Art Spiegelman*:* ***MAUS I.*** *A Survivor's Tale: My Father Bleeds History*



**DISCUSSION AND WRITING.**

**Prologue.**

1. What is your first impression of Vladek Spiegelman? What does his remark about friends suggest about his personality?

**1. The Sheik.**

1. What has happened to Artie's mother?
2. How does Vladek get along with Mala, his second wife? What kind of things do they argue about?
3. How long has it been since Artie last visited his father? What do you think is responsible for their separation?
4. How does Vladek respond when Artie first asks him about his life in Poland? Why might he be reluctant to talk about those years?
5. 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?
6. Describe Vladek's relationship with Lucia Greenberg. How was he introduced to Anja Zylberberg? Why do you think he chose her over Lucia?

**2. The Honeymoon**.

1. What is Vladek doing when Artie comes to visit him? How does his health figure elsewhere in the book?
2. How does Vladek become wealthy?
3. What does Vladek see while traveling through Czechoslovakia?
4. 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? What other symbolic devices does the author use in this book?

**3. Prisoner of War**

1. When Artie refused to finish his food as a child, what did Vladek do? How does he characterize Anja's leniency with their son?
2. Why was Vladek's father so reluctant to let him serve in the Polish army? What means did he use to keep him out?
3. How does Vladek feel after shooting the German soldier?
4. What is the significance of Vladek's dream about his grandfather? What recurring meaning does "Parshas Truma" have in his life?
5. 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?

**4. The Noose Tightens**

1. Describe the activities depicted in the family dinner scene on pages 74-76. What do they tell you about the Zylberbergs?
2. Although Jews were allowed only limited rations under the Nazi occupation, Vladek manages to circumvent these restrictions for a while. What methods does he use to support himself and his family?
3. 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?
4. What happened to little Richieu

5. 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?

**5. Mouse Holes**

1. Why does Artie claim that he became an artist?
3. How does the comic strip "Prisoner on the Hell Planet" depict Artie and his family? How did you feel on learning that Artie has been hospitalized for a nervous breakdown? Why do you think he has chosen to draw himself dressed in a prison uniform? What is the effect of seeing these mice suddenly represented as human beings?
4. Why did Anja finally consent to send Richieu away? Was his death "better" than the fate of the children depicted on page 108?
5. 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?
6. What eventually happens to the "mouse" who informed on the Spiegelmans? What becomes of Haskel, who refused to save Vladek's in-laws even though he accepted their jewels?
7. 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.

**6. Mouse Trap**

1. On page 149 Vladek is almost betrayed by a group of schoolchildren. What stories did Poles tell their children about Jews? How do you think such stories—and perhaps similar stories told by German parents—helped pave the way for the Final Solution?
2. Why does Vladek want to flee to Hungary? How are he and Anja eventually captured? What is the significance of the letter from Mandelbaum's nephew (p. 154)?
3. Why does Artie call his father a murderer? Is he justified? Who else has he called a murderer, and why?

**The characters of Maus I**

1. What kind of man—or mouse—is Vladek Spiegelman? What details does Spiegelman use to establish his character? What traits do you think enabled him to survive events in which the overwhelming majority of Jews were killed?
2. How does Spiegelman establish the old Vladek's "foreignness"? In what specific ways, for example, does his speech differ from his son's? Why does the author show the young, remembered Vladek, as well as his family, speaking "normal" English?
4. How would you sum up the character of Artie? How would you compare him with his father? What things about Vladek irritate him? Which of Artie's traits does Vladek seem incapable of understanding? In what ways do you think Vladek has influenced his son?
5. How does the author portray Anja as a young woman, and later as a depressed and suicidal older one? How are your earlier perceptions of her altered by the comic-within-a-comic "Prisoner on the Hell Planet"? If Anja had written a suicide note, what might it have said?

**SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES.**

1. Over the next month, interview a parent or grandparent about an episode of his or her life related with the twentieth century. Record not only the story that emerges, but your responses to that story. In what way is that story also your own?

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