

## Maus Lesson Plan

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**Grade Level:** 9 – 12

**Subject:** Social Studies

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**Objective:** In this lesson, students read and study Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, the first "comic" book to win the Pulitzer Prize. Through the story itself, they will learn about World War II and the Holocaust.

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### Getting Started:

- Before reading *Maus*, discuss with your students what they know about the Holocaust: Explore what books they have read on the subject and what films or television programs have they seen. Find out what they know about World War II generally.
- Discuss also the comic book form: What kinds of stories can you tell with a comic book? If you decided to tell a story about the Holocaust, what medium would you choose, and why? What would be the advantage of that medium?

### Topics for Discussion:

Describe the faces in *Maus*. Are they iconic (could be anyone) or particular (could only be Vladek)?

Why do you think Spiegelman drew the characters this way? Hitler reduced Jews to vermin. Is Spiegelman doing the same thing? Why?

What adjectives would you choose to describe Spiegelman's artwork? Generally, comics artists draw their works twice the size of the eventual published product. When the artwork is reduced by half, the resulting image is crisp and detailed. Spiegelman drew *Maus* at its actual size. Why do you think he did? Look carefully at the frames (the lines around the panels) and the gutters (the space between the frames). Gaps in the borders, and lines intruding into the gutters are considered "unprofessional." Why do you think Spiegelman drew *Maus* this way?

Where do you think the artwork is most detailed? Where is it roughest? Is there something about those moments in the story that calls for a particular way of drawing?

Look at page 159, book one. Analyze the page, panel by panel. Predict what will happen next. (What does the jagged speech balloon mean? Why do you think that? What is the meaning of the black squiggle over Art's head? Why is there no frame? What details do you notice about that panel? Artie's back is turned, he's carrying a satchel, and he seems to be smoking. What feelings does this frame express?)

In book two there are actual photos. How are these images different from the drawings? How do you feel when you see photographs of Richieu and Vladek?

What are stereotypes? Are they harmful, and if so, how? What are some current examples of stereotypes? How does Spiegelman use stereotypes in *Maus*? Seek and select specific examples. Summarize his techniques, and analyze why he uses them. Infer the artist's attitudes, and the reasons for his choices.

On page 43, book two, Spiegelman writes that Pavel's "place is overrun with stray dogs and cats" and wonders, "Can I mention this, or does it completely screw up my metaphor?" What is the metaphor? Does it screw up his metaphor? Conversely, does it make a particular point?

### **Words & Pictures:**

The comics combine words and pictures. We know how to read words, but how do we "read" pictures? Look for general and specific examples of images as "text" in *Maus*.

How do Spiegelman's images supplant or circumvent words?

What is a symbol? What symbols are on page 33, book one? What associations do these symbols have? What is the effect of the swastika in the panels on page 33? Is it the same in every panel?

We see Art carrying a satchel at various points (for instance, on pages 43, 69, and 159 of book one). What does this image suggest? What does it mean to be carrying around baggage? Is the story about carrying around baggage? Explain.

Look at page 64, book one. Why does Vladek wear a mask? Look at Spiegelman's self-portrait inside the back cover. Why is he wearing a mouse mask? Hypothesize what that means?

Look at page 136, book one. Try to ignore the words and just look at the pictures. Can you understand the story? Can you imagine the text? What visual clues does Spiegelman create for us?

What do the words tell us on page 41, book two? What do the pictures tell us? How many different things are the pictures trying to tell?

In book one, Spiegelman draws masks to show Jews posing as Poles. What do the masks on page 42, book two indicate? Compare and explain?

Look at the panel at the bottom of page 79, book two. Explain the power of the panel. Try to assess the relative importance of the words and the pictures.

### **After the Holocaust:**

- How is the Holocaust a part of life after the Holocaust?
- Look at page 12, book one. What does the number signify? Describe its placement.
- On page 159, book one, Art calls Vladek a murderer. Why would Artie call his father, a Holocaust survivor, a murderer?
- In what ways does Artie's life echo his father's experience in the Holocaust? (More specifically: Look on page 74, book two. Art sprays the bugs with insecticide. What does that remind you of? What is Spiegelman's metaphor? Why does Artie smoke all the time? Look at Art Spiegelman's self portrait inside the back cover, and look carefully at the pack of cigarettes: the brand is "Cremo Lights." Infer: What do you think that means? What is Spiegelman referring to?)

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