

Think About . . .

Prejudice

When Vladek is wearing his “pig” mask, he can’t be distinguished from the Poles. What makes the Jews “Jews,” not Poles? Does assigning people social categories change who they are?

What specific strategies do the Nazis employ to create the category “Jews,” making it seem acceptable to the other Poles and Germans to vilify them? Where does prejudice originate, and how is it perpetuated?

Identify other examples of prejudice and stereotyping in the novel, for instance Artie’s debate about whether to draw Françoise as a mouse, given her French heritage (II, 11-12), or Vladek’s prejudice against African-Americans (II, 98-100). How are they similar to or different from the Nazis’ behaviors?

Moral and Philosophical Issues

Vladek says, speaking of Auschwitz, “But here God didn’t come. We were all on our own” (II, 29). How can one reconcile belief in a benevolent God with the evil of the Holocaust?

When the Nazi soldiers commit unimaginable acts—killing babies, slaughtering innocent people in cold blood—do they cease being human? What about prisoners who are willing to do anything to stay alive, even steal food from family members? What is your definition of being “human”?

Survival

What qualities in Vladek enable him to survive when so many others die? What do you make of the fact that these very qualities, admirable in the context of the Holocaust, make him annoying, even at times insufferable, in the present?

Levels of survival: Did the heroic Vladek survive, or had he changed to someone else? What does Anja’s suicide suggest about her survival? Did she *not* survive?

Guilt

Who is to blame for the Holocaust? Only those who actively participated? Those who did nothing to stop it? All Germans who lived through the war? Contemporary Germans? Artie says, “Maybe EVERYONE has to feel guilty. . . FOREVER!” (II, 42). When does guilt stop?

How guilty are we of the atrocities being committed in Darfur and elsewhere in the world?



Jewish Memorial Gate, Dachau

Identity and the Relationship of Past and Present

How much is our identity shaped by our past? Our parents and their history? Can we compose our own lives, starting with a clean slate, or are we always to some extent a product of our history?

Artie’s life is shaped by events that occurred before he was born: his parents’ experience, his “ghost brother” Richieu. He says, “It’s spooky, having sibling rivalry with a snapshot!” (II, 15). To what extent can he free himself of his past, and what does the act of writing have to do with it? Consider the last page of *Maus II* as you answer this.

Writing About the Holocaust

Auschwitz survivor and author Elie Wiesel calls Holocaust literature a contradiction because “Auschwitz negates all literature as it negates all theories and doctrine” (*A Jew Today*). Pavel says, “The victims who died can never tell their side of the story, so maybe it’s better not to have any more stories” (II, 45). What are the inherent problems with writing about the Holocaust? What are the moral issues?

Pavel also says, “Look at how many books have already been written about the Holocaust. What’s the point? People haven’t changed” (II, 45). Is he right? Is it futile?

Do only those who experienced the Holocaust have the right or the authority to write about it?

The Writing Process

What do you make of the fact that when Artie writes, he wears a mouse mask, but when he’s simply talking to his father, he doesn’t? What does this have to do with Artie’s identity as a son? As a writer?

What’s the difference between Art Spiegelman the author and Art Spiegelman the character?

Does telling this Holocaust story in comic book form trivialize it? Is Spiegelman, however well intentioned, insulting the millions who died? What does *he* think about this?

About This Guide

This guide was written by Dr. Laurie Porter of the Department of English and Evelyn Barker and C.D. Walter of UT Arlington Library. Special thanks to Joshua Been, UT Arlington Library.

MAUS

A Resource Guide for Readers

Welcome

Art Spiegelman’s *Maus: A Survivor’s Tale*, UT Arlington’s 2007–08 OneBook selection, examines the most important historical event of the twentieth century and arguably the worst sustained atrocity of all time, the Holocaust.

As Holocaust literature, *Maus* asks us to consider profound moral and philosophical questions: What is the source and nature of evil? Can one believe in God in the face of widespread evil? What does it mean to be human?

As a biography and autobiography (author Art Spiegelman tells the story of his father Vladek, an Auschwitz survivor), *Maus* examines the relationship of past to present and father to son, the implicit

contract between the author and his or her subject, and the tension between factual and emotional truth(s).

As a novel it deals with guilt, identity, survival, and the immediate and delayed impact of trauma.

As a *graphic* novel, it presents these complicated issues through a combination of words and images, raising still more questions: Does this treatment trivialize the horrors actual people experienced? Is this an appropriate genre for such a subject? Can images accomplish what words can’t?

From all of the many issues *Maus* addresses, we have chosen “prejudice” as the focus of UT Arlington Conversations, a year-long, campus-wide program of activities and events that explores prejudice from many points of view.

Biography

Art Spiegelman is the creator of the Pulitzer Prize-winning *Maus: A Survivor’s Tale*. The two-volume work has been translated into 18 languages. In

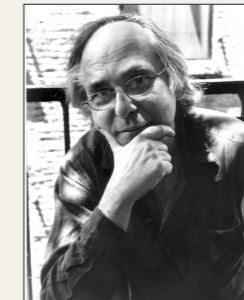


Photo by Nadja Spiegelman

1980 he and his wife, Françoise Mouly, co-founded *Raw*, the acclaimed and influential magazine of avant-garde comics and graphics, which they co-edited until 1991.

From 1992 to 2002 he was a staff artist and writer for *The New Yorker*, which published his powerful black-on-black 9/11 cover a few days after the event. His drawings and prints have been exhibited in museums and galleries throughout the world. Spiegelman lives . . . in lower Manhattan with his wife and their two children, Nadja and Dashiell.

Source: Spiegelman, Art. *In the Shadow of No Towers*. New York: Pantheon, 2004.

As you read the novel, be alert to the ways prejudice works to dehumanize the “other,” in its obvious and more subtle manifestations, and the impact it has on both victims and victimizers.

We hope that you will discuss the novel with your friends, join the online blog discussion, and attend some of the many OneBook and Conversations events.

OneBook Web Site

Visit the OneBook web site to find:

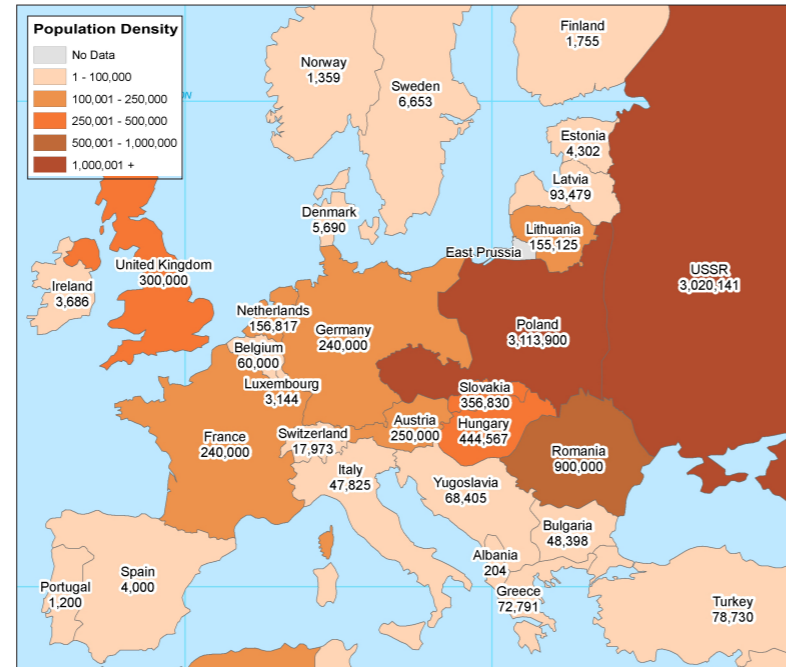
- More information about *Maus*
- A calendar of events
- Contest information
- An online book discussion
- Sources for the information in this handout

www.uta.edu/onebook

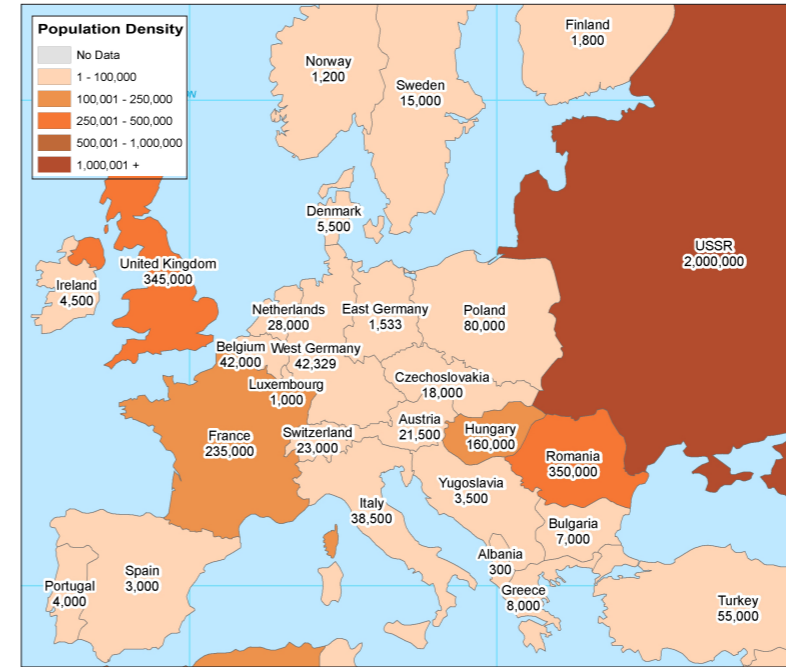
Timeline

- January 30 1933**  German President Paul von Hindenburg appoints Adolf Hitler as chancellor.
- March 22**  The first concentration camp is opened at Dachau.
- August 2 1934**  German President Paul von Hindenburg dies. Hitler becomes the "Fuehrer" and commander-in-chief of Germany's armed forces.
- December 1935**  Vladek Speigelman meets Anja Zylberg in Sosnowiec, Poland.
- February 14 1937**  Vladek and Anja marry.
- October**  Vladek and Anja's son Richieu is born in Sosnowiec.
- August 24 1939**  Vladek is called to serve in the Polish Army.
- September 1**  World War II begins when Germany invades Poland.
- September**  Vladek is captured by the Germans and becomes a prisoner of war.
- September 4**  The German army enters Sosnowiec.
- September 28**  Poland surrenders.
- November 23**  Jews in German-occupied Poland are forced to wear an arm band or yellow star.
- December 5-6**  Jewish property in Poland is confiscated by Germany. Vladek and his father-in-law lose their factories.
- February 1940**  Vladek is released as a POW and sent to Lublin.
- May 20**  The Auschwitz camp begins functioning.
- September 3 1941**  First gassing at Auschwitz.
- December 7**  Japan attacks U.S. Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii.
- December**  All Jews in Sosnowiec forced to move to a ghetto.

European Jewish Population Pre-WWII

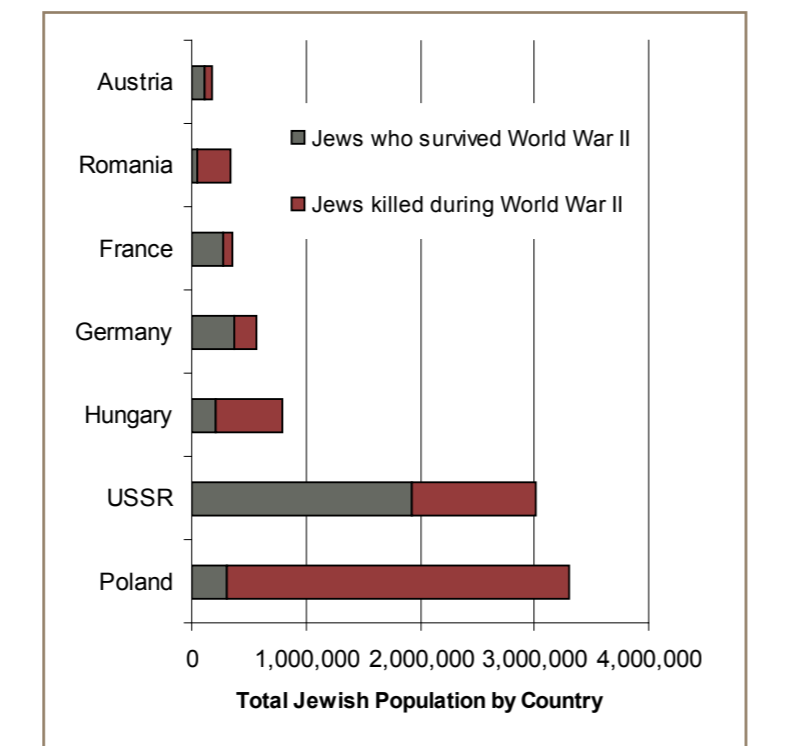


European Jewish Population in 1950



For an interactive version of these maps, visit <http://gis.uta.edu/maus>.

Holocaust Death and Survival Rates



Source: Barnavi, E. *A Historical Atlas of the Jewish People*. New York: Schocken, 2002.

 = 100,000 Jews killed by Nazis per year

Source: Hilberg, R. *The Destruction of the European Jews*. New York: Holmes & Meier, 1985.

Glossary and Pronunciation Guide

- Anja** (Slavic): AHN-yeh – Artie's mother and Vladek's wife.
- Auschwitz** (German): OWSH-vits – Nazi concentration camp in Poland where Anja and Vladek were sent.
- Birkenau** (German): BUR-ka-now – Women's camp near Auschwitz. Also called Auschwitz II.
- Françoise** (French): fran-SWAH – Artie's wife.
- Gemeinde** (German): ja-MIN-da – Jewish community organization.
- Juden Raus** (German): YÜ-den ROWSE – "Jews, get out!"
- Judenrat** (German): YÜ-den-RAT – Jewish councils formed by the Nazis to serve as a liaison between the Nazis and Jews living in Polish and Soviet ghettos.
- Kapo** (Unknown): KA-po – Concentration camp prisoner who worked in an administrative capacity.
- Oswiecim** (Polish): osh-FĒ-EN-cheem – Polish name for Auschwitz.
- Richieu** (Unknown): RĒ-shū – Artie's brother, who was killed as a small child in Poland.
- Shvartser** (Yiddish): SHVART-ser – Black person, pejorative.
- Sosnowiec** (Polish): sos-NŌ-vē-ets – Polish city where Vladek and Anja lived with her parents.
- Vladek** (Unknown): VLAH-dek – Artie's father and narrator of *Maus's* Holocaust story.
- Zawiercie** (Polish): zav-YUR-chē – Polish city where Richieu was sent for safety.
- Zloty** (Polish): ZLO-tē, ZLO-tēz (pl) – Polish currency.

- 1942 February 15**  The first mass gassing of Jews begins at Auschwitz.
- May 10-12**  1500 Jews removed from Sosnowiec. Anja's grandparents are in this group.
- June**  2000 Jews sent from Sosnowiec to Auschwitz.
- August 12**  8000 Jews are sent from Sosnowiec to Auschwitz after reporting to Dienst Stadium for "document inspection."
- 1943 Spring**  All remaining Jews in Sosnowiec are forced to move to the Srodula ghetto. Richieu is sent to Zawiercie with his aunt, Tosha.
- August 16**  Most inhabitants of the Srodula ghetto are deported to Auschwitz. Vladek and Anja are in hiding.
- August 26**  All Jews in Zawiercie ghetto are sent to Auschwitz. Tosha poisons herself, Richieu, and two other children to avoid being sent to the gas chambers.
- 1944 January**  The remaining Jews in Srodula are killed. Vladek and Anja are still in hiding.
- March**  Vladek and Anja are sent to Auschwitz.
- Summer**  Vladek sees Anja in Birkenau.
- Early Fall**  Anja moved from Birkenau to Auschwitz.
- 1945 January 18**  Forced evacuation of Auschwitz, in what became known as the Death Marches.
- February**  Vladek is sent to Dachau.
- April 29**  Dachau is liberated.
- May 7**  Germany surrenders.
- August 14**  Japan surrenders; end of World War II.
- 1946**  Vladek and Anja, previously reunited, leave Poland for Sweden.
- 1948 February 15**  Art Spiegelman is born in Stockholm, Sweden.
- 1951**  Spiegelman family immigrates to the U.S.