

Example of argumentative essay on rhetorical analysis of maus

[Literature](#), [Novel](#)



Is a Picture Really Worth a Thousand Words

In Art Spiegelman's graphic novel *Maus I and II* we get many actions illustrated in pictures instead of words. The novel portrays his father's Holocaust survival story and relationship with Vladek. The comic book style pages show a powerful message through symbolism and the metaphors. The novel begins with generalizing the Jews, the Polish, and the Germans with different animal characters. The Jews as mice, the Germans as cats, and the Polish as pigs. His novel depicts cat and mouse gaming struggles. The Jews were suffering, when they were closed in this circle being sent into concentration camps by the Germans.

In the interview *Art Spiegelman's Life in the "Shadow of Maus"*, Spiegelman was asked, "What first drew you to comic books, and how did you decide you wanted to draw for a living?" (Mother Jones). "Well, the words "for a living" weren't there at first, of course. I think as soon as I figured out—and this must have been incredibly young—that comic books were made by humans, rather than being natural phenomenon like trees or rocks, I just wanted to be one of the people who did that. So I was copying all kinds of cartoons that I was reading, comic books, and eventually learned how to draw cartoon books step-by-step and just, I don't know, I'm not an especially quick learner, but I sure was a dedicated one" (Spiegelman).

In the graphic novel the mice have a friendliness with its soft features. The cats is described, as having intensity and hard look, constantly showing their teeth. The picture describes the cats preying on the innocent looking mice. It invokes an emotional reaction from the reader. The novel also shows use of the "masking effect". This is when you make certain characteristics of

a character or many so that the reader can in-visions him or herself easily in the story. Reader visualize the same faces and feel deep through experiencing those mimics.

“ When I first read Maus, I had a strong personal reaction to it. I was surprised how new and visceral the story felt even though I had learned about the horrors of the Holocaust long before. What do you think made Maus resonate the way it did?” (Mother Jones). “ Comics have a kind of intimacy that makes it feel like two people are talking, in a way, even though there's a hell of a lot of work in putting together the vocabulary with the cartoonists. There is a kind of relationship that moves into your brain comfortably because of the stripped-down images. Comics ask for and the stripped-down language that will fit into a balloon that allows it to enter deeper into your brain more than prolix prose or photographs. As my wife said, looking up from a Science magazine she's reading, " Hmm, a baby can recognize a Have a Nice Day smiley face before it can recognize that its mother is smiling." So that means we're wired to understand a certain kind of cartoon imagery” Spiegleman).

In Maus the characters had people bodies with animal heads. They were still identified as people. The characters did the same activities, which normal person do: walking upright, wore clothing, drove vehicles, etc. This allowed the reader to put themselves into the story and feel every aspect of pain and the struggle of the Jews. An example of the “ masking effect” would be the hanging scene, showing four mice hanging from nooses. This scene is very disturbing, you see four pairs of legs dangling. Horror could be seen in every human look. We know the legs dangling are supposed to be those of mice

but the lack of specificity makes it so that we can interpret it as human legs. "Maus was also novel in that it incorporated autobiographical elements from your own life side by side with your father's." "The idea of autobiographical comics was something that had just started in the underground comics' movement, ironically by Justin Green - who's half-Jewish - who did a comic about growing up Catholic called Binky Brown. It really introduced the idea of confessional autobiography as a possible subject matter for comics. He had a very big influence on me" (Spiegelman).

Since Maus is a graphic novel we get many pictures, even more than an actual dialogue. The little speech in the novel are the primary representation for the characters verbal forms. Ironically, Spiegelman paid close attention to the way how different languages help the characters. For example Vladek knew Yiddish, Polish, German, French, and English. His vast knowledge of languages was his savior, as it gave him different opportunities throughout the story.

Also actual masks were important as symbolism, because Vladek wore a Polish pig mask. He made people believe, that he was a non-Jewish Pole. Vladek and Anja used to walk the streets wearing the pig masks to hide from the Gestapo who was a fearing cat. This really shows the racial profiling to an extremism. Another important symbol is Vladek's exercise bike. The faster he pedals the more intensely he recounts the events of his Holocaust experience.

"We can express our feelings regarding the world around us either by poetic or by descriptive means. I prefer to express myself metaphorically. Let me stress: metaphorically, not symbolically. A symbol contains within itself a

definite meaning, certain intellectual formula, while metaphor is an image. An image possessing the same distinguishing features as the world it represents. An image — as opposed to a symbol — is indefinite in meaning. One cannot speak of the infinite world by applying tools that are definite and finite. We can analyse the formula that constitutes a symbol, while metaphor is a being-within-itself, it's a monomial. It falls apart at any attempt of touching it" (Andrei Tarkovsky).

For an example Vladek pedals furiously while he reencounters. When Richieu, Art's older brother, was poisoned by his Aunt, fearing Nazis coming and deporting them to concentration camps. Vladek wants to forget and leave the past behind, but like is stationary bike, no matter how hard he tries he can't outrun the past. Art forced him to give more information and confront his memories, while he tried to escape his past.

The comic is drawn using black and white colors, except for the comic excerpt in the middle. This mid book mini comic is called " Prisoner on the Hell Planet: A Case History", which is mainly used in different shades of grey. Lines are angular and very sharp. This shows a huge contrast between Art and his Father. It also shows the absurd population racial divide lines.

" This book also serves as a master class on the making and reading of comics, highlighted by Spiegelman's close analyses of dozens of important points in the text. Especially instructive are his observations about the story's bittersweet final page — a happy ending that isn't truly happy, made of six perfectly paced panels, a tombstone and a signature. The last frame encapsulates in one simple moment the artfulness behind the tale we've just read, and the uneasy combination of filial pride and anger that flowed

through "Maus" and flows through "MetaMaus" as well. "I'm tired from talking, Richieu," the elderly Vladek Spiegelman says to his son Art, turning over in his bed, "and it's enough stories for now" (The New York Times). In the beginning of the novel Spiegelman hints that the characters are people symbolized as animals, that is the first point in the novel. The use of symbolisms and the masking effect are perfectly paired which gives it a very significant affect in the novel. The simplicity of the images and the very extensive symbolism allow the novel to have heart and purpose. Spiegelman helps you understand fully the extent of the message he is trying to convey.

Work Cited

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