

## Teaching Guide for “Maus:” Module 6 of SGO 1000

The following learning outcomes *should guide your curriculum* and *should be shared with the students*. The two most important parts of this Guide are the information on **Learning Outcomes** and the method of **Assessing the Module Curriculum**. These parts are required. The section in the middle of this guide provides teaching tips. For the course assessment and the exam for this module of the course—the same instrument—all instructors must require that students answer questions 2 and 4 below (in **boldface**).

### Learning Outcomes

1. Students will be able to explain why we study painful historical periods and events.\*
- 2. Students will be able to define, in their own words, “prejudice” and explain the degree to which, if any, the representation of the characters as different kinds of animals represents an example of prejudice.\***
3. Students will be able to identify one positive and one negative characteristic of the same member (any member) of the Spiegelman family, and explain the basis for the identifications.\*
- 4. Students will be able to define, in their own words, “memory,” and will identify/discuss an example where memory can have a positive impact and an example where memory can have a negative impact on the individual.\***
5. Students will be able to explain, in their own words, the difference between “**history**” and “**memory**,” and discuss examples from the memoir that represent two different obstacles to making “history” and “memory,” in the book, one and the same.\*
6. Students will be able, in their own words, to define and distinguish between “oral history,” “memoir,” and “novels,” explaining which of these three literary voices Maus represents.
7. Students will be able to identify and discuss a positive and a negative example in Maus of “testimonies” as sources of history.
8. Students will be able to identify and discuss two examples in Maus of generational conflict, one of which arises largely out of the unique experiences of the traumatized survivors and one of which reflects only the “generation gap” of the 1960s common to all American families.

**\*The first five outcomes are essential outcomes; the remaining ones are optional outcomes.**

Although Maus can be taught as literature or as history, or as both, **in this class you will only have time to discuss the social and historical aspects of the memoir.** The learning outcomes above address these aspects. You are not required to address all eight outcomes. You must, however, cover **at least the first five of them.** Some suggestions on addressing the historical context of the memoir are included below. Beyond this, the outcomes themselves suggest how to design your teaching curriculum and testing rubric for the module. Also, the outcomes cry out for this to be a discussion-rich module. For example, you should not give the students possible definitions for **memory, history and prejudice** until the students have provided many examples of their own definitions. Since students are to exemplify these terms, you should be prepared, if the students struggle, to provide one example only for each of the terms that they are having difficulty exemplifying. You may need to provide an example for outcomes 7 and 8, but only if students are struggling. It is critical that you do NOT provide all the examples, which would drain the module of its critical thinking possibilities and transform this into a pointless exercise in teaching to the test.

This module will fail to the degree to which some or many students have not read the memoir—a real danger. You should remind students each class of the importance of this reading. Remind students that they will not be force-fed the information but that every student will be expected to participate. When you pose questions to them about the book, you may wish to call on students randomly by name. This provides them an incentive to keep up the reading. It may be useful, if possible, to devote the last five to ten minutes of each class to a discussion of the novel, and require students to answer specific, narrowly-framed questions to keep students on track.

## About Maus



Maus is sometimes described as a graphic novel, but it is really a graphic history/memoir conveyed with both images and text. The images may be described as “cartoons,” except that, unlike cartoons, the subject matter is neither fictional nor funny, at least most of the time. By the time you convey these points, it will become apparent to your students that Maus really has no parallel in terms of genre. Winner of the Pulitzer prize in 1992, it is partly a history of a father’s experience in the Holocaust told by the cartoonist son who was not there. Partly it is a memoir of the son’s effort to hold himself together while researching and telling (pictorially) the story during the 1970s and 1980s. The scene shifts continuously between the Holocaust era (history) and the period of remembering and telling (memoir). Sometimes there are rather odd if not bizarre digressions in the story designed to convey the trauma that occurs when people try to remember and hide the past from themselves and others at the same time.

A very valuable teaching guide for Maus, which will help you present the background and significance of the book to students was presented by LaGuardia Community College’s common reader program and is at:

<http://www.lagcc.cuny.edu/maus/mausHome.htm>

I will also be giving an overview of the themes that you might present, along the lines of the presentation that Dr. McDonald gave last year on the learning outcomes for To Kill a Mockingbird. I will present this overview early in the fall semester. The learning module for Maus occurs late in the semester (it is Module 6 of 7 modules) and so this will provide you with sufficient time to incorporate the suggestions into your curriculum, especially with the written material provided here.

The following bullet points indicate background topics that it will be necessary for you to discuss in order for students to understand the foreground material represented by the images and text of Maus:

- **Some background material on the beginnings of the Holocaust.** Maus covers the material only from the mid-1930s to 1942, before Vladek, the father, was sent to Auschwitz. It therefore covers a period before the worst period of the Holocaust, a time little known to students. They will not understand the geopolitical conditions of the time (The conditions in Germany before World War II and the timeline leading up to and after the Nazi-occupation of Poland in September 1, 1939) unless you tell them
- **Background material on the situation facing survivors in the US after World War II.** Students must know, but will have no clue, about the atmosphere which conditioned the possibilities for remembrance by Holocaust survivors in the US after World War II. The survivors wanted to get on with their lives amidst a culture that did not care, or want to hear horror stories, about the past. American society largely wanted to put the period to an era of privation and sacrifice (the Depression and World War II) and survivors wanted the same for their children. Memories of the German genocide were unwelcome amidst the Cold War effort to build up West Germany as a bulwark against communism. An integrationist ethos prevailed in the immediate postwar years and it was poles apart and many years distant from the ethnic pride movement that began

in the 1960s. Most survivors maintained a stony silence about their wartime experiences until their children came of age in the 1960s and a new era of social criticism coincided to force the children (like Art Spiegelman) to press their aging parents for answers. Even then, the survivors could not believe that their stories were of interest. “No one wants to hear such stories, anyway,” Vladek tells Art.

- **Background on the literary conventions of using animals allegorically to depict people.** Aesop’s fables and Orwell’s Animal Farm could be used as examples
- **Vladek’s use of broken English must be contextualized.** Student’s must be reminded that character voice is important to building authenticity, they may need help understanding its meaning, and they may need to be reminded that proper English, while not required of an author writing in the voice of his character, is required of student papers on the same.
- **Another angle concerns the psychology of Maus.** The survivors must deal with “survivor’s guilt,” the inability to understand why they survived when so many of their loved ones had died or to even be certain that survival in a post-Holocaust world had any meaning. The memoir is full of behavioral peculiarities by Vladek that may seem to have no reason or relationship to the story, like saving useless things or insisting that Art use a wooden hanger. But these are survival mechanisms and it would help students to understand this. You might remind students that surprising turns in plot lines or unusual happenings are not part of a novel or a memoir for no reason but are introduced in order to highlight the main points of the book in different ways. Art, too, is on the edge psychologically, and explores his demons quite graphically. What do these sections have to do with Vladek and the memories of the Holocaust. How does it show that trauma was not just a characteristic of the survivors but was passed down to the next generation, at least?

#### **Assessing the module curriculum (Required):**

Even though some instructors will have more than five of the learning outcomes above, the assessment may be different from one instructor to the other. On the other hand, **the first five outcomes are required of all instructors and it is necessary to be able to assess the learning outcomes with some common assessment questions (as we do with General Education assessment).** Accordingly, the boldface questions will have to be the focus of every examination of this module administered to students. Student success in answering these questions will be scored to determine success in meeting a selected two of the required five learning outcomes. Instructors will be required to submit the scores from the answers that students give to the two standardized questions that instructors are required to use.

#### **The two selected learning outcomes to be assessed for 2012**

Just to make it clear, let me reiterate that although only two of the required learning outcomes are to be used to assess the success of the course in achieving the learning outcomes, **all five of the required learning outcomes must be taught this semester and included on your exam.** The latter, your exam, is

what is called an “embedded assignment.” That is, it does double-duty. The grade on the exam counts as the Module 6 grade for the course. And the scores for the questions on the exam that assess two of the learning outcomes are going to be submitted at the end of the semester to assess *the success of the course*.

The learning outcomes to be used to assess the course in fall 2012 are:

**1. Students will be able to define, in their own words, “prejudice” and explain the degree to which, if any, the representation of the characters as different kinds of animals represents an example of prejudice.\***

**2. Students will be able to define, in their own words, “memory,” and will identify/discuss an example where memory can have a positive impact and an example where memory can have a negative impact on the individual.\***

**Here are the questions that every instructor must include in their exam for this course module. The grading rubric for these questions is also supplied below:**

- Common question #1: Provide a definition in your own words of the concept of “prejudice” when applied to the relationships among individuals and one example of prejudice in action from the book. To what degree, if any, does the portrayal of the characters as non-human animals represent “prejudice,” and why or why not? You may want to provide the definition and example **in your first paragraph** and your answer to the question about non-human animals **in your second paragraph**.

Merriam-Webster defines “prejudice” as “irrational attitude of hostility directed against an individual, a group, a race, or their supposed characteristics.”

Grading rubric:

8-10

The student presents a definition that contains the concepts of irrationality, hostility and the targeting of individuals of the whole group. The student can present the definition in their own words, however lengthy it may be. The student’s example will represent all parts of the student’s definition. The second part of the question will be answered fully and the answer must either defend Spiegelman’s technique from the charge of prejudice, or, if not, must at least acknowledge that the device is Spiegelman’s attempt to attack prejudice. The response

may have spelling or grammatical errors or incomplete sentences but the latter will be very infrequent.

6-7

The student presents a definition that contains the concepts of irrationality, hostility and the targeting of a group if not of individuals. The student can present the definition in their own words, however lengthy it may be. The student's example will largely represent the student's definition. The second part of the question will be answered partially and the student may not even partially defend Spiegelman's technique from the charge of prejudice. There will be some minor error in handling this part of the question. For example, a blanket attack on the use of the technique without any acknowledgement of its purpose would count as a minor error. The response may have spelling or grammatical errors and infrequent display of incomplete sentences.

4-5

The student presents a definition that contains the concepts of irrationality, hostility and the targeting of a group if not of individuals. The student can present the definition in their own words, however lengthy it may be. The example will not represent all parts of the student's definition. The second part of the question may be addressed but almost no explanation will be provided as to the student's position. For example, Spiegelman will be accused of prejudice in using the animal device or defended from that accusation, but the student will give little or no reason for their position on the question. The response may have spelling or grammatical errors and incomplete sentences with some frequency.

1-3

The student presents a definition that contains serious departures from the concepts in the definition. The student can present the definition in their own words, however lengthy it may be. None of the three examples represent all parts of the student's definition. The second part of the question will be presented in completely unintelligible form and no clear explanation will be provided as to the student's position on the use of the animal device. The response will have serious spelling or grammatical errors and many incomplete sentences.

- Common question #2: Provide in two paragraphs a definition, in the student's own words, of "memory," and two examples from the book in which memory could have a positive impact and an example where memory could have a negative impact on the

individual. In the first paragraph the student will define memory in their own words. In the second paragraph, the student will cite the two contrasting examples and give support for their conclusions regarding the same.

Merriam-Webster defines “memory” as “a particular act of recall or recollection” or “the fact or condition of being remembered,” or “an act of commemorative remembrance.”

Grading rubric:

8-10

The student presents a definition that contains the concept of “a particular act of recall or recollection”. The student must present the definition in their own words, however lengthy it may be. Both examples will represent all parts of the student’s definition. The negative and positive examples will be clearly demonstrated and distinguished as such and will be correct examples. The response may have spelling or grammatical errors or incomplete sentences but the latter will be very infrequent.

6-7

The student presents a definition that contains the concepts of politeness or respect, treatment, and “others,” whether the others are defined as individuals or groups. The student can present the definition in their own words, however lengthy it may be. The examples represent all parts of the student’s definition. Although, both examples will represent all parts of the student’s definition, the negative and positive examples will have problems of demonstration, such as awkwardness or problems of accuracy but will more accurate than inaccurate. The response may have spelling or grammatical errors and infrequent display of incomplete sentences.

4-5

The student presents a definition that contains the concepts of politeness or respect, treatment, and “others,” whether the others are defined as individuals or groups. The student can present the definition in their own words, however lengthy it may be. Only one of the two examples represent all parts of the student’s definition. The negative and positive examples will have major problems of demonstration, such as more inaccuracy than accuracy. There will be

some limited value to the discussion of the examples. The response may have spelling or grammatical errors and incomplete sentences with some frequency.

1-3

The student presents a definition that contains serious departures from the concepts in the definition. The student can present the definition in their own words, however lengthy it may be. Neither of the two examples represent all parts of the student's definition. The negative and positive examples will be unintelligible or otherwise valueless in answering the question. The response will have serious spelling or grammatical errors and many incomplete sentences.

Goals/Target: 70% of the students will score at least a 6 on both questions included in the assessment