

# The maus a survivor's tale



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The Maus a Survivor's Tale is a powerful book that portrays the Holocaust. With the use of comics, the pictures and dialogue create a powerful impact on historical event that's occurring during this time. The use of animals to represent race and nationalities shows the controversial complexity of this part of history.

Starting out we first become introduced to Art and Vladek's family. These characters are represented as mice that are actually the Jewish people. Art comes home to see his father Vladek to record and write about his father's life during the Holocaust time period. The author chooses an excellent representation to display the family as mice because mice are looked at as weak and fragile. As Vladek goes on to tell his story to Art, he explains where he was at the start of the war and Holocaust. Anja, Vladek's wife, struggled with post-partum depression so he takes her out to seek medical treatment. On the way to get help they see Nazism throughout Europe but are far enough away from it. After Anja gets her help, they return home and come to find Vladek's factory has been destroyed. Eventually Vladek gets taken as a prisoner by the Germans and gets released back to Poland. The Germans view the Jews as vermin that needs to be taken out. They look at them as if they are rodents and every last person needs to be exterminated. Once the Jews were taken into the camps they were literally treated like rats. Then there was a selection, with people sent either to the left or either to the right. Old people, families with lots of kids, and people without work cards are all going to the left. We understood this must be really bad (4. 90 Spiegelman). Here at this point of the comic book the Jews were picked to either be killed or put to work. The ones that got picked to work had poor living conditions and are

fed little to nothing. It was many, many such stories synagogues burned, Jews beaten with no reason, whole towns pushing out all Jews each story worse than the other (2. 35 Spiegelman). This quote shows Vladek that the Jews weren't looked at as citizens anymore. Some Jews didn't even get fed, so they became starved and worked to death. Others were gathered in groups and were gassed to get rid of. That form of execution is basically like extermination of rodents. They would only kill the Jews that had no use to the Germans. If they didn't have a certain skill, were too old, or even moms with too many kids would be gassed right away. A pesticide was dropped into chambers that were filled with Jews. This shows that the Germans viewed the Jews as rodents. Something that should be eliminated and ultimately used a pesticide to kill them.

When the Germans are introduced into the story they are portrayed as cats. Spiegelman picks a perfect portrayal of the Germans being cats due to the society's representation of cats and mice not getting along. In society cats are always represented that they are out to kill mice. We have movies, comics, and stories that are even told to this day about how cats and mice don't get along. The irony in this story is that the Germans are the one in charge rounding up all the Jewish people. The Germans are the reason that the holocaust went down. Gradually, all the Jews are taken from homes and are sent to camps. Vladek and Anja pay smugglers to transport them out so they wouldn't be sent away, but they got turned over to the Germans. The smuggler turned them in. By showcasing the Germans' powers and authority here it proves that cat and mouse theory. The cats are just trying to get rid

of the mice due to different beliefs. It brings a powerful message to the reader showcasing and highlighting the authority.

Now looking at the Polish they are represented as pigs. Now this might seem a little random but when you look at what the Nazis call the polish it makes sense because the Nazis would refer to the polish as pigs. This is a flat out insult to be calling the Polish pigs. Pigs are viewed as filthy, greedy animals, that eat and gain weight. Also pigs are viewed as vulgar animals so Spiegelman could get his point across about the Poles. Also Spiegelman represented the Polish as pigs because these animals are non-kosher animals. Jewish people and even Muslims view pigs as unclean animals. By portraying the poles as pigs its showing the reader that the Germans are looking at the polish as dirty, filthy animals.

Some animals in the story even wore different masks to make them look different. The mice would wear a mask and or dress up as the cats or polish just to get away from the terror. They needed to make themselves look like the enemy so they wouldn't face the horror that was going to happen to them. The mice were worked to death, starved, and even killed in gas chambers. Everything that Spiegelman wrote about Vladek's family and what they went through were actual representations of what happened during the holocaust. Not everyone was as lucky and Vladek and his family. Mostly everyone died if they didn't have a certain skill. Vladek and Anja had skills that the German needed so that's why they weren't killed. They were seen valuable to the Germans to do their dirty work. Vladek and Anja worked as hard as they could and did the best they could to stay alive under these conditions.

Towards the end of the story Vladek catches typhus fever and is transported to the Swiss border where he thinks he will be freed. The Germans take them into the woods to execute them but got scared because of the repercussions from the American soldiers. In the comic the Americans are shown as dogs. The reason for that is because of the classic tale of cats and dogs not playing nice together. As known from society dogs and cats aren't friendly with one another. Most cats seem to shy away from dogs and dogs typically scare cats according to society and from stories being told. So having the Americans come in to stop the Germans from the executing the Jews shows the cat and dog theory very well. Also another good reason that the Americans are portrayed as dogs is because according to society dogs and mice really don't have any problems together. You don't hear often stories of mice getting killed by dogs or even dogs not liking mice. It's more of a food chain effect that cats hate mice and dogs hate cats. The dogs would eat or kill the cats and the cats would eat or kill the mice. The Americans had to step in to stop the horror that was going on.

By having Spiegelman showcase his characters as mice, pigs, dogs, and cats it emphasizes the horror that took place during this time period. This helped the story get the reaction that's needed from the reader. Sometimes when people visually see something a different way it can put a greater impact on what went on so they can understand it better. By placing animals with humans it makes you think about the deeper meaning on what's really going on. It helps you connect the dots and see the characters for who they really are. It can also help you pick up details that you weren't aware of if maybe humans played as these characters.