

TEXTS: *MAUS*, VOLUMES 1 AND 2, BY ART SPEIGELMAN

Maus is a book that cannot be put down, truly, even to sleep. When two of the mice speak of love, you are moved, when they suffer, you weep. Slowly through this little tale comprised of suffering, humor and life's daily trials, you are captivated by the language of an old Eastern European family, and drawn into the gentle and mesmerizing rhythm, and when you finish *Maus*, you are unhappy to have left that magical world. --*Umberto Eco*

THE DIALECTICAL JOURNAL

A dialectical journal shows your own thoughts and ideas about the things you read in the novel. Feel free to write what you really think. Dialectic is a form of engaged argumentation—this means your journal should demonstrate an **active** interaction with the text as you read. Respond to it. Question it. Be **involved** in the story, not just a passive recipient.

Your goal with this journal is somewhat more focused than a traditional dialectical journal: **CHOOSE THREE** PANELS WHICH YOU DEEM THE MOST SIGNIFICANT FROM **EACH** CHAPTER. Explain briefly (but as deeply and clearly as possible) in complete sentences what the significance of the panel is in light of the main theme of the work, the overall plot or character development (as well as the relationship between Art and Vladek), the style of the graphic novel (consider visual composition and symbolism), issues of morality, wider historical concerns, or any other elements you deem important to the work. **DO NOT MERELY SUMMARISE THE PANEL.** Your goal here is to analyse significance, not merely describe what is present.

Some hints from *St. Martin's Handbook* to help you analyse and avoid summary (qtd. by The Writing Center at the University of North Carolina):

- Identify evidence that supports or illustrates the main point or theme as well as anything that seems to contradict it.
- Consider the relationship between the words and the visuals in the work. Are they well integrated, or are they sometimes at odds with one another? What functions do the visuals serve? To capture attention? To provide more detailed information or illustration? To appeal to readers' emotions?
- Identify the work's underlying assumptions about the subject, as well as any biases it reveals.

Though you are not expected to write lengthy explanations, you should clearly demonstrate you understand the significance of what is going on within the panel, as well as the relationship between that panel and the graphic novel as a whole. Focus on big ideas. Be sure to cite page and panel numbers.

ARGUMENTATIVE PARAGRAPH

In addition to the dialectical journal, you will be given a writing exercise when you return to school. You will be expected to write a solid, argumentative paragraph which demonstrates your understanding of the basic principles of literary writing learned in your freshman year, as well as an understanding of the major ideas of *Maus*. Your paragraph will be written in response to a specific prompt supplied by your teacher either over the course of the first week or two, or as a timed writing exercise (Honours students will all write the timed exercise), and must demonstrate an ability to assert a claim, support that claim with textual evidence, and clearly and logically analyse the evidence and *how* it supports your claim. Your preparation for this writing assignment should consist of a careful reading of both volumes of *Maus* and thoughtful, serious completion of the dialectical journal.

ENGLISH II AND II HONOURS SUMMER READING RATIONALE

The objective of the NCHS English Department's Summer Reading assignment is two-fold:

1. To foster a love of reading (for both pleasure and edification) by assigning engaging works of fiction, both classic and contemporary.
2. To keep those essential analytical and critical reading skills honed for the next year.

The English Department has selected *Maus: Volumes I and II*, by Art Spiegelman, for the summer reading for rising sophomores in both English II and English II Honours. Below are a variety of objectives served by the reading and study of the work both over the summer and upon return to class:

- We will discuss the relevance, importance, and impact of Holocaust literature. This work deals specifically with the impact of the Holocaust on the generation that followed. This is particularly pertinent to sophomores as they begin their course in world history.
- We will examine the graphic novel as a medium. We will discuss how it aims to achieve its purpose in ways different than merely prose. We will examine both why the author chose to portray his narrative in this form and whether or not readers find it effective.

Evidence of students' understanding of the deeper themes and engagement with the text will be assessed by use of a dialectical journal to be completed over the summer, and a writing assignment given upon the students' return to school in August. Class discussion of the text will also support our treatment of more specific thematic and stylistic elements of the work. The writing assignment will consist of a strong, argumentative paragraph which demonstrates students' ability to assert a claim, support it with specific evidence from the text, and analyse it at a level of depth appropriate to incoming sophomores. The paragraph will be assessed according to usual English Department standards.