MAUS:

A Teacher’s Guide

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Rationale:

My experience teaching Art Spielgelman’s *Maus* started my first year teaching at Frazer Schools on the Ft. Peck Reservation in northeastern Montana. I wanted my students to have an engaging experience with reading, a visual experience. I had read *Maus* in college and had found the black and white images compelling, shocking, and whimsical, a transportation into a nightmarish landscape of survival. The themes of survival and resilience stuck with me, as did the dynamic relationship between father and son as Spiegelman patiently recorded his father’s stories. I immediately saw the parallels of oral tradition between my students’ culture in Frazer and the Jewish story tradition. I saw the potential to teach students symbolism, metaphor and personification without intimidating them with language. And, naively, I saw comics as a “simple” medium for students to understand.

Over the course of the next seven years, teaching first in Frazer and then in Simms, I discovered that nothing about *Maus* was simple, and that with every new class of students, I learned something new about families, storytelling, war and generational trauma. I began to realize that this was a story less about the history of the Holocaust as it was a story about fathers and sons, survival and forgiveness. What fascinated students and I wasn’t the Holocaust itself, but the way some people survived and some did not. Through our careful analysis of Speigelman’s starkly drawn black and white panels, a portrait emerges, not of heroes with superpowers, but of men and women with flaws and weaknesses not unlike or own.

For this unit I have drawn from many sources and resources on the teaching of comics, the Holocaust, and *Maus* specifically. I have taken student’s suggestions and worked and reworked these lessons into something fluid and meaningful. I do not think this unit is the final iteration of my teaching, but I do think it is worth sharing, if only to start a dialogue about visual literature like comics and their place in the classroom.
Standards:

9-10RL.2 Determine a central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.

9-10RL.3 Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, (including those of American Indians), interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.

9-10RL.5 Analyze how an author’s choices concerning how to structure a text, order events within it (e.g., parallel plots), and manipulate time (e.g., pacing, flashbacks) create such effects as mystery, tension, or surprise.

9-10RL.6 Analyze a particular point of view or cultural experience reflected in a work of literature from outside the United States, drawing on a wide reading of world literature.

9-10RI.1 Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

9-10SL.1 Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative and culturally diverse discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9–10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

a. Come to discussions prepared, having read and researched material under study; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence from texts and other research on the topic or issue to stimulate a thoughtful, well-reasoned exchange of ideas.

b. Work with peers to set rules for collegial discussions and decision-making (e.g., informal consensus, taking votes on key issues, presentation of alternate views), clear goals and deadlines, and individual roles as needed.

c. Propel conversations by posing and responding to questions that relate the current discussion to broader themes or larger ideas; actively incorporate others into the discussion; and clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions.

d. Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives, summarize points of agreement and disagreement, and, when warranted, qualify or justify their own views and understanding and make new connections in light of the evidence and reasoning presented.

Objectives:

- Identify and understand the use of metaphors and other figurative language in a variety of genres
- Understand and analyze the way symbols are used both verbally and visually to tell a story.
- Analyze and evaluate multiple perspectives presented about historical events.
- Synthesize the multiple themes present in the narrative to determine author’s purpose and audience.
- Listen and discuss with classmates the multiple perspectives and ideas present in Maus.
- Synthesize personal experience into symbolic cartoon
- Compare and contrast multiple artistic renditions of the Holocaust.
### Calendar:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day One</th>
<th>Discussed figurative language and introduced Miloz Poem “A Song on the End of the World” Questions for reading poetry.</th>
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<tr>
<td>Day Two</td>
<td>Introduce symbolism and comics as a medium using Introduction to Maus PowerPoint</td>
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<td>Day Three</td>
<td>Read aloud in class Maus Prologue and Chapter One – Questions for prologue and chapter one</td>
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<td>Day Four</td>
<td>Read aloud Chapter 2 - The Honeymoon - discuss Spiegelman's use of symbols for practical and artistic representation.</td>
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<td>Day Five</td>
<td>What is transgenerational trauma and how can it affect families? Read articles from Washington Post and Toronto Globe and Mail</td>
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<td>Day Six</td>
<td>Read aloud Chapter 3 - Prisoner of War - How does Spiegelman create visual metaphors and similes? How is visual figurative language different from literary?</td>
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<td>Day Seven</td>
<td>Discuss Ch. 2&amp;3 Partnered activity on visual metaphors – students review the panels identify examples of symbols, metaphor and personification</td>
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<td>Day Eight</td>
<td>Read aloud Chapter 4 - The Noose Tightens - discuss the effects of the war over time on Vladek and Mala</td>
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<td>Day Nine</td>
<td>Read aloud Chapter 5 - Mouse Holes - discuss the effect of PTSD on the relationship of Vladek, Anja, and Artie.</td>
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<td>Day Ten</td>
<td>Discuss Maus Ch. 4 &amp; 5 How does the conflict become more complex? How are the characters developing?</td>
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<td>Day Eleven</td>
<td>Read aloud Ch. 6 and discuss Ch. 6 How does Spiegelman show the effects of historical trauma on his family? What is the symbolic significance of the archway above Auschwitz and why does Spiegelman choose to end the first part of the story there?</td>
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<td>Day Twelve</td>
<td>PTSD and Maus How does Vladek exhibit the symptoms of PTSD and how does Artie respond to his father? Write an imagined dialogue between Artie and Vladek in which they discuss PTSD.</td>
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<td>Day Thirteen</td>
<td>Review Maus and discuss the overall effect of symbols in the story. Do we feel less sympathy for the characters because they are “mice”, “pigs” and &quot;cats&quot;? Does Spiegelman want us to focus on the emotional experience of the war or something else?</td>
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<td>Day Fourteen</td>
<td>Introduce Symbolism project: Make a cartoon about yourself using either paper and pen. The cartoon should be a simple story with setting and multiple characters that contains conflict and resolution.</td>
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<td>Day Fifteen</td>
<td>Finish cartoon and hand in at the end of class.</td>
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<td>Day Sixteen</td>
<td>Read excerpt from Suite Francaise, discuss. Which story seems more real? How are the narrative techniques different? Are the experiences of the people similar or different?</td>
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<td>Day Seventeen</td>
<td>Write a three to five paragraph comparison and contrast of Maus and Suite Francaise.</td>
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<td>Day Eighteen</td>
<td>Revise and edit compare/contrast using peer review</td>
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<td>Day Nineteen</td>
<td>Final edits to compare/contrast turn in at the end of class.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Day Twenty</td>
<td>Reflection and test over Maus</td>
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Resources:

Online


Print


Lesson Plan Handouts:
Terms for Reading *Maus*:

**Comic Book Technical and Literary Terms**

**Bleed:** The image extends to the edge of the page.

**Detailed:** The drawing is specific, places and faces are unique and recognizable in other panels.

**Frames:** The lines around the panels.

**Gutters:** The spaces between the frames.

**Panel:** The defined area of action.

**Rough:** The drawing is generalized, places and faces are generic.

**Voice Balloon:** The space in a panel reserved for speech.

Streaks suggest fast movement, or velocity.

A drop of sweat on a character’s forehead might suggest fear or pressure.

Jagged voice balloons mean anger, or a raised voice, yelling.

Black squiggles over a character’s head suggest simmering anger.

**Places named in Maus**

Sosnowiec (So·snow·vee·its)

Zawiercie (Zav·wert·cee)

Częstochowa (Ches·ta·ho·va)

Auschwitz (Aw·sh-wits)
Reading *Maus* The Prologue & Chapter 1

What is your first impression of Vladek Spiegelman? His remarks about friends?

What has happened to Artie’s mother? How do you think that might affect his relationship with his father?

On page 12 we see a close-up of Vladek as he pedals his exercise bicycle. What is the meaning of the numbers tattooed on his wrist? How does this single image manage to convey information that might occupy paragraphs of text?
What does Vladek see while traveling through Czechoslovakia?

Why does the artist place a swastika in the background of the panels that depict the plight of Jews in Hitler's Germany (p. 33)? Why, on page 125, is the road that Vladek and Anja travel on their way back to Sosnowiec also shaped like a swastika?

Why was Vladek's father so reluctant to let him serve in the Polish army? What means did he use to keep him out?

How does Vladek arrange to be reunited with his wife and son? What visual device does Spiegelman use to show him disguising himself as a Polish Gentile?
Reading *Maus* Chapter 4 & 5

During the brutal mass arrest depicted on page 80, Vladek is framed by a panel shaped like a Jewish star. How does this device express his situation at that moment?

What happened to Vladek's father? What does the scene on pages 90-91 suggest about the ways in which some Jews died and others survived?

Describe the strategies that Vladek used to conceal Anja and himself during the liquidation of the ghetto. How did the Germans flush them from hiding?

How did Vladek care for Anja after the destruction of the Srodula ghetto? Contrast his behavior toward his first wife, during the worst years of the war, with the way he now treats Mala.
**Reading Maus Chapter 6**

On page 136 Vladek says that he was able to pass for a member of the Gestapo but that Anja's appearance was more Jewish. What visual device does Spiegelman use to show the difference between them?

Given the fact that the Spiegelmans are "mice," what is the significance of the panels on page 147, in which Vladek and Anja's hiding place turns out to be infested with rats? Why might the author have portrayed this incident?

Why does Artie call his father a murderer? Is he justified? Who else has he called a murderer, and why?
Comparing Escape

Compare and contrast the flight scenes in Maus (chapter 5 & 6) with the excerpt from Suite Française. Write one handwritten page in your neatest penmanship. You must site page numbers from Maus or Suite Française to support your answers. Do not answer the following questions directly in your response. Instead, use them to guide you in your analysis. Feel free to include other comparisons you think are relevant.

How is the Parisian flight different from Vladek and Anja’s flight in Poland? How is it similar?

How do the supporting characters in Suite Française treat the Michauds?

How do the supporting characters in Maus treat Vladek and Anja?

Why do you think the differences in treatment exist?

Be sure to organize your analysis with an introduction, thesis statement, transition sentences, and a conclusion.
Creating a Symbolic Cartoon

Due __________________

In Maus, Art Spiegelman turned his parents into mice escaping from vicious and sly cats during World War II. His mice became symbols for the Jewish plight, his cats symbols of Nazi aggression.

**Audience:** You've been asked by the independent comic book publisher, Krazy Art Inc., to produce a comic similar to Maus about your own life. Before they front you all the cash for a full-length book they want to see a six panel sample of what you can do.

**Purpose:** To explore personal symbols and better understand how symbolism works on the literal and figurative levels. Your goal with this assignment isn’t to draw a beautiful cartoon, but to create your own symbolic world on paper.

**Measure for Success:** Write a six-panel cartoon about an animal that you feel best symbolizes you on a sheet of art paper. The cartoon should have a complete story line with or without supporting characters or dialogue. Use the comic book conventions we discussed before we began Maus to correctly convey your emotions. Your cartoon’s story line should reinforce your choice of animal, and should represent something true about yourself.

I will look for the following to grade you:

- A symbolic animal that represents you
- A clear story line that fits into six panels
- Completeness of symbolism
- Attention to detail and clarity
- Creativity
How does Vladek exhibit the symptoms of PTSD and how does Artie respond to his father? Write an imagined dialogue between Artie and Vladek in which they discuss PTSD. Use the VA guide to talking about PTSD with family members as a resource.
Maus Quiz

1. Art Spiegelman uses animals to tell his father’s story of the Holocaust. Give reasons why certain animals were chosen to represent the various groups in the story.
   a. Mice (Jews)
   b. Cats (Nazis)
   c. Pigs (Poles)

2. Why does Vladek tell Artie his story?
   A. He’s angry at Artie for smoking
   B. It’s Jewish tradition to tell stories from one generation to the next.
   C. Artie blackmails his father with guilt over his remarriage.
   D. Vladek wants to make money from the sale of Maus.

3. What was Vladek’s life like before the war?
   A. He was broke all the time because German bullies beat him up.
   B. He lived in a shoe with an old woman
   C. He was a young, successful businessman.
   D. Vladek lived in New York and drew comic books for a living.

4. List three (3) instances of Jewish persecution by the Nazis in Maus.

5. What happens to Vladek and Anja’s son Richieu?

6. What are the pigs masks a symbol of?
7. What happened to Artie’s mother?

8. Why does Artie call his father a “Murderer” at the end of the first book?

9. How are Vladek & Anja captured at the end of *Maus I*?