Maus I-II: Vocabulary and Literary Terms

Vocabulary Words
Study the following definitions for our reading of Maus I and Maus II. These definitions describe the words in the context in which they appear in Maus. You will be expected to write out the definitions of these words on the quizzes.

QUIZ #1 – Maus I: Chapters 1-2
- cataract – an abnormality of the eye, characterized by opacity of the lens
- sheik – (slang) a man held to be masterful and irresistibly charming to women.
- Communism – a system of social organization in which all economic and social activity is controlled by a totalitarian state dominated by a single political party
- tenant – someone who rents an apartment or a room from a landlord
- anti-Semitic – being prejudiced against Jews
- sanitarium – an institution for rest and recuperation or a mental hospital
- pogrom – an organized massacre, especially of Jews.

QUIZ #2 – Maus I: Chapters 3-4
- annexed – attached to; incorporated into a larger body
- Gestapo – an abbreviation of “Geheime Staatspolizei,” the Secret State Police, the SS
- protectorate – land controlled by German government
- reich – land annexed to Germany, later meaning the Nazi regime
- Wehrmacht – the German Armed Forces
- Bar Mitzvah – a ceremony to admit as an adult member of the Jewish community a Jewish boy 13 years old
- schlepped – Yiddish for “carried or moved in a trudging fashion”

QUIZ #3 – Maus I: Chapter 5-6
- liquidate – to put an end to; to abolish (also: to kill)
- meshuga – Yiddish slang for “crazy; senseless”
- neurotic – overanxious; panicky
- kombinator – a person of low morals, used to describe a Jew who collaborates with the Nazis
- caricature – an exaggerated representation
- pragmatic – practical; concerned with the facts at hand

QUIZ #4 – Maus II: Chapter 1
- epigraph – a short quotation that appears in front of a poem, a book, or a chapter explaining something about what follows.
- kapo – supervisor, used to describe Jews who were put in charge of other Jews in the camps
- presumptuous – excessively forward; “having a lot of nerve”
- reproach – expression of disapproval
- schnell – German for “quick”
- Yids – German derogatory term meaning “Jews”

QUIZ #5 – Maus II: Chapter 2-3
- absolution – the act of having one’s sins cleansed away
- cathartic – that which relieves emotional tensions, especially through certain kinds of art, as tragedy or music.
- hermetic – air-tight
- munitions – weapons and ammunition
- notary – one legally empowered to certify documents
- Shvartser – Yiddish derogatory slang for a black person
QUIZ #6 – Maus II: Chapter 4-5

cache – hiding place for storing provisions
valises – small pieces of luggage
listless – lacking energy or spirit
quotas – numbers of people designated, in this case, as upper limits
genocide – the deliberate and systematic extermination of a national, racial, political, or cultural group
scapegoat – a person or group made to bear the blame for others or to suffer in their place

Literary Terms
You will need to know these literary terms and be able to identify examples of these terms for the unit exam.

Allusion – a reference to a person, place, poem, book, event, etc., which is not part of the story, that the author expects the reader will recognize.

Characterization – the methods, incidents, speech, etc., an author uses to reveal the people in the book. Characterization is depicted by what the person says, what others say, and by his or her actions.

Conflict – the struggle that moves the action forward in a work of literature. There are three types of conflict, and most books include all three: man versus man, man versus nature, man versus the supernatural, man versus society, and man versus himself

Frame Narrative – a story that has another story or stories within it. The frame story in Maus is Artie interviewing his father about his experiences in the concentration camp.

Imagery – the use of words to evoke impressions and meanings that are more than just the basic, accepted definitions of the words themselves.

Irony – a perception of inconsistency, sometimes humorous, in which the significance and understanding of a statement or event is changed by its context. Example: The firehouse burned down.

• Dramatic Irony – the audience or reader knows more about a character’s situation than the character does and knows that the character’s understanding is incorrect.

• Situational Irony – a discrepancy between what the reader or character expects and what actually happens.

• Verbal Irony – a discrepancy between what is said and what is really meant; sarcasm. Example: A large man whose nickname is “Tiny.”

Metaphor – a comparison of two things that are basically dissimilar in which one is described in terms of the other. Example: The moon, a haunting lantern, shone through the clouds. (Moon=lantern)

Mixed Metaphor – combining two or more literary terms in such a way that the meaning is ridiculous, impossible, or incorrect. Example: The athlete sailed down the road of life without missing a step.

Allegory – a story that represents abstract ideas or moral qualities. An allegory has both a literal and a symbolic level of meaning. It is considered an extended metaphor.

Protagonist – the central or main character in a story around whom the plot centers.
Symbol – an object, person, or place that has a meaning in itself and that also stands for something larger than itself, usually an idea or concept; some concrete thing which represents an abstraction.

Theme – the central or dominant idea behind the story; the most important aspect that emerges from how the book treats its subject. Themes are generally hinted at through different methods: a phrase or quotation that introduces the novel, a recurring element in the book, or an observation made that is reinforced through plot, dialogue, or characters. It must be emphasized that not all works of literature have themes in them.

Tone – the attitude of the author toward his subject (or towards his readers).

Comic relief - the intrusion of humor interrupting or immediately following a scene of great excitement or seriousness

Dialect - a particular kind of speech used by members of one specific group because of its geographical location or class. Example: Vladek uses a Yiddish dialect when speaking English.

Foreshadowing - the use of hints or clues in a story to suggest what action is to come. Foreshadowing is frequently used to create interest and build suspense.

Juxtaposition - the placement of two dissimilar items, people, thoughts, places, etc., next to one another to emphasize the differences or heighten the similarities. Example: In The Pearl, Kino instinctively touches the valuable pearl and his knife at the same time.

Litotes (understatement) - a conscious understatement that achieves the opposite effect of the words themselves.

Paradox - a statement that is self-contradictory on its surface, yet makes a point through the juxtaposition of the ideas and words within the paradox.

Parallelism - the repetition of similarly constructed phrases, clauses, or sentences within a short section. Examples: “Government of the people, by the people, and for the people…”

Catachresis: the deliberate use of words to create an impossible situation or mixed metaphor. Example: Spiegelman says, “My father bleeds history.”

Epigraph: a short quotation that appears in front of a poem, a book, or a chapter explaining something about what follows.

Frame Narrative: a story that has another story or stories within it. When Artie is interviewing his father, this is the frame narrative used to tell the stories about Auschwitz.