

## 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](http://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*, 6<sup>th</sup> 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 completed 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.