

# ART SPIEGELMAN

## MAUS 1991

**INTRO:** The Pulitzer Prize-winning graphic novel you are about to read tells the story of the author's late father, Vladek Spiegelman. During World War II, Art Spiegelman's Jewish parents, who were from Poland, were sent to Auschwitz. They were among the fortunate ones who survived the concentration camp, but the experience left emotional scars that especially the father finds it hard to talk about. After the war the Spiegelmans emigrated to the US where Art was born and grew up. The immigration story explains the broken English which you will see the father speak in the story. **MAUS** is also the story about how Auschwitz continues to affect the survivors as well as their children. Moreover, it is a story about how to tell this story and *how* you remember things, personal and historical.

**MAUS** was published in two volumes that were immensely popular and critically acclaimed. As we enter the story, Art Spiegelman is struggling with this success.

### PRE-READING

- 1 Discuss in class what you know about the Holocaust during World War II. In your opinion, what is the most shocking fact?
- 2 Furthermore, discuss the various ways you have learned about the Holocaust (history books, movies, novels, museums, personal accounts, etc.). Which of these ways of portraying the Holocaust has affected you the most – and why?
- 3 Look at the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin (photo this page). Write down your associations with it and compare them with your partner's associations. What do you think was the artist's intention? What impression of the Holocaust does the memorial convey? Discuss whether this is a good way to commemorate the genocide.
- 4 The graphic novel **MAUS** is based on real events and tells the story of the Holocaust. The characters, however, are all animals, predominantly mice and cats. Divide the class in two – one half is to write about cats, the other half about mice. Individually: As a stream of consciousness, write down what you think of when you see the word you have been assigned: "mouse" or "cat". Spend three minutes on this brainstorm. Compare notes with your partner.



Time flies...

Vladek died of congestive heart failure on August 18, 1982...  
Françoise and I stayed with him in the Catskills back in August 1979.

Vladek started working as a tinman in Auschwitz in the spring of 1944...  
I started working on this page at the very end of February 1987.

In May 1987 Françoise and I are expecting a baby...  
Between May 16, 1944, and May 24, 1944 over 100,000 Hungarian Jews were gassed in Auschwitz...

In September 1986, after 8 years of work, the first part of MAUS was published. It was a critical and commercial success.

At least fifteen foreign editions are coming out. I've gotten 4 serious offers to turn my book into a T.V. special or movie. (I don't wanna.)  
In May 1968 my mother killed herself. (She left no note.)  
Lately I've been feeling depressed.

Alright Mr. Spiegelman... We're ready to shoot!...

congestive heart failure hjertesvigt  
the Catskills bjergområde i staten  
New York  
tinman tinsmed

Tell our viewers what message you want them to get from your book?

a message? I dunno...

Many younger Germans have had it up to HERE with Holocaust stories. These things happened before they were even born. Why should THEY feel guilty?

Who am I to say?...

If your book was about ISRAELI Jews, what kind of animal would you draw?

I have no idea... porcupines?

Excuse me...

So, whaddya WANT - a bigger percentage? Hey, we can talk.

I want... ABSOLUTION. No... No... I want... I want... my MOMMY!

whaddya = what do you (talesprogs-sammentrækning)  
absolution syndsforladelse  
cathartic rensende

I-I never thought of reducing it to a message. I mean, I wasn't trying to CONVINCE anybody of anything. I just wanted-

Your book is being translated into German...

But a lot of the corporations that flourished in Nazi Germany are richer than ever. I dunno... Maybe EVERYONE has to feel guilty. EVERYONE! FOREVER!

Okay... Let's talk about Israel...

flourish blomstre  
porcupine pindsvin  
licensing deal juridisk kontrakt, hvor rettighederne til et produkt overdrages til en anden

Artie, baby. Check out this licensing deal. You get 50% of the profits. We'll make a million. Your dad would be proud!

HUH?

MAUS YOU'VE READ THE BOOK NOW BUY THE VEST!

Could you tell our audience if drawing MAUS was cathartic? Do you feel better now?

WAH!





Czech tjekkisk  
Terezin = Theresienstadt,  
kz-lejr i Tjekkiet  
stray dog herreløs hund

louse up ødelægge  
proposition tilbud  
grease spot fedtplet  
upholstery betræk



urgency påtrængende nødvendighed  
feel remorse føle anger, have samvittighedsnag  
ridicule (sb) latterliggørelse  
Rego Park middelklassekvarter i New York City





① Individually, pick a panel that you find interesting and study it closely for technical details. Use terms from the toolbox pp. 14-23. How are the mood and Spiegelman's ideas conveyed by means of these devices? Prepare to tell a classmate about it.

② In pairs, after hearing the presentation, the person listening has to choose which part of the presentation he/she liked the most and explain why. Moreover, he/she has to ask three questions in order to get an even more elaborate analysis.

③ In pairs, find a page that you like and discuss how it works as a single page spread (see toolbox p. 14), i.e. as a story within the story. Afterwards discuss how the double page spread works. Talk to a neighbouring couple about your respective analyses.

④ In your group of four, discuss why the chapter has the subtitle "Time Flies". Come up with as many reasons as possible.

⑤ Now return to your stream of consciousness responses to the pre-reading exercise 4. Based on this, discuss why Spiegelman has chosen to depict the Jews as mice and the Nazis as cats?

### IN CLASS OR GROUPS

- ① In your opinion, why are the characters wearing masks?
- ② How is the narrator, Art Spiegelman, feeling and why? How are these feelings conveyed graphically?
- ③ Why are the narrator's feelings important to the story?
- ④ Compare MAUS to other graphic novels you have studied in class. What are the similarities and differences? You might compare them in terms of form (graphic style and devices) as well as subject matter.

### WORKING WITH THE TEXT

### WRITTEN/DRAWING ASSIGNMENT

In MAUS Spiegelman gives a graphic account of his late father's Holocaust experience but the genre is difficult to determine. Draw two librarians (e.g. in the form of stick men) and speech balloons in which they discuss to what extent the book is fiction/non-fiction, and where they should place it in the library (with conventional novels, with comics, with history books on the Holocaust, with biographies).