



TEACHER GUIDE

GRADES 9-12

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

The Metamorphosis

Franz Kafka



READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT

The Metamorphosis

Franz Kafka

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NOTE:

The trade book edition of the novel used to prepare this guide is found in the Novel Units catalog and on the Novel Units website. Using other editions may have varied page references.

Please note: We have assigned Interest Levels based on our knowledge of the themes and ideas of the books included in the Novel Units sets, however, please assess the appropriateness of this novel or trade book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading with them. You know your students best!

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Skills and Strategies

Comprehension

Predicting, cause/effect,
inference

Writing

Poetry, biographical sketch,
monologue, précis, eulogy,
newspaper, script

Listening/Speaking

Discussion, oral reading,
film viewing, music, drama

Vocabulary

Target words, definitions,
application, games

Literary Elements

Characterization, symbolism,
irony, personification, simile,
metaphor, allusion, theme,
universality, foreshadowing,
conflict

Thinking

Research, compare/contrast,
analysis, brainstorming,
critical thinking

Across the Curriculum

Art—drawing, caricature,
sculpture, collage; History—
currents events

Date of First Publication: 1915

Genre: fiction

Point of View: third-person omniscient

Style: narrative

Setting: small rooms in an apartment in an unnamed city; time period, approximately four months

Themes: alienation, self-identity, familial relationships, guilt

Summary

Gregor Samsa, a traveling salesman, awakens from an unsettling dream one morning and finds himself changed into a “monstrous vermin.” He has been the sole support for his mother, father, and sister. In his metamorphosed state, he is unable to work and cannot communicate effectively or care for his physical needs. Although his sister initially tries to care for him, she becomes apathetic towards him and wants to be rid of him. Gregor ultimately experiences total alienation from his family and wills himself to die.

Characters

Gregor Samsa: a traveling salesman who hates his job but must work to support his family. He is changed into a giant insect, feels guilty because of his inability to work, becomes alienated from his family, and finally dies.

Grete: Gregor’s seventeen-year-old sister and the only one in the family to whom Gregor is emotionally close. Her initial concern and attempts to care for him turn to disinterest and neglect. She is the first one to mention the need to be rid of Gregor.

Mr. Samsa: Gregor’s father; overbearing and controlling. He has become lazy after his business failure and expects his son to provide money for the family. After Gregor’s metamorphosis, Mr. Samsa goes to work. Suspicious and angry, he wounds the “insect” twice.

Mrs. Samsa: Gregor’s mother; suffers from asthma. Although she loves Gregor, she faints at the sight of him. Although generally quiet and submissive to her husband, she intervenes when Mr. Samsa almost kills Gregor by throwing apples at him.

Office Manager: spokesman for Gregor’s boss. He comes to the Samsa home when Gregor does not arrive for work. When he cannot get Gregor to unlock the door to his room, he falsely accuses him of stealing money and being inadequate in his work.

Character Analysis

Directions: List some of the characters who appear in the novel in the boxes below. Begin the chart after reading Chapter I and add to the chart after Chapters II and III. Working in small groups, discuss the attributes of the various characters with other members of your group. In each character's box, write several words or phrases you feel describe him or her.

The chart consists of eight empty boxes arranged in two rows of four. Each box is a rounded rectangle with a smaller rounded rectangle at the bottom, resembling a label or a card. A large, light gray watermark with the word "SAMPLE" is oriented diagonally from the bottom-left to the top-right, covering the entire chart area.

Chapter I, pp. 3-20

Gregor Samsa awakens from an unsettling dream and finds he is transformed into a giant insect. Unable to get out of bed, he reflects on his aversion to his job as a traveling salesman. His mother, father, and sister attempt to rouse him but he is unable to communicate with them. The office manager arrives to find out why he has not reported for work. Gregor is still locked inside his room. The office manager uses cajolery and threats to try to get him out. When Gregor finally comes out, his appearance causes chaos. Gregor is seriously injured when his father drives him back into his room.

Vocabulary

metamorphosis (title)	vermin (3)	clarity (5)	meticulous (6)
perpetual (7)	apprentices (9)	rile (10)	whims (11)
obstinacy (11)	indisposition (12)	premonition (12)	crucial (14)
exuded (14)	delusion (14)	façade (15)	rectify (16)
perceptive (17)	imminent (17)	gyration (19)	profusely (20)

Discussion Questions

1. Examine Gregor Samsa's initial reaction to his metamorphosis and the part of his "new life" that most troubles him. Discuss examples of his denial of his transformed condition. Elicit student response about nightmares in which they experienced a similar terror. *(As he views his domed belly and many legs waving above him, he wonders what has happened to him. He does not believe it is a dream but feels he has overslept and must hurry to catch the next train. He vacillates between acknowledging his dilemma and believing he can still make it to work before he is in serious trouble with the boss. He rationalizes that his physical problems will leave when he gets up and that his inarticulate speech is the result of a cold. Each time the clock strikes a later hour, he renews his determination to get up. His consuming thought is that he must not stay in bed being useless. pp. 3-8)*
2. Analyze Gregor's view of his job and the summation of his life. Discuss whether or not Gregor suffers from a persecution complex. *(He hates his grueling job as a traveling salesman but feels he must keep working for five or six more years in order to pay off his parents' debts and to care for parents and his sister. He cites the "torture of traveling, worrying about changing trains, eating miserable food at all hours, constantly seeing new faces, no relationships that last or get more intimate." He thinks having to get up so early makes a person a complete idiot. He believes that only he is condemned to work for a firm that has no trust of its employees and always expects the worst from them. He reflects on his own loyalty toward the company, feels unappreciated and undervalued, and longs to be able to quit. pp. 4, 8, 16)*
3. Discuss Gregor's opinion of his boss. Note the statement, "He was a tool of the boss, without brains or backbone" (p. 5). Discuss how this might reflect Kafka's view of capitalism. *(The boss represents the worst facets of capitalism. He sits on his desk and talks down to the employees, who have to come up close to him because he is hard of hearing. Gregor feels that the boss watches for any excuse to fire him. The boss makes Gregor feel dumb and inadequate, and Gregor becomes weak and irresolute in his presence. pp. 4-5)*

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4. Analyze Gregor's relationship with family members and how they react to his failure to get up and go to work. Discuss the symbolism of his locked door. Note the reversal in Chapter II when the family locks the door from the outside. *(He must work at his hated job to support his family and pay off his parents' debts to his boss. His mother knocks cautiously and speaks softly; his father speaks in a deep, warning voice. His sister, Grete, shows the most concern for Gregor. She speaks gently, pleads with him to open the door, and worries that something is wrong with him. Gregor feels the family members are concerned because the boss will fire him and hound his parents about their debts to him. Yet, he knows he has no intention of letting them down. Although Gregor is protective of his family, the locked door symbolizes his separation from the family, physically and emotionally: they cannot come in without his approval. In Chapter II, he cannot come out without their approval. pp. 5-11)*
 5. Analyze the symbolism of the weather. Elicit student response of the way weather is used in literary genres to intensify the mood. *(The raindrops hitting against the window depress Gregor. The fog shrouds everything from his view. The statement, "seven o'clock already and still such a fog" symbolizes the "fog" in his mind and his inability to comprehend what has happened to him and what he must do about his dilemma. pp. 3, 8)*
 6. Examine the arrival of the office manager and its effect on the family. Have students characterize the family members based on their response to the manager. *(Grete warns Gregor of the manager's arrival and begins to cry. Gregor is concerned for his family, becomes angry, and gains the impetus to swing himself out of bed. Mr. Samsa is at first reasonable but becomes impatient and angry when Gregor doesn't open the door. Mrs. Samsa makes excuses for Gregor, saying there is something wrong with him and telling the manager how devoted Gregor is to his work. pp. 9-11)*
 7. Examine the office manager's tactics as he attempts to get Gregor out of his room. Apply the adage, "Getting what you ask for and not wanting what you get" to the manager's actions. *(He speaks of the importance of overcoming any obstacles to fulfill business obligations and blames Gregor for causing his parents to worry. He falsely accuses Gregor of being obstinate and of inadequate job performance, and he alludes to the possible embezzlement of funds. The manager's presence and threats give Gregor the impetus to unlock his door and come out. Gregor's appearance and his garbled speech cause the office manager to run away in fear. pp. 11-17)*
 8. Examine Gregor's desire to see his family and to discover their reactions to him. *(He believes their reactions will show whether his metamorphosis is real or in his mind. If they are shocked, Gregor is an insect and has no further responsibility and can remain calm. If they are calm, Gregor is still a human, has no reason to get excited, and can make the 8:00 train to work. p. 12)*
 9. Analyze the reaction of the office manager and the family members to Gregor's voice and the effect of their reactions on Gregor. *(Manager: says it is the voice of an animal and asks parents if Gregor is trying to make fools of them all. Mother: thinks he is ill and tells Grete to go for a doctor. Father: tells Anna, the maid, to go for a locksmith. After initially acting as if a great misfortune has occurred, all become quiet and still. Gregor: becomes calmer, realizes others know something is wrong with him, feels integrated back into society, and hopes for help from the doctor and the locksmith. pp. 13-14)*

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10. Discuss the individuals' reactions to Gregor's appearance and he to them. Note the significance of Mr. Samsa's driving Gregor into his room and away from the family. (*Office manager: utters loud "Oh!"; presses hand over mouth; backs away as if repulsed by an invisible, unrelenting force; runs away in fear. Mother: runs to Mr. Samsa, clasps her hands, starts toward Gregor, sinks down on the floor and hides her face, and cries to God for help. Father: has a hostile expression, clenches his fist, shields his eyes with his hands and sobs, then angrily grabs a cane and newspaper, hisses like a wild man, and drives Gregor back into his room. Gregor: at first is calm and says he'll get dressed and go to work, pleads for understanding, tries to detain the manager to ask for his help, and finally tries to get back into his room before his father kills him. pp. 15-20*)

Supplementary Activities

1. Have students draw a caricature of Gregor, the insect, or of the office manager.
2. Have students write name poems for Gregor, Grete, Mr. Samsa, and Mrs. Samsa.
3. Have students write a journal response to the following prediction questions: Will Gregor return to his normal state? If not, what will happen to him?

Chapter II, pp. 21-39

Gregor's insect-like characteristics dominate his life and isolate him from his family. Grete feeds him and cleans his room but does not communicate with him. When his mother and sister clear the furniture from his room, he feels deprived of everything he loves and "breaks out." His father bombards him with apples to drive him back to his room, and only his mother's interference saves his life.

Vocabulary

pallid (21)	tautening (21)	implicitly (26)	ardor (27)
conservatory (27)	allusions (27)	intact (28)	sluggish (28)
casement (29)	covered (30)	turmoil (35)	blotch (36)
corrosive (36)	prostrate (37)	subtleties (37)	obtuseness (39)
bombard (39)	chemise (39)		

Discussion Questions

1. Discuss the differences in Gregor and his family following his metamorphosis. Compare the physical changes with the emotional changes. (*Gregor: his eating habits change. He no longer likes milk and prefers to eat decaying, rotten food. He must lie flat on his back on the floor to rest, he hides under the couch, and he crawls over the walls and ceiling. Family: his father no longer reads the paper aloud at mealtime, and the family becomes quiet and still. Although Grete feeds him and cleans his room, no one tries to communicate with Gregor or realizes that he can understand their conversations. The father, mother, and sister form an alliance that excludes Gregor. He overhears their conversations concerning what to do with him, and he begins to decline emotionally from lack of companionship. pp. 21-30*)