Maus I: My Father Bleeds History
by Art Spiegelman
Reading Response Questions

Directions: Answer the following questions in your own words. There is not always a right answer, because some are questions of fact while some are questions of interpretation. Your judgment is important and you should be able to defend your answers with quotations and panels from the graphic novel.

Prologue

1. What is your first impression of Vladek Spiegelman? What does his remark about friends suggest about his personality? How might it foreshadow revelations later in the book?

Chapter 1 The Sheik

1. What has happened to Artie's mother?
2. How does Vladek get along with Mala, his second wife? What kind of things do they argue about?
3. How long has it been since Artie last visited his father? What do you think is responsible for their separation?
4. How does Vladek respond when Artie first asks him about his life in Poland? Why might he be reluctant to talk about those years?
5. On page 12 we see a close-up of Vladek as he pedals his exercise bicycle. What is the meaning of the numbers tattooed on his wrist? How does this single image manage to convey information that might occupy paragraphs of text?
6. Describe Vladek’s relationship with Lucia Greenberg. How was he introduced to Anja Zylberberg? Why do you think he chose her over Lucia?

Chapter 2 The Honeymoon

1. What is Vladek doing when Artie comes to visit him? How does his health figure elsewhere in the book?
2. How does Vladek become wealthy?
3. What does Vladek see while traveling through Czechoslovakia?
4. Why does the artist place a swastika in the background of the panels that depict the plight of Jews in Hitler's Germany (p. 33)? Why, on page 125, is the road that Vladek and Anja travel on their way back to Sosnowiec also shaped like a swastika?

Chapter 3 Prisoner of War

1. When Artie refused to finish his food as a child, what did Vladek do? How does he characterize Anja's leniency with their son?
2. Why was Vladek's father so reluctant to let him serve in the Polish army? What means did he use to keep him out?
3. What is the meaning of the beard and skullcap that Vladek's father is shown wearing in the panels on page 46? What happens to his beard later on?
4. How does Vladek feel after shooting the German soldier?
5. How did the Germans treat Vladek and other Jewish prisoners after transporting them to the Reich? How was this different from their treatment of Polish P.O.W.'s?
6. What is the significance of Vladek's dream about his grandfather? What recurring meaning does "Parshas Truma" have in his life?
7. How does Vladek arrange to be reunited with his wife and son? What visual device does Spiegelman use to show him disguising himself as a Polish Gentile?

Chapter 4 The Noose Tightens
1. Describe the activities depicted in the family dinner scene on pages 74-76. What do they tell you about the Zylberbergs?
2. Although Jews were allowed only limited rations under the Nazi occupation, Vladek manages to circumvent these restrictions for a while. What methods does he use to support himself and his family?
3. During the brutal mass arrest depicted on page 80, Vladek is framed by a panel shaped like a Jewish star. How does this device express his situation at that moment?
4. What happened to little Richieu? When Vladek begins telling this story on page 81, the first three rows of panels are set in the past, while the bottom three panels return us to the present and show the old Vladek pedaling his stationary bicycle. Why do you think Spiegelman chooses to conclude this anecdote in this manner?
5. What happened to Vladek's father? What does the scene on pages 90-91 suggest about the ways in which some Jews died and others survived?

Chapter 5 Mouse Holes
1. This chapter and the one that follows both have the word "mouse" in their titles. And, in fact, in the concluding sections of this book Spiegelman's mice seem to become more "mouse-like." How does the author accomplish this? What reason might he have for doing so?
2. Why does Artie claim that he became an artist?
3. How does the comic strip "Prisoner on the Hell Planet" depict Artie and his family? How did you feel on learning that Artie has been hospitalized for a nervous breakdown? Why do you think he has chosen to draw himself dressed in a prison uniform? What is the effect of seeing these mice suddenly represented as human beings?
4. Why did Anja finally consent to send Richieu away? Was his death "better" than the fate of the children depicted on page 108?
5. Describe the strategies that Vladek used to conceal Anja and himself during the liquidation of the ghetto. How did the Germans flush them from hiding?
6. What eventually happens to the "mouse" who informed on the Spiegelmans? What becomes of Haskel, who refused to save Vladek's in-laws even though he accepted their jewels?
7. What does the incident on pages 118 and 119 tell us about relations between Jews and Germans? Does the knowledge that some Nazis fraternized with their victims make their crimes more or less horrible?
8. How did Vladek care for Anja after the destruction of the Srodula ghetto? Contrast his
behavior toward his first wife, during the worst years of the war, with the way he now treats Mala.

Chapter 6 Mouse Trap
1. What does Vladek mean when he says that reading Artie's comic makes him "interested" in his own story (p. 133)? Is this statement just a product of broken English, or does it reveal some deeper truth about what happens when we record our personal histories?
2. On page 136 Vladek says that he was able to pass for a member of the Gestapo but that Anja's appearance was more Jewish. What visual device does Spiegelman use to show the difference between them?
3. Given the fact that the Spiegelmans are "mice," what is the significance of the panels on page 147, in which Vladek and Anja's hiding place turns out to be infested with rats? Why might the author have portrayed this incident?
4. On page 149 Vladek is almost betrayed by a group of schoolchildren. What stories did Poles tell their children about Jews? How do you think such stories—and perhaps similar stories told by German parents—helped pave the way for the Final Solution?
5. Why does Vladek want to flee to Hungary? How are he and Anja eventually captured? What is the significance of the letter from Mandelbaum's nephew (p. 154)?
6. Why does Artie call his father a murderer? Is he justified? Who else has he called a murderer, and why?