

Beyond the Words of a Survivor



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What was the Holocaust?

- The Holocaust was a genocide perpetrated by Nazi Germany during World War II. The Nazis, led by Adolf Hitler, believed in a supremacist ideology that deemed Jews and other minority groups as inferior and unworthy of life. From 1941 to 1945, they systematically murdered six million Jews, as well as million of other people, including Roma, disabled individuals, homosexuals, and political dissident. The Holocaust is widely regarded as one of the most heinous crimes in human history, and it had a profound impact on the world's political and social landscape.

Summary “Maus”

- The graphic novel written by Art Spiegelman, “Maus” is the story of his father’s experiences during the Holocaust. The novel uses animals to represent different groups of people, with Jews being portrayed as mice and Nazis being portrayed as cats. The story is told through a series of flashbacks and present-day conversations between Art and his father. The novel explores themes of survival, guilt, and the impact trauma on subsequent generations. This story won a Pulitzer Prize in 1992.

Use of Animal Imagery:

- In this story, each minority group is represented by a different animal.
 - Jews (mice)
 - Nazis (cats)
 - Poles (pigs)
 - Americans (dogs)
 - French (frogs)
- The use of animal imagery allows Spiegelman to explore the complex issues of identity and power in a way that is both accessible and thought-provoking.

Broader Themes of the Holocaust:

“The Jews are undoubtedly a race, but they are not human.” (Maus)

- In the story “Maus,” it explores the Holocaust and its aftermath. Some of the broader themes that the book covers are the trauma it had on subsequent generations, the nature of survival and guilt, the ways in which identity is constructed and contested, and the power dynamics that shape human relationships.
- “Maus” also offers readers a unique and compelling perspective on one of the most significant events of the 20th century.

Psychological Effects on Survivors:

“A common tendency among survivors was that many married and soon thereafter had children... The period following liberation is often referred to as “Return to Life” or “Returning to Life.” (Module 6, Lesson 2)

- The survivors of the Holocaust experienced a wide range of psychological effects as a result of their experiences. Many suffered from PTSD, which caused flashbacks and nightmares. Survivors also experienced guilt that formed because they survived this traumatic event. Many survivors turned to therapy and other forms of support to help them cope with these effects and rebuild their lives after the war.

Sources

Module 6, Lessons 2-4

Module 4, Lessons 1-3

Spiegelman, Art, and Art Spiegelman. *Maus*. Rowohlt-Taschenbuch-Verl., 2004