



## MAUS by Art Spiegelman

### Summary and Review:

*Maus* is the story of Vladek Spiegelman, a survivor of the Holocaust and the father of the author. *Maus* is a deeply personal view of the events in WWII as told to Art Spiegelman, who uses the medium and symbolism of cartoons to portray it. The story alternates between the present day, as Art interacts with the Vladek and his wife, and the WWII, where Vladek's life changes from a Polish textile salesman to married factory owner to concentration camp survivor. Vladek is not always an easy man for Art to deal with, and they have frequent scuffles as Art attempts to understand and record his history. Vladek's story of the Nazi invasion and the struggles to survive bring out his personal tenacity, cleverness, and ingenuity as well as the crushing sadness and tragedy of the war.

### ***From School Library Journal***

***YA Told with chilling realism in an unusual comic-book format, this is more than a tale of surviving the Holocaust. Spiegelman relates the effect of those events on the survivors' later years and upon the lives of the following generation. Each scene opens at the elder Spiegelman's home in Rego Park, N.Y. Art, who was born after the war, is visiting his father, Vladek, to record his experiences in Nazi-occupied Poland. The Nazis, portrayed as cats, gradually introduce increasingly repressive measures, until the Jews, drawn as mice, are systematically hunted and herded toward the Final Solution. Vladek saves himself and his wife by a combination of luck and wits, all the time enduring the torment of hunted outcast. The other theme of this book is Art's troubled adjustment to life as he, too, bears the burden of his parents' experiences. This is a complex book. It relates events which young adults, as the future architects of society, must confront, and their interest is sure to be caught by the skillful graphics and suspenseful unfolding of the story. Rita G. Keeler, St. John's School, Houston***

### Discussion Questions:

- *Maus* is a Pulitzer Prize winning comic book (or graphic novel), which is very unusual. Is a comic book an appropriate form for subject matter as serious as the Holocaust? Does this book affect the way you view comics? Does this format make the subject more approachable for YAs?
- Spiegelman chose to represent people of different ethnicities as different animals: Jews are mice, Germans are cats, Americans are dogs, Poles are pigs, etc. What do these depictions say about the various groups? Does the depiction of animals instead of people make the story easier to understand for a YA audience?
- Spiegelman's parents, particularly in the current day scenes, are often not shown as being sympathetic. Vladek, Spiegelman's father, is especially difficult for his family to live with. Has Vladek's character changed from the time of the war? Do his modern problems result from his wartime experiences?
- What do you think about the "Prisoner on the Hell Planet" section? Would *Maus* be as successful if it were all in this style?
- *Maus* switches frequently from the past to the present day. How does this affect the storytelling? Does the present give insight to the past? Or vice versa?
- The author feels a complex connection with his dead older brother Richieu. Does this remind you of any of the other novels we've read?
- What do you think of the final word in *Maus*? Is the author justified in calling his father a "murderer?"

### Author Bio

Bravely resisting his parents' urgings to become a dentist, Art Spiegelman started to professionally publish cartoons at the age of sixteen. He was born in Stockholm, Sweden in 1948 and was raised in the New York area. Once he graduated college, he joined the ranks of the underground comics movement, along with other famous cartoonists like R. Crumb and Bill Griffith. In 1980, he and his wife started *Raw* magazine, which featured the talents of many well-known cartoonists. In 1972, a shortened version of *Maus* appeared in *Funny Animals* and greatly advanced his career. He began work on the full-length graphic novel, which was finally published in 1991. *Maus* and *Maus II* won the Pulitzer Prize in 1992. Since *Maus*, Spiegelman has gone on to write a series of children's books, including *Open Me, I'm a Dog* and the *Little Lit* series.

### Awards

1987: Inkpot Award  
1988: Adamson Award, Sweden, for *Maus*  
1988: Angoulême International Comics Festival, France, Prize for Best Comic Book, for *Maus*  
1988: Urhunden Prize, Sweden, Best Foreign Album, for *Maus*

1990: Max & Moritz Prize, Erlangen, Germany, Special Prize, for *Maus*  
1992: Pulitzer Prize Letters award, for *Maus*  
1992: Eisner Award, Best Graphic Album (reprint), for *Maus*  
1992: Harvey Award, Best Graphic Album of Previously Published Work, for  
*Maus*  
1993: Angoulême International Comics Festival, Prize for Best Comic Book, for  
*Maus II*  
1993: Sproing Prize, Norway, Best Foreign Album, for *Maus*  
1993: Urhunden Prize, Best Foreign Album, for *Maus II*

### **Similar Titles**

**Spiegelman, Art. *Maus II: And Here My Troubles Began*. Pantheon, 1992.**

Gipi. *Notes for a War Story*. First Second, 2007.

Kubert, Joe. *Fax from Sarajevo*. Dark Horse, 1998.

Jacobson, Sid. *The 9/11 Report: A Graphic Adaptation*. Hill and Wang, 2006.

Satrapa, Marjane. *Persepolis*. Pantheon, 2003.

Sis, Peter. *The Wall: Growing Up Behind the Iron Curtain*. Farrar, Straus and  
Giroux, 2007.