

Individual Learning Packet

**Teaching Unit**

# The Metamorphosis

by Franz Kafka

Copyright © 1999 by Prestwick House Inc., P.O. Box 658, Clayton, DE 19938. 1-800-932-4593.  
www.prestwickhouse.com Permission to copy this unit for classroom use is extended to purchaser for his or her  
personal use. This material, in whole or part, may not be copied for resale. Revised August 2003.

ISBN 978-1-60389-857-7  
Reorder No. 200961

## Introduction

Kafka, born into the dying Austro-Hungarian Empire, lived in the ruins of that world. As a German-speaking, middle-class Jewish youth from Austria living among hostile, anti-Semitic, German-hating, poor people in Prague, Kafka was the quintessential outsider. To add to his isolation, he lived with a cold, domineering father with whom he did not get along.

Kafka's inner reality was no better. It has been described as a rather sunless, scary place where people and things were seldom what they seemed, and reason was constantly overwhelmed by chaos, evil, and indifference.

Critics do not always agree in their interpretation of Kafka's works, but the one point on which they do agree is that it is not possible to draw solid conclusions. While this will deprive some students of the certitude they seek in interpreting literary works, it also opens the door for the student to draw any conclusion for which they can find support in the text.

Note: All quotations and page references come from the Prestwick House Literary Touchstone Press edition of *The Metamorphosis*, copyright 2005.

## Objectives

By the end of the Unit, the student will be able to:

1. recall the literal events of the stories, outlining the major sequences of action.
2. write a character profile for Gregor's parents and point out the changes that take place in them.
3. discuss the function in the story of Gregor's supervisor, the big boss, and the company porter who meets the train.
4. identify the major symbols in the story and interpret them.
5. note and comment on the significance of the groupings of three in *The Metamorphosis*.
6. explain how Gregor Samas is used by the author to represent "the modern everyman."
7. define the term "allegory" and state to what extent this story may, or may not, be considered allegorical.
8. trace the changes that take place in Grete, the sister, and comment on the significance of the last sentence in the story, in regard to her.
9. discuss the extent to which this may be the story of Grete, the emerging artist.
10. support or refute the contention that, as some critics contend, this novel is timeless and universal.
11. give reasons why Kafka, despite the apolitical nature of his writing, is often celebrated as an especially effective critic of totalitarianism and its faceless bureaucracy.
12. draw a generalization regarding Kafka's view of capitalism and support that generalization by citing incidents from the stories.
13. explain how Kafka creates an air of verisimilitude in *The Metamorphosis*.

### **Questions for Essay and Discussion**

1. While there is no apparent reason for it, Kafka clearly put people, events, and things in groups of three. Identify as many of those groupings as you can.
2. While Gregor's metamorphosis gives the story its title, discuss the other metamorphoses which occur in this story.
3. In what ways may this story be seen as a criticism of capitalism?
4. In what ways may it be seen as an attack on personal and political tyranny?
5. A point of disagreement in the interpretation of Kafka's work is whether Kafka's obscure, symbolic works were in fact profound existential or religious allegories, or, as he expressed it, only about his "own dreamlike inner life." State your opinion and support it by referring to the text.
6. In what sense is Gregor a modern everyman?
7. Identify the significance of the sister's final action and point out how this relates to the story.
8. Identify and discuss the possible symbolism involved in the following:
  - the picture
  - the father's uniform
  - Gregor's transformation
  - Gregor's big boss
9. Point out how Kafka is able to make something that is impossible seem plausible.
10. The term allegory, which is sometimes used to describe this book, is associated with religion, yet there are not any significant references to churches or religion in this story. Discuss one possible way this story may be construed by some to be a religious or existential allegory.
11. Support or refute the idea that in the persons of Grete, we have the story of an emerging artist.
12. For what reason do you suppose some people describe this story as timeless or universal?
13. Consider the characters of Mr. Samsa, Mrs. Samsa, and Grete. Describe what they are like before Gregor's metamorphosis and what they are like after the change. Support or contradict this statement: The ties of blood are not strong enough to overcome the egocentric needs of the individual.

# The Metamorphosis

## Chapter I

### VOCABULARY

abraded – worn or scraped off  
admonish – warn  
caprices – whims  
enmeshed – tangled in  
exhortations – encouragements  
gilt – gold painted  
girth – circumference  
harbinger – indication  
idee fixe – obsession  
indisposition – slight illness  
lamenting – showing sorrow  
obliquely – diagonally  
obstinate – stubborn  
supine – horizontal  
tribulation – suffering

1. How does Gregor feel about the people he meets in his workplace?

---

---

---

---

---

2. Why does Gregor not quit his job if he hates it?

---

---

---

---

---

3. What does the boss represent?

---

---

---

---

---

## Chapter II

### VOCABULARY

**ascertain** – determine  
**asphyxia** – difficulty breathing  
**beneficent** – helpful  
**casement** – window frame  
**dissuaded** – advised against  
**invocations** – calls for help or support  
**pallidly** – palely  
**pronounced** – obvious  
**sojourn** – short stay  
**swoonlike** – as in a faint

1. In the first paragraph of this section what do we learn of Gregor's health?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. Some critics suggest that Gregor's growing appreciation of his antennae and his loss of interest in milk hints at Gregor's loss of humanity. Would you agree or disagree?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. Do you see any significance in the fact that Gregor must crawl under the couch to feel comfortable?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. At this point, Gregor tries to be as considerate as possible to his family for the unpleasantness that his metamorphosis has caused them. Is this consistent with his earlier attitude toward the family?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_