MAUS Historical Context

TERMS:

- ### PANEL:

  A segment of the comic which contains an image and text. A comic or graphic novel consists of an array of panels in a specific order. The size of the panels will often dictate the importance of each scene, such as a larger panel will have much more details compared to a smaller one.

- ### FRAME:

  The borders that surround the panels, different frames will often indicate different settings, atmosphere, etc.

- ### GUTTER:

  The space between panels which usually indicating time passing between different panels. Larger separation will show a longer passing of time whereas shorter gaps represent continuous flow of events.

- ### BLEED:

  An image that extends to and or beyond the edge of the page

- ### CAPTIONS:

  Boxes containing a variety of text elements, including setting, descriptions that gives readers background information on the setting.

- SPEECH BALLOONS:

Enclosed dialogue from the speaker's mouth and often indicate dialogue between the characters within a panel. The order of the speech bubbles is often self explanatory and is up to the reader's own interpretation.

- THOUGHT CLOUDS:

Inner thoughts of the characters that are only limited to the characters in which the thought clouds originate. The other characters are unaware of these thoughts.

- CONCENTRATION CAMPS:

The place where people were imprisoned and are usually used for forced labour. They were built by Nazi Germany throughout the duration of the Second World War and was spread out throughout all of Europe. The Nazi government abused this forced labour in order to boos their war effort and mass-produced weapons as well as extracted nature minerals from the environment.

- EXTERMINATION CAMPS:

Extermination camps served the same function as concentration camps but also had a gas chamber that used Zyklon B gas to kill the inmates. Extermination camps were mostly located within Poland as it was the first nation that Germany "conquered" within during the war.

- GHETTOS:

Ghettos were impoverished sections of town and cities that housed minorities mostly in Poland. They were often reserved for Polish Nationals who were not Jewish but still seen as the less desirable race. Jews who were found to still be useful to the war effort were also imprisoned here so they could continue to contribute to the government.

Context:

State of the World At the Time:

The Weimer Republic of Germany was defeated during the first World War (WWI) and were seen as weak by their people. Hitler believed that Germany was stabbed in the back by the Treaty of Versailles and scapegoated the rest of the world for this. The Great Depression and War Reparations caused high unemployment, extreme inflation and low profits from their exports. Hitler believed in anti Semitism to an extreme, and even though the concept was existing since the beginning of Christ, Hitler reignited the hatred towards the Jewish people.

Adolf Hitler:

Adolf Hitler was born in Austria and lived from 1889-1945. He had no significant achievement in his life and was a failed student, failed artist and even did not have a significant role in the German military. He saw the economic downturn of Germany after the first world war and because he couldn't get into Art school, he believed that only Jewish people were accepted into the Art School. His Fiery rhetoric and charisma helped him to become the leader of the Nazi part in the year 1921. He finally wins the German election in 1932 and quickly consolidates power. On March 23, 1933, the Nazi Party passed the Enabling Act, which gave the German executive branch power to pass laws without the German Legislature giving Hitler dictator powers. Even though Germany was a democracy at the time, because there was only one party, it was more like an authoritarian government. He also combined the powers of the chancellor and president, and he was given the new title called Fuhrer.

ROOTS OF ANTI-SEMITISM:

German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche came up with the idea of the "Uermensch" or super-human. From the 18th century, this idea was also popular where they believed that only the strong will survive. He believed that the Aryan race was the master race, blonde with blue eyes, but primarily Anglo-Saxons and Germanic Caucasians. Jews were the inferior race along with Slavs and Gypsies and eventually provided his government with funding towards the Eugenics movement.

NUREMBERG LAWS:

The Treaty of Versailles was declared to be dead by Hitler in 1935 and passed the Nuremberg Laws which included the followings:

- Identified Jews with the Yellow Star

- Took away citizenship of Jewish citizens

- Number of Jewish people in each profession were limited

- Marriage and sex between Jews and Non-Jews were outlawed.

KRISTALLNACHT:

During November 9-10 of 1938 known as the Night of the Broken Glass, Synagogues were set on fire and Jewish shop windows were broken. 91 Jews were killed, and thousands were injured. Jewish property was confiscated and over 20,000 Jews were sent to Concentration Camps.

LIVING SPACE:

Hitler adopted the policy of Lebensraum or living space to preserve the health of the German people. In order to achieve this space, Germany underwent massive military expansions. They took

advantage of a splintered Poland and began to forcibly move Jews into Poland and then towards the outer sections of Germany until they could no longer expand. It was then when Germany implemented the massive extermination of the Jewish population to create more living space.

POLAND:

Ghettoization was slowly phased into Poland and the first ghettos were set up in October of 1939 where some towns as well small cities were built to accommodate the living space for the Jewish population. As living space ran out for the German population as well as the Jews, they executed [the Final Solution] which was the mass extermination of the Jewish people. All the major extermination camps were in Poland with total of millions of people who died there.

THEMES:

- ### THE HOLOCAUST:

   The world Holocaust comes from the Greek Word "holokauston" which means burnt sacrifice and is the word "HaShoah" in Hebrew. The suffix Shoah in Hebrew means catastrophe and so HaShoah means the catastrophe. The term of Holocaust was not widely used until the end of the 1950s.

- ### DEATH:

   The theme of death is present in both the death of the characters and how the other characters coping with the death of their loved ones.

- ### LOVE/FAMILY:

   The Spiegelman family, the Zylberg's love and unconditional love between family members were also present.

- <u>SACRIFICE AND SURVIVAL AT ALL COSTS</u>

  Vladek's craftiness and financially shrewd mind helped him make off deals to help him and Anja survive the rule of Nazi Germany.

- <u>LOYALTY AND BETRAYAL:</u>

  Loyalty of family and friends but also the betrayal committed by these said family members and how they cope with this throughout the story.

- <u>GUILT:</u>

  In particular "Survivor's guilt" from both Vladek and Art where they feel guilty that they were the ones who survived the Holocaust, and their family and friends did not.

CHARACTERS:

- <u>ART SPIEGELMAN:</u>

  The author of the graphic novel and son of the protagonist and went through a period of depression after his mother committed suicide after the war. He wrote the graphic novel to tell his father's story but also to cope with the trauma.

- <u>VLADEK SPIEGELMAN:</u>

  Art's father who survived the Holocaust and is the protagonist of the story. He was imprisoned at one point in Auschwitz concentration camp and was described to be temperamental, financially shrewd and was an optimist who turned into a pessimist by the end of the story.

- <u>ANJA SPIEGELMAN (NEE ZYLBERBERG):</u>

Art's biological mother who survived the Holocaust with Vladek and comes from a wealthy family. She lost almost all her family members during the war and due to this, became depressed and committed suicide after the war.

- MALA SPIEGELMAN:

Art's stepmother who wed Vladek after Anja's Death and Mala's family also survived the Holocaust. She is described to be caring throughout the story but is often frustrated with Vladek who refuses to spend the money that he has earned.