Great Books: Kafka’s Metamorphosis: Teacher’s Guide

Grade Level: 9-12  Curriculum Focus: Literature  Lesson Duration: One to two class periods

Program Description
What if you woke to find yourself transformed into a giant bug? When a mild-mannered salesman turns into an insect overnight, his family reacts with dismay, recrimination, and ultimately, murder. Gregor Samsa, Kafka’s protagonist, finds that alienation, family dysfunction, paranoia, and bureaucracy define life. Learn why the term “Kafkaesque” is still used to define life in the 21st century.

Onscreen Questions
Before watching the video
• Think about works of autobiographical fiction that you have read. As you watch the program, consider the ways in which writers incorporate details of their own lives into their stories.
• Note how Kafka’s own life is reflected in The Metamorphosis.

After watching the video
• The program suggests that Kafka is relevant to modern readers who also experience undefined anguish. Define the term “Kafkaesque.”
• What are some aspects of modern society that seem Kafkaesque to you?

Lesson Plan

Student Objectives
• Discuss the use of symbols in literature.
• Select a symbol to represent an important issue.
• Write a description of the symbol’s meaning.

Materials
• Paper, pens, pencils
• Copies of The Metamorphosis, by Franz Kafka
**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, *The 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 metamorphosis, or transformation, 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 big idea and a symbol to represent it. 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.

**Assessment**

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 The 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.

Academic Standards

**National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE)**

The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and the International Reading Association have developed national standards to provide guidelines for teaching the English language arts. To view the standards online, go to [http://www.ncte.org/about/over/standards/110846.htm](http://www.ncte.org/about/over/standards/110846.htm).

This lesson plan addresses the following 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.
Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL)
McREL's Content Knowledge: A Compendium of Standards and Benchmarks for K-12 Education addresses 14 content areas. To view the standards and benchmarks, visit link: http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/browse.asp

This lesson plan addresses the following national standards:

- Language Arts—Reading: Uses reading skills and strategies to understand and interpret a variety of literary texts

Support Materials
Develop custom worksheets, educational puzzles, online quizzes, and more with the free teaching tools offered on the Discoveryschool.com Web site. Create and print support materials, or save them to a Custom Classroom account for future use. To learn more, visit

- http://school.discovery.com/teachingtools/teachingtools.html