

Assignment Discovery Lesson Plan Great Books: Kafka's *Metamorphosis*

Subject

Literature

Grade level

9-12

Duration

One or two class periods

Objectives

Students will

- discuss the use of symbols in literature;
- select a symbol to represent an important issue; and
- write a description of the symbol's meaning.

Materials

- Paper, pens, pencils
- Copies of *Metamorphosis*, by Franz Kafka
- *Great Books: Kafka's Metamorphosis* video and TV/VCR

Procedures

1. Begin the lesson by holding a class discussion about the role of symbols in literature. Why do authors use symbols? What do symbols convey? Ask students if they think symbols are a powerful literary device.
2. Then ask students to think about Franz Kafka's masterpiece, *Metamorphosis*. Discuss the compelling symbol at the centerpiece of the novel—Gregor Samsa's transformation from a man into a large insect. Ask students for ideas about what this symbol represents. Some suggested ideas are listed below:
 - The transformation, or metamorphosis, represents Gregor's personal alienation and the effect of his deadening job.
 - Gregor's metamorphosis symbolizes problems in his family and how the demands placed on him have worn him down.
 - Gregor's metamorphosis poignantly illustrates the power struggle within this family and shows how Gregor's transformation alters the family's dynamics.
3. Next, tell students that they will have an opportunity to experiment using symbols in a piece of writing. Working individually or in pairs, have students think of a symbol that represents a big idea. Examples include increasing violence in our society, the threat of terrorism, or how peer pressure affects behavior. Explain that a symbol representing the threat of terrorism may be an image of a student burdened by the weight of a heavy backpack. The student could represent people in the United States or throughout the world,

and the backpack symbolizes the burden of having to worry about a random act of terrorism happening anywhere, at any time.

4. After students think of a symbol, have them incorporate it into a piece of writing up to two pages long. The piece could be an essay on what the symbol means, a piece of fiction, or a poem describing the symbol's meaning.
5. Give students time in class to work on their writing. Then ask for volunteers to read their work. What issues are of concern to students? What symbols did they select?
6. Conclude the lesson by revisiting the questions asked at the beginning of the lesson. After students have experimented using symbols in their writing, hold a class discussion about why authors use them. Do students think symbols are a powerful literary device? Have them give reasons to support their ideas.

Evaluation

Use the following three-point rubric to evaluate students' work during this lesson.

3 points: Students participated actively in class discussions, developed a compelling symbol to represent their ideas, and used their symbol effectively in writing.

2 points: Students participated in class discussions, developed a symbol to represent their ideas, and used their symbol in writing.

1 point: Students participated minimally in class discussions, had difficulty developing a symbol to represent their ideas, and did not use their symbol in writing.

Vocabulary: **alienation**

Definition: The separation of a person from other people or objects to which he or she was formerly attached

Context: Gregor Samsa's alienation was the result of his long working hours and the lack of affection and affirmation he received from his employer and his family.

Franz Kafka

Definition: A Czechoslovakian writer who lived from 1883 to 1924; most well known for *Metamorphosis*, published in 1915; *The Trial*, published in 1925; and *The Castle*, published in 1926

Context: Franz Kafka's works did not achieve recognition until long after his death, but today he is known as a powerful writer who wrote about pain, suffering, and loneliness in a unique and compelling way.

metamorphosis

Definition: Change in physical form or structure

Context: Gregor's metamorphosis from a man into a giant insect dramatically conveys all the pent-up frustrations and unresolved issues of both Gregor and his family.

symbol

Definition: A concrete representation of abstract ideas that makes those ideas clearer and more accessible to readers

Context: The American flag is a symbol of the United States and its democratic ideals.

National Standards

The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) has developed national standards to provide guidelines for teaching English language arts, with the goal of promoting literacy. To become a member of the NCTE, or to view the standards online, go to <http://www.ncte.org/standards/standards.shtml>

This lesson plan addresses the following NCTE standards:

- Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g., philosophical, ethical, aesthetic) of human experience.
- Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.

Credit

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