A Unit of Instruction for *Maus*

by Jason W. Brunken

1. **Unit Goals (long range—how does this unit fit with year-long goals?)**

   - Students will identify and explain literary symbols and their meanings.
   - Students will develop their own literary symbols and justify their selections.
   - Students will write a correctly formatted essay using facts and details from *Maus*.
   - Students will correctly identify the four main types of literary conflict and provide examples of each from the novel *Maus*.
   - Students will research and present information on a topic related to WWII by building an informative website.
   - Students will recall important people, places, and events of WWII.
   - Students will apply old and newly learned technology skills (word processing, Internet search skills, web design basics, free website building software, online collaboration) to build an informative website.
   - Students will define "Holocaust" and genocide.
   - Students will recall the important events and locations of the Holocaust.

2. **Specific ways to relate goal(s) to curriculum (team/department, system and state frameworks)**

   The only stated curriculum or school goals for the Happy Kids Middle School Program are, "to produce students who have a strong command of the English language [and] to teach our students to value diversity, learn about local and global issues, develop an awareness of cultural differences, connect history to our changing world, and recognize the challenges for the future." The Middle School Program is a combination Middle School language arts and social sciences class for ELL students. The stated goals of the unit in #1 will align well with the program goals and objectives.

3. **Characteristics of the students for whom this unit is intended (needs in the cognitive, affective, physical, and social areas)**

   The Happy Kids Middle School Program is the only course available for secondary students at Happy Kids in Taipei, Taiwan. Happy Kids is an all-English language buxiban (a sort of school after school for elementary and secondary students) and preschool. The school is small, serving about 200 students ranging in ages from 3-17. The school houses three programs: the Day Program or preschool/kindergarten, the After School Language Arts Program for elementary school students, and the Middle School Program for secondary students. The Middle School Program meets once a week on Saturday mornings. Students in this program typically attend their middle or high schools five days a week for 8-10 hours a day, not counting any cram schools they attend and their homework. Taiwanese students, like most East Asian students, have particularly grueling schooling regimens consisting of mostly rote memorization lessons and high-stakes testing. While the Middle School Program is meant to be a stark contrast to its students' typical curriculums, this class takes away precious respite time from students being on Saturday morning. Yet, many are willing to come

because of they enjoy the alternate learning style (and many of their parents mandate some kind of education-related activity on Saturday mornings.)

Typically, students in the Middle School Program are intelligent, high-performing and responsible students from relatively affluent backgrounds. They are all well-adjusted students and require no special accommodations, either physical or cognitive. Nearly all Happy Kids students are native Mandarin Chinese speakers and are learning English as a foreign language. Many have attended Happy Kids, an all-English environment, since preschool and have developed levels of fluency in speaking, reading, listening, and writing similar to North American students of similar ages. Therefore, most of the Middle School curriculum is delivered as it would be to native speakers with few accommodations for ELL students.

4. **Student's Present Level of Performance and Knowledge (Do the students have the adequate knowledge to complete the unit successfully? What prerequisite skills must the students have to complete the unit content? Include technology skills.**

This unit requires few prerequisite skills outside of what is already expected of students in the Happy Kids Middle School Program. No prior knowledge of any of the subjects covered in the unit is necessary. To complete the website assignment, students will need some technology skills to complete the task. It will be assumed that all students already are able to open an Internet browser and find their way around, perform basic Internet searches, compose and send email, use a word processor, and understand basic online functions, tools, and terminology. Students will also need to know their way around Google Sites and its basic functions and features, how to share their site with collaborators, basics of copyright rules and how to search for copyright-free media to use on a website, and how to identify creditable information online.

5. **Classroom Layout and grouping of students (Where will the learning take place? How will the room be organized? How will students be grouped (whole group, individuals, pairs, small groups, etc.)**

Classes at Happy Kids are small with no row seating. Students typically sit in groups of 3-5. The Middle School Program is no different. However, room organization changes from activity to activity. During independent work, students will sit in small groups at tables. During small group work, students will move to different rooms in the school (as the rest of the school is empty on Saturdays) to work. During large group activities and discussions, students typically sit or stand in a circle facing each other.

The unit will be divided into four smaller lessons: An introduction to WWII and Nazi Germany lesson, a lesson on the Holocaust, a lesson on literary conflict, and a final lesson about symbolism as a literary device. For the WWII unit, the main assignment will be building an informative website about a WWII topic. Students will work in teams of three assigned by the teacher for this assignment. For the Holocaust lesson, the main assignment will be an experiential activity, a discussion, and some read and response activities. These activities will be completed together as a whole class with the reading response activities to be completed independently. For the literary conflict unit, there will be two assignments: a short worksheet and a visual representation assignment. Students will complete the worksheet independently and the visual assignment will be completed in small groups of 2-3 of the students' choice. Finally, the symbolism lesson will serve as the final lesson for the unit. Students will participate in a whole-group discussion and work on an essay independently.

6. **Introductory procedures (How will you introduce the unit and the goals?)**

The instructional website will contain some introductory content about WWII and the Holocaust like important battles, a general timeline (for both), casualty figures, maps, and more. I plan to open the unit with a "big question" for the unit (something along the lines of "How can a country allow something horrible like the Holocaust happen?) that the students will begin by thinking about and then writing down a response in their journals before they begin learning. Following this activity, students will then work in pairs to explore the instructional website and its content, and complete a follow along worksheet as they go. Following these activities will then start the WWII website assignment.

7. **Materials and media (any resource, persons or materials: be as specific as possible. Identify resource, its availability, how it is to be used and why.**

- **Computers with high-speed Internet connection** – computers will be used for many activities throughout this unit. They will be used by students to view and use the unit website to complete the unit introductory activities, learn about the Holocaust, and to build their websites. Happy Kids has six such computers available for students in the Middle School Program to use during class time. If extra time is needed, all students have access to computers and high-speed Internet at home.

- **Art Supplies** – A variety of art supplies including paper (white and colored), colored pencils, markers, pens, pencils, markers, and pastels will be needed for students to complete both the pictowords and literary conflict images assignments. These materials are always in stock and available to students at Happy Kids.

- **How to Write an Essay guide sheet and graphic organizer** – Students will be writing essays in the unit, and while they all have written essays before, they will need these materials to guide and remind them of proper essay format so they can complete the task properly. These are completed and will be made available to the students through Google Docs and the unit website.

- **Digital Projector** – A digital projector is essential to this unit in order to display the website content and other content during the unit. It will also be used during the tutorial on Google Sites. Happy Kids has one digital projector that can be checked out and used by teachers. This resource will be reserved and available for the unit.

- **Rise of Hitler and Nazi Germany slideshow** – This resource will be used to introduce students to Adolf Hitler, Nazi Germany and the Holocaust early in the unit. Since Taiwanese middle school students do not have much exposure to these subjects, this resource is essential to provide background information and context to the students as they read through *Maus*. This resource is currently partly finished and will be completed by me and ready when the time comes to deliver the unit.

- **Journals** – All students will need a journal to record their thoughts, reflections, and responses during a variety of activities throughout the unit. The journals will also serve as a means for the teacher to track and record student performance throughout the unit. Students in the Middle School Program are given journals at the beginning of the year. These journals will also be used for this unit.

- **Unit Companion Website –** A website will be created for this unit that will provide background information on the novel, *Maus* and relevant topics like WWII, Nazi Germany, and the Holocaust. The website will also contain information and resources for all lessons and activities throughout the unit. The companion website also includes a variety of graphics that will be used during the instruction as well. Many of these graphics will be examples that will help guide students when completing assignments. This resource is currently only in the planning stages. It is set to be completed by the end of the summer in time for the unit next school year.

- **Google Accounts for students –** In order to create their websites, students will need a Google Account in order to access and use Google Sites to complete the assignment. Students will also need to collaborate with their team to finish the websites. Google Site's ability to share the site and allow collaborators requires all parties to have Google Accounts. Email communication will also be necessary throughout the unit. All students currently enrolled in the program have Google Accounts already. Starting in the 2013-2014 school year, all Middle School Program students will be required to have a Google Account for the class. They will use personal accounts for this unit and the course in general.

8. **Visuals (although this is part of the materials and media, I want this to be a specific part of your plan). Identify at least EIGHT static graphic visuals (NOT links to video clips or websites, please) that you will be creating and use, their purpose, and design**

- **Map of the Holocaust –** This visual will be used to show students the locations of the many Nazi concentration, work, and death camps used during the Holocaust. This visual will differ from other similar maps out there as it will use separate icons for students to quickly distinguish the differences between the purposes of the camps. The map will also highlight the camps in which Vladek, the main character of the graphic novel Maus, was imprisoned.

- **WWII and Holocaust Casualty Tables and Charts –** This visual will give students a visual representation of the sheer amount of death that WWII wrought on different populations like Jews, soldiers from different countries, civilians, and more. It will include the population of Taipei City so students can better fathom the amount of lives claimed by WWII. This graphic will use people-shaped icons and different colors to represent the casualties.

- **Annotated Image of a *Maus* Character (x2) –** Two images of characters from Maus will be annotated with text and other images to help students understand the intentional symbolism behind the author's choice of animal to represent the different groups of people in *Maus*. The purpose of these images is to help students begin to think about the power of symbolism in literature and which animals they might use. The students will be required to choose animals to represent the different groups of people involved in the WWII Pacific theater and explain their choices for a graphic novel similar to *Maus* in an essay, the final assignment for the unit.

- **Visual Representation of the Types of Literary Conflict –** This visual will be used on the website and a handout to help students gain a better understanding of the concept of literary conflict and the three types. It will also serve as an example for students to follow when creating their own representative visuals of the types of the different types of literary conflict. This graphic will contain three images, one of two men fighting with swords, the second with a man braving a cold win, and a third of a man with a thought bubble showing himself defeating his fear.

- **Pictoword (x2)** – Pictowords are a visual representation of a word. They are typically interpretive or transformative visuals. Students learn the meaning of a new vocabulary word and then find a way to depict the word graphically in a way that also represents its meaning. Students typically remember the words longer after completing this exercise. I will create two Pictowords as examples for the website that students can view to model their creations after.

- **How to Write an Essay Graphic Organizer** – This resource will be posted on the website and passed out to the students to help remind them of how to properly organize an essay and help them during the essay writing process. While all Middle School Program students have learned to write a proper essay prior to this unit, this resource will help students recall this knowledge and increase their chances of success on the assignment. This resource will be an adaptation of a previous version I currently use that can be found at http://goo.gl/WC2IW.

- **Assorted Decorative Graphics** – Several graphics will need to be created to make the website look more attractive and there for do a better job to hold student interest throughout the unit. Studies have shown that a lack of decorative or appealing visuals in the content can cause learners to be less enthusiastic about the content. At this point I foresee a Maus-themed visual for the home page as well as at least one for each of the separate lesson pages. I also think I will need to make small graphics for the site's main banner and navigation tabs, possibly custom bullets as well.

9. **Assessment and evaluation of learner understanding (Identify the methods the teacher will use to identify student learning levels and needs. Describe when these will be used during the unit)**

As Happy Kids does not collect grades for student performance, all student work and performance is evaluated by the teacher for each class and reported directly to parents in semiannual progress reports and parent-teacher conferences. For this unit, I will record my observations of student performance during each class period. Because Happy Kids is an English learning buxiban, teachers' observations are generally related to how well students are learning and demonstrating their English proficiency in class. The Middle School Program, however, is a bit different in that acquisition of the social science content covered in the curriculum is also evaluated and reported to parents. To monitor this area of student progress, students' WWII websites, unit worksheets, journal entries, literary conflict images, and symbolism essay will serve as the assessment tools. They all will be reviewed and assessed by me to determine how well the students have met the stated goals for the curriculum. Assessment of the individual assignments will take place after they are completed and turned into me for review. This data is then recorded in a gradebook and as well as the observation book and relevant details are passed onto parents in the form of progress reports and a parent-teacher conference.

10. **Relate assessment instruments to the outcomes stated in the goals. (Assessment metric to be used to determine outcomes related to the unit goals shown in red and parentheses.)**

- Students will learn to identify and explain literary symbols and their meanings. **(Teacher's observations from class discussions, symbolism essay)**
- Students will develop their own literary symbols and justify their selections and write a correctly formatted essay using facts and details from *Maus*. **(Symbolism essay)**
- Students will correctly identify the three main types of literary conflict and examples of each from the novel *Maus*. **(literary conflict image assignment)**

- Students will research and present information on a topic related to WWII by building an informative website. **(WWII Website Assignment)**
- Students will recall important people, places, and events of WWII. **(Unit introduction activities, WWII Website Assignment reflection)**
- Students will apply old and newly learned technology skills (word processing, Internet search skills, web design basics, free website building software, online collaboration) to build an informative website. **(WWII Website Assignment)**
- Students will understand the meaning of the words "Holocaust" and genocide. **(Unit introduction activities, teacher's observations from class discussions, Holocaust experiential activity)**
- Students will recall the important events and locations of the Holocaust. **(Unit introduction activities, Holocaust experiential activity reflection)**
- Students will discuss how the Holocaust was allowed to happen and why genocide continues to happen. **(Unit introduction activities, Holocaust experiential activity reflection)**
- Students will be able compare and contrast the Holocaust with other acts of genocide in history. **(Unit introduction activities, Holocaust experiential activity reflection)**

* *Adapted from Unit Plan at* http://edtech.tennessee.edu/~bobannon/unit_plans.html