**Introduction to Maus: A Survivor’s Tale by Art Spiegelman**

*Maus* is a story within a story (known as a frame narrative): Art Spiegelman, the son of two survivors of the Holocaust, tells how he interviewed his father Vladek about his father’s Holocaust experience, and he also tells the story of his father’s persecution and survival. It is written in a comic book format, with various types of animals representing the various nationalities (and religions: Jews are generally mice, no matter what nationality they are).

**Introduction to the graphic novel**
The term "graphic novel" has been in use since the 1960s, though books written in this format did not appear often until the early 1980s. The genre is characterized by stories about substantive issues written in comic book format and published as bound paperback or hardbound books. Longer than a short story and more literary than a comic book, the graphic novel uses high quality graphics with text to tell a complete story. Many graphic novels are collections of stories previously published as separate comic books. Art Spiegelman received a special Pulitzer Prize for *Maus* in 1992, adding validity to the graphic novel as an important genre in contemporary literature.

**Introduction to Art Spiegelman**
Born in 1948 in Stockholm, Sweden, Art Spiegelman is a naturalized U.S. citizen. While growing up, Spiegelman lived with his parents in Rego Park in the Queens section of New York City. From 1966 to 1989 he worked for Topps Chewing Gum, Inc. illustrating trading cards and stickers including the Garbage Pail Kids series. He has written many comix (underground comics), worked as a New Yorker staff artist and writer, and been a lecturer and teacher at various times in his career. His work has been the subject of special museum and gallery exhibits both in the U.S. and abroad. Spiegelman is especially noted for his work as the co-founder and editor of the comix periodical *Raw*. *Maus* earned him a Guggenheim Fellowship and a special Pulitzer Prize. Mr. Spiegelman is currently working on the story and the sets for an opera. His newest graphic novel, *In the Shadow of No Towers*, a reflection of the tragedy of September 11, was published in September 2004.

**About Maus: A Survivor’s Tale**
Written over a thirteen-year period, the books tell the story of Spiegelman's attempts to learn about his father and mother's experiences as Jews during the Holocaust and later as survivors in the United States. *Maus* also documents Spiegelman's difficult relationship with his father, his own search for understanding as a survivor of this relationship, and his artistic odyssey in creating the work. The historical content is based on dialogues between Spiegelman and his father, Vladek, over many years. Spiegelman uses animal heads with human bodies to portray characters: Jews are mice, Germans are cats, Poles are pigs, Americans are dogs, Frenchmen are frogs, and Swedes are reindeer. While the subjects treated in the books are serious, there is also humor. The setting moves from Rego Park, New York...
York, to various cities and towns in Poland, to a resort in the Catskill Mountains, to Germany, to Florida to Sweden. This device helps Spiegelman tell the larger story of the Holocaust with the authority of a survivor’s memories while at the same time telling the story of his family’s history and relationships during and after World War II. The books are hard to classify since they have elements of fiction, nonfiction, biography, and autobiography.

What is Maus?
It is a graphic novel or actually a graphic memoir since it is a true story. It is a complex story told in pictures and handwritten captions, as opposed to only typeset print. Therefore, it is a piece of visual as well as literary art.

It is an oral history and memoir. An oral history is an extended interview where a witness to historical events is asked to recall what he experienced. Someone else writes it down. A memoir is the story of a life written by the participant or another person. These are testimonies, and as such they may be partial or not entirely reliable. Yet all history has to be witnessed by someone and dependent on his or her memory.

It is the story of one concentration camp survivor, a Jewish Polish refugee and his family: Vladek and Anja, and their son Art Spiegelman. Another son Richieu died in the war; so did the other members of Anja’s and Vladek’s families. After Anja Spiegelman’s death, Vladek married Mala, also a survivor. Only a tiny percentage of those Jews deported to concentration camps survived. It is often very difficult for witnesses to genocide to feel comfortable with everyday life because of the horrors they have experienced.

It is the story of a historical genocide that is now known as the Holocaust. “The Holocaust” names the systematic persecution and murder of six million Jews from 1933 through 1944 (as well as members of other groups targeted by the Nazi regime such as homosexuals, communists and gypsies). Maus is also an oral history of one aspect of World War II. It is difficult to say exactly when major events in history begin since they grow out of earlier events. World War I ended with the Germans and their allies losing in 1918. Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party began their activities in Germany the 1920’s but Hitler was also jailed during some of those years.

The Nazi Party rose to prominence in the 1930’s due in great part to the international economic depression that began in the United States. In 1933 Hitler was appointed Chancellor of Germany in a power-sharing scheme since the Nazi Party had received a third of the vote. The first major terrorizing action was to burn the Reichstag, which was the German parliament, a representative governing body, though the Nazis denied responsibility and accused the communists. Within two months Hitler had seized dictatorial power and had opened the first concentration camp. He
militarized the country in violation of the Versailles Treaty and stripped Jews of all civil rights. On Kristallnacht (the night of broken glass) Nazis broke the windows of synagogues, Jewish shops and homes. British, French and Italian heads of state met at Munich on September 29, 1938 to negotiate with Hitler. Afterwards, British Prime Minister Chamberlain famously declared that there would now be “peace in our time.”

After occupying neighboring states and signing a non-aggression pact with Josef Stalin, head of the U.S.S.R., in March of 1939 Hitler invaded Czechoslovakia. On September 1, Hitler invaded Poland and the Russians also invaded Poland two weeks later. In response, Britain, France, Australia and New Zealand declared war on Germany on September 3, 1939, and World War II began. The United States declared neutrality, but began to funnel aid and war material to the British allies. Still, they did not enter the war until Japan, a German ally, bombed Pearl Harbor December 7, 1941.

The Axis Powers included the Germans and their allies: Mussolini’s Fascist Italy; Emperor Hirohito’s Japan; and the Occupied French. The Allied Powers were Great Britain and her allies: the Free French; the U.S.; and after Hitler broke his non-aggression pact with Stalin and invaded Russia, the U.S.S.R.. In the camps, mass exterminations by gassing began in 1942 and escalated as the war went against the Germans.

On June 6, 1944 the Americans landed on the beaches at Normandy in France and began to re-take France from the Germans. The Russians also launched a counter-offensive in Eastern Europe and were defeating the Germans there. In 1944 American troops and Soviet troops began to liberate the extermination camps. On April 28, 1945 Mussolini was captured and hanged by Italian partisans and, realizing defeat, Hitler committed suicide on April 30. On May 7, the Germans surrendered unconditionally. The Japanese kept fighting and on August 6 the Americans dropped the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima. When the Japanese did not immediately surrender, the second bomb was dropped
on Nagasaki three days later. Over 100,000 people, mostly civilians, were killed. On August 14, 1945 the Japanese surrendered unconditionally; this is VJ Day.

MAUS is also a study of memory and its effects, good and bad. Many of those who survived the war and particularly those who survived the camps suffered from severe depressions later, sometimes attributed to “survivor’s guilt.” Having lost so many of their friends and families to horrible deaths, they could find no reason that they lived and others died. These people had seen so many unspeakable acts daily that often they lost confidence in humanity – their own as well as other people’s. Another difficulty was that after the war there were social and personal pressures to return to “normal” life or for the refugees to conform to new societies where their neighbors or even their own children could not fully comprehend the enormity of their sufferings. Spiegelman’s mother, who previously experienced depression finally surrendered in middle age. Yet memory serves many purposes in the story: as Art sets out to tell his father’s story so many years after the fact, we see the father and son become closer and begin to resolve their painful conflicts with each other and their histories. As the source for Art Spiegelman’s artistic energy, Vladek Spiegelman’s memories become public -- a vehicle for identification and understanding of this powerful historical period and the people caught up within it.

MAUS is also the story of generational difference and conflict. It is never easy for immigrants to adapt to their new environments. Since the concentration camp experiences were of such significance to the traumatized survivors, they sometimes found it even more difficult to assimilate to post-war American life. This added to the tension between the parents and their children, who might find themselves carrying part of this burden without fully understanding the source. The 1960s, the period when many of the refugees’ children grew up, was a time of international political conflict and upheaval, cultural transformation and of a widespread “generation gap.” The Vietnam War, the Civil Rights Movement, and the “counterculture” were major sources of social division and they changed the world.

Timeline of Events in Maus and Spiegelman’s Life (back to top)

- 1906, Oct. 11: Vladek Spiegelman born
- 1912, March 15: Anja Zylberberg born
- 1927: Vladek starts his first service in the Polish army (conscripts must train every 4 years)
- 1937, Feb. 14: Vladek and Anja marry (he is age 30, she 24)
  - 1937, Oct: Vladek and Anja’s son Richieu is born in Sosnowiec
- 1939, Aug. 24: Vladek is called to serve in the Polish army
  - Sept. 1: Germany invades Poland
  - Sept. 4: Germans enter Sosniwiec
  - Vladek is arrested as a prisoner of war
  - Sept. 28: Poland surrenders
    - Nov. 5-6: Jews in Poland must wear an armband or yellow star patch
    - Dec. 23: Jewish property in Poland is confiscated
    - Vladek and Anja’s father lose their factories
- 1940, Feb.: Vladek is released from the POW camp and sent to Lublin
- 1941, Dec.: All Jews in Sosnowiec are forced to live in the ghetto section
  - Dec. 7: Japan attacks US at Pearl Harbor, US enters World War II
- 1942, May 10-12: "Aktion" (deportation) of 1500 from Sosnowiec, includes Anja's parents
  - June: 2000 more Jews deported from Sosnowiec to Auschwitz
  - Aug. 12: 8000 Jews called to Sosnowiec stadium, then deported to Auschwitz
  - Vladek's parents are also deported and murdered in 1942
• **1943**, Spring: all remaining Jews in Sosnowiec are sent to Srodula ghetto
  - Richieiu is sent to Zawiercie with his aunt Tosa
  - Aug. 16: most Jews in Srodula are deported to Auschwitz
  - **Vladek and Anja are in hiding**
  - Aug. 26: Tosa poisons herself, Richieiu, her daughter Bibi and her niece Lonia to avoid deportation

• **1944**, Jan.: all remaining Jews in Srodula are murdered; Vladek and Anja are still in hiding
  - March: **Vladek and Anja are sent to Auschwitz**; quarantine til mid-May (II, 68)
  - May-Aug.: Vladek works in Auschwitz tin shop
  - Summer: Vladek sees Anja in Birkenau
  - Aug.-Oct.: Vladek works in Auschwitz shoe shop, then tin/metal working again
  - Sept/Oct: Anja is moved from Birkenau to Auschwitz I

• **1945**, Jan.: Vladek is marched to Gross Rosen (Anja, too, then to Ravensbrück)
  - Feb.: Vladek is sent by train to Dachau
  - April: Vladek is evacuated from Dachau
  - Apr. 29: Dachau is liberated
  - May 7: Germany surrenders
  - Vladek is in a US displaced persons camp in Garmisch-Partenkirchen
  - he goes to Bergen-Belsen, learns that Anja is in Sosnowiec, and goes there to meet her

• **1946**: Vladek and Anja move from Poland to Sweden; Vladek starts a business

• 1948, Feb. 15: Art Spiegelman is born in Stockholm

• **1951**: Spiegelman family immigrates to US, Art grows up in Queens, New York

• 1965: Art attends the High School of Art and Design in Manhattan

• 1968, ca. March: Art has a brief but intense nervous breakdown & is hospitalized
  - May 21: Anja commits suicide after Art returns home
  - Art leaves Harpur college/SUNY Binghamton (major: art & philo)

• 1970: Art publishes "Prisoner from Hell Planet" (reproduced in Maus)

• **1972**: Art publishes "Maus" in Funny Animals (3 page comic; one panel, six panels)

• 1975: Art meets the woman he will marry, Françoise Mouly (b. 1955)

• **1978**: Art Spiegelman starts drawing Maus

• 1979, Aug.: Art and Françoise spend time in the Catskill mountians (NY) with Vladek

• 1980: Art and Françoise start the avant-garde magazine RAW
  - Art begins drawing Maus, which is serialized in RAW

• **1982**, Aug. 18: Vladek dies of congestive heart failure

• **1986**: first volume of Maus published

• 1987: Art and Françoise's daughter Nadja born

• **1991**: second volume of Maus published

• 1992-: Art starts working for the New Yorker (he resigns some time after 9/11/2001)
  - 1992: Art wins a Pulitzer Prize for Maus
  - 1992: son Dashiell born

• 1993-: Françoise works as art editor at the New Yorker

• 2004: Art publishes In the Shadow of No Towers

• 2005: Art begins publishing a comix format memoir, Portrait of the Artist as a Young !@##$%, which incorporates some of his most significant early underground comix.
  He is also assembling a book about the making of Maus, titled Meta-Maus.