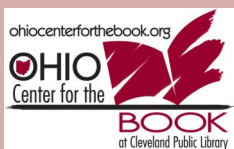


This toolkit is one of the many resources offered by *Get Graphic!* with the Ohio Center for the Book at Cleveland Public Library.

We aim to promote the study of comics in spaces from public libraries to academic institutions and all those outside and

Created by Ohio Center for the Book Scholar-in-Residence, Valentino L. Zullo, Ph.D.



# Get Graphic! Toolkit

## *Maus* by Art Spiegelman

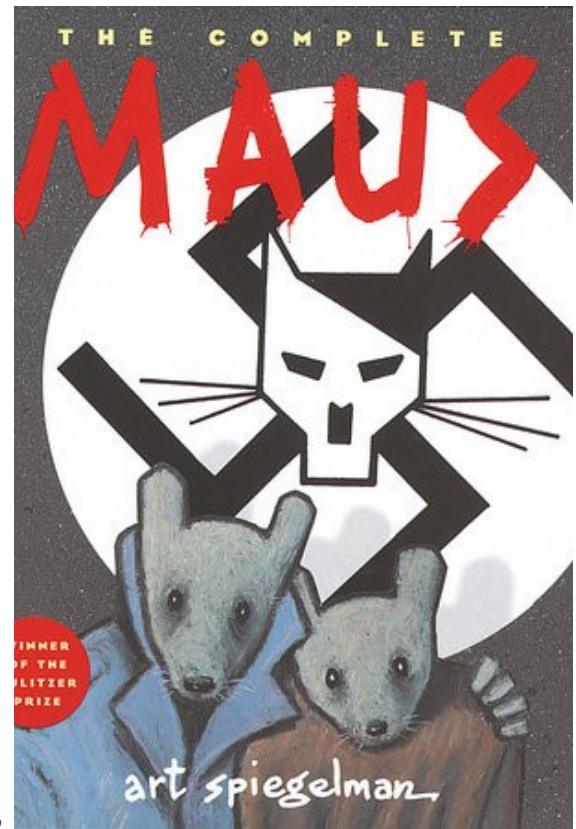
### About the Comic

*Maus* is arguably the most well-known autobiographical comic in the West. Art Spiegelman's graphic narrative catapulted the medium into the popular imagination as a form that could tell "serious" stories. While Spiegelman and other creators including Justin Green and Trina Robbins had been using the comics form to explore powerful stories of personal experience for decades, *Maus* revolutionized the industry by bringing new, focused attention to the form and its capabilities.

Spiegelman's *Maus* documents in comics form the story of Art's father, Vladek Spiegelman, who survived the Holocaust. Vladek lived in Poland when the Nazis invaded and occupied the country, creating ghettos and concentration camps, and murdering millions.

Spiegelman documents his father's story in comics form, drawing upon recorded interviews. Overlaying past and present, Art Spiegelman displays the impact of his father's trauma on his childhood and adult life, revealing a story of intergenerational transmission of trauma as Art carries with him his father's history and pain.

Art Spiegelman's comic won a special Pulitzer Prize in 1992, and it has since been recognized by many cartoonists, from Marjane Satrapi to Alison Bechdel, as influential to their own long form comics.



# Who is Art Spiegelman?

Art Spiegelman is best known for his autobiographical comic, *Maus*. He worked as co-editor of *Raw* with his wife, Francoise Mouly (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 Mouly 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.



Figure 1 *Maus II*, p. 46.

## 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 reclaims the life of one man tortured under Nazi rule, drawing our attention to bear witness to this terror.

# 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 memoir?
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 to 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 Mala. 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.

- Rebeca Sutton, [“Art Spiegelman Discusses the Art of Comics,”](https://www.arts.gov/NEARTS/2013v2-ahead-their-time/mixing-words-and-pictures) *NEA Arts Magazine*, 2013. <https://www.arts.gov/NEARTS/2013v2-ahead-their-time/mixing-words-and-pictures>
  - 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?
- Claudia Dreifus, [“Drawing Is Always a Struggle’: An Interview with Art Spiegelman,”](https://www.nybooks.com/daily/2018/04/13/drawing-is-always-a-struggle-an-interview-with-art-spiegelman/) *New York Review of Books*, April 13, 2018. <https://www.nybooks.com/daily/2018/04/13/drawing-is-always-a-struggle-an-interview-with-art-spiegelman/>
  - 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?
- Rebecca Milzoff, [“Art Spiegelman on ‘Breakdowns’ Redux and the Dark Side of Tina Fey,”](https://www.vulture.com/2008/10/art_spiegelman_on_breakdowns_r.html) *Vulture*, October 4, 2008. [https://www.vulture.com/2008/10/art\\_spiegelman\\_on\\_breakdowns\\_r.html](https://www.vulture.com/2008/10/art_spiegelman_on_breakdowns_r.html)
  - 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?



I WAS IN TEXTILES-BUYING AND SELLING-I DIDNT MAKE MUCH, BUT ALWAYS I COULD MAKE A LIVING.

Figure 2 *Maus I*, p. 12.

# 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.

- Hillary Chute, "'The Shadow of a Past Time': History and Graphic Representation in *Maus*," *Twentieth Century Literature* 52, no. 2 (2006): 199-230.
  - 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, "Family Pictures: *Maus*, Mourning, and Post-Memory," *Discourse* 15, no. 2 (1992): 3-29.
  - 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*?
  
- Henry Redwood and Alister Wedderburn, "A Cat-and-*Maus* Game: The Politics of Truth and Reconciliation in Post-Conflict comics," *Review of International Studies* 45, no. 4 (2019): 588-606.
  - 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?

EACH DAY I MARCHED TO WORK AND HOPED AGAIN I'LL SEE MANCIE...



SHE COULD HAVE MORE NEWS OF ANJA.

I JUST READ ABOUT THE CAMP ORCHESTRA THAT PLAYED AS YOU MARCHED OUT THE GATE...

AN ORCHESTRA?...



NO. I REMEMBER ONLY MARCHING, NOT ANY ORCHESTRAS...



FROM THE GATE GUARDS TOOK US OVER TO THE WORKSHOP. HOW COULD IT BE THERE AN ORCHESTRA?

I DUNNO, BUT IT'S VERY WELL DOCUMENTED...

NO. AT THE GATE I HEARD ONLY GUARDS SHOUTING.



DID YOU EVER TALK WITH ANY OF THE GUARDS?

ACH! WE WERE BELOW THEIR DIGNITY. WE WERE NOT EVEN MEN. BUT IT WAS ONE GUY...

IF HE SPOKE OF COURSE I ANSWERED. HE HAD EVEN A LITTLE HEART.



AH. GUTEN MORGEN. THIS SPRING AIR REMINDS ME OF HOME... OF NUREMBERG...

YES. I WAS THERE ONCE. IT'S A BEAUTIFUL CITY.



AND IF HE LIKED ME, MAYBE SOMEDAY HE WON'T SHOOT ME

ONE TIME HE WAS MISSING A FEW DAYS...

YOU LOOK PALE. WERE YOU SICK HERR SOLDAT?

NO... I WAS... WORKING... IN BIRKENAU.



YES... I'VE HEARD ABOUT WHAT GOES ON THERE...

SHUT UP!



AND HE WAS AFRAID ANYMORE TO SPEAK.

Figure 3 Maus II, p. 54.

# Further Supplemental Materials

## Additional resources to supplement this toolkit

- The Comic Book Legal Defense Fund offers a valuable case study of [Maus](http://cbldef.org/banned-challenged-comics/case-study-maus/) which can be paired with this toolkit. (<http://cbldef.org/banned-challenged-comics/case-study-maus/>)
- 92nd Street Y, [“Art Spiegelman and Hillary Chute at 92Y.”](https://youtu.be/Vnb2D4FySro) (<https://youtu.be/Vnb2D4FySro>)
- Manufacturing Intellect, [“Art Spiegelman interview on ‘Maus’ \(1996\).”](https://youtu.be/HIEsyyTQ_Fs) ([https://youtu.be/HIEsyyTQ\\_Fs](https://youtu.be/HIEsyyTQ_Fs))
- UW Video, [“The Holocaust Through the Eyes of a Maus \(Art Spiegelman\).”](https://youtu.be/BLVG3GNvHkU) (<https://youtu.be/BLVG3GNvHkU>)
- Art Spiegelman, *Metamaus: A Look Inside a Modern Classic, Maus* (Pantheon, 2011).

# 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).
- *Flying Couch* by Amy Kurzweil (*Black Balloon Publishing*, 2016).

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

- *The Complete Persepolis* by Marjane Satrapi (Pantheon, 2007).
- *Arab of the Future* by Riad Sattouf (Metropolitan Books, 2015).
- *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).
- *Binky Brown Meets the Holy Virgin Mary* by Justin Green (1972, repr., McSweeney’s Publishing, 2009).
- *Our Cancer Year* by Harvey Pekar and Joyce Brabner (Running Press, 1994).