

9th Grade English Summer Reading

Name: _____

The Metamorphosis

Background: Franz Kafka, one of the most influential writers of the early twentieth century, was born in Prague in 1883 and died in 1924. He was Jewish in Catholic Czechoslovakia, the son of a German-speaking shopkeeper. His father pushed him into business but he was interested in literature. Kafka lived with his parents most of his life although he felt neglected by his mother and pressured by his father. He earned a law degree and worked in a large accident-insurance corporation until he died of tuberculosis in 1924. Before his death he published a number of short stories and two novellas, including *The Metamorphosis* (1915). His executor Max Brod ignored Kafka's instructions to burn his manuscripts, instead publishing three novels that were nearly completed at his death. The predicaments and terrors described in his writing have been considered relevant to modern readers since Kafka's early death. He did not live to see his three sisters die in concentration camps, but some of his works seem to predict conditions of the World War II Holocaust. In his personal writings and fiction, Kafka reveals the torment and frustrations of his life: his illness, lack of success in love, unhappiness with his family, resentment of his bureaucratic job and an indifferent or oppressive society, and general feelings of inferiority.

His characters' lonely search for the meaning of individual existence in a meaningless or indifferent world reflects Kafka's **existentialist** views of life. People who are not dependent on older belief systems or institutions have freedom that also brings anxiety and guilt with the responsibility for constructing the meaning of one's own existence. Kafka had no association with Surrealist writers or artists, who saw hidden miracles of existence behind everyday reality. Kafka's works are sometimes called **surreal** because of his blend of matter-of-fact everyday reality and dream or nightmare images, but his vision of the ordinary person's impossible struggles to control life is quite different from the views of the Surrealists who came after him. Like **absurdist** writers of the mid-twentieth century, Kafka depicted irrational, anguished people in nightmarish situations, unable to form significant relationships with(in) their environment.

Reading Comprehension/Analysis Questions:**(Part I)**

1. What is Gregor's job situation? _____

2. What is Gregor's initial reaction to his metamorphosis into an insect?

3. What is the relationship between realism and fantasy in this story? What are some details that make the fantastic story credible?

4. Why does Gregor dismiss the idea of calling for help when he tries to get out of bed?

5. What seems most important to members of his family as he lies in bed?

6. What is the significance of the view from Gregor's window?

7. Analyze Gregor's adaptation to his new body. In what ways do the satisfactions of his life as an insect differ from the satisfactions of his life as a traveling salesman?

8. What does Gregor's father do at the end of part I, regarding Gregor and his room?

[Part II]

9. What kinds of changes do Gregor and his family undergo in this section in response to his metamorphosis?

10. How does Grete treat Gregor in section II? Is he ill?

11. What are Gregor's hopes for the future? Is there anything wrong with those hopes?

12. For a time, Gregor is ashamed of his condition and tries to hide from everyone. In what way might this be called a step forward for him?

13. What is the significance of Gregor's relationship with and dream for his sister Grete? Is this dream in conflict with other demands upon Gregor?

14. Why does Gregor change his mind about having the furniture removed from his room so that he can move freely about? _____

15. Why does Gregor's father behave as he does when Gregor "breaks loose"? Explain the situation that has developed by the end of section II?

[Part III]

15. What does the after-dinner scene in the third paragraph reveal about the family's relationship with and attitude toward Gregor?

16. What does Gregor's father's uniform symbolize?

17. Is there a connection between Gregor's eating problems and Grete's violin playing?

18. What causes Gregor's death, and how does his family react to that event?

19. How does Gregor's condition deteriorate by the end of the story, in his environment and within himself? _____

20. How does Gregor's family behave at the end of the story? What are your reactions to the events and atmosphere at the end?

21. What, ultimately, is the meaning of Gregor's metamorphosis?
