
MAUS DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

CHAPTER 1: THE SHEIK

1: Is the depiction of Vladek in the picture here flattering?

The depiction of Vladek in the picture is not flattering as it portrays him to be an asshole who only stayed with Lucia because of her physical body and did not even try to form an emotional connection with her. He seemed rather upset in the picture and almost confused as he did not know why she would try to hold on to him and didn't care about how much he meant to her. Even though he pursued a relationship with another woman while dating Lucia, he nonchalantly ends a four-year relationship without much thought simply because Lucia did not come from a wealthy family.

2: Why does Spiegelman split Vladek's body over three panels here? What is symbolic about Artie's position in this page? Why is the exercise bike a smart inclusion here? What symbolic significance does it hold? (Page 14)

The exercise bike is symbolic of effort that has gone to waste as people pedal on the exercise bikes but is not necessarily getting anywhere, and this could also mean that he is trying to run away from his past, but to no avail. It also shows that their family is relatively well off, as they could afford an exercise bike within their household. The panel that is in the shape of a bicycle wheel represents Vladek's memories, as it is in the form of a circle, it shows repetition and that it cannot be changed. The scene of Vladek riding on the exercise bike is split into three separate panels to show Vladek's current state, he feels broken and lost without a purpose in life and it could also show that his memories are incomplete, he only memorized fragments of his life in the concentration camps.

Vladek also overshadows Artie in every one of the pictures to show that he is the main character of the story and not Artie. The three panels could also symbolize how Vladek lived three different lives, the one here in New York, his life during the war as well as his life before the war. This is further reinforced by the quote "It would take many books, my life, and no one wants anyway to hear such stories" (Spiegelman, 14). Furthermore, when Vladek looks at Artie while riding his exercise bike, he looks past him into the dark hallway behind, to show that he is reminiscing about his dark past.

3: How is contrast used here? (Page 15)

The contrast is shown by the comparison between past and present versions of Vladek as can be seen in the picture in the bottom left corner. The younger Vladek was more carefree as can be seen by him dancing with Anja whereas the present Vladek is at home riding on his exercise bike, so he doesn't get leg cramps at night. There is visual dominance to show how important he was when he was younger when all the women would chase him, and he was going places with his life as can be seen by the palm tree in the picture. Compared to now, he is riding on his exercise bike at home by himself to show loneliness and even though that he is married, there is no woman present within the picture to show an unhappy marriage. Furthermore, the color contrast between black and white is more evident within this page to show the contrast between his past and present self. Lucia is also colored black without features to show how Vladek only stayed with her for her physical attributes instead of her personality.

4: How does Spiegelman distinguish present panels from past panels? (Page 16)

The panels that describe events of the past are boxed, whereas the panels in the present are unboxed. This shows that the past is caged, signifying that it cannot be changed and is only a memory whereas the present can be altered at any moment and hence is free. In the present panels, Vladek and Artie are always facing each other to show that they are conversing about Vladek's past.

5: What do we note about Vladek's insensitivity here? (Page 17)

Vladek in this scene is portrayed to be materialistic and marries only to increase his social status. He does not plan on marrying Lucia because she does not come from a rich family and his insensitivity can be seen because he is only using Lucia for sex and does not plan on marrying her even though she is madly in love with him as can be seen in later when she tries desperately to hold on to him as well as blackmailing him after he becomes engaged to Anja.

6: Why is the placement of the photo of Anja significant? (Page 19)

The photo of Anja is used as a passive way of telling Lucia that she is not longer important in his life anymore without straight up telling the news to her to her face. Furthermore, by framing her photo in a very nice-looking frame, it's a small but endearing gesture which shows just how much Anja mean to him, and even though Vladek has been described to marry to increase his social status, it can be seen from this simple gesture that he is truly in love with her. The photo that Anja sends depicts her in an expensive coat which conveys her wealth but also demonstrates her mature manner contrasting to Lucia and was also what was expected from woman at the time. The fact that

the picture bleeds over multiple panels between past and present to show that even now, Anja is the driving force in Vladek's life.

7: What foreshadowing is suggested here? (Page 21)

When Vladek visited Anja's house, he was able to get a peek into her closet and found it to be very organized. This shows the matching of their personalities as they both value order and cleanliness and foreshadows a happy and compatible marriage. Furthermore, the pills that was found in her closet will foreshadow her sickness and stay at the sanitarium. It also insincerity as he looks into her closet without her permission as well as shows a lack of trust between the two parties. There is also craftiness present as he is able to use his wits to investigate her personality without her knowing and further shows his insensitivity. This could also foreshadow that her suicide after the war was due to an overdose of pills.

8: Why does Spiegelman include Vladek remembering that he has forgotten something? (Page 22)

Spiegelman using the fact that Vladek remembered he forgot something to show that the relationship really meant nothing to him and that even though she was madly in love with him, she meant nothing to him. The picture of Vladek is white which shows honesty, even though he was not forthcoming with Lucia at the time, he comes clean to his son and explained everything to him.

9: Is Lucia's letter really all that inaccurate? (Page 24)

Lucia's letter was fairly accurate as Vladek did in fact have many girlfriends back in his hometown and he did not have the best of reputations. However, he lied to Anja in order to convince her and that he could marry her for her money. Even though the letter is vengeful in their nature, the information contained are not too far off from the truth.

10: How is the depiction of Artie's dishonesty actually honest? What other irony exists on this page? (Page 25)

Artie promised his father that he would not share this information within the book but does so regardless and the fact that both characters appear as a silhouette show homogeneity and that both Artie and Vladek are liars. This is so reinforced by the fact that both are shrouded in darkness to show mysteriousness and uncertainty as the father and son don't know much about each other.

CHAPTER 2: THE HONEYMOON

1: CHAPTER ILLUSTRATION—WHAT IS SYMBOLIC AND WHAT IS IRONIC HERE?

There is situational irony present within the second chapter. As the title of the chapter is honeymoon, the reader would expect the newlywed couple, Anja and Vladek to have a good time. However, the exact opposite happened with the massive imprisonment and execution of Jews. The anti-Semitism within Europe at the time created a very negative atmosphere, ironic to honeymoon phase that couples usually experience after their marriage. The illustration of the chapter shows a Nazi flag flying high in the air, as if to show that it is the “moon” in the sky. The picture is colored everywhere in grid-like patterns except the Swastika flag which is the focus of the picture. All of the mice are colored black to show that they are all the same when it comes to the treatment against them and the discrimination is regardless of gender and class. By depicting the mice to look up at the flag, it shows the hopelessness that they feel about their impending imprisonment and extermination.

2: What can money do here that it cannot later on? (Page 29)

In the second chapter, Anja’s family was able to pay their tenet to hide the package for them in exchange for her to go to prison instead of them. However, later on in the story when Vladek was sent to a prisoner of war camp, the money he had his possession was unable to help him bribe the guards and they were betrayed by the Polish to be smuggled out of the country.

3: Why would Spiegelman want us to know that others suffer because of Anja?

(Page 30)

Anja does things that is not for her own benefit to satisfy others because she works for the communist even though she knows that if she was found out, she would hurt her family. Furthermore, this also foreshadows her suicide at the end of the war which causes Vladek and Artie to suffer with that loss for the rest of their life. Furthermore, Artie wants the reader to know that despite all of the positive imagery that Vladek uses to describe her, she is not perfect and has made many serious mistakes in her life.

4: Why does Spiegelman want us to consider Richieu as being conceived pre-marriage? What is symbolic about the details of Artie's birth? (Page 32)

In the story, Vladek and Anja stated that the baby was born pre-mature having been married in February and having Richieu born in October. However, this was most likely not the case as he was a heavy baby weighing 3kg, it is more likely that he was actually conceived before Anja and Vladek actually got married. The pre-marital fertilization shows that the couple rushed into the process of pro-creation and that Richieu was an unwanted accident.

5: How is Anja's sensitivity a blessing and a curse? (Page 33)

Her emotional sensitivity can be a blessing because it was what made Vladek fall in love with her. But her sensitivity was also a curse when she refuses to let the Polish family take care and raise their child that eventually gets Richieu killed. Furthermore, it was Anja's sensitivity that brought Vladek

back from the factory and into the sanitarium. This protected them from the initial period of anti-Semitism within Europe.

6: Where are they when they first notice the swastika? Why is that significant?

(Page 34)

They first noticed a Swastika when they were on a train to the sanitarium, and this is significant because it foreshadows how Jews were transported between concentration camps through death trains in which many ended up not surviving. There are also five Jewish people in the same seat to show crowding and lack of consideration of luxury and show they are cramped into trains, so they are delivered to their final destinations. The town that they passed was significant as it showed that even prior to the Holocaust, there was already extreme anti-Semitism within the town and the people were supporting it rather than opposing it.

7: What is the Sanitarium a symbol of? (Page 36)

The sanitarium symbolizes a place of peacefulness and serenity and free of the war. The time that Vladek and Anja spend there are happy and joyful and contrasting to the chaos and disorder of the war. It also symbolizes shelter, somewhere where they can be worry-free.

8: Why is it fitting that Vladek's eyes are poor and in fact that he has one glass eye?

(Page 41)

The poor vision that Vladek has is symbolic to show that he can no longer interpret the world properly and that his life is a blur. It also goes to show that he has lost his common sense as can be seen when he threw out his son's jacket and gave him his old one without asking him for permission and when his son is already thirty years old.

8: Note Artie's hand at the end. Why is this significant? (Page 42)

In the picture, Artie is depicted to be yawning and picking his hair to show a lack of respect he has for his father. This lack of respect could have stemmed from the incident at the start of the story where he fell from his skateboard and his father showed him a lack of empathy and caring for him. He also shows how he has gotten bored of his stories and decides to stop his father from telling him anymore and save it for next time. It also shows that because his hand is fragile and easy to cramp, he has not gone through the same labor that many Jews went through during the war.

CHAPTER 3: PRISONERS OF WAR

1: SPIEGELMAN STARTS WITH THE BACKGROUND SPOTLIGHT—WHEN DOES HE USE THIS? WHY WOULD SPIEGELMAN START THE CHAPTER OFF WITH A MEMORY OF FIGHTING OVER EATING AT MEALTIMES. (PAGE 45)

The memory of conflict during the meal is symbolic of the conflict that Vladek experienced during the war and was also used to show how unhappy he was during the marriage. Furthermore, it shows the difference in personality between Vladek and Artie as one is critical of everyone's mistakes while Artie compliments people.

2: WHY IS ARTIE'S POSITION IN THE TOP PANEL SIGNIFICANT? (PAGE 47)

Artie's position at the top right panel of the page is lying on the floor while his dad is sitting on a chair to show that his father Vladek is the one with authority and is the main focus of the picture. Furthermore, Artie's position blends into the boxed panel of the memory to show that he interrupted his father's thought and to express his astonishment that they were only trained for a few days before they were sent to the front lines.

3: WHY ARE THE JEWS DAMNED IF THEY DO AND DAMNED IF THEY DON'T IN THE WAR? (PAGE 49 - 51)

The Polish were way under manned compared to the German forces and no matter if they try to fight back or not there was no way that they were going to win the war. The Jews were damned if they tried to fight back in the form of punishment and even if they surrender, they will still be subjected to torture and concentration camps like the rest because Hitler and the Nazi party firmly

believed that they were the cause of Germany's downfall after the First World War. Furthermore, he was yelled at for not shooting and after he was captured, he was yelled at for shooting the German soldiers. Hence, they were damned if they do shoot and damned if they didn't.

4: WHY ARE THE HANDS ENCIRCLED? CAN YOU CONNECT THIS TO ARTIE'S DELICATE HANDS? (PAGE 53)

The scene where the German grabs onto Vladek's hand is circled to show emphasis and the fact that the German hand is reaching down to grab Vladek's hand shows a position of authority and control. Furthermore, the German hand is seen to have longer nail to show danger as nails can become quite sharp if they are left untrimmed as well as the Nazi flag (Swastika) is clearly visible in the top right corner of the phrase. Furthermore, the difference in the texture of the hands can show that Artie has never experienced hardship within his life whereas the German soldier has seen lots of combat and has wrinkles on his hand.

5: CONSIDER THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE IMPROVISED CHESS SET (PAGE 56).

The improvised Chess set shows that even though they were confined to do manual labor in the concentration camps, they still want to ensure that their intellectual brain are kept sharp. Furthermore, Chess is considered to be an elegant sport and the Jewish prisoners are using it to befriend others. The Chess matches were also how they were able to distract themselves from the harsh reality of the Prisoner of War camps. The fact that they had to use stones and breadcrumbs shows the desperation as well as the bleak conditions within the prisoner of war camps.

6: WHY IS THE WINDOW ON THIS PAGE SIGNIFICANT? (PAGE 67)

The window on this page can be considered to be significant because it shows that they are excluded from the outside world. The window is representative of the separation between the Jewish people and rest of society as well as demonstrates how the Jews as well as Polish people were considered to be second class citizens that did not belong together with the pure Aryan race.

7: WHAT DOES ARTIE'S JOKING ABOUT "CURFEW" REVEAL ABOUT HIS CHARACTER? (PAGE 69)

Artie's joke about curfew is extremely insensitive as during the war, Jews had to be in their home with the lights out before 7pm each day and the fact that even though Artie knew about this and still chooses to joke about this matter shows his lack of respect for his father.

8: WHY DOES SPIEGELMAN CHOOSE TO END THE CHAPTER ON THE TOPIC OF ARTIE'S JACKET? (PAGE 71)

The fact that Artie's father threw out his jacket without asking him for his permission shows that he is the one in authority and does not even need to consult his opinion in order to come to a decision even though Artie was already thirty years old and is no longer needing of his supervision. Furthermore, as he is leaving the house, he checks the garbage can and sees that his father had in fact threw out his jacket. If he had felt that the jacket was important, he could have easily taken out the jacket and washed it. But, in order to make his father happy, he chooses not to and leaves instead. This shows that even though he is a grown man he still closely listens to his father. It also shows how Vladek doesn't like when Artie does things without his permission and tries to control him.