more ill-tempered and rude he gets.

Part of the memoir concerns Vladek's relationship with his second wife Mala, who is also a Holocaust survivor. Vladek is often rude, disrespectful, inconsiderate, and resentful towards Mala, often for no reason or for the smallest things. Some of this resentment comes from the fact that she seems to have done a better job of coping with her experiences in the Holocaust, and some of it comes from the fact that Vladek misses his first wife, and feels constant guilt over her death. In many ways, Vladek purposefully isolates himself and drives Mala away, while at the same time telling Art he feels lonely and abandoned all the time. Vladek's paradoxical behavior of pushing people away just when he needs them the most, is demonstrated to be both an effect of his experiences in the Holocaust, but also largely an effect of his aging.

For Art, his father's loneliness weighs heavily on him, and makes him feel more and more guilt as his father gets older and more feeble. Balancing his father's

needs and the needs of his own family and personal life proves a difficult task, and illustrates many of the difficulties of caring for an aging parent.

Setting

An understanding of the setting in context of the historical period it is situated in is crucial to understanding fully much of *Maus*. The setting is important not only because it gives place and context to the events of the memoir, but also because the various settings illustrated in the graphic novel provide stark juxtaposition for each other. Moreover, because the setting is literally illustrated in the novel, it lends weight, meaning, and reality to the text.

Students will be aided in their understanding of the setting and its implications for the novel if they are shown real-life images of these places, in addition to the illustrated ones provided in the story. This is especially true for the concentration camps, because they will likely be the setting most foreign to students and most difficult to understand or relate to.

Maus takes place largely in three areas: Poland just before and after Nazi Germany invaded the country, the concentration camps, and 1970s-1980s New York USA. The various settings parallel stages in Vladek, the main character's life. In Poland, he is a successful businessman setting up his life with Anja, his new wife. Soon though, troubling rumors of anti-semitic activity in Germany begin to creep into Poland, and Vladek begins to fear for his freedom and safety in Poland. However, Vladek is drafted into the Polish army, and by the time Hitler has invaded Poland, sparking the beginning of WWII, Vladek has already been taken prisoner by the Germans and is in a POW camp. Eventually, Vladek is reunited with his family, only to suffer increasing restrictions, discrimination and brutality under Nazi occupation in Poland. They are moved to a ghetto, and later to concentration camps.

Vladek and Anja have experiences in three major concentration camps: Auschwitz, Birkenau, and Dachau. It will be important for students to understand some of the similarities and differences between these camps, and to understand that the camps, while part of Heinrich Himmler's overarching plan to exterminate the Jews, were designed for specific purposes. In some ways, which camp an individual was sent to factored into their ability to survive, and this element of Holocaust survival is examined somewhat in the graphic novel. For example, Auschwitz was largely a slave labor camp, whereas the majority of the killings occurred in nearby Birkenau.

Compared to the other settings of the graphic novel, Rego Park, New York seems very removed and even isolated from the events of the Holocaust. However, here the setting provides a backdrop to the examination of the lasting effects of the Holocaust, not only on relationships, but also of the mental states of those who

survived. Here especially, where everything is safe, clean, and happily middle class, is the power of survivor's guilt and the unnecessary but lingering survivor mentality most present.

Characterization

Art: Art is the writer and narrator of this story. He is the son of Vladek and Anja who were both survivors of the holocaust. It is from his perspective that much of the story is written. An example of his narrative voice includes: "Somehow my arguments with my father have lost a little of their urgency... and Auschwitz just seems so scary to think about... so I just LIE there..." (Spiegelman 44).

Vladek: It is from Vladek's stories that we learn about what happened during the Holocaust. Readers see how his fears and experiences from the camps affect him even in old age. We are also introduced to his hypocrisy. At the very end of the story we see him tell his son Art, "I'm tired from talking, Richleu, and it's enough stories for now..." (136). This is significant in that Art always felt in the shadow of his older brother Richleu, and for Vladek this may be him seeing Art as Richleu.

Anja: Anja is Art's mother. She committed suicide when Art was a young adult. This may have been part of the reason that Art decided to write the book. It was clear throughout the book from his frequent arguments with his dad that Art really wanted to know more about his mother. Anja is probably more a background figure, but because of her significance to the other main characters, she herself can be considered a main character as well. Her last words to Art were, "Artie, you still love me, don't you?"

Mala: Mala is Vladek's second wife, who he doesn't really like. They fight through most of the book, and for part of the novel she leaves Vladek. "I swore I'd never see him again, but I'm just a sucker he talked until I was blue in the face...and here I am" (122).

Francoise: This is Art's wife. She isn't a born Jew, but converted, which is discussed somewhat in the story. In addition, she and Art agree on many things. Her perspective is often used to demonstrate Vladek's contradictory behavior, as is seen here: "Oh, about the matches—It's even crazier than you thought...since gas is included in the rent, he leaves a burner lit all day to save on matches" (22).

Richleu: Richleu is Art's older brother who died during the war. He was a little kid when he passed away, and Art's parents would often use his picture as a role model kid. This adoration seemed to shape Art's childhood, which is why Richleu is important enough to include as a main character.

Literary Terms

Flashback

Flashback is “a device in the narrative of a motion picture, novel, etc., by which an event or scene taking place before the present time in the narrative is inserted into the chronological structure of the work” (Flashback).

Flashback is a recurring literary feature in *Maus* because of the perspective that Art Spiegelman chooses to write the story in. The main characters are speaking in the present and every time that Vladek returns to his story and to the past, can be considered a flashback.

An example from the story can actually be found in the introduction. “It was the summer, I remember. I was ten or eleven. Last one to the schoolyard is a rotten egg.” In this instance it is blatantly obvious that his is referring to the past.

Imagery

Imagery is “1. the formation of mental images, figures, or likenesses of things, or of such images collectively: the dim imagery of a dream. 2. pictorial images. 3. the use of rhetorical images. 4. figurative description or illustration; rhetorical images collectively.” (Imagery).

Imagery, another essential element in *Maus*, actually requires two definitions since it is a graphic novel. The author actually has a different way of creating imagery.

- First, there are the literary/written elements, which are important to teach since *Maus* will be taught in a literature class. Most often when we think of imagery we think of descriptive passages, which provide information on what the surrounding, or characters look like. However, since the graphic novel has drawings to supplement the words, it would be redundant to include these kinds of passages. The author does, however, create an auditory image through his punctuation, as the reader can picture how the characters say what they say.
- Second, the pictures in the novel also develop the story. Since the story is about the holocaust, Spiegelman worked hard to both maintain the integrity of the events and their horror, without making the novel too visually offensive to read. This said, the sensitive subject matter can make the novel a difficult read, especially for some students. Discussions on the usefulness of the graphic novel format will help students better understand the format and the reasoning behind it.

Dialogue

Dialogue is “the conversation between characters in a novel, drama, etc.” (Dialogue).

Almost the entire book is a dialogue. This can be a tricky feat for an author as he or she must use other devices to show elements of irony or imagery. However, Spiegelman uses dialogue effectively in the book, and it serves as a constant reminder of the human interactions that both created and carried out the horrors of the holocaust, and also the human interactions that aid healing and survival.

Motivation

Motivation is the “desire to do; interest or drive” or “providing with a reason to act in a certain way” (Motivation).

This novel creates a perfect opportunity to discuss motivation. Vladek, Art’s father, is motivated by many things—the Holocaust being one of these things.

One example of motivation Vladek demonstrates is love for Art: Here, Vladek is explaining his motivations for hiding his money from his wife Mala. “One I wanted in trust of Mala, one for my brother in Israel, and one I wanted for you, but she didn’t like I’ll put for you and Pinek Anything—She screamed like a crazy person.” Keep in mind that Vladek shows his love in different ways. Students could discuss why Vladek chose to leave money for Art, but less for his wife. Then, they could discuss how his actions were motivated by his feelings and also by his experiences.

Point of View

Maus is narrated almost entirely in first person, switching back and forth between Art Spiegelman’s voice and that of his father’s, as Vladek both narrates the story and performs dialogue in it. While this narrative technique does little to establish objectivity or a sweeping view of history, it does create a great sense of intimacy and immediacy in the story. Readers are drawn into the action, even though it is in the past tense from memory. Additionally, the technique allows us to understand events from both Art and Vladek’s perspectives, which adds to the overall commentary and meaning of the novel. This way, we get a glimpse into the experiences and understandings of both the survivor and the survivor’s child, including their various conflicts, weaknesses, and personal demons.

Moreover, point of view is key to revealing the complexities of character in the story, as character point of view is demonstrated to be shaped by culture, age, and experience. For Vladek of course, this includes his experiences during the Holocaust, which must be taken into account when analyzing his often contradictory personal point of view and flawed character.

Irony

Irony is “1. the use of words to convey a meaning that is the opposite of its literal meaning. 2. Literature. a. a technique of indicating, as through character or plot development, an intention or attitude opposite to that which is actually or ostensibly stated. b. (especially in contemporary writing) a manner of organizing a work so as to give full expression to contradictory or complementary impulses, attitudes, etc., especially as a means of indicating detachment from a subject, theme, or emotion. (Irony)

Most often in this graphic novel, the irony revolves around Vladek not picking up on Art’s sarcasm. However there is one sad instance of dramatic irony. When Anja and Vladek put Richieu in hiding to keep him safe during the holocaust, he actually dies, while Anja and Vladek, who both suffer the concentration camps, live.

Affective Issues Related to the Work

How will students personally relate to this work? What characters or issues can be brought out in your instruction? Examples would include popularity, loneliness, individuality, etc. Illustrate these with quotes and page numbers.

Students will be able to relate to the themes of racism, parent-child barriers, and marital problems (from a child’s perspective). The parent-child barriers and the marital problems can be brought into the discussion from the ideas of point of view and perspective. What does having this background story going on, do for *Maus*? Why does Spiegelman include this illustration of marital conflict in a memoir about the holocaust?

Racism would probably be better off with a more formal discussion or even having students look for elements of Racism in class. Note that this will probably be one of the vocabulary words because even though they may have heard of racism before, *Maus* requires an in-depth exploration of the topic to fully understand the novel.

Vocabulary Issues

To better understand a novel, the vocabulary has to have meaning for the reader. Building a rich vocabulary for students is a natural outcome of broad and continual reading. In *Maus*, most words used in the text are tier 1, or everyday common words that most students will already know. Indeed, the accessible vocabulary is a selling point for *Maus*, especially when teaching struggling readers or ESL students. However, there are some tier 2 words that are high usage and important words for students to learn and which will help students better express their feelings and understandings of this and other literature in the future. These

tier 2 words, in addition to a few contextually important tier 3 words have been included in the vocabulary list that follows.

Some questions to consider while teaching vocabular in *Maus* are, what types of words or word usage (slang, colloquialisms, etc.) provide opportunities for word study? Are there examples of usage that model good writing? Also, an activity for students would be to illustrate these terms with quotes and page numbers, or to literally illustrate, or draw examples of them as they are used in the text.

Since Vladek is a non-native English Speaker, he has a more simplified English language background than his son, art. We can however find a few words per chapter, which students will need to learn. Also, in the novel there are Malapropisms, which could confuse students. The starred item in the list is one such example; however there are more. In addition, there are some mild obscenities, which of course we will prepare the students and parents for via a sent home letter.

Below is a list of recommended words to include in the vocabulary list.

WORD LIST	
anti-Semitism 11 (tier 3)	conspirators 27 (tier 2)
converted 11 (tier 2)	evidence 29 (tier 2)
bungalow 13 (tier 2)	trenches 47 (tier 2)
presumptuous 13 (tier 2)	parshas truma 57 (tier 3)
ventilation 70 (tier 2)	corporal 59 (tier 3)
radiates 74 (tier 2)	protectorate 60 (tier 3)
shvartser 98 (tier 3)	reich 60 (tier 3)
racist 99 (tier 2)	textile 76 (tier 2)
liberation 105 (tier 2)	pragmatic 131 (tier 2)
bachelor 18 (tier 2)	miserly 131 (tier 2)
hosiery 19 (tier 3)	
convince 21 (tier 2)	
reputation 22 (tier 2)	
diabetes 26 (tier 3)	
communist 26 (tier 3)	

sanitarium 31 (tier 3)

cataracts 40 (tier 3)



Photo credit: Far left: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Middle: “Yellow Badge” article on Wikipedia. Far right: “The Freedom Fighter’s Journal.”

Implications for Students of Diversity

This book has a great opportunity for students to learn about tolerance. One of the many reasons for studying history is so that we do not repeat the mistakes of the past. It was because of differences that Hitler was able to use the Jewish people as a scapegoat.

One thing we can talk about is how the Jewish people were set apart by the Star of David. Although the text doesn't discuss this separation and labeling, the pictures show the Stars of David sewn to their shirts. This can be seen on page 83 and until they leave the Ghetto.

Students with disabilities may actually find this novel more accessible due to the added images. However, students with visual impairments may need amplification. Also, students with emotional disturbances may struggle through the text because of the subject matter. Creating a safe classroom atmosphere will be essential in this unit as well as adjusting teaching strategies for these students.

Gender Issues

The stereotypes are not gender based in the novel. However, Vladek often does treat Mala as a second class person. This is not a matter of him thinking less

of women, but more of a matter of Vladek missing his first wife Anja. We can tell that this is the case because Vladek is polite to Francoise.

Research Issues/Project Ideas

Because *Maus* deals with so much history and presents so many details of the Holocaust and WWII, the graphic novel, and any teaching unit that surrounds it, would be greatly enriched by additional information and historical context. That is why this novel pairs so well with potential history units, and provides such an excellent opportunity for cross-curricula collaboration. Keeping that in mind, or even just waiting to sync teaching *Maus* with the timing of WWII units in other history classes, would be very beneficial to students.

Family History Narrative

For this assignment, students would choose a living relative they would like to know more about, and interview them, gathering life stories, guiding moments, and personal challenges faced and experienced by their chosen relative. Students would put together a family history narrative portfolio, which would include a family tree diagram outlining their relation to the person, a narrative story of an episode in the person's life and/or important experiences, and a reflective essay analyzing the value of their experience and the use of memoir in preserving memory. An interesting twist on this assignment would be to incorporate multimedia genres or mixed media representations of the narrative interviews, much like Spiegelman did with his graphic novel format. Students could direct and edit a video of their interviews, could make audio recordings of them, splicing in music or other sounds to enhance the listening experience, could create scrap book style narrative booklets that link images of their relative to text, could illustrate their relative's life experiences using drawings or other art forms, or could create an interactive website with pages documenting moments in their relative's life.

Personal Graphic Novel

For this assignment, students will try their hand at the graphic novel style employed by Spiegelman in *Maus*. Choosing an experience from their own life or from the experiences of a relative, students will employ the various visual techniques of graphic novel writing to illustrate their narratives. Emphasis can be placed on point of view, creating emotion in the scenes, and showing versus telling a story. Alternate twists to this assignment would be to have students create graphic novel posters to illustrate a specific moment in their life, or to allow students to use collage to show the ways in which their life has been shaped by an event. A reflection would be turned in with the assignment, wherein students

would analyze how their understanding of the connection between our experiences and our perspective, or how illustrating their experiences helped them understand them better.

Instances of Genocide

For this assignment, students would do inquiry into other instances of genocide that have occurred since the Holocaust. Having chosen a specific genocide to focus on, students will then research memoirs from that genocide, to write an experience fact sheet that characterizes the various experiences they read regarding that genocide. Students will focus on recurrent themes present in genocide, and will write reflective pieces which consider why genocide happens, and what can be done to stop it. Students will present their findings to the class, using a creative presentation that helps the class to connect personally with the various memoirs and experiences of genocide. A variation of this project would be to divide the class into teams which would each work on a different genocide, gathering information and memoirs of that particular genocide. Then, students would create experience booths where they could present their information to other English or history classes, for example, in an information fair setting. This could be an interdisciplinary project, and would provide excellent opportunities for collaboration.

Text Sets and Enrichment Resources

Longer Texts

- *Sunflower* by Simon Wiesenthal
 - This would be a much more complicated book Unit. This novel has interesting themes of forgiveness. In conjunction with *Maus* the Graphic Novel, *Sunflower* would provide a great bridge into the classics.
- *Night* by Elie Wiesel
 - This book creates a powerful emotional response in the reader because of the imagery used in the book. It was not something that I could set down easily. Read in conjunction with *Maus* the Graphic Novel, *Night* provides another personal account of the Holocaust, but from a more immediate perspective, rather than through the lens of the survivor's child.
- *Diary of Anne Frank* by Anne Frank
 - A very classic novel, provides another first hand account, but of the hiding, rather than the camps.
- *The Giver* by Lois Lowry

- This book deals with themes of memory, memory loss, and the need to maintain our memories. This would work well in connection to the discussion of memory and the need to record memories in *Maus*.

Shorter Texts

- *Terrible Things* by Eve Bunting
 - Children's book using allegory to re-tell WWII. This would be a great anticipatory set.
- *Wilfred Gordon McDonald Partridge* by Mem Fox
 - This children's picture book deals with aging and the loss of memory associated with age. It also considers the role the young have in the care and keeping of the elderly. The book works well with *Maus*, because it explores many of the themes of aging and the difficulty of aging that *Maus* is concerned with.
 - This would serve as an excellent during reading student engagement activity.
- "How to Die" by Siegfried Sassoon and "Dulce et Decorum Est" by William Owen
 - These are two different poems a teacher could use in this unit to help students see a different format for imagery. We can also see a different side to the war through the military's eyes. We see that death didn't only lurk in the Holocaust camps.

Texts Dealing with Genocide

- *Shake Hands with the Devil: The Failure of Humanity in Rwanda* by Lieutenant-General Roméo Dallaire
- The movie *Hotel Rwanda*

Texts Using Anthropomorphism to Deal with Human Themes

- The Redwall series by Brian Jacques
- *Watership Down* by Richard Adams
- *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH* by Robert C. O'Brien and accompanying movie, *The Secret of NIMH*.

Multimedia Texts

- Image Power Point made from google images of the camps and Holocaust survivors.
 - Since the book is illustrated, it may be beneficial for students to see the real people. This will help bridge the story into reality for them.
- Elie Wiesel's interview with Oprah and visit to Auschwitz.

- The whole interview is available on youtube, and the print form of the interview is available on Oprah's website, with additional interviews and content.
- The interview is excellent, combining history, Wiesel's personal experiences, Oprah's reactions, and live footage of the camps as they are today.