Further Supplemental Materials

Additional resources to supplement this toolkit

- The Comic Book Legal Defense Fund offers a valuable case study of *Maus* which can be paired with this toolkit. (http://cbldf.org/banned-challenged-comics/case-study-maus/)
- UW Video, “The Holocaust Through the Eyes of a Maus (Art Spiegelman).” (https://youtu.be/BLVG3GNvHkU)

Further Reading

If you are interested in stories about the Holocaust and its aftermath:

- *We are On Our Own* by Miriam Katin (Drawn & Quarterly, 2006).
- The Property by Rutu Modan (Drawn & Quarterly, 2014).

If you are interested in other comics about political violence and trauma:

- *Year of the Rabbit* by Tian Veasna (Drawn & Quarterly, 2020).

If you are interested in other autobiographical comics:

- *Fun Home* by Alison Bechdel (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2006).
- *Our Cancer Year* by Harvey Pekar and Joyce Brabner (Running Press, 1994).
Who is Art Spiegelman?

Art Spiegelman is best known for his autobiographical comic, Maus. He worked as co-editor of Raw with his wife, Françoise Moly (now the art editor of The New Yorker). Spiegelman first gained prominence in the underground comix world as he produced short, autobiographical comics. A selection of these were reprinted in 2008 in his book, Breakdowns, including the first three panel version of Maus from 1972. Spiegelman and Moly edited eleven issues of Raw from 1980 to 1991 wherein they first published Maus chapter by chapter. In 2004, Spiegelman published In the Shadow of No Towers which documented his response to the September 11 attacks in New York City. For the twentieth anniversary of Maus, Spiegelman, with Hillary Chute as editor, created MetaMaus, a book-length reflection on Maus. In recent years, Spiegelman has focused on lecturing on comics history.

Context: The Holocaust

Spiegelman’s comic returns readers to one of the greatest terrors of the Western World: the Holocaust. Also known as the Shoah, the Holocaust was a genocide of the European Jewish population following Hitler’s appointment as Chancellor on January 30, 1933. The systematic violence and murder of the Jewish population began with the creation of concentration camps for political opponents and others after his appointment as Chancellor. Other acts of dehumanization and vilification of the Jewish population would transpire soon after, including a boycotting of Jewish businesses in April 1933 and the enacting of the Nuremberg Laws in September 1935 forbidding marriages or extramarital affairs between German and Jewish people (and later Blacks and the Romani as well). In September 1939, Germany invaded Poland and created ghettos to segregate the Jewish population. Over the next six years, the Nazis would create camps across German-occupied Europe. For the Nazis, this was all part of the “Final Solution to the Jewish Question.” The murders would continue until the end of the Second World War when the Nazis were defeated. In addition to the death of six millions Jewish people, the Nazi government also murdered the Romani, disabled people, other religious minorities, queer people, and others, bringing the final number of victims to nearly 12 million. The Nazis used the Jewish people and immigration as ways to divide the people of Germany and Europe. Spiegelman’s story of his father reveals the life of one man tortured under Nazi rule, drawing our attention to bear witness to this terror.
Scholarship & Additional Questions

If you want to advance your discussion even further, consider pairing the comic with one of following scholarly articles and supplemental questions.

  - Chute discusses visual representation of the Holocaust in her essay, specifically Spiegelman’s layering of past and present. She writes, “Spiegelman speaks of the act of ordering a comics narrative in frames as a kind of necessary reckoning: ‘The parts that are in the book are now in neat little boxes. I know what happened by having assimilated it that fully. And that’s part of my reason for this project, in fact’” [qtd. in Witek 101]. Working with his father’s slippery, strange, non-linear, incomplete testimony, Spiegelman is drawn to the concept of imposing formal order” (p. 210).
  - How does the comics form and Spiegelman’s “neat little boxes” both contain the horrors of the Holocaust and yet also demonstrate how the events never end for neither Vladek nor Art?

  - Marianne Hirsch coins the term post-memory in her groundbreaking essay on Maus. She writes, “Seeing, on the first page, a photo of Artie’s dead brother Richieu, and, on the last page, the picture of the survivor Vladek Spiegelman in a starched camp uniform came to focus for me the oscillation between life and death that defines the photograph. These photographs connect the two levels of Spiegelman’s text, the past and the present, the story of the father and the story of the son, because these family photographs are documents both of memory (the survivor’s) and of what I would like to call post-memory (that of the child of the survivor whose life is dominated by memories of what preceded his/her birth).” Hirsch clarifies as well that “Post-memory, in my reading, has certainly not taken us beyond memory, but is distinguished from memory by generational distance and from history by deep personal connection” (p. 8).
  - How does the term “post-memory” help us to understand the trauma which Spiegelman documents in Maus?

  - Redwood and Wedderburn suggest that Spiegelman uses the “comics medium to emphasize the complexity, partiality, and fragility of his knowledge of the story”… “although Art’s obsessiveness with detail is everywhere evident, there is no assumed causal connection between truth and reconciliation: Maus is a book about coming to terms with loss and trauma, rather than overcoming it” (p. 602).
  - What is the distinction between truth and reconciliation in Maus? How does this help us to understand the graphic memoir and its therapeutic potential?

Questions for Discussion

1. The comics medium is known for its ability to turn time into space (powerfully used in Maus). This allows us to explore how traumatic events are not discrete and limited to the time when they occurred (Fig. 2). This overlapping of the past on the present becomes particularly clear as Vladek often recreates the feeling from his history through his actions. How does Spiegelman use the comics form to capture this flattening of time for victims of trauma?

2. There is an infamous story where the review board of the New York Times debated about where to place Maus when it became a bestseller—fiction or nonfiction. One editor angrily stated, “Well, look, let’s go out to Spiegelman’s house and if a giant mouse answers the door we’ll move it to the nonfiction side of the list!” While Maus eventually appeared on the nonfiction list, how can this story offer us insight into the status of comics and what we recognize as truth?

3. Spiegelman has long been asked the question “Why mice?” While the anthropomorphic characters make the argument very clear, why might there have been such negative feelings ranging from skepticism to anger about the use of mice?

4. During the second half of Maus, Spiegelman captures the discrepancy that can occur between personal and historical memory (Fig. 3). Spiegelman states that it is well-documented that there was an orchestra in Auschwitz, but Vladek says there was not one. So, Art draws two panels: one with the orchestra and one with the orchestra hidden though not entirely removed. This scene opens up an important point about memory and memoir. When drawing a memoir, what is the importance of something being factually true if personal memory does not account for it? Does feeling supersede accuracy in memory?

5. The story is about the transmission of trauma through generations (Figs. 1 and 2). How does Spiegelman use the comics form to display the guilt held on by survivors of the Holocaust and their children?

6. At the end of the first book, the reader learns that Vladek had burned Anja’s diaries as Vladek states, “I had to make an order with everything... These papers had too many memories. So I burned them” (Maus I, 158). How does this scene give us insight into the mind of Vladek and what he continues to suffer through?

7. In a disturbing scene, Vladek makes a racist comment about a black man (Maus II, p. 99). How is it possible that Vladek who has suffered so much for being Jewish can make such a comment? What does Spiegelman ask us to consider in this moment about the future of race relations? How does he use the comics form to ask us to think about this civil rights issue?

8. Spiegelman creates a story where we both feel empathy for Vladek and the trauma he suffered in the Holocaust but also retract as he treats others negatively including Art and Malia. How does Art Spiegelman help us to understand that one can feel empathy for a person and yet still consider their faults?
Interviews & Additional Questions

Below are recommended interviews with the creator and supplemental questions if you want to take your book discussion a step further.

  
  In this interview, Spiegelman reflects on how comics function as he notes, “I think of comics as a kind of amazing distillation. One’s allowed only a few words, and relatively few marks to make the picture compared to oil paintings or something that’s more overtly visual. You’re forced to strip it down just by the nature of what it is as a medium. One of the attributes that I like in comics is how things can be distilled to their furthest point, and then re-expand once they hit your brains through your eye. So the process is one of distillation, and it’s usually seeing how efficiently one can make something incredibly inefficient and complex, like an emotion and a thought, happen.”

- Reflecting on Maus, how does the comics form offer something new and different from other visual depictions of the Holocaust?

  
  In this interview, Spiegelman thinks about the function of the cartoon. He states, “In my line of work, one is always hunting for that essentialization. Comics do that especially well. They permit you to boil down an image and a thought to its essence, with the two circuits mixing the words and images. In that frame, I drew myself sitting over the dead bodies, while people are clambering up the mound in order to interview me about how swell Maus I was. It was how I felt” (Maus II, p. 41).

- How does the comics form capture feeling in unique ways in which other media may struggle?

  
  When asked about creating as therapeutic, Spiegelman declared, “NO! Therapy, therapy is vomiting things up. Art is about eating your own vomit. There’s a therapeutic aspect to all making, but the nature of working is to compress, condense, and shape stuff, not to just expunge it. It’s not just an exorcism.”

- If memoir is not therapeutic, how do we begin to describe the experience of creating for both the artist and the act of reading? This process for both creator and consumer is one of exploring feelings, but, if it is not therapeutic, how might we define it?

Figure 2 Maus I, p. 12.