

FRANZ KAFKA

“THE METAMORPHOSIS”

This handout was prepared by Dr. William Tarvin, a retired professor of literature. Please visit my free website www.tarvinlit.com. Over 500 works of American and British literature are analyzed there for free.

An ANSWER KEY is provided at the end of this handout (p. 7).

Text used: Ann Charters, ed. *The Short Story and Its Writer*, 6th ed. Boston: Bedford, 2003. pp. 803-37.

1. THEMES: What are the two principal themes of this novella? (1) The dehumanization of modern life and (2) alienation.

2. STRUCTURE: The novella has three parts, each centered on the three times that the metamorphosed _____ Samsa leaves his room and the disastrous results which ensue.

3. The BEGINNING (PART I, 803–14): The first sentence declares Gregor’s _____ into an insect-looking creature. Ironically, Gregor’s greatest fear is not about this change, but about getting to _____ on time to keep from losing his _____.

IRONICALLY, this major concern does not differ from what would matter to him to him if he had not been transformed into a non-human _____.

In essence, in this first part, although he physically resembles an _____, Gregor acts like a human who is concerned about his _____.

The SYMBOLISM of the situation is apparent: As a human, Gregor had already turned himself into a mechanical _____ even before his metamorphosis.

4. On page 811, Gregor finally gets the door to his bedroom open, and in his transformed state appears. On pages 811–14, discuss (1) the amazement of the company manager, (2) the alarm of Gregor’s mother, and (3) the hostility of his father.

(1) When the metamorphosed Gregor appears, the manager utters “a loud ‘_____!’” (811) and quickly retreats into the foyer of the apartment building (812), before running down the stairs, shouting “_____” (813).

(2) On seeing him, Gregor’s mother “_____ down,” hiding her _____ (811). As Gregor comes near to her, she “_____ up, . . . crying,

‘Help, for _____ sake, help!’” (813). Darting from him, she backs into the dining table, knocking over “the big _____,” causing coffee to pour “in a steady stream onto the _____” (813). When Gregor softly addresses her, “_____. _____,” she “_____ once more, fled from the table, and fell into the arms” of her _____ (813).

(3) At first sight of his changed son, Gregor’s father “_____ with heaves of his powerful chest” (811). After the manager had fled, Mr. Samsa drives Gregor into the bedroom, using the _____ left by the manager (813). When Gregor gets “_____ [in the doorway] and could not have _____ any more by himself” (814), his father shoves him into the bedroom before quickly “slam[ming] _____” the door with the cane (814).

5. The INCITING MOMENT of a work of fiction is that point when the reader realizes the problem with which the fictional work will deal.

In “The Metamorphosis,” how is this reaction of Gregor’s family the Inciting Moment? His _____, like Gregor, is now aware of his sudden transformation. Here the reader asks two questions: How will Gregor and his family adjust to this _____? What changes in the family will Gregor’s physical _____ bring?

6. In part 1, Gregor’s metamorphosis is not complete, but certain aspects of his physical appearance are apparent.

Critics have noted that Gregor is too broad and convex to be a cockroach or even a dung beetle, as the cleaning woman will later call him. He is described as having numerous legs so he might be considered a centipede, which is not classified as an insect.

However, in a letter to his publisher Kafka refers to the metamorphosed Gregor as an “insect,” but he insisted that the cover of the book not have a drawing or depiction of an insect. Thus Kafka’s intention seems to have been to retain a descriptive vagueness of the transformed Gregor.

Some specifics are mentioned. His color is brown (824). His height (or length) is about three feet since by standing on his hind legs he can reach the doorknob of his room. He is broader than half a door, so his width would probably be about two feet.

He is able to speak in the first scene of the story, but his voice gradually disappears. Of his facial features, specifically mentioned are his jaws, eyelids, and nostrils. He also has a neck.

7. The MIDDLE (Part II and most of Part III, 814–34): Here, Gregor and his family try to come to an understanding of his new condition, which they initially believe will be _____ (that is, his transformation will not last too long).

8. In part 2, Gregor’s alienation and isolation deepen as he continues to change _____ and as his room is stripped of his possessions.

Physically, Gregor is becoming more _____ (use the

verb of “metamorphosis”). He eats insect _____ and even climbs up the _____ and across the _____.

Another physical change is that he loses his ability to _____; however, he can still hear and understand _____ speech (817).

9. Mentally, Gregor wants to remain _____. He fights to keep the _____ from being taken from his room because these pieces (particularly the print of the woman with the _____ stole) represent his human identity (822–24).

10. _____, his _____-year-old sister (819), is the one who comes to terms with the transformation in as humane a way as possible. She tries to get him the _____ he likes to eat and to modify his _____ to accommodate his sleeping, hiding, and roaming habits.

11. As Gregor is changing, so is his family. List some instances of the family’s “metamorphosis” brought on by Gregor’s metamorphosis.

They take on new strength, liberating themselves from dependence upon _____.

First, they learn to economize: the _____, who had also been their cook, is let go, with Grete and her mother taking on the _____ duties (817).

Next, as they are discussing their financial plight, Gregor overhears how they had tricked him into _____ himself when he was a human since there is family _____ which had been hidden from him (818–19): Despite “all their misfortunes a bit of _____, a very little bit, certainly, was still intact from the old days But besides that, the money Gregor had brought home every month—he had kept only a few _____ for _____—had never been completely used up and had accumulated into a tidy _____” (819).

His sister, so dependent on him before, begins to develop self-confidence: “Of course it was not only childish defiance and the _____ she had _____ acquired . . .” (822).

The change is most pronounced in Gregor’s father. He is transformed from a semi-invalid, who had not worked for _____ years (819), into a smartly dressed, energetic person with a responsible job: “Now, however, he was holding himself very erect, dressed in a tight-fitting blue _____ with gold buttons, the kind worn by _____ at _____ concerns” (825).

12. Part II ends with Gregor leaving his _____ (for the second time), again because of concern for his family: He wants to help his _____ revive his _____. She had fainted on seeing Gregor, who is described as a “gigantic _____ blotch” (824).

13. Who (once again) drives Gregor back into his room? What does this person

throw at Gregor, and is there any Biblical symbolism in the object thrown? Where does one of these objects become lodged? What does this person desire to do, and who intervenes to stop him?

(1) As in the first section, part 2 ends with Gregor's _____ driving his transformed son back into his _____ (825).

(2) The father bombards Gregor with _____ (825–26), probably a symbol drawn from the Bible where the apple is instrumental in driving _____ and Eve from the Garden of _____.

(3) One _____ painfully lodges in Gregor's _____ (826), perhaps a symbol of the father stripping his son of his _____.

(4) Gregor's mother thinks that her husband is intent on _____ him because she intervenes to beg "for Gregor's _____" (826).

14. PART III (826–34; the END of the story starts at the bottom of page 834 of this section).

In part 3, the process of Gregor's alienation from his _____ becomes complete.

First, the family members have discovered their ability to _____ themselves (their central metamorphosis) and no longer have to live with the hope that Gregor's condition is only _____.

(1) His father has a job as a bank _____ (suggested on page 825; confirmed on page 827).

(2) Grete has become a _____ and is studying _____ and French in the evenings (826).

(3) His mother has become a _____ (826).

(4) All are earning money; also the family is taking in _____ (829).

15. Concurrently, the family is losing _____ in Gregor. For instance, they do not care that Gregor has stopped _____, and Grete stops _____ his room (828).

16. The violin scene (the _____ and last time Gregor leaves his room): The music of Gregor's sister draws him from his room; the _____ see the horribly shaped Gregor and decide to _____ up the apartment they were renting (830–33).

A REVERSAL in a work of fiction is something which happens at the end of the story which contrasts with an event or situation presented earlier.

This pathos-laden violin scene has one Reversal because it shows that

Gregor's mind is becoming more "human" than it was before his metamorphosis. He desires the beauty of music, "the unknown _____ he longed for" (831). Before his metamorphosis, when he was a _____, Gregor had _____ music: Grete, "unlike him, loved _____" (818).

However, at the very moment Gregor develops this new kind of sensitivity and awareness, he is unwittingly driving his family to _____ him.

17. The CLIMAX, or the point at the end of the story which resolve the problem presented at the Inciting Moment (pp. 833–34): Gregor overhears as the family members, with Grete taking the lead, decide they must "get _____ of ____" (833). Notice that they no longer using the human pronoun, "him."

Grete's next speech (and she seems to realize that Gregor can understand human speech) is delivered not so much as an explanation to her _____ but as an ultimatum to Gregor: "If it were _____, he would have realized long ago that it isn't possible for _____ beings to live with such a _____, and he would have _____ away of his own _____. Then we wouldn't have a _____, but we'd be able to go on living and _____ his _____" (834).

Thus, after Gregor intrudes upon his sister's playing the violin and causes the boarders to leave, the family makes a final _____ about what to do with Gregor.

The two questions asked at the Inciting Moment are answered: The family realizes that it can not _____ to the situation. Gregor must be gotten _____ of for the family to _____. The metamorphosis of Gregor necessitates a reactive change in the other _____ members.

18. The END (834–37): Also at the end of a work of fiction, there should be a RECOGNITION, that is, a realization by the protagonist of what must be done. What Recognition comes to Gregor? He realizes that he has become a _____ to his family; he seems to lose the _____ to live.

19. A comic work ends with reconciliation, but a tragic fictional narrative ends with a CATASTROPHE, usually the death or destruction of the protagonist. What is the Catastrophe of "The Metamorphosis"?

Gregor's _____. He _____ feeling only "deep emotion and _____" (835) for his family.

The _____ discovers him dead and informs the family (835). It is she who disposes of his corpse: "Well,' the cleaning woman answered, . . . 'look, you don't have to worry about getting rid of the _____ next door. It's already been taken _____ of'" (837).

20. POINT OF VIEW is the vantage point which the writer employs in narrating the work of fiction. What change in Point of View is necessary after Gregor's death?

The last nine paragraphs (835–37) are told from the Third Person Omniscient Point of View, where we enter the minds of the family members.

The earlier parts were told from a Third Person Limited Omniscient Point of View, that is, from Gregor's vantage point.

21. What occurs in the aftermath to Gregor's death? His death fully _____ the family members. They now optimistically take charge of their lives, make new plans, and in the final paragraph, leave the stifling atmosphere of their _____ dwelling for a trip to the _____. Seeing their daughter bathed in sunlight, the Samsas decide that "it would soon be time, too, to find her a good _____" (837).

22. In the analysis of fiction, it is preferable not to speak of the "hero" or "heroine" of a work of fiction, but to refer to the main character as the PROTAGONIST. In "The Metamorphosis," how is Gregor the Protagonist?

Gregor basically desires his family to view him after his metamorphosis in the same way that they did _____ it.

Ironically, this previous life of Gregor perhaps explains why he was metamorphosed into an insect-like creature. As a traveling _____, he was little more than a _____-making "insect" for his demanding _____, who entirely depended upon him to pay the bills.

When Gregor becomes an _____-like creature, the roles are reversed. He is utterly _____ upon his family for his care and survival. However, instead of love and understanding, the family members progressively withdraw from and isolate _____.

23. The character or group of characters who oppose the protagonist is better called the ANTAGONIST(S), not the "villain(s)." How is Gregor's family collectively the principal Antagonist?

At first, the family lives on the hope that the metamorphosis of its breadwinner is only _____. However, as Gregor's condition does not revert, the members realize that they must _____ upon themselves. In essence, they become stronger as Gregor becomes _____.

Finally they recognize the necessity of _____ from the prison in which Gregor has placed them.

As if to symbolize this escape, in its last sentence, the novella may be said to end with a final metamorphosis, focused in the image of _____ stretching her body like a _____ emerging from its _____: "And it was like a confirmation of their new _____ and good intentions when at the end of the ride their _____ got up first and _____ her young _____" (837).

24. One SYMBOLISM often found in the novella is that it presents a ritualistic account of how the terminal _____ of one member of a family affects the other members.

Faced with such a calamity, a family (just like Gregor's) typically shows varying degrees of (1) compassion, (2) aversion, (3) panic, (4) hope, and (5) resentment.

Gregory's family finally is ready to cast him out just as sometimes a family is ready to get a terminal illness out of its life as the price of resumed _____ and for the sake of the _____ of the family.

ANSWER KEY

2. Gregor.
3. metamorphosis; work; job; differ; creature; insect; work; insect.
4. (1) Oh; Ugh. (2) sank; face; jumped; God's; coffeepot; rug; Mother; Mother; screamed; husband. (3) sobbed; cane; stuck; budged; shut.
5. family; metamorphosis; change.
7. temporarily.
8. physically; metamorphosed; food; walls; ceiling; speak; human.
9. human; furniture; fur.
10. Grete; seventeen; food; surroundings .
11. Gregor; maid; cooking; overworking; money; capital; dollars; himself; principal; self-confidence; recently; five; uniform; messengers; banking.
12. bedroom; sister; mother; brown.
13. (1) father; bedroom. (2) apples; Adam; Eden. (3) apple; back; backbone. (4) murdering; life.
14. family; support; temporary. (1) messenger; (2) salesgirl; shorthand; (3) seamstress; (4) three boarders.
15. interest; eating; cleaning.
16. third; boarders; give; nourishment; salesman; disliked; music; abandon.
17. rid; it; family; Gregor; human; creature; gone; free will; brother; honor; memory; decision; adjust; rid; survive; family.
18. burden; will.
19. death; dies; love; cleaning woman; stuff; care.
21. releases; city; country; husband.
22. before; salesman; money; family; insect; dependent; Gregor.
23. temporary; rely; weaker; escaping; Grete; butterfly; cocoon; dreams; daughter; stretched; body.
24. illness. health; survival.