

Summer Reading Packet

11th Grade

All Levels

Summer 2026

Text: *The Metamorphosis*

By Franz Kafka

Directions for summer reading assignment:

***You will need to buy or find a copy (online) of the text.

1. Review the background information and literary devices sheets in the packet.
2. Read the questions for each section before reading the designated part of the novella.
3. Read the section and take notes marking in the text the information to support each question in the packet to help you answer the response questions. Highlight parts of the story that you would need clarification on as well.
4. Answer the questions in the packet with HANDWRITTEN responses.
5. Have your physical copy of the text with annotations and the packet ready for our first days of class in September.

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.

Terms and Definitions

Allegory - a story that represents abstract ideas or moral qualities. An allegory has both a literal and a symbolic level of meaning. Example: *Gulliver's Travels*.

Existentialism – the philosophy that emphasizes human experience and existence, popularized in the early twentieth century. Existentialism states that the world is absurd and meaningless and humans must set their own values. Example: Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*.

Persona - the author's chosen identity in a work of literature; the plot is revealed through what this character says. This technique allows the writer to adopt the beliefs, behaviors, and attitudes of a character in the work, which allows for different approaches to stories. The reader should usually interpret the "I" in a book as someone different from the author. Examples: The chapters in *The Pigman* are written, in an alternating manner, by each of the two major characters; therefore, we can conclude that neither one represents the author, Paul Zindel. Marlowe in *Heart of Darkness* is not intended to be thought of Stephen Crane, although Marlowe's opinions may be similar to Crane's.

Symbol - an object, person, or place that has a meaning in itself and that also stands for something larger than itself, usually an idea or concept; some concrete thing which represents an abstraction. Example: The sea could be symbolic for "the unknown." Since the sea is something that is physical and can be seen by the reader, and also has elements that cannot be understood, it can be used symbolically to stand for the abstraction of "mystery," "obscurity," or "the unknown."

Theme - the central or dominant idea behind the story; the most important aspect that emerges from how the book treats its subject. Sometimes theme is easy to see, but, at other times, it may be more difficult. Theme is usually expressed indirectly, as an element the reader must figure out. It is a universal statement about humanity, rather than a simple statement dealing with plot or characters in the story. Themes are generally hinted at through different methods: a phrase or quotation that introduces the novel, a recurring element in the book, or an observation made that is reinforced through plot, dialogue, or characters. It must be emphasized that not all works of literature have themes in them. Example: In a story about a man who is diagnosed with cancer and, through medicine and will-power, returns to his former occupation, the theme might be: "Real courage is demonstrated through internal bravery and perseverance." In a poem about a flower that grows, blooms, and dies, the theme might be: "Youth fades, and death comes to all."

Verisimilitude - the use of realistic elements to make literature appear truthful or accurate. Example: The creature in *Frankenstein* meets and converses with a blind man.

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?

4. What is the significance of the boss' desk?

5. Existentialism claims that human beings are only what they are at each moment. Relate this idea to Gregor as he is in the first few pages.

6. Some readers see this section as an attack on capitalism. In your opinion what seems to support or refute this idea?

7. At this point do you think Gregor has really changed into a bug; is the change just in his head, or is he dreaming?

8. What do you note about his reaction to the situation once he realizes that he is not dreaming?

9. The only thing in the room that is described is the picture of the woman in the fur boa and muff. Do you suppose this picture has any significance?

10. How do the time of day and weather contribute to the mood?

11. At this point how would you describe Gregor's life as a salesman?

12. Explain the irony of Gregor's thought that people at work believe it to be of "the greatest suspicion" if one were late. (Pg. 19)

13. What is our first view of his mother, his father, and his sister?

14. Why is Gregor having such a difficult time getting out of bed?

15. How does time create an element of anxiety in Gregor's life?

16. How does this passage from pages 16-17 create an air of verisimilitude?

It was very easy to throw aside the blanket; he needed only to push himself up a little, and it fell by itself. But to continue was difficult, particularly because he was so unusually wide. He needed arms and hands to push himself upright. In the place of these, however, he had only a lot of little legs, which were incessant in their various motions and which, moreover, he was unable to control. If he wanted to bend one of them, then it was the first to stretch itself out, and meanwhile, if he finally succeeded in doing what he wanted with this limb, all the others, as if left free, moved around in an excessively painful agitation. "But I must not stay in bed uselessly," (Pg. 16-17)

17. How does this next paragraph further emphasize verisimilitude?

At first he wanted to get out of bed with the lower part of his body, but this lower part—which, by the way, he had not yet looked at and which he also couldn't clearly imagine—proved itself too difficult to move. The attempt went so slowly. When, having become almost frantic, he finally hurled himself forward with all his force and without thinking, he chose his direction incorrectly, and he hit the lower bedpost hard. The burning pain he felt taught him that the lower part of his body was, at the moment, perhaps the most sensitive. (Pg. 17)

18. The chief clerk, a man focused entirely on business, states that there is a suspicion that Gregor ran off with the day's receipts. He also tells Gregor that because of unsatisfactory work, Gregor's job is none too solid. What is Gregor's reaction?

19. How are his mother, father, and the chief clerk described when they first see Gregor?

20. Before he is chased back into his room, what does Gregor try to do?

21. Characterize Gregor's speech to the clerk.

22. On what note does Chapter I end?

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?

5. In these first few pages of Part II, what seems to be the family's attitude toward Gregor?

6. Do you think Gregor's father purposely misled Gregor about the family's financial condition? Explain your answer.

7. What is the reaction of Gregor's sister whenever she enters Gregor's room?

8. How has the sister changed?

9. Explain the significance of the phrase, "...the lack of any direct human conversation, together with the monotonous life among the family." (Pg. 43)

10. How is the world Gregor inhabits [his room] being transformed also?

11. What object does Gregor cover with his body so that his sister and mother cannot move it out of his room? Do you see any significance to this?

12. Explain the father's new attire. How has the job changed his father?

13. What does the mother do after Gregor's father hits him with an apple? What is the effect of the father's attack on Gregor?

14. In describing the father's change from that of a weak, sickly man to his present state Kafka says:

Now, however, he was standing starkly upright, dressed in a taut blue uniform with gold buttons like the ones servants in banking institutions wore; his prominent double chin expanded above the high, stiff, pleated collar; from underneath the bushy eyebrows a bright, alert, and penetrating gaze came forth from his black eyes; the normally disheveled white hair was meticulously combed down and precisely parted. He flung his hat, upon which a gold monogram (probably of a bank) was set, across the entire room onto the couch and, with the long coattails of his uniform thrown back, went up to Gregor with a determined face and his hands in his pants pockets. (pg. 47)

How would you describe the father's new temperament? Do you suppose the uniform has anything to do with it?

Chapter III

VOCABULARY

conspicuous – obvious
copiously – plentifully
foretokening – prediction
imploringly – pleadingly
liaison – a linking up, a meeting
placate – calm
reconciled – brought into agreement
repose – rest
reproach – blame
retrenchment – reduction
saccharine – overly sweet
superfluous – unnecessary

1. Despite his worsening health, what solace does Gregor find? Why is this significant for him?

2. What demonstrates the father's great attraction to his uniform?

3. Given the situation with the uniform, how might it be a symbol?

4. Give both the false and the real reason the family is unable to move.

5. Why is the family described as overworked and overtired?

6. How has his sister's treatment of Gregor changed?

7. What is Gregor's initial reaction to the new cleaning lady? How does she behave toward him?

8. "So this won't go any further?" is spoken by the maid, but the question's meaning can relate to what other parts of Gregor's life? (Pg. 56)

9. What significance do the three boarders bring to the story?

10. Of what importance are the lodger's teeth?

11. How does the sister's violin playing move incidents and understanding along?

12. Why do you suppose the author did not tell us the boarders' names?

13. When does the climax occur in this story?

14. At this point, how do members of his family refer to Gregor?

15. Describe the family's reaction to Gregor's death.

16. In the course of the story Grete has become a new person; she has undergone her own metamorphosis. What action of hers at the end symbolizes this change?

17. If this story is a religious allegory in which Gregor is a modern everyman transformed into a bug, what is the story's underlying philosophical importance?

18. To see this story as timeless and universal, what premises about the story must be accepted?
