

The Complete Maus Study Guide

The Complete Maus by Art Spiegelman

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Plot Summary

Artie Spiegelman, the author, artist, and principle narrator, uses the medium of a graphic text—a comic book—to relate the biographical memoir of Vladek and Anja Spiegelman, his parents. The Spiegelmans are Jews, originally from Poland, who survived the Nazi Holocaust and internment at Auschwitz, Auschwitz-Birkenau, Gross-Rosen, Dachau, Ravensbrück, and other concentration camps. After the war the Spiegelmans lived briefly in Stockholm before emigrating to the United States of America and settling in Rego Park, New York. The graphic text uses the extended allegory of anthropomorphized mice—Maus in German—to represent Jews, cats to represent Germans, and other suitable animals to represent other nationalities or ethnicities.

Vladek Spiegelman, born 1906, meets Anja Zylberberg, born 1912, in the town of Sosnowiec, Poland. They court and wed in 1937 and live in various small Polish towns in the Sosnowiec area—close to the German-Poland-Czechoslovakia border, between Krakow, Poland and Breslau, Germany. Their first son, Richieu, is born in 1937 as Vladek becomes commercially successful establishing a textile factory which is initially largely funded by Anja's affluent father.

After the birth of Richieu Anja suffers a nervous collapse, c. 1938. Leaving the textile factory in the custody of his father in law, Vladek takes Anja to a sanatorium in Czechoslovakia where the couple stays for several weeks until Anja recovers her health. While traveling through Czechoslovakia, Vladek and Anja are alarmed at the popularity of militant Nazism and blatant anti-Semitism. They return to the Sosnowiec area briefly and then move to Bielsko, Poland, where Vladek continues to prosper in the textile business.

Then, in 1939, Vladek is drafted. Anja returns home to Sosnowiec while Vladek participates in a single border skirmish where he kills a Nazi invader and is then captured with thousands of other Polish soldiers. Vladek spends several weeks as a prisoner of war in difficult circumstances performing brutal manual labor for the Nazis. He is then discharged back to Poland and makes his way to Sosnowiec where he lives with the Zylberberg family.

Over the next months the Nazi Holocaust begins to unfold and the Zylberbergs are moved into various ghettos and the family begins to splinter as the Nazis begin pogroms and deportations. Richieu is sent to what is perceived as a place of safety only to die within a few weeks. Vladek and Anja subsequently attempt to flee to Hungary but are handed over to the Nazis by double-crossing smugglers. The Spiegelmans are then sent to Auschwitz where they are segregated and put at hard labor. Through a detailed series of horrific experiences, Vladek and Anja manage to survive the Holocaust and a series of deportations and mass executions and eventually are liberated by the advancing allied armies. They once again meet in Sosnowiec where their few remaining friends and relatives also gather. The Spiegelmans emigrate to Sweden and live in Stockholm where, in 1948, their second son Artie is born. Soon they emigrate to the United States of America and settle in Rego Park, New York.



After about two decades the prolonged trauma of the Holocaust finally overwhelms Anja and she takes her own life. After some time, Vladek marries Mala—another Jewish Holocaust survivor—although their relationship is contentious. Artie is distant from his father but desires to create a biographical memoir and therefore conducts a series of tape-recorded interviews with Vladek which eventually result in the production of the graphic text.



Rego Park, N.Y.C. 1958

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Artie Spiegelman, the narrator and author, remembers skating to school as a child and having his skate malfunction. Instead of waiting for him, his friends leave him behind. Artie walks home sniffing and his father greets him by dismissing friends in general as useless.

Rego Park, N.Y.C. 1958 Analysis

This two-page prologue positions Artie as a child growing up in Rego Park with his father, Vladek Spiegelman. Vladek's rather cryptic dismissal of friends in general seems strange but will become all-too-intelligible as the graphic text progresses. The encounter is interesting on several levels. First, Artie is presented as a fairly normal child who turns to his father for emotional support. Vladek, as usual, is busily engaged with his hands and instead of offering emotional support remains distant and, reflecting upon his own life, simply dismisses the concept of having friends as ridiculous. The emotionally-distant relationship established in this brief prologue will remain throughout the graphic text.

In the first panel of the graphic text, Artie and his friends are depicted as mice, but another boy riding a bicycle is depicted as a dog. Although the significance of this is not yet established, the difference does establish a dominant visual metaphor used throughout the graphic text. The prologue introduces Artie and Vladek. Artie functions as the author, narrator, and principle participant in the graphic text while Vladek is clearly the main participant and principle protagonist. Vladek, through Artie, is also the original narrator of his own biography.



Chapter One - The Sheik

Chapter One - The Sheik Summary

Artie, now an adult, visits Vladek in Rego Park. Artie notes he is not particularly close to his father, and Vladek appears saddened that Artie is not accompanied by his girlfriend Françoise. Vladek is disgusted when Mala, his wife and Artie's step-mother, hangs Artie's coat on a wire hanger; Vladek quickly moves it to a wooden hanger. After dinner Artie and Vladek begin to talk and Artie explains that he has decided to create a graphic text about Vladek's life's experiences. Vladek's narrated experiences are then presented as a collage of flashback sequences interspersed with his commentary and occasional panels showing Artie and Vladek discussing Vladek's life's experiences in the present.

In the mid-1930s Vladek lives in Czestochowa, a small Polish city, and makes his living selling textiles. He is young, strong, and handsome and many girls flirt with him. One girl, Lucia Greenberg, is very persistent in her efforts to engage Artie in a relationship and eventually the two begin to date exclusively.

Artie then travels alone to Sosnowiec to visit his parents and while in Sosnowiec he meets Anja Zylberberg, an intelligent but nervous young woman from a particularly affluent family. Artie and Anja are immediately attracted to each other and after Artie returns to Czestochowa Anja frequently writes and occasionally visits. Artie slowly breaks off his relationship with Lucia and develops his relationship with Anja. Artie and Anja become engaged in 1936. Lucia tries several methods of destroying Artie and Anja's relationship but they nonetheless marry in 1937 and Artie moves to Sosnowiec.

Artie and Vladek conclude their discussion. When Artie suggests that his graphic text will include the details of Vladek's involvement with Lucia and his courtship of Anja, Vladek expresses surprise and requests that Artie not make public such private and intimate details; Artie tentatively agrees to keep the information private.

Chapter One - The Sheik Analysis

Chapter One is significant in establishing the general pattern followed throughout the remaining chapters of the graphic text—short sequences which illustrate events in the 'present-tense' of the graphic text's principle timeline interspersed with longer sequences detailing events from the life of Vladek Spiegelman. Although the chronology is complex the visual representation of events makes the frequent chronological shifts easily intelligible. With his nearly stream-of-consciousness narrative, Vladek tends to wander through chronological time detailing events which are emotionally connected but not necessarily chronologically ordered—Artie performs the function of real-time editor by gently guiding Vladek back into a more traditionally chronological exposition of his personal history. The 'present tense' of Part I of the graphic text encompasses several

separate occasions which span a series of discussions between Artie and Vladek and several decades of Artie's adult life.

In Chapter One and throughout the remainder of the graphic text, Vladek and other Jews are illustrated as mice, giving the text its German-language title of *Maus*. Mice are a suitable and obvious choice to represent a people who were heavily persecuted during the Nazi Holocaust. Poles are illustrated as pigs, indicating their essentially selfish nature from the viewpoint of the Jews—throughout the graphic text, many Poles will sacrifice Jews for often trivial personal gain.

Chapter One also introduces Mala Spiegelman, Artie's step-mother and Vladek's second wife. It is evident that Vladek and Mala do not share a particularly close relationship and frequently argue over trivial things. Chapter One also introduces Anja, Artie's biological mother to whom the text is dedicated; clearly Anja is no longer living though her death will not be described in the text until considerably later. The Chapter establishes that Vladek was essentially a normal Jewish man living in Poland just prior to the outbreak of World War II; discussions of Hitler's Nazi Germany were held around the dinner table but—at that moment—were not taken very seriously.



Chapter Two - The Honeymoon

Chapter Two - The Honeymoon Summary

Artie visits his father in Rego Park and they hold another discussion. Vladek worries about his failing health and counts out numerous pills while he relates his life story to his son.

After marrying Anja, Vladek travels on business. On one occasion he returns home to discover that the police have searched his apartment. Vladek learns that Anja has a friend who is a Communist, and Anja translates Communist documents into German. Vladek is outraged that his wife would voluntarily associate with Communists—after a brief relationship upheaval, Vladek establishes a textile factory in Bielsko, funded by Anja's father's considerable wealth. In October, 1937, Anja delivers Richieu, her first child. Vladek works in Bielsko during the week and returns to Sosnowiec for the weekends until Anja suffers a nervous collapse. Vladek turns the management of his factory over to business associates and travels with Anja to a sanatorium in Czechoslovakia. On the trip to the sanatorium, Vladek is stunned to witness widespread and virulent anti-Semitism, primarily sponsored by Nazi party members.

Anja recovers and Vladek and Anja return to Sosnowiec where Vladek is informed that his textile factory has been robbed. Within a few months he has established another factory in Bielsko and subsequently moves, with Anja and Richieu, to Bielsko where they live for several months and are quite prosperous. Then, in August of 1939, Vladek, now thirty-three years old, receives a draft notice. He quickly helps Anja to pack and return to her family in Sosnowiec and then reports for several days of training before he is dispatched for the front lines to defend the frontier. On September 1, 1939, the Nazi army invades Poland.

Vladek's recounting of his war-time experiences are interrupted when he accidentally knocks a bottle of pills off the table. He then discusses his recent ill-health with Artie and notes that his vision is becoming particularly deficient.

Chapter Two - The Honeymoon Analysis

During Chapter Two, Vladek continues to narrate his pre-war experiences as a young Jewish man in Poland. Vladek mentions the controversial and illegal existence of Communist politics in Poland during the late 1930s and then recounts how he became very successful in business. Vladek's business sense and developed work ethic allow him to be successful; they will later allow him to survive the Nazi extermination camps. Vladek's life appears to be running smoothly along a traditional course as his wife, devoted if overwrought, delivers a healthy son and he pursues a growing business interest. During one visit to a sanatorium in Czechoslovakia, Vladek is shocked by the extent of public anti-Semitism demonstrated in various small towns—Vladek's and



Anja's visit to Czechoslovakia may well have been after the Munich Agreement of 1938 which resulted in a partial Nazi occupation of portions of the country, although Vladek does not specify an exact date. The illustrations of their train ride include Nazi flags, swastikas, and jack-booted Nazi troopers who are illustrated as cats, an apt symbol for the Nazis who will prey upon the Jewish peoples illustrated as mice.

The fact that Vladek, a father at thirty-three, is drafted indicates the depth of justified apprehension felt by the Polish government immediately prior to the Nazi invasion. Chapter Two ends rather abruptly—Vladek recalls the date of the Nazi invasion and then knocks over a bottle of pills which interrupts his narrative. He then discusses his failing health and eyesight briefly and Artie leaves.



Chapter Three - Prisoner of War

Chapter Three - Prisoner of War Summary

Artie visits his father and Mala once again and eats dinner. Vladek insists that Artie finish all of the food on his plate while simultaneously announcing that Mala's cooking is inferior. After a fairly contentious dinner, Artie and Vladek once again engage in conversation about Vladek's World War II era experiences. Vladek reminisces about his own father's attempts to prevent Vladek's initial enlistment in the military service as a youth—Vladek had been forced to nearly starve and go without sleep prior to his health inspection; nevertheless, Vladek eventually enlisted and served his expected term prior to engaging in businesses.

After being drafted in 1939, Vladek is stationed along the Polish-German frontier where an invasion appears to be imminent. Within a few days the Nazis do indeed invade and Vladek is caught in a firefight. He sees a German soldier hiding behind some brush and takes careful aim with his rifle—a bolt-action rifle with, oddly, a telescopic sight. From a distance that appears to be only a few yards, Vladek fires at the German and hears him scream and sees him fall. The German soldier weakly waves his hand in surrender but Vladek continues to fire into him until he stops moving. After only two hours of fighting, Vladek's position is overrun by Nazi troopers and he, along with many others, surrenders. The Nazis cause the Poles to gather German wounded and dead. Vladek purposefully retrieves the body of the German he killed and inspects his identification, noting his name. Over the next several weeks Vladek and other Jews are subjected to a series of denigrating work assignments and forcible relocations to various small work camps. Vladek writes postcards home and receives occasional Red Cross packages of food.

After several weeks Vladek and some others volunteer for a heavy work assignment. Their conditions and food improve materially but they are expected to perform backbreaking labor. Vladek is very strong and healthy and prefers the hard work and sufficient food to his earlier work camp experiences. After three months Vladek and many other prisoners-of-war are placed upon a train and shipped back to Poland where they are, ostensibly, released. Vladek is released in Lublin, hundreds of miles from his home. He poses as a non-Jewish Pole to avoid persecution and makes the dangerous and difficult journey home where he is received by an overjoyed family.

Vladek then explains to Artie that the Nazis released the Jews because as prisoners-of-war they enjoyed certain rights and privileges—once freed, as simply Jewish citizens of a conquered country, their legal rights arising from prisoner-of-war status vanished and they could be brutalized and treated as the Nazis desired without legal or international complication. Vladek then recounts several of the anti-Semitic practices and policies implemented during the early stages of the Nazi occupation. These included mandatory curfews, random beatings of Jews, the forcible taking of wealth and real estate from Jews, and occasional murders of Jews. Artie then concludes the evening's discussions



only to discover that his father has thrown out his winter coat because he deemed it shabby. Vladek then insists Artie begin to use another winter coat which Vladek finds acceptable. Artie, disgruntled, agrees because of necessity.

Chapter Three - Prisoner of War Analysis

Vladek explains to Artie that his post-draft training consisted of only a few days of training because as a youth he had, along with other Poles, previously undergone mandatory and conventional military training for a prolonged period. Thus, his post-draft training is simply a brief refresher course. Vladek's military contribution to the defense of Poland is typical of the defense against the rapid Nazi onslaught—within just a few hours he is a prisoner of war. He does, however, manage to kill one German soldier which he views as a notable contribution to the war. It is interesting to note that Vladek is illustrated as having a bolt-action rifle with a telescopic sight—such sights were extremely rare in 1939 and the illustration is probably not historically accurate; Vladek would most likely have been equipped with an open-sight.

Vladek and the other Jews are segregated from the non-Jewish Polish soldiers and subjected to worse living conditions and more difficult forced labor. He spends several weeks performing manual labor and being shuttled from camp to camp. Since he is a prisoner of war he enjoys several rights enforced by international agreement. The Nazi regime realizes they will not easily be able to execute Jewish prisoners of war without violating numerous international conventions and treaties and they therefore simply release the prisoners of war back into the Polish populace after Poland has been conquered. Vladek is no longer a prisoner of war and, as a private citizen, is now subject to the full anti-Semitic persecution of the Nazi Reich. Once released Vladek uses several ruses and takes enormous risks to travel across Poland to his home city. Although the entire suite of Holocaust atrocities is not yet fully evident, Vladek is aware of many signs of the coming terror.



Chapter Four - The Noose Tightens

Chapter Four - The Noose Tightens Summary

Artie visits his father and they discuss Vladek's life's experiences. Vladek mentions that much of the deportation process was managed by Jewish police—Nazi collaborators who gained some temporary advantage by working against their own people. Artie appears surprised that anyone would do such a thing, but Vladek appears to take it as a matter of course.

Vladek fortunately arrives in Bielsko and lives in a house with eleven other Jews, including Richieu, his son, Anja, his wife, Anja's parents (Anja's mother is named Matka) and grandparents, Anja's sister Tosha and her husband Wolfe and baby Bibi. Also living in the house are Lolek and Lonia, the children of Anja's brother Herman and his wife Helen. Herman and Helen have been traveling in the United States of America when the war erupted and thus cannot return home.

The group of relatives lives as best they are able as the Nazi terror continues to mount. Vladek pursues various odd jobs and black market opportunities which allow him to bring home small amounts of food and money. The Nazis begin to gather and deport Jews. Vladek works in a tin shop and continues to make various black market deals. The Nazis round up and deport more Jews and then finally relocate all Bielsko Jews into a ghetto and begin to hang participants in the black market economy. Vladek and others make and use bunkers—hiding spaces where they can escape Nazi inspections. Over the course of several weeks about ten thousand Jews are selected and deported, including Vladek's father and sister and her small children.

After talking with his father, Artie then holds a brief private discussion with Mala. Mala briefly relates her own story—she, too, had survived the Nazi Holocaust and her internment in Auschwitz-Birkenau. Artie then searches the house for his mother's diary but cannot find it.

Chapter Four - The Noose Tightens Analysis

Chapter Four begins to detail the descent into the horror of the Nazi-perpetrated Holocaust. Hundreds of Jews are executed, thousands are deported, and tens of thousands are stripped of their wealth and real property, denigrated, beaten, and forced to live in ghettos. As bad as this situation appears, it is simply the beginning of a prolonged assault on humanity, directed at the Jews, by the insane Nazi regime.

Vladek and Artie's discussion of Jewish police is interesting. Vladek explains that some Jews collaborated with the Nazis—even locating hiding Jews and turning them over for execution—in order to gain some temporary advantage or privilege. Other Jews worked publicly to try and assist the Jewish cause, but most simply tried to survive on vanishingly small food allotments and insufficient living quarters. Meanwhile the local

non-Jewish Polish community, in general, passively cooperated with the Nazi atrocities simply by not resisting. Some few Poles actively participated in the persecution and some tried to assist Jews as they were able—for this reason, Artie's use of pigs to represent Poles is appropriate as it demonstrates their essentially selfish behavior during the period.

Anja kept a journal of events during the war years but that document was destroyed or lost. After the war she created an apparently extensive diary which included her life story and a chronicle of her experiences during the war. It is this post-war diary which Artie searches for throughout the middle chapters of Part I, as he desires to add his mother's story to the graphic text.



Chapter Five - Mouse Holes

Chapter Five - Mouse Holes Summary

Artie again visits his father. Vladek and Mala continue to argue about everything. Mala privately tells Artie that Vladek recently found and read one of Artie's previously-published comic books entitled *Prisoner on the Hell Planet - A Case History*. The comic, non-fictional and autobiographical—is presented as an in-line reprint and relates in very terse detail how Anja had committed suicide and briefly describes the emotional aftermath of her suicide. Artie also learns that his mother's diaries have still not been located. Vladek then begins to recount his life story.

In 1943 Vladek and all of the Jews of Sosnowiec are forcibly deported to Srodula, a small nearby village. The village is surrounded by barbed-wire and armed guards and serves as an initial Jewish ghetto. Vladek and his nephew Lolek work in a wood shop. Vladek and his family use their money and influence to secure the transfer of Tosha, Wolfe, BiBi, Lonia, and Richieu to Zawiercie—a ghetto this is perceived as a more secure location. They will later learn that Tosha poisoned herself and all of the children to avoid the gas chambers—thus, Vladek and Anja never again see their firstborn child.

Vladek and Anja make bunkers and often hide in them to avoid deportation. Most of Anja's family are eventually caught and deported. After Anja's parents are sent to Auschwitz, Vladek obtains a job repairing shoes. They continue to survive and hide through many rounds of deportation, at one point eating wood shavings to ease their hunger pangs. Many Jews are killed in various arbitrary ways, and many, many more are deported to Auschwitz. Finally deeming Srodula to be untenable, Vladek and Anja disguise themselves as Poles and sneak away, intending to return to Sosnowiec.

After talking about his history, Vladek begins to wonder why he ever married Mala. Vladek complains that all Mala desires is to obtain his money. Meanwhile, Artie considers his father to be a very difficult and annoying man.

Chapter Five - Mouse Holes Analysis

Chapter Five derives its title—*Mouse Holes*—from the depictions of the various bunkers built and used by Vladek and others. The bunkers were used as hiding places while the Nazis performed roundups and deportations—if one could escape deportation, one could survive a few more days. Following a now-familiar pattern, Artie visits his father and uses a tape recorder to obtain another chronological segment of his father's life's history. Mala recounts how Vladek recently read Artie's previous comic book.

Prisoner on the Hell Planet - A Case History, is a comic within the comic. Like the primary graphic text, the short comic is non-fictional and autobiographical and briefly relates the events surrounding Anja's suicide. The comic was, in fact, previously published in a serial and is re-printed in its entirety within the graphic text. The artwork is

notably different from the artwork surrounding it; the brief comic has a very stark presentation with sharp lines and heavy, black panels. Even the page borders are black instead of white. The individuals within the brief comic are presented as humans instead of animals and the entire texture and tone of the shorter piece is remarkably different from those of the longer graphic text. Mala comments that the comic is incredibly personal.

Vladek relates how he and Anja, nearly alone among all of their friends and family, manage to avoid the routine deportations and murders, eventually remaining as two of only a very few living Jews in the area. They then sneak off to Sosnowiec where they intend to attempt to hide. One lower panel on page 127 is particularly interesting—it shows Vladek and Anja walking along a road through the countryside; the roadway's winding arms are in the shape of a giant swastika. The particularly effective illustration indicates that the Nazi presence was in every shadow and loomed over everything.



Chapter Six - Mouse Trap

Chapter Six - Mouse Trap Summary

Artie makes another visit to his father's home. Mala complains to Artie of Vladek's incredible self-centeredness, his stinginess, and his need to be controlling; Artie is largely sympathetic as he also feels that Vladek is a difficult man. Artie then speaks privately with Vladek and they talk about the graphic text; Vladek suggests that Artie should spend his time drawing comic books that would make money, and he then complains at some length about Mala's behavior, suggesting that she only cares about money. He then continues narrating his life's story.

Vladek and Anja travel to Sosnowiec and manage to survive for several weeks hiding in the town. They sneak around and spend the nights in the open or sheltering in outbuildings or tunnels, often living with rats and filth, and always hungry. Other Jews survive by hiding in garbage pits. Vladek eventually hears of some smugglers who can transport them from Poland to Hungary. Vladek meets with his friend Mandelbaum and Mandelbaum's nephew Abraham. They travel to meet the smugglers who offer to transport them for a huge payment.

Vladek and Mandelbaum are cautious and hold a discussion in Yiddish. Abraham determines to go and tells them he will write them a letter upon his successful voyage to Hungary. Within several days they receive a letter from Abraham which purports to confirm that the smugglers have indeed transported him to Hungary. Vladek, Anja, Mandelbaum, and others then pay the smugglers who betray them and hand them over to the Nazi authorities. Vladek and Anja are imprisoned, transported to Oswiecim, and then sent into Auschwitz.

Vladek and Artie then go outside where Vladek confesses to Artie that long ago he destroyed Anja's diaries. After Anja's suicide Vladek had become so depressed that he wanted to eliminate any remembrance of the Holocaust. Thus he destroyed Anja's diaries and many photographs. Artie is enraged and viciously accuses Vladek of murder before leaving.

Chapter Six - Mouse Trap Analysis

Chapter Six derives its title—Mouse Trap—from the false representations of escape to freedom made by the Polish smugglers. Abraham, Mandelbaum, and Vladek agree, in Yiddish, to a plan which appears foolproof—Abraham will go first and upon successful escape will write a letter. The letter arrives and appears to be authentic; it is written in Yiddish, posted from Hungary, and signed by Abraham. Thus emboldened, Vladek and Mandelbaum attempt the escape only to be betrayed and captured by the Nazis. Within a few days they find themselves passing under the menacing and infamous gates of Auschwitz.



An additional significant development in Chapter Six involves Vladek's confession that he deliberately destroyed Anja's diaries. He states that he did not read them beyond the opening page which stated Anja had written them for Artie because she felt he would one day find them valuable; Vladek's actions are like a slap in the face to Artie—he has long desired to hear part of his mother's story and now realizes that Vladek has ensured this will never be. Although Vladek's actions are excusable and intelligible, Artie hatefully accuses him of being a murderer. The accusation is clearly symbolic; Anja committed suicide—but Vladek has killed Artie's only possibility of getting to know his mother.

The constant conflict between Vladek and Mala is also repeated throughout the chapter, as it has been throughout nearly all of the chapters in the graphic text. Their relationship is clearly difficult and not likely to proceed for long without serious upheaval. Chapter Six concludes Part I of the graphic text. Artie's realization that he will never learn much about his mother's life serves as a starkly depressing ending within the tale of overwhelming trauma and sadness.



Chapter One - Mauschwitz

Chapter One - Mauschwitz Summary

Artie and Françoise discuss the graphic text and Artie ponders how he should represent Françoise. She argues for representation as a mouse but he notes that she is French. She counters that she has converted to Judaism—in any event, she is portrayed as a mouse. Vladek later telephones Artie and informs him that Mala has left him; Vladek forcefully requests that Artie come and stay with him for awhile. Artie agrees and thus he and Françoise engage on a long automobile trip. During the drive Artie complains that his father is particularly difficult and states that he does not want to go and does not want to stay long. Françoise is more sympathetic but also admits that Vladek is trying. Artie then speculates about his graphic text and worries that his book will be pretentious. He worries that Vladek will be perceived as a monster or, worse, as simply a stereotype. Artie then confesses to Françoise that he feels worthless and invalid because he did not survive the Auschwitz death camps—he feels a sibling rivalry with his dead older brother.

When Artie and Françoise arrive at Vladek's house a prolonged and stressful encounter ensues which is full of argument and emotion. Vladek claims that Mala left him because he refused to give her all of his money. While Françoise goes over Vladek's finances, he and Artie take a walk and Vladek relates more of his life's experiences.

Vladek and Anja are sent to Auschwitz where they are stripped naked, shaved, dehumanized, de-loused, beaten, and tattooed—Vladek has 175113, his prisoner's number, tattooed on his forearm. They are then segregated and sent to gender-specific areas within the death camp. Vladek, in good health and strong, is retained in Auschwitz I, primarily a forced-labor camp. Anja, female and frail-looking, is sent to Auschwitz II, or Auschwitz-Birkenau, a vast extermination camp. After some days Vladek meets Abraham. Abraham explains that the Polish smugglers—who understood Yiddish after all—had forced him at gunpoint to write his letter; he was thereafter sent to Auschwitz. Vladek, later, sees the Polish smugglers themselves; no longer useful to the Nazis they, too, have been sent to Auschwitz as prisoners. Like Vladek, Mandelbaum is incarcerated in Auschwitz I and begins to suffer a mental collapse. Vladek takes heroic measures to care for his friend for several weeks until Mandelbaum is killed. Vladek, somewhat fluent in English and Polish, gives the Polish Kapo, a violent inmate overseer who is also incarcerated, English lessons. In return the Kapo ensures preferential treatment and protection for Vladek.

Artie and Vladek continue their walk to a hotel. Vladek insists that they sneak in and pose as hotel guests so they can play Bingo for free. He explains that he often poses as a hotel guest to obtain free services.



Chapter One - Mauschwitz Analysis

The Chapter's title—Mauschwitz—refers to the graphic text's representation of mice as prisoners within Auschwitz and is a play-on-words combination of Maus and Auschwitz. The title is successful in indicating the presentation of Auschwitz is from Artie's understanding of his father's point of view; it is not intended to be authoritative for everyone's experiences. Chapter One is significantly different from the structure of most other chapters because it is nearly divided into half between concerns of the present and the past. Almost all the other chapters have brief pieces of present-tense events but are devoted primarily to the past; Chapter One is about evenly divided between the two—as the introduction to Part II, it serves to begin the transition of the graphic text from the past to the present. Artie will, more and more frequently, insert himself into the text and become a more active participant in the narrative development. Part II is, additionally, a survivor's tale—Vladek and Anja have been captured and imprisoned in Auschwitz and will remain there under death sentence for the remainder of the war.

Chapter One begins with an interesting meta-textual discussion where Artie and Françoise discuss the graphic text's production. This meta-textual narrative element runs throughout the graphic text but is here prominently displayed as it will be, once again, in Chapter Two. One of the most difficult but truthful elements of the narrative centers on Artie's resentment of his father; he does not particularly like him as an individual and considers him to be difficult and obnoxious. Artie takes time to formulate excuses for why his stay must be very short.

Vladek relates his number—175113—and then spends some time postulating on various aspects of numerology associated with the number. Clearly he and other Jews spent huge amounts of time trying to find significance and create meaning from their brutal and horrible experiences, including even reading magical significance into the random digits permanently imprinted upon their flesh. Chapter One is prefaced by a photograph of Richieu and a fairly detailed map of the camp layout of Auschwitz I and Auschwitz II-Birkenau.



Chapter Two - Auschwitz (Time Flies)

Chapter Two - Auschwitz (Time Flies) Summary

Chapter Two begins with Artie—surprisingly now a human wearing a mouse mask—sits at his artist's easel amidst a pile of emaciated human-sized mouse corpses. Flies buzz around as Artie reminisces about Vladek's death in 1982. Artie gives an interview where he does not give a satisfactory apology for the graphic text; he goes to counseling and wonders about his family connection. He feels very small and, in fact, becomes very small—a walking miniature. He returns to the easel and turns on his tape recorder, hearing his father's life's narrative.

Vladek manages to arrange a job in the Auschwitz tin shop—with a job, he will be able to avoid being murdered by the Nazis for longer. He routinely bribes the tin shop foreman to retain him in preference to other more-skilled tin workers. Massive and routine extermination proceed all around him. Vladek learns that Anja has been befriended by a Hungarian woman named Mencie. Mencie has taken an S.S. soldier for a lover and enjoys a substantial improvement in her living conditions—nevertheless, she remains an inmate of the death camp. Mencie knows that Vladek and Anja are in love, and she apparently values the idea of true love surviving through the Holocaust; thus, she does what she can to protect and help Anja.

Occasionally Vladek is sent to Auschwitz II Birkenau to repair the roofs of the barracks. Once in a while he catches sight of Anja and they even exchange brief conversations on occasion. They both manage to survive repeated selections, beatings, and bouts of murders. Vladek finally gets a job in the shoe-repair shop where he is more skilled. He arranges to repair Anja's Kapo's boots which secures Anja the Kapo's preferential treatment. Vladek amasses a huge amount of money through various deals and uses it to pay enormous bribes which allow Anja to secure a transfer to a better location within the death camp. From time to time Vladek performs so-called black work; physical labor which is so demanding that it literally kills most workers. He survives, however, and eventually returns to easier shop work. On one occasion Vladek is sent to repair the tin smokestacks on the crematorium and gas chambers. Several times he hides in the restroom during selections.

Artie then switches off the tape recorder and remembers how he and Françoise had stayed with Vladek after Mala left him—Vladek had nightmares and cried out in his sleep. Artie and Françoise has sat on the porch listening to Vladek's moans. Artie had sprayed insecticide on biting flies to kill them.

Chapter Two - Auschwitz (Time Flies) Analysis

Chapter Two is significantly unique in several ways. First, it alone among the graphic text briefly represents humans as humans wearing animal masks—thus, Artie is drawn

as a human being wearing a mouse mask. There is no discussion about the rationale behind the transition except to note that Artie sits and contemplates his father's distant death. Thus, Artie realizes that he is struggling to move forward, leaving behind the horrible past of trauma engendered by the Holocaust. The distance of time allows Artie to re-humanize people. Soon enough, however, he will return to the past and complete Vladek's story using illustrations of anthropomorphized animals.

Chapter Two also features distinctive artwork in the backgrounds of many panels. Violent images and disturbing vistas have appeared throughout the graphic text—but nowhere near the prevalence depicted in Chapter Two. In one panel, for example, Vladek eats soup next to a pile of emaciated mouse corpses. In another panel, mountains of dead mice are shoveled along toward the crematorium. Accompanying Vladek's memories of the 'cremo building' is a detailed schematic drawing of the building's layout, including the gas chambers and the corpse lift to the cremation ovens. Various violent acts are also illustrated. The tone of the graphic text becomes even more serious and depressing than before as the narrative plumbs the depths of despair and horror created by the foul Nazi regime.

Vladek, in considerable detail, describes how he survived the terror of Auschwitz by taking every advantage possible and by doing whatever was necessary and within his capability. For example, he bribes the tin shop foreman to retain him in preference to more-skilled tin workers—although this ensures Vladek's survival it clearly consigns another Jew to death. Needless to say, commonplace morality and peacetime ethics clearly do not answer the paradigm obtaining in Auschwitz. This is evident in Artie's occasional surprised exclamations that Vladek should have to bribe someone in order for them to behave in a 'civilized' manner. Vladek assures Artie that it was imperative to receive every advantage possible in order to survive just another few days.

Chapter Two also presents the most information about Anja's experiences that exists—all of it delivered through Vladek's narrative. Although he freely admits that his knowledge of Anja's experiences is fragmentary and second-hand, he manages to present a somewhat complete narrative of her experiences. Vladek's recounting serves to highlight Artie's irreplaceable loss of his mother's diaries.



Chapter Three - ...And Here My Troubles Began...

Chapter Three - ...And Here My Troubles Began... Summary

Chapter Three continues with Artie's remembrance of staying with his father after Mala had left him. The next morning Artie, Françoise, and Vladek drive to the local grocery store. Vladek describes some events from Auschwitz on the drive.

The Russian front is rapidly advancing and within a few days the Russian army will overrun Auschwitz. The Nazis therefore evacuate the death camp and Vladek and thousands of other Jews are force-marched for prolonged distances without adequate shoes, clothes, food, or water. Many collapse from exhaustion and are shot by the Nazi guards. Vladek watches one man's death throes after being shot and realizes the contortions are similar to those made by a dog he had seen shot as a youth. The forced march spans about 180 miles of open country and finally ends at Gross-Rosen, a work camp near Breslau, Germany. The next day the survivors board a train—they are crammed into cattle boxcars, about two-hundred men to each car. Vladek happens to have a blanket and he fixes it to meat hooks on the boxcar's ceiling—thus while the other men are packed together below, Vladek can sit on a sort of blanket-hammock—this undoubtedly saves his life. After several hours the train comes to a halt and then, for about one week, the boxcar sits on the tracks exposed to the weather and most of the inhabitants die from starvation, dehydration, and exposure. The Nazis then open the doors and the survivors, only about twenty-five men, throw out the many dead. The train then continues and finally arrives at Dachau, another Nazi extermination camp.

At Dachau lice and typhus are commonplace and inter-inmate violence and fighting escalate. Vladek happens to meet a French political prisoner; since Vladek can speak French the two men become friends. The French prisoner receives occasional food shipments from the Red Cross and shares his meager allotment with Vladek. Soon, however, Vladek sickens from typhus—to use the restroom he must walk across hallways full of corpses and the memory of walking on dead men's heads and bodies will haunt him for the remainder of his life. Eventually he collapses and is sent to the infirmary which he realizes is virtually a death sentence. After several days he finally staggers out of the infirmary when he learns that many prisoners are going to be boarded on a train and presumably sent to the Swiss border to be exchanged for German prisoners of war.

Vladek, Artie, and Françoise arrive at the grocery store. Embarrassed, Artie and Françoise refuse to accompany Vladek inside where he harangues the store manager until he finally accepts the return of numerous opened and partially used grocery items. Vladek emerges triumphant with a sack of new groceries. On the way home, Françoise stops to pick up an African American hitch-hiker and Vladek is outraged—he swears in



Polish and makes numerous racially insulting remarks about the thieving nature of blacks. Françoise is stunned that Vladek, of all people, could be so intolerant and racist—Vladek responds that Françoise is simply naïve about blacks.

Chapter Three - ...And Here My Troubles Began... Analysis

The panel on the bottom of page 239 is particularly interesting—it shows Vladek, Artie, and Françoise driving to the grocery store in the graphic text's 'present tense'; they are traveling through a wooded area where Jewish bodies in camp uniforms are hanging from the trees—clearly for Vladek and Artie the two time periods are blurred and not as distinct as they appear to be.

Vladek and other Jewish survivors of Auschwitz are initially excited to hear the approaching Russian artillery, thinking that it signals their imminent freedom—they have not counted on the unremitting insane hatred of the Nazi regime which diverts effort from the war to continue the genocide of the Jewish peoples. The survivors are massed for a forced-march through winter conditions and—as expected—thousands die of exhaustion and exposure. After surviving months in Auschwitz and the forced march to Gross-Rosen, Vladek and others are packed into cattle boxcars and then the car is idled on the rails for about one week. Miraculously, about twenty-five men of the original two-hundred in Vladek's boxcar actually survive the ordeal of starvation, dehydration, and exposure and these incredible few are shipped finally to Dachau. The Dachau experience is less detailed than the Auschwitz period but the salient details remain the same—the Nazis continue to murder and cremate the Jews.

Vladek eventually falls ill with typhus and suffers a physical collapse. He knows that the so-called infirmary is in reality just a location where Jews are abandoned to die, and he therefore resists being sent there as long as possible. Eventually, however, he is shipped to the infirmary where he is more or less abandoned to death by illness and starvation. Once again beyond all expectation, Vladek not only survives but manages to recoup some meager strength. He leaves the infirmary with the assistance of some friends and they head toward a train—a real passenger train—which will supposedly take them to Switzerland where they will be liberated in exchange for German soldier prisoners of war.

The most significant development in the chapter—perhaps the most interesting development in the entire memoir—occurs when Françoise stops to pick up an African American hitch-hiker. The man is illustrated as a black dog (all Americans are illustrated as dogs). Vladek is appalled that Françoise would willingly assist a black man—he refers to him as 'shvartser' and, in Polish and English, heaps racist abuse upon the man's head. Vladek expects that the man will certainly attempt to rob them but after a brief and uneventful ride the hitch-hiker exits the car with casual thanks. Françoise comments that Vladek—a Holocaust survivor—more than any other individual should surely appreciate the ridiculous illogic of racism; tellingly, Vladek dismisses her

objections as simple naïve opinion. Artie, familiar with his father, dismisses his skewed world view as hopeless.



Chapter Four - Saved

Chapter Four - Saved Summary

Artie and Vladek discuss Vladek's living conditions. Vladek states that Mala has agreed to return and act as his caretaker if he will give her outright a considerable portion of his financial assets. Vladek suggests that Artie be his caregiver but Artie bluntly refuses. Vladek then asks Artie for advice, but Artie declines to offer any. Vladek then angrily denounces Mala as seeking only his money and compares her unfavorably to Anja. Artie then asks Vladek about Anja's history after Auschwitz. Vladek says he does not know the particulars—only that she was evacuated on a forced march several days before him, that she also passed through Gross-Rosen and was then sent on to Ravensbrück and, ultimately, survived. Vladek then remembers more details about his own final liberation.

Vladek and other Jews traveled by train toward the Swiss border. Before reaching the border, however, the train stopped and various people began shouting that the war was over. The Nazis announce that the Jews will be returned to Dachau but confusion is rampant and most of the prisoners dismount the train and begin to wander about. For several days Vladek and a few friends wander in search of food and clothing. Occasional Nazi patrols gather groups of Jews and attempt to return them to Dachau but Vladek and others manage to elude long-term capture. Many random killings take place—primarily executions of Jewish survivors. Finally American soldiers secure the area and Vladek is truly free.

Vladek then remembers that after the war he was reunited with Anja and they moved to Stockholm, Sweden, to await entry into the United States of America. Vladek produces a shoebox full of photographs and gives them to Artie. Artie looks through them—he sees a photograph of Lolek, his cousin—Vladek comments that Lolek had survived the Holocaust. Vladek points out a photograph of Josef—Anja's brother—and says that Anja always felt that Artie strongly resembled Josef. Vladek then provides a terrible accounting of Artie's close relatives. Anja's oldest brother Herman survived the war. Her brothers Levek and Josef, and her sister Tosha, were all murdered. Vladek's father, his sister Fela and her children, and his sisters Zosha and Vадja all died at Auschwitz. Vladek's brothers Marcus and Moses died at Blechamer. Vladek's younger brothers Leon and Pinek survived the war but Leon died shortly thereafter of appendicitis. Thus, Artie has only one surviving maternal uncle and one surviving paternal uncle. They discuss some of the other photographs and Vladek comments that his heart has been giving him trouble.



Chapter Four - Saved Analysis

Chapter Four was the final chapter originally printed in serialized form; Chapter Five initially appeared only after the serialized sections were gathered and republished in volumes. Chapter Four, therefore, was the original 'ending' of the graphic text.

Many of the photographs that Vladek gives to Artie are illustrated in the graphic text—the illustrations depict anthropomorphized mice and are labeled with the names, places, and dates of the individuals—most of the photographs date from after the war, and Vladek despairs that he does not even have photographs of his murdered parents, brothers, sisters, nieces, nephews, and other relatives. Artie's surviving uncles and cousins are apparently more or less strangers to him—not surprising given that he is not particularly close even with his father. Vladek's factually brief litany of his extinguished family is chilling and heart-rending, and the art in this section deserves close attention—particularly the pane-interrupted large illustration of Vladek on page 276.

The discussion between Vladek and Artie about care arrangements and monetary payments continues the depiction of Vladek as a miser. Artie worries that Vladek will appear to be a stereotype rather than a believable character, but notes that Vladek is simply penurious to a fault. Mala's demand for a lump-sum cash payment to return seems absurd at first—but note that in earlier chapters Mala has explained that Vladek doles out an allowance to her with an eyedropper and her demand is more credible, even understandable.

Finally, Vladek's recollection of the confused state of affairs after the official cessation of hostilities is historically interesting. He recalls being willfully denounced by a civilian who clearly expects a reward—but the Nazis are too busy running from the advancing allied army to stop and execute a straggling Jewish survivor. He is caught up a few more times but then left as the Nazis retreat pell-mell. Vladek's liberation is, therefore, fairly uncertain and somewhat protracted.



Chapter Five - The Second Honeymoon

Chapter Five - The Second Honeymoon Summary

Artie sits at his own home and listens to his father's tape recorded voice relate the story of Tosha and how she poisoned the infants in her care, including Richieu, to avoid having them murdered by the Nazis (the story was previously illustrated in Part I, Chapter 4). Artie then remembers how, eventually, Mala had returned to live with Vladek, and how she had one day telephoned him to inform him that Vladek was very sick.

Artie and Françoise travel to Vladek's home where they find him weak and fairly disoriented. Artie briefly speaks to Vladek who remembers that after the war ended he was eventually reunited with Anja and then they went to Stockholm, Sweden, where he worked as a textile salesman for a few years before they were able to emigrate to the United States of America with the assistance of Herman and Helen. In America, Vladek made his living by selling diamonds.

After their brief conversation, Artie takes Vladek to the hospital where he is examined by a doctor and then released to return home, being pronounced as essentially in good health. Artie returns to his own home but, about a month later, again visits Vladek to learn the remainder of Vladek's war-time story. Vladek recalls that after he was liberated he lived near American forces.

He suffers a relapse of typhus and is hospitalized. He learns he also suffers from diabetes. After being discharged from the hospital he performs odd jobs, earns money, and regains his health. He lives in a local house until the owners return and demand he leave. He drifts through various displaced-person camps and mails letters to various destinations seeking information about Anja or other relatives or friends.

After some weeks he decides to travel back to Sosnowiec—however, he is advised against it. He learns that Jews returning to Sosnowiec find their houses occupied and their stores and factories appropriated by Poles. He hears that Jews are beaten and that one Holocaust survivor was even hanged after attempting to reclaim his home. He instead travels to Hannover by train. On the way he passes through Nuremberg and Würzburg and notes the cities were destroyed by allied bombing. Vladek feels joy when he sees the discomfited German survivors grubbing for existence among the rubble.

Meanwhile Anja has survived and returns to Sosnowiec where she lives with a few surviving relatives. In despair she consults a gypsy fortuneteller who supplies her with an incredibly accurate foretelling of coming events. Soon after, she receives a letter from Vladek with a photograph. She writes back and Vladek rushes to Sosnowiec to meet her—they are finally joyfully reunited.



Vladek concludes his war-time history and tells Artie he has grown tired. The graphic text closes with Vladek in bed mistakenly—and touchingly—calling Artie 'Richieu' and saying he has told enough stories; the final illustration is of a headstone engraved with Vladek and Anja's birth and death dates.

Chapter Five - The Second Honeymoon Analysis

Chapter Five's structure varies considerably from the fairly straightforward chronology of previous chapters. For example, Artie and Vladek have a brief discussion where Vladek outlines in broad detail his life after the suspension of armed conflict. Several weeks later they have another conversation where Vladek provides more details about the same period, which was also touched on in Chapter Four. This triple repetition gives weight and significance to Vladek's post-war experiences—not only did he and Anja survive the Holocaust, they had productive and meaningful lives afterward, despite their horrific experiences. Vladek also narrates some of Anja's experiences and they are presented almost as if Anja were the narrator. It is interesting to note that the gypsy fortuneteller is illustrated as a gypsy moth. The fortuneteller's recounting of events and predictions of the future are entirely correct—one wonders if she were prescient or if Vladek's recounting of Anja's memory is altered to fit the circumstances.

Vladek's post-war experiences continue to be confusing. Trains do not run because the rails have been bombed away, water within the cities is practically unobtainable, and Vladek sees people living on—literally—piles of fragmented rock. Various murders and random acts of violence continue and Vladek apparently spends a considerable amount of time just wandering around. When he is with the American soldiers things seem well but beyond their influence society rapidly deteriorates and becomes chaotic. For example, Vladek travels with his friend and they arrange a definitive meeting place and time. Vladek leaves for just a few minutes and when he comes back his friend has vanished with all the belongings—Vladek never hears from or of him again. It is very unlikely that his friend simply robbed him, and one wonders what could have become of Vladek's friend.

The chapter includes an actual reproduction of a real photograph of Vladek; the picture shows Vladek as a Holocaust survivor. His gaze is piercing and stunning, the photograph magnificent. One clearly sees the determination and incredible humanity of the forty-year-old man, coupled with the somber horror recalled by his prison inmate garb. It is also interesting to note that Chapter Five was added to the serialized collection at the time of the initial collection into re-printed volumes; the material was written nearly two decades after *Prisoner on the Hell Planet - A Case History* and nearly one decade after Part 1, Chapter One.



Characters

Art (Artie) Spiegelman

Artie is the author, artist, and principle narrator of the graphic text. His presentation is autobiographical and also a family biography, focused on his father's experiences as a Jew in Poland during World War II.

Artie is born in Stockholm, Sweden, in 1948. Shortly after his birth his family emigrates to the United States of America. Artie grows up in Rego Park, New York. As a young man he suffers a short but serious nervous breakdown in 1968, which he refers to in *Prisoner on the Hell Planet - A Case History*, the comic-within-the-comic presented in Part 1, Chapter 5. After being released from the mental hospital Artie lives with his parents, Vladek and Anja Spiegelman until some time after Anja Spiegelman's suicide. As to be expected, Artie is never completely reconciled to Anja's suicide and considers her somewhat of an unknown personage. Later Artie moves out on his own and eventually lives with his girlfriend (later wife) Françoise Mouly.

Artie's relationship with Vladek is strained and difficult. Artie respects and loves, but does not like, his father. He finds Vladek penurious and insulting and believes that Vladek is purposefully unwilling to change. Although Artie spends several days interviewing Vladek to learn his life's story, he does not particularly enjoy spending social time with his father. Artie is not particularly handy with household chores and constantly urges Vladek to hire someone to perform repairs rather than attempting them himself.

Vladek Spiegelman

Vladek Spiegelman is the principle protagonist in the narrative and also acts as an intermediate narrator for most of the material in the book—that is, he narrates his life story to Artie who re-tells Vladek's story, frequently using Vladek's own words.

Vladek is a Jew and a Pole and was born October 11, 1906. He grows up in the small Polish village of Czestochowa where he becomes successful as a textile salesman. He has one prolonged romantic relationship with a girl named Lucia Greenberg but eventually ends that relationship to pursue a relationship with Anja Zylberberg. Vladek and Anja marry on February 14, 1937, and move to Sosnowiec where Vladek enjoys success continuing his career as a textile salesman. Anja's affluent father soon establishes a textile factory for Vladek in Bielsko, a nearby town. Vladek works in Bielsko and lives in Sosnowiec for some time until Anja suffers a nervous breakdown shortly after delivering their first son, Richieu. Vladek accompanies Anja throughout her prolonged recuperation at a sanatorium in Czechoslovakia. After Anja regains her health, Vladek moves the family to Bielsko where they remain until he is drafted on August 24, 1939, at which time Anja returns to Sosnowiec to live with her parents.



Vladek takes part in one firefight where he kills one German soldier and is then captured. He is incarcerated as a prisoner of war for several months and is then discharged back to Poland as a common citizen of the now-occupied country. Vladek manages to sneak home to Sosnowiec where he lives with Anja and her relatives for several months. The family group is slowly broken up by various pogroms and selections. Vladek and Anja eventually send young Richieu away to what they suppose to be a safer environment—it is not, however, and Richieu soon dies. They live in various Jewish ghettos until attempting an escape to Hungary when they are handed over to the Nazis by double-crossing smugglers. Vladek and Anja are then transported to various work camps and on to Auschwitz where they are separated.

Vladek uses all his skills and luck and survives months at Auschwitz even as nearly all of his family and friends are murdered. He then is evacuated from Auschwitz to Dachau where he survives several more weeks of Holocaust until the war finally ends. Vladek is eventually freed and spends several weeks roaming through Germany until he makes his way back to Sosnowiec where he is reunited with Anja who—miraculously—has also survived. They emigrate to Sweden and have a second child, Artie, and then continue on to New York where they settle in Rego Park. About two decades later Anja commits suicide and, much later, Vladek marries Mala. Vladek's generally good health begins to fail with age and he dies on August 18, 1982, at the age of seventy-five.

Anna (Anja) Spiegelman nee Zylberberg

Anja is born March 15, 1912, to Mr. and Matka Zylberberg a very affluent family living in Sosnowiec, Poland. She remains in Sosnowiec until being introduced to Vladek Spiegelman by her cousin. She immediately pursues Vladek and they quickly develop a strong romantic relationship and are married on February 14, 1937—Anja is 24 and Vladek is 30. Their first son, Richieu, is born October 1937 while Vladek works in a nearby town and Anja lives with her parents. After Richieu's birth Anja suffers a brief but serious nervous collapse and spends several weeks, with Vladek, in a Czechoslovakian sanatorium. After her recovery she moves with Vladek to Bielsko.

After Vladek is drafted on August 24, 1939, Anja moves back to Sosnowiec and lives there with her parents until being deported to a Jewish ghetto by the Nazis. Anja and Vladek manage to stay together for several months even as the remainder family group is slowly broken up by various pogroms and selections. Vladek and Anja eventually send young Richieu away to what they supposed to be a safer environment—it is not, however, and Richieu soon died. They live in various Jewish ghettos until attempting an escape to Hungary when they are handed over to the Nazis by double-crossing smugglers. Vladek and Anja are then transported to various work camps and on to Auschwitz where they are separated.

Anja's detailed history becomes rather vague at this point as it is only related second-hand through Vladek's memory. Inside Auschwitz she manages to survive and is befriended by Mancie, a Hungarian inmate who holds some influence through her Nazi lover. Under Mancie's helpful care Anja survives Auschwitz until she is evacuated from



Auschwitz to Ravensbrück where she survives several more weeks of Holocaust until the war finally ends. She then makes her way back to Sosnowiec where she lives with the few surviving members of her family until being reunited with Vladek.

They subsequently emigrate to Sweden and have a second child, Artie, and then continue on to New York where they settle in Rego Park. Anja feels that Artie would perhaps one day be interested in reading about her own experiences and writes them out in a diary. About two decades later Anja becomes increasingly depressed and finally commits suicide on May 21, 1968, at the age of fifty-six. A few years after her suicide, a despondent Vladek destroys the diary, believing it would help him forget the trauma of the past.

Mala Spiegelman

At some point after Anja's suicide in 1968 Mala met and subsequently married Vladek Spiegelman. Little biographical information is given about Mala, even though she is a fairly prominent individual in much of the narrative. Like Vladek, Mala is a Holocaust survivor who spent at least some time in Auschwitz-Birkenau. It is unclear if Mala knew or even met Anja, but given that they were both in Auschwitz-Birkenau at the same time it is possible they were at least acquainted. Mala's concise biography is noted in Part 1, Chapter Four, where she holds a brief conversation with Artie.

Mala appears to be a very typical woman in most respects aside from being incredibly tolerant of Vladek's peculiar form of emotional abuse. She takes care of Vladek and keeps a clean house and cooks good food. She resents Vladek's penurious ways and tries to convince him to allow her to be a more equal partner in their relationship. After many years of frustration, Mala briefly separates from Vladek. When his health begins to fail he asks her to come back. Mala agrees but only if Vladek will unconditionally assign her a large portion of his financial assets. Vladek apparently agrees because Mala returns and cares for him until his death.

Richieu Spiegelman

Vladek and Anja Spiegelman's first child, a boy, Richieu is born during October 1937 and died c. 1941 though the date is not specified in the text. Vladek describes Richieu as a beautiful and intelligent child. Richieu lives with his parents until c. 1940-1941 when they send him to live in Zawiercie under the care of his aunt Tosha. He is sent away because his parents perceive Zawiercie to be a more secure location than their current ghetto. Unfortunately the Nazis eliminate Zawiercie. Hours before being evacuated to Auschwitz, Tosha gathers Richieu, her own daughter, and other infants in her care and mercifully kills them by using poison, thus sparing them the horrors of Nazi brutality and sure execution. Although they obviously never met, Artie feels a complex sibling rivalry with Richieu which is detailed in the graphic text.



Tosha and Wolfe

Tosha is Anja Spiegelman's sister and Wolfe is Tosha's husband. They have a baby, Bibi, and live with Vladek and Anja at Bielsko during 1939. They survive several selections and deportations and then, with a few other family members, leave Bielsko probably c. 1940-1941 for Zawiercie, another ghetto which is incorrectly deemed to be more secure. After prolonged soul-searching, Vladek and Anja decide to send Richieu with Tosha for safekeeping. Soon enough the Nazis begin wholesale deportations from Zawiercie and Tosha realizes that she and the infants in her care will be sent to Auschwitz and gassed. Rather than let them be brutalized and terrorized by the Nazis, Tosha uses poison to kill the infants, including Richieu, and then ends her own life. Wolfe is apparently eventually sent to Auschwitz where he is murdered and cremated. Although Vladek spends several weeks living with Tosha and Wolfe, they are somewhat minor individuals within the narrative structure, primarily significant for being associated with Richieu at the time of his death.

Herman and Helen (Hela)

Herman is Anja Spiegelman's brother and Helen is Herman's wife. They have two children, Lolek and Lonia. Herman and Helen are vacationing in the United States of America when Germany invades Poland and thus spend the entire war in the safety and relative comfort of America. Unfortunately their children remain in Poland and are thus not spared the horrors of Nazi Germany. Herman and Helen are minor individuals within the narrative structure, primarily significant in their post-war sponsorship of the immigration of Vladek, Anja, and Artie. Toward the conclusion of the graphic text, Vladek gives Artie a box of photographs and some of them depict Herman and Helen, whose name is given on the photographs as Hela.

Lolek and Lonia

The children of Herman and Helen, Lolek and Lonia remain in Poland while their parents travel to the United States of America. When the war erupts their parents remain abroad and thus Lolek and Lonia must face the Holocaust on their own. The infant Lonia is poisoned by Tosha to be spared Nazi brutalization. Lolek is eventually interned in Auschwitz where he periodically works alongside of Vladek. Lolek miraculously survives the Holocaust and eventually emigrates to the United States of America where he rejoins his parents.

Mancie

Mancie is a Hungarian woman who is interned in Auschwitz-Birkenau. Little biographical information is given about her though her role in Anja's survival is an apparently critical one. Mancie is young, strong, beautiful, tall, clever, and blonde. In the concentration camp she somehow takes a lover from among the Nazi guards—Vladek refers to him as



"an S.S. man" (p. 212). This allows Mencie to receive preferential treatment and better food.

Mencie apparently befriends Anja after learning that Anja's husband has also survived—Mencie finds the idea of true love within the Holocaust irresistible and takes personal risks to allow Anja and Vladek to periodically converse and to send each other small items of care and occasional letters. After the war Vladek and Anja make several attempts to contact Mencie or learn about her but are never able to discover any additional facts.

Abraham and Mandelbaum

Mandelbaum is a friend of Vladek and Abraham is Mandelbaum's nephew. Abraham and Mandelbaum, like Vladek and Anja, manage to avoid the various deportations and survive in hiding in the Sosnowiec area even after the Nazis close out the various local ghettos. They then, along with Vladek, meet with some Polish smugglers who offer to transport them all to Hungary for a huge sum. Mandelbaum and Vladek are cautious and decline the offer but Abraham is intent upon taking his chances at escape.

Abraham and Mandelbaum evolve a plan, speaking in Yiddish to supposedly avoid being understood by the smugglers. Abraham will write a letter upon achieving freedom, and this will signal to Mandelbaum that the smugglers have kept their bargain. Abraham thus goes off with the smugglers. Within a few weeks an authentic-looking letter arrives, with Abraham's signature, stating that he is doing well and has arrived at his anticipated location. Mandelbaum, Vladek, Anja, and others then accompany the smugglers. The smugglers double-cross them, however, and hand them over to the Nazis who transport them to Auschwitz.

Mandelbaum and Vladek meet Abraham again in Auschwitz. He explains that the smugglers understood Yiddish after all, and after betraying him to the Nazis held a gun to his head and dictated the letter which he wrote and sent. In Auschwitz Mandelbaum does not fare well—his pants are enormously oversized and his shoes are completely inadequate. He walks around trying to hold on his clothes in search of shoes as his spoon and bowl are stolen. Vladek manages to acquire a belt and new shoes for Mandelbaum who views the assistance as a form of divine intervention of kindness.

Both Mandelbaum and Abraham are eventually murdered and cremated. Vladek does not know the details, but he believes that a guard took Mandelbaum's cap and threw it several feet away and then commanded Mandelbaum to retrieve it. When Mandelbaum went to retrieve the cap the guard shot him and claimed he was trying to escape—thus earning a few days on leave as a reward. As a final ironic judgment, Vladek notes that the Polish smugglers are also interned in Auschwitz where they die—once their usefulness to the Nazis ends they are consigned to death as common criminals.



Objects/Places

Czestochowa

Czestochowa is a small Polish city near the German border and north of Sosnowiec. Vladek Spiegelman lives in Czestochowa, where he was also born, prior to becoming engaged to Anja Zylberberg. Czestochowa is in the portion of Poland which was transferred to Reich-governance during the Nazi occupation.

Sosnowiec

Sosnowiec is a Polish city near the German border and west of Krakow. Vladek Spiegelman moves to Sosnowiec after his marriage to Anja Zylberberg, and there conducts a successful textile business for several months. Vladek and Anja move away from Sosnowiec for a brief period but eventually return and remain until they are deported to Auschwitz. After surviving the Holocaust, Vladek and Anja are reunited in Sosnowiec. Sosnowiec, a major setting within the text, is in the portion of Poland which was transferred to Reich-governance during the Nazi occupation.

Bielsko

Bielsko is a small Polish city near the German border and south of Sosnowiec. Vladek Spiegelman establishes a textile factory in Bielsko immediately before the outbreak of World War II, and temporarily spends his time between working in Bielsko and returning home to Sosnowiec on the weekends until eventually moving with his family to Bielsko for a brief period of time. Vladek lives in Bielsko when Nazi Germany invades Poland and he is drafted into the Polish armed forces. Bielsko is in the portion of Poland which was transferred to Reich-governance during the Nazi occupation and is very close to the site of Auschwitz.

Srodula

Srodula is a small village on the outskirts of Sosnowiec which is used as a ghetto to house deported Jews prior to their transportation to Auschwitz. Vladek and Anja Spiegelman live for several weeks in Srodula. Vladek describes it as small, extremely crowded, and very poor. In the illustrations, Srodula is surrounded by barbed-wire fences and armed guards. Srodula, like Zawiercie and other Jewish ghettos, is eventually evacuated by the Nazis and all occupants sent to their deaths at various concentration camps.



Bunkers

During the Nazi occupation of Poland many Jews manufactured hiding places which are generically referred to as bunkers. The bunkers were disguised in numerous clever ways and were intended to provide minimal—often tiny—areas in which individuals or small groups could hide during Nazi inspections. Several bunkers are described and illustrated in detail and the ingenuity used in their construction and operation is a testament to the intelligence and desire to survive demonstrated by Vladek and other Jews. In fact, Vladek insists on instructing Artie how to build and disguise a bunker just in case the knowledge might ever prove necessary for survival.

Prisoner on the Hell Planet - A Case History

Prisoner on the Hell Planet - A Case History is a concise non-fictional and autobiographical comic strip which consists of several pages. It details the events surrounding the suicide of Anja Spiegelman and briefly discusses the emotional aftermath. The comic book was originally printed in a serial and is reprinted in its entirety within the graphic text. It is noteworthy for having an entirely distinct texture and tone which sets it markedly apart from the remainder of the graphic text and for being the first portion of Spiegelman's autobiographical graphic text published. The style of illustration used is markedly different from the remainder of the graphic text.

Jews

In the graphic text, Jews are initially represented by mice. This representation indicates that within the historical context of the text the Jewish people are weak and helpless victims to the Germans, represented by cats. Representing Jews as mice also satirizes the Nazi portrayal of Jews as vermin. Jews are, of course, the major focus of the graphic text.

Poles

In the graphic text, Poles are initially represented by pigs. Pigs are typically viewed as selfish and brutal animals and within the historical context of the text, particularly from the Jewish perspective; many Poles were far more interested in self-preservation than in questions of morality. Poles appear with great frequency in the graphic text.

Germans

In the graphic text, Germans are initially represented by cats. This representation clearly indicates an unquestioned physical superiority over the Jews, represented by mice, as well as suggesting a cruel malevolence. Germans appear with great frequency in the graphic text.



Americans

In the graphic text, Americans are initially represented by dogs. Dogs, often viewed as loyal, friendly, strong, and dumb, are an apt animal to represent the Americans who were also victorious over the Germans, represented by cats. Americans appear a few times in the graphic text.

French

In the graphic text, French people are initially represented by frogs. Aside from an obvious play on words, the frog indicates that the French are slippery and not entirely trustworthy. It is interesting to note that Françoise, Artie's girlfriend, is French but is illustrated as a mouse instead of a frog. The French appear only a few times in the graphic text. Vladek meets one fellow inmate who is a Frenchman and the two become friends because Vladek can speak French.

British

In the graphic text, British individuals are initially represented by fish. Fish are representative of the island nature of the Britain. Fish are also often the desired, but generally unobtainable, prey of cats, representing the Germans. Only two British soldiers appear in the graphic text, and they are illustrated only in a single pane.

Swedes

In the graphic text, Swedes are initially represented by deer. This representation indicates a peaceful but timid nature for Sweden, a country that remained neutral during the war. Swedes appear in only a few panes in the graphic text—they are depicted around Vladek and Anja in Stockholm where they briefly live after the war.

Themes

The Holocaust

The central theme and dominant feature of the graphic text is the Nazi-perpetrated Holocaust, the genocide of Jews and other minority groups of Europe and North Africa. The most-commonly cited figure for the number of Jewish victims murdered is six million, though estimates range from five to seven million. In addition, millions of other minorities were also murdered. Roughly three million of the Jewish victims were Poles; an additional three million non-Jewish Poles were also murdered. The Holocaust is sometimes defined as limited to the genocide of the Jews but many consider it to include the mass genocide of all targeted groups. Thus the most inclusive definition places the total number of Holocaust victims at nine to eleven million with some estimates as high as twenty-six million.

The Holocaust was characterized by a systematic attempt to efficiently assemble and murder as many people as possible. All of the resources and technologies of the Nazi regime were used to accomplish this vile purpose. Various methods of execution were used as the Holocaust developed, ranging from massed shootings to imprisonment to starvation to mass gassing and cremation. In addition to murder, Holocaust victims were routinely subjected to cruel and inhumane practices including starvation, torture, and enforced physical labor—a policy known as 'extermination through work.' Children were singled out for rapid execution—Vladek relates how on at least one occasion Nazis murdered children by swinging them by their legs and dashing their heads against stone walls.

For many, death came inside of concentration camps such as Auschwitz, Auschwitz-Birkenau, Dachau, Gross-Rosen, and Ravensbrück. Conditions within the camps were characterized by starvation, rampant disease, beatings, torture, and forced labor. The situation was so dire that many inmates welcomed death as a release. As allied armies would approach various concentration camps the Nazis would evacuate them and force the few surviving inmates on death marches for hundreds of miles, often through winter conditions. The Holocaust is usually understood to encompass the entire period of genocide from roughly November 1938 through the end of the war in 1945.

Generational Trauma

The author and artist appears as the meta-textual narrator within the graphic text and frequently expresses apprehension about trying to express the inexpressible. Within the text Vladek and Mala represent the point of view of Holocaust survivors while Artie represents someone who did not experience the Holocaust but is still deeply connected to it; the text is manifestly a reaction of a non-survivor because of generational trauma.



Vladek and Anja survive the Holocaust but are unable to escape the trauma. They are left devoid of parents, siblings, friends, and even the context of their culture and society. Vladek starts a successful textile business in Poland but ends up selling diamonds in America. Anja and Vladek have a child taken from them; although Artie is a comfort he does not fill the void left by Richieu. Anja eventually seeks to escape the trauma of Holocaust by committing suicide. Her act reverberates throughout Artie's life and he feels somehow responsible; Vladek also feels somehow responsible. Vladek survives but remains colored by his experiences—he salvages garbage because it might prove useful, and he returns opened and partially used groceries because they are still edible. To Vladek, money is literally life—too many times having a bribe was literally life-saving—and he refuses to willingly part with any amount of money that can be squirreled away.

Artie receives generational trauma from the Holocaust; he is largely estranged from his extended family. He has at least two uncles and a few cousins who survived the Holocaust but apparently is nearly completely unacquainted with them. Even his relationship with his father is strained and distant and Artie would rather pay someone to assist his father than assist him in person. For example, Artie often says that spending time with Vladek is very distasteful. This same generational trauma is paralleled by the offspring of tens of thousands of other survivors which is hinted at through various mechanisms within the text, particularly when Vladek and Artie look through a box of photographs of cousins and Vladek enumerates the familial aftermath of genocide.

Families

The central narrative unit which survived the Holocaust was the family. Vladek carefully notes the familial relationship of his relatives; he even notes how several friends were related to each other. Vladek's narrative is essentially constructed around the chronology of loss of family members. He does not dwell often on individual suffering but instead focuses on the events surrounding the loss of some friend. For example, instead of focusing on how he personally survived several months of abuse at Auschwitz he focuses on Mandelbaum's plight—Vladek's success was not so much surviving as being able to help Mandelbaum survive. Vladek simultaneously realizes that personal survival is a complex moral issue and he fairly easily dismisses moralistic judgments about individual actions. For example, when Artie expresses outrage that relatives expected payment from Vladek to assist him, Vladek ignores Artie's discomfort and states the facts of the time—if one did not demand payment, one would surely die through unremunerated self-sacrifice.

The graphic text's theme of generational trauma is included solely because Artie exists, indeed the entire text exists, because Artie creates it, and Artie is the product of the family unit miraculously persisting through the Holocaust. Even as millions are murdered, Vladek strives to survive and takes enormous personal risks to help Anja survive. The Hungarian woman Mancie is central to Anja's survival and befriends and assists her because Anja and Vladek represent to Mancie something which she values but cannot obtain—a persisting true love; a viable family which will transcend the

Holocaust. Mencie, the inmate lover of an S.S. guard, realizes her future is impossibly complicated but nevertheless strives to assure the future family of Anja.

The extension of the family theme focuses on Artie's relationship with Françoise Mouly, his girlfriend (and later wife). As Anja and Vladek pass from the scene Artie continues the Spiegelman family by bonding to Françoise; he also notes that one cousin—Lolek—survived, and his uncle Pinek survived and has married and has children. Thus, the generational family transcends the Holocaust even as it struggles with the generational trauma caused by the genocide.

Style

Point of View

The graphic text is presented in the first-person, limited, point of view which is naturally appropriate for an autobiographic and biographical memoir. Artie Spiegelman, the artist and author, appears in the text as a meta-textual narrator. He spends several days interviewing Vladek Spiegelman, his father, about Vladek's experiences surviving the Holocaust and its aftermath. The point of view utilized gives the work an incredibly personal tone and lends it an immediacy that transcends the historical nature of World War II and gives a compelling personal horror to the genocide of millions. Indeed, the text's point of view is vital to its success and contributes materially to the accessibility and power of the narrative.

Within Artie's first-person narrative, Vladek acts as a secondary narrative in a very complex structure of autobiographical biography. That is, each typical segment of the text begins with Artie as the primary individual. Artie travels through a 'present tense' narrative to visit his father and engage him in discussion. The discussions nearly invariably begin with 'current event' happenings in Vladek's life—his relationship with Mala, his failing health, or his monetary situation—and then proceed to a discussion of Vladek's prior experiences. Vladek's Holocaust narratives are usually presented as if he were the narrator, even though the events are secondarily related by Artie. The 'present tense' events occasionally interrupt Vladek's historical narrative when Artie asks pertinent questions or interjects to chronologically direct the conversation. This is further complicated by the fact that the meta-textual narrative and textual writing and illustration happen after Vladek's death but are generally reported in the present tense as if they were happening as related. This subtle and complicated chronological structure is made easily intelligible in the comic medium—illustrations unequivocally establish time and place. Furthermore, the 'present tense' events are related in a more-or-less chronological sequence. Artie routinely and effectively reveals Vladek's narrative in a fairly chronological manner.

Setting

The graphic text encompasses a vast number of settings ranging through several countries and across many decades. However, within this myriad of locations three locations emerge as primarily significant.

The first primary location is Sosnowiec, Poland. Sosnowiec is described by Vladek as a fairly typical small Polish city; it lies near the German-Poland-Czechoslovakia border. Prior to the war Vladek, Anja, and Anja's extended family live in or near to Sosnowiec. After Vladek is initially captured by the Nazis Anja returns to Sosnowiec; after Vladek's parole he also returns to Sosnowiec. The extended family then remains in Sosnowiec or one of its ghettos until being deported to Auschwitz. After surviving the Holocaust,



Vladek and Anja return to Sosnowiec where they meet with a few surviving relatives before emigrating to Sweden and, later, the United States of America.

The second major setting is the concentration camp of Auschwitz and Auschwitz-Birkenau. Vladek usually refers to them together by the simple name of Auschwitz, and the illustrations of Vladek's arrival and departure through the infamous gates inscribed Arbeit Macht Frei ("work shall make you free") makes it clear that Vladek was imprisoned in what is today generally referred to as Auschwitz I. He notes that Anja was imprisoned in what is often referred to as Auschwitz II or Auschwitz-Birkenau. Although Vladek does not provide dates—when Artie presses him for an exact chronology he sarcastically notes "in Auschwitz we didn't [sic] wear watches" (p. 228)—he likely arrived in Auschwitz in 1941 and was later evacuated in 1944. He notes that Anja arrived at the same time but was evacuated several days or weeks before he left.

The third prominent setting is Rego Park, New York. This is the neighborhood in Queens where Vladek and Anja settle after immigrating to America. Vladek lives in the same house in Rego Park from c. 1950 until his death in 1982. Anja commits suicide in the house and Artie grows up in the house and neighborhood. The opening prologue of the text takes place in the neighborhood of Rego Park and the opening and closing segments of nearly every chapter occur in that setting.

Language and Meaning

The graphic text is presented in simple language which is accessible and intelligible. The predominant language used is English though a very few lines of dialogue are delivered in Yiddish or Polish. However, the non-English dialogue is accompanied by an English translation. The non-dialogue portions of the text are delivered in grammatically correct but simple structures. Much of the dialogues is delivered in grammatically incorrect or awkward construction reminiscent of a non-native speaker's use of the language. For example, Vladek's construction is typically difficult—"So... let's stop, please, your tape recorder... I'm tired from talking, Richieu, and it's enough stories for now..." (p. 296).

The graphic illustrations accompanying the relatively simple language allow for a rich and Pulitzer-Prize-winning presentation full of texture and tone which would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to present in a traditional text-only memoir. The extended allegorical presentation of cultural identification through the use of anthropomorphized animals is one of the text's defining highlights and creates an inferred meaning beyond any possible textual construction. The portrayal of the gallant Vladek as a mouse—a maus—effectively dispels completely the Nazi-inferred inferiority of race and unequivocally dismisses the vile Nazi concept of racial inequality.

Structure

The first published portion of the graphic text originally appeared as a brief stand-alone comic strip. The initial segment was subsequently joined by expanded materials which

were published serially in volumes. The individual volumes were thereafter collected into two works, or 'parts' and republished with some additional information as a two-part graphic text. The two parts were sold singly and as a boxed set. Finally, the two parts were collected into a single graphic text with one additional concluding chapter—the collection is summarized here. The original two-part division (as well as the original serially-divided volumes) is retained within the republished collected work. Several editions and reprints of most formats have been issued including soft-cover and hardcover printings. It is thus possible to find variations in page count and overall page numbering depending upon which edition or reprint is consulted. The differences, however, are minor and all editions and reprints contain essentially identical textual and graphic information.

The graphic text is produced in black and white line drawing and each page generally follows a typical multi-panel layout with panels being usually read from left to right and top to bottom. Occasional larger illustrations, including several full-page illustrations, and illustrations which span or break through traditional framing, interrupt the general multi-panel layout. The pagination and organization are very straightforward and are clearly intended to assist with easy access to the material. Although the black and white presentation gives, at first, a fairly monotonous appearance to the visual page, it does allow for a large amount of fine detail within the illustration and conveys a somber tone to the work.



Quotes

"[Vladek:] 'Friends? Your friends?... If you lock them together in a room with no food for a week... ..then you could see what it is, friends!...' (Prologue - Rego Park, N.Y.C. 1958, p. 6)

"[Vladek:] 'Come—we'll talk while I pedal... It's good for my heart, the pedaling. But, tell me, how is it by you? How is going the comics business?'

"[Artie:] 'I still want to draw that book about you... The one I used to talk to you about... About your life in Poland, and the war.'

"[Vladek:] 'It would take many books, my life, and no one wants anyway to hear such stories.'

"[Artie:] 'I want to hear it. Start with mom... Tell me how you met.'

"[Vladek:] 'Better you should spend your time to make drawings what will bring you some money... But, if you want, I can tell you... I lived then in Czestochowa, a small city not far from the border of Germany... I was in textiles—buying and selling—I didn't make much, but always I could make a living.'" (Part I - Chapter 1, p. 14)

"[Vladek:] 'By October 1937, the factory was going, and it was born my first son, Richieu. [...] Of course, you never knew him. He didn't come out from the war.'

"[Artie:] 'Yes, I know... But wait—if you were married in February, and Richieu was born in October, was he premature?'

"[Vladek:] 'Yes, a little... But you—after the war, when you were born—it was very premature. The doctors thought you wouldn't live. I found a specialist what saved you... he had to break your arm to take you out from Anja's belly! And whenever you were a tiny baby your arm always jumped up, like so! We joked and called you "Heil Hitler!" Always we pushed your arm down...'" (Part I - Chapter 2, p. 32)

"[Vladek:] '...always I went to sleep exhausted. And one night I had a dream... A voice was talking to me. It was, I think, my dead grandfather...'

"[Voice:] 'Don't worry... ..don't worry, my child... You will come out of this place—free! ...on the day of Parshas Truma.'

"[Vladek:] 'I woke up right away. And when I went to sleep, again it was: "Parshas Truma! Parshas Truma!'

"[Artie:] 'So what's Parshas Truma?'

"[Vladek:] 'Each week, on Saturday, we read a section from the Torah. This is so called—a Parsha... and one week each year it is Parshas Truma. Before work a few from us prayed. It was a Rabbi there with us.'

"[Vladek:] 'One moment, Rabbi. When will we read Parshas Truma?'

"[Rabbi:] 'Parshas Truma?... ..in the middle of February—almost three months from now. Why?'

"[Vladek:] 'Three months—and every day was for us a year! I told him my dream...'

"[Rabbi:] 'Let's hope it's true. I'm afraid we'll never get out of here.'

"[Vladek:] 'So we worked, day after day. We survived. Week after week. The Same.



Until, one time... It came very many Gestapo and Wermacht.'

"[Jew:] 'Look—soldiers!'

"[Officer:] 'Attention! Line up on the road in two rows! Immediately!'

"[Vladek:] 'We were not at ease. We didn't know what they could do with us. I stood always in the second line. I didn't want they should see me much. Someone sneaked next to me...'

"[Rabbi:] 'Psst—Vladek.'

"[Vladek:] 'Rabbi!'

"[Rabbi:] 'Do you know what day it is?'

"[Vladek:] 'Saturday, of course.'

"[Rabbi:] 'But do you know what a Saturday? It's Parshas Truma!'

"[Vladek:] 'They marched us to the main courtyard and lined us by alphabet at tables...'

"[Soldier:] 'Name and rank?'

"[Vladek:] 'Spiegelman, Vladek. Corporal.'

"[Soldier:] 'Destination upon release?'

"[Vladek:] 'Sosnowiec... .. to my wife and child.'

"[Soldier:] 'Very well—sign this release form.'

"[Vladek:] 'This the Germans did very good... ..always they did everything very systematic. ...And it was all done in one day.'

"[Artie:] 'You mean your "Parshas Truma" dream actually came true?'

"[Vladek:] 'Yes—this is for me a very important date... I checked later on a calendar. It was this Parsha on the week I got married to Anja. ...And this was the Parsha in 1948, after the war, on the week you were born. And so it came out to be this Parsha you sang on the Saturday of your Bar Mitzvah! The next morning each from us got a Red Cross package, and they loaded us on a train to Poland. During the journey I sat with the Rabbi.'

"[Rabbi:] 'So, my son, now I see you are a "roh-eh hanoled," one who sees what the future will bring.'" (Part I - Chapter 3, pp. 59-62)

"[Artie:] 'He was just telling me about the time everyone in Sosnowiec had to get his passport stamped.'

"[Mala:] 'In the stadium? Yes... they got my mother then. She was taken, with everybody else who was going to be deported, to four apartment houses that were emptied to make a sort of prison... They put thousands of people there... It was so crowded that some of them actually suffocated... No food... No toilets. It was terrible. People jumped out of the windows to end their misery a little quicker.'

"[Artie:] 'God.'

"[Mala:] 'But my mother survived that. Her brother was on the Jewish committee, and he hid her in a coal cellar 'til all the transports left. Then he got me a job, scrubbing the people's filth—vomit! excrement!—out of several apartments, and I managed to smuggle her out. Eventually she and my father both ended up in Auschwitz. They died there.'" (Part I - Chapter 4, pp. 94-95)

"[Vladek:] 'That spring, on one day, the Germans took from Srodula to Auschwitz over 1,000 people. Most they took were kids—some only 2 or 3 years. Some kids were screaming and screaming. They couldn't stop. So the Germans swunged them by the



legs against a wall... and they never anymore screamed. In this way the Germans treated the little ones what still had survived a little. This I didn't see with my own eyes, but somebody the next day told me. And I said, "Thank God with Persis our children are safe!"

"[Artie:] 'So... what happened to Richieu?'

"[Vladek:] 'Ach! Our beautiful boy. We only found out much later. A few months after we sent Richieu to Zawiercie, the Germans decided they would finish out that ghetto.'" (Part I - Chapter 5, pp. 110-111)

"[Vladek:] 'The smugglers proposed us how they would do. We spoke Yiddish so the Poles don't understand.'

"[Smuggler:] '...and at the border our partners will take you through the mountains.'

"[Vladek:] 'Whew—it's risky and very expensive!'

"[Mandelbaum:] 'Nie, vas denkst die? (So, what do you think?)'

"[Vladek:] 'Yech kenn die Frau Kawka, uber yech bin nish zeker vegen die zwei. (I know Mrs. Kawka, but I'm not sure about these two.)'

"[Abraham:] 'Herr mech tse! Yech gei koidem mit zei. Az alles vetzein beseder, yech vil schreiben tse deyer. (Listen! I'll go first. If everything is okay, I'll write back to you.) The others want to think about it a little longer, but I'm ready to go now.'

"[Smuggler:] 'Fine, fine.'

"[Vladek:] 'I agreed with Mandelbaum to meet again here. If it came a good letter, we'll go.'" (Part I - Chapter 6, p. 152)

"[Vladek:] 'All night I heard shooting. He who got tired, who can't walk so fast, they shot. The more we walked, the more I heard shooting... and in the daylight, far ahead, I saw it. Somebody is jumping, turning, rolling 25 or 35 times around. And stops. "Oh," I said, "They maybe killed there a dog." When I was a boy our neighbor had a dog what got mad and was biting. The neighbor came out with a rifle and shot. The dog was rolling so. Around and around, kicking, before he lay quiet. And now I thought: "How amazing it is that a human being reacts the same like this neighbor's dog." One of the boys what we were in the attic together, talked over to the guard.'

"[Boy:] 'Psss... Look, the war is almost over. Some of us want to escape into the woods. We can pay... Share this gold with the guards in front and behind. Just don't shoot when we run...'

"[Guard:] 'We'll give you the signal later tonight, and shoot over your heads.'

"[Vladek:] 'All day long they were arranging...'

"[Boy:] 'It's all set, Vladek. Help pay off the guards and join us.'

"[Vladek:] 'Ach. How can you trust the Germans?'

"[Vladek:] 'At night was a commotion, 8 or 9 ran off... and of course you couldn't trust... So the march was going and going, forever we marched. And the ones what didn't fall down, we marched.'" (Part II, Chapter 3, pp. 242-243)

"[Vladek:] 'Hah?! What for do you stop, Françoise? We're not yet to the bungalow?'

"[Françoise:] 'There's a hitch-hiker...'

"[Vladek:] 'A hitch-hiker? And—oy—it's a colored guy, a shvartser! Push quick on the gas!'

"[Hitch-Hiker:] 'Hiya. Thanks, it's a hot day fo' walkin'.'



"[Vladek:] 'Móz boż! Co się stało jego żonie? Czy ona zglupiała? (Polish: Oh my God! What's happened to his wife? She's lost her head!)"

"[Hitch-Hiker:] 'Mah cousin's place is jus' up th' road.'

"[Vladek:] 'Psia krew! Cholera! To nie możliwe. A shvartser siedzi tu ze mina! (Polish: @! *!! [sic] I just can't believe it! There's a shvartser sitting in here!)"

"[Hitch-Hiker:] 'Y'all take care now, an' be good.'

"[Vladek:] 'What happened on you, Françoise? You went crazy or what? I had the whole time to watch out that this shvartser doesn't steal us the groceries from the back seat!'"

"[Françoise:] 'What?! That's outrageous! How can you, of all people, be such a racist! You talk about blacks the way the Nazis talked about the Jews!'"

"[Vladek:] 'Ach!... I thought really you are more smart than this, Françoise... It's not even to compare the shvartsers and the Jews!'"

"[Françoise:] 'But how dare you generalize and say all blacks steal! It's—'"

"[Vladek:] 'Just stop, yes? You only don't know them... When first I came to New York I worked in the garment center. Before this I didn't see coloreds... Bu there it was shvartsers everywhere, and if I put down only for one second my valuables, they took!'"

"[Françoise:] 'But, you—'"

"[Artie:] 'Forget it, honey... he's hopeless.'

"[Vladek:] 'Yah!... Better we'll just forget it. Ah!... You see, kids... we're home sweet home already... ...now we can make a very happy lunch from all my new groceries. Only thank God that your shvartser didn't take them.'" (Part II, Chapter 3, pp. 258-260)

"[Artie:] 'What about your side of the family?'"

"[Vladek:] 'My side?... My father, and Fela, and her 4 kids, I told you got taken in '42. Zosha and Yadja, my younger sisters, had only 1 kid each, and came with me into the ghetto before they all died later to Auschwitz. Marcus, my closest brother, and Moses, went to a camp, to Blechamer, soon after I came out from the army. I sent them money by the Red Cross... I hid it into Bread. I wrote them: "This bread, it's expensive. Eat it very slow and careful." I met after the war a guy, he saw them die, but wouldn't tell me how. My other brothers, Leon and Pinek, they deserted out from the Polish army to Lemberg, in Russia... A family of peasant Jews kept them safe. Pinek, he married one of them. But Leon got sick. Doctors said it's typhus, and he died of a bad appendix. So only my little brother, Pinek, came out from the war alive... From the rest of my family, it's nothing left, not even a snapshot.'" (Part II, Chapter 4, p. 276)

"[Vladek:] 'We want tickets to Hannover.'

"[Conductor:] 'Tickets??... I don't know if there are even any tracks! That freight may be heading north.'

"[Vladek:] 'Trains stopped and started and had to change often directions...'"

"[Vladek:] 'Look, Shivek—Nuremberg.'

"[Shivek:] 'I scrubbed streets here as a P.O.W...'"

"[Vladek:] 'Now it was only stones and nothing. We came to one place, Würzburg—what a mess!'"

"[Shivek:] 'Where can we find water?'"

"[German Man:] 'Hah! We haven't had any water in three days!'"

"[German Woman:] 'The Americans destroyed—sob—everything!'"

"[Vladek:] 'Not one building was still standing. We came away happy. Let the Germans have a little what they did to the Jews.'" (Part II, Chapter 5, p. 290)



Topics for Discussion

The Jews are presented as anthropomorphized mice, the Poles as pigs, and the Germans as cats. Discuss how these caricature portrayals destroy the notion of any so-called rigorous investigation into the putatively distinct quality of race.

Why do you think that, today, some people seek to deny the historicity of the Holocaust?

After reading the narrative, do you think that Artie and Françoise will have children of their own?

What would have likely happened to Richieu had Anja and Vladek retained him in Sosnowiec? Did they make the best possible decision for their infant's future?

Do you think that it is useful to know how to construct a bunker? Look at the details of the bunker illustration on page 112. Why was it important that the bin was bolted to the floor?

Today in Germany it is illegal to display a swastika, the symbol of Nazi Germany. Do you think this is a good law?

Why do you think Mancie helped Anja to survive within Auschwitz-Birkenau?

What can we learn from studying the Holocaust? Can such inhuman genocides still take place in the modern world?

If you had the opportunity to hold an hour-long conversation with Vladek Spiegelman, what would you like to talk about?

Do you think that the 'comic book' medium is a suitable format for a Holocaust memoir? How does the atypical format contribute to or detract from the power of the message delivered?

Do you think the graphic text deserved to win the Pulitzer Prize?