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Literature
Teaching Unit

Chapter-by-Chapter Study Guide



Maus I and II

by Art Spiegelman

- Learning objectives
- Study Guide with short-answer questions
- Background information
- Vocabulary in context
- Multiple-choice test
- Essay questions
- Literary terms



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ISBN: 978-1-58049-428-1

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Item No: 300652

Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to:

1. define the vocabulary words listed in the study guide.
2. define and point out examples in *Maus I* and/or *Maus II* of
 - frame narrative
 - symbolism
 - metaphor
 - metafiction
 - comic relief
 - irony
 - foreshadowing
 - catachresis
 - parallelism
 - mixed metaphor
 - dialect
 - pun
 - epigraph
 - litotes
 - paradox
 - juxtaposition
3. identify Vladek's chief motivations and describe the ways in which they help him to survive.
4. evaluate the effectiveness and aptness of Spiegelman's "cat and mouse" metaphor in *Maus*.
5. point out instances in the text of the use of artistic deviations to emphasize or parallel the emotional content of the story.
6. demonstrate a basic knowledge of the progression of Nazi actions against Polish Jews during World War II, beginning with the setting of curfews and ending at the concentration camps.
7. assess Spiegelman's decision to weave the stories of the young and the elderly Vladek together rather than telling them separately.
8. understand the limitations of comics or any other form of writing or art to represent historical reality without distortion.
9. understand the concept of "craft" and intentional choice in composition and notice these when approaching a creative work.

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Discuss the effectiveness of the frequent movement from the story of the young Vladek and the Holocaust to the story of the elderly Vladek and his relationship with Artie (and back). Would the story of the young Vladek have more emotional weight if Spiegelman had decided to tell it in one uninterrupted piece? Defend your answer.
2. Discuss the usefulness of the “cat and mouse” metaphor in *Maus*, considering the following:
 - A. How apt is the metaphor? Does it extend beyond the one-dimensional suggestion of a cat-and-mouse chase or of cats toying with their prey?
 - B. Cats hunt mice for a practical reason—their own survival. What did the Nazis believe was the practical reason for hunting Jews? Why did Nazis deem it necessary to their own survival?
 - C. Some have suggested that Spiegelman’s point is that humans are “nothing but animals.” Do you agree with this interpretation? Why or why not?
 - D. What characteristics or circumstances do Spiegelman’s Jews share with mice? What were the “mouse holes” of Nazi Germany?
3. As a librarian faced with the challenge of finding an appropriate location for *Maus*, would you shelve it with histories, comic books, biographies, fiction, or in some other pre-existing section? Defend your choice with specific examples from the book.
4. Using specific examples from the text, compare the artistic and narrative styles of the bulk of *Maus* with those of *Prisoner on the Hell Planet*, in *Maus I*. How does the form of each reflect its content?
5. An old saying has it that, while some *wait* for good luck, others make their own good luck. Using specific examples from the text, explain how this saying applies to Vladek.
6. Vladek tells his story in broken English peppered with Yiddish, Hebrew, and German words. What impact does the language in which his story is delivered have on the story itself? What, if anything, would be lost if Vladek’s language were rendered into standard—or proper—English?
7. In *Maus II*, Artie worries that “reality is too complex for comics...so much has to be left out or distorted.” What other approaches to recording “reality” or history in writing or pictures result in a lot being “left out” or “distorted”?
8. Explain the place and value of comedy in *Maus I* and *Maus II*. Is it appropriate in a work that deals with the Holocaust? Why do you think comedy and irony are included in the bulk of *Maus*, but are utterly absent from *Prisoner on the Hell Planet*?
9. Evaluate Spiegelman’s decision to include the story of Lucia in *Maus I*. Why does Spiegelman feel it necessary to make the story of Jews in the Holocaust “more REAL, more human”? (*Maus I*)

Maus I & II

Maus I: My Father Bleeds History

Prologue

1. What literary device is Spiegelman using in *Maus*'s subtitle, "My Father Bleeds History"?

2. Briefly characterize Artie's father's response to Artie's problem in this mini-chapter. What kind of response is it? What does it reveal to us about this father-son relationship?

Chapter Two: The Honeymoon

VOCABULARY

anti-Semitic – having prejudice against Jews
kilos – kilograms; one kilogram = 2.2 pounds
pogrom – an organized extermination of a minority group
tuchus – Yiddish for “buttocks”
zloty – the monetary unit of Poland

1. What do the words and images on the title page of this chapter seem to foreshadow?

2. Why is Miss Stefanska, the seamstress who lives down the hall from Vladek, arrested?

3. What political party is Anja involved with, and how does Vladek react to the news of her involvement?

4. Examine the frame that depicts Miss Stefanska in jail. Why do you think Spiegelman decided to draw everything within this frame on a slant?

Chapter Four: The Noose Tightens

VOCABULARY

gemeinde – German for “members of a municipality”
schlepped – Yiddish for “carried or moved in a trudging fashion”

1. What purpose do the little arrows with boxes that say “wooden hanger” and “new trench coat” serve?

2. Why do you think Spiegelman introduces us to the members of Vladek’s family by “panning” around the dining table for close-ups of each? What does this technique accomplish that simple “mug” shots of each, divorced from the dining room context, would not?

3. What has happened to Jewish businesses during Vladek’s absence?

4. Compare Vladek’s response to the new economic situation of the Jews to his brother-in-law Wolfe’s response.

5. Why does Vladek lie to his family about the amount of money he makes from his under-the-table deals?
