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Advanced Placement in
English Literature and Composition

Teaching Unit
Individual Learning Packet

The Metamorphosis

by Franz Kafka

Written by Michael Fisher

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The Metamorphosis

Objectives

By the end of this unit, the student should be able to:

1. Discuss the basic notions that characterize the Existentialist movement in philosophy and literature and how these notions came into existence;

2. Explain how *The Metamorphosis* fits into the Existentialist framework;

3. Discuss the effect of Kafka's choice to begin *The Metamorphosis* with its climax;

4. Show how irony is used to create humor in *The Metamorphosis*;

5. Trace the development of the major theme in this story—metamorphosis of the self through the vehicle of society—as it applies to:
   - Gregor;
   - Sister (Grete);
   - Father;

6. Explain the impact of Kafka's personal experiences on his writing and point out parallels in *The Metamorphosis*;

7. Discuss the novel as a response to the social and political environment of its day;

8. Discuss Kafka's use of the limited-omniscient narrator to bring focus to the absurdity of his characters and their situations;

9. Discuss Kafka's use of absurdity and the grotesque;

10. Respond to multiple choice questions similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition exam;

11. Respond to writing prompts similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition exam;

12. Offer a personal interpretation of Kafka's message in *The Metamorphosis,* using direct evidence from the text as well as authoritative sources;

13. Discuss the themes of alienation, isolation and uncertainty in *The Metamorphosis* and cite the ways this theme is evidenced in the text;

14. Discuss the derivation and usage of the modern term, *Kafkaesque;*

15. Discuss Gregor as a failure (deserving of punishment) in an Existentialist framework;

16. Discuss the motifs of:
    - Self-Determinism and Escapism;
    - Alienation and Communication;
    - Guilt and Family Obligation;
    - The impact of social roles (such as maintaining an appearance of normalcy) and/or obligations (such as money) on human relationships.

17. Discuss the novel as a commentary on turn-of-the 20th Century life—especially public and private duty and obligation, family, loyalty, and free-thought, etc.;

18. Discuss the symbols present in the story, and their significance:
    - The Hospital;
    - Music;
    - The lodgers;
    - The apple;
    - The doors to Gregor's room;
    - The number 3; (3 doors, three family members, three lodgers).

The Metamorphosis

Background Information

Parallels to Kafka's Life

Although it is debatable exactly to what extent the characters in *The Metamorphosis* are drawn directly from Kafka's life, certain parallels cannot be overlooked.

In order to study Kafka's writing, an understanding of Kafka's life can be helpful. It has been suggested, in fact, that Kafka used writing to express ideas he was not able to express in his real life; ranging from social analysis and criticism to feelings of anxiety and inadequacy—in this light, Gregor, Kafka's anti-hero turned "gargantuan pest" in *The Metamorphosis*, can be interpreted as a projection of some of Kafka's darker feelings about himself.

Early Life

Franz Kafka was born in 1883 to a middle-class, German-speaking, Jewish family in Prague, Bohemia (now the Czech Republic).

Franz was the first born of six children, and before he was six years old he witnessed the deaths of his two younger brothers, leaving him with a keen sense of mortality. Franz had three younger sisters whom he helped a series of governesses and housemaids raise while his parents worked at his father's business as many as 12 hours every day.

Kafka's relationship with his parents was strained; his father was domineering and cold; his mother loving, but non-committal. Despite this, Kafka developed a strong emotional dependence on his family, which would last his entire life. This idea is mirrored in *The Metamorphosis*, in Gregor's dependence on his sister and mother and his acquiescence to his father.

As a youth Kafka did well in school, but struggled against feelings of isolation—in part due to his frail physique and sensitive nature, and in part due to his status as a minority and his inability to identify with the Jewish community. Themes of isolation and alienation would recur in Kafka's writing.

After a largely successful university career, Kafka found employment at a series of insurance companies and wrote in his spare time. He was a social person, but was often left feeling dejected by his failed relationships with women. Many of Kafka's characters would suffer similar difficulties, and the motif of sexual confusion is recurrent in his work.

In part due to his experiences as a youth, Kafka lived under the dark cloud of self-doubt, a fact which urged him to keep his writings private. Fortunately, he was prompted into divulgence by his friend and fellow writer, Max Brod, who, against Kafka's wishes, was also responsible for publishing a number of Kafka's works posthumously. Almost ironically, in keeping with one of Kafka's major themes—that life is uncertain, and nothing (not even health) can be taken for granted—Franz Kafka died prematurely, one month before his 40th birthday, due to complications from tuberculosis.

Kafka's father
One of the most noted parallels from Kafka's life involves the father character in *The Metamorphosis*.

Kafka is quoted as saying of his father, Hermann Kafka: "[He was] a true Kafka in strength, health, appetite, loudness of voice, eloquence, self-satisfaction, worldly dominance, endurance, presence of mind, [and] knowledge of human nature... " This statement clearly shows Kafka's reverence and admiration for the man who was also somewhat of a rival, and the source of much antagonism in his life—very similar to Gregor and *his* father in *The Metamorphosis*.

Hermann Kafka worked long hours, and has been described by biographers as determined, domineering, selfish, and aggressive. Like the character Gregor, Kafka's father worked as a traveling salesman, but unlike Gregor, Kafka's father was able to rise out of this lowly position to start his own business.

According to accounts, Kafka's real-life father rarely showed a sign of weakness. This stands out as a contrast to Gregor's father in *The Metamorphosis*, who is a failed businessman, and who, as a result of years of listlessness and inactivity, coupled with feelings of failure and impotence, has become a shell of his former self, both physically and in spirit. However, the reader soon learns that Gregor's father has a trick up his sleeve, and that his weakness is, at least in part, an act. He emerges as a strong character with violent tendencies; manipulative—a projection of characteristics attributed to Kafka's real father.

Meanwhile, Gregor, perhaps like Kafka himself, is naïve, acquiescent, and plays the dupe.

As the story progresses, the father gains power and becomes Gregor's primary antagonist and ultimately his killer, while Gregor continues to become more and more passive, refusing to address the reality of his situation, or to confront his aggressors (father and sister); almost inviting death by resignation.

Kafka's mother
The mother in the story is a passive, delicate woman who faints whenever confronted with intense situations. She is the one character who, although never in a position of power, is supportive of Gregor throughout the story.

Kafka's own mother was probably very similar to this, a mother who would always look on her son with sympathetic eyes, but who would never attempt restrain the abusive father.

Dependence on family
Kafka was emotionally dependent on his parents, and—as is still common in many parts of Europe—lived with his parents for some time as an unmarried adult; never able to fully break away on his own. Kafka never married, and his relationships with women were often troubled. Much of his emotional needs were satisfied by his mother and his sisters. This is similar to the situation of Gregor Samsa, who, in the course of working his life away to support his entire family, has neglected any considerations for his own personal happiness or fulfillment.

Gregor rationalizes away his need for women, but this results in a deep emotional dependence on the mother and a sort of perverse attraction to the sister, which is hinted at throughout the book, but never stated outright.

Kafka's own attitude toward sexuality was rather confused, fluctuating between self-imposed abstinence and consorting with prostitutes. *The Metamorphosis*, read in a certain light, is laden with symbols of sexual ambivalence and confusion.

Religion
As a Jewish family in Prague, the Kafkas were part of the religious minority. Anti-Semitism was rising in most of Europe, which led Jews to try to stick together in social and business circles. Kafka, however, did not identify with the other Jews in his social world. His attitude to his Jewish heritage was ambivalent. In a diary he wrote: "What have I in common with Jews? I have hardly anything in common with myself and should stand very quietly in a corner, content that I can breathe." This statement shows a powerful sense of alienation and suggests resultant feelings of isolation—themes that would emerge as central to *The Metamorphosis*.

It is an interesting note that later in his life, just before he died, Kafka expressed interest in reconciling his relationship with Judaism.

School and work
Kafka was a good student, and did well in school. As a young man, he was employed in a series of insurance companies (jobs which he called his "bread job," or money-earning job) and wrote in his spare time.

Despite the fact that Kafka was known by his friends as a harsh critic of the bureaucratic system that came to dominate the business world of the early 20th century, he was quiet about these feelings in public and was known by his employers as a good worker. In fact, Kafka was never the outspoken critic of society he would have liked to have been. He lacked confidence in his convictions and essentially feared the social stigma of being known as an iconoclast, or an outsider. It is for this reason that he was always hesitant to publish any of his works during his life, as they were rife with the sort of sentiment he feared would elicit social retribution and more alienation and isolation.

Illness
Around age 35, Kafka came down with tuberculosis, a debilitating, and usually fatal, disease that most commonly affects the lungs. This physical defect, as Kafka saw it was yet another source for his feeling of impotence. In the end, it proved to be even more significant when it took his life on June 3, 1924.

Although Kafka's illness occurred long after he wrote *The Metamorphosis*, it is easy to see that feelings of frailty and mortality preoccupied him long before he contracted the disease. In fact, in some ways, it seems as if he was almost expecting to become ill. Kafka's reaction to his infirmity is telling of his character—he was so concerned about physically repulsing others that he hid his illness for as long as he could. Parallels can be seen in the character Gregor Samsa, who, upon awaking to find himself transformed into a bug, is more concerned about the shame and infamy the discovery of his grotesque form will bring to his family, than he is about his own physical well-being. He avoids even addressing the corporeal reality of it, as if he is brainwashed into thinking in social and pragmatic, rather than selfish or personal terms.

Kafkaesque
All the external forces that Kafka felt working against him transformed the world around him into a bizarre, threatening, absurd maze with horrors at every turn. It is this hyper-consciousness of being—a lost, confused, alienated, exposed creature in a hostile world—that was at the heart of some aspects of Existential thought. Perhaps people had experienced these feelings before, but something about the day and age—the changing social paradigms and obligations, the onset of the Industrial Age, the rise in drug and alcohol use—that all came together in a way that was unique and created a general feeling of anxiety that Kafka managed to capture better than many of his peers—even if he never really intended to do so.

The word "Kafkaesque" has made its way into common usage and now is understood to mean anything having to do with alienation, absurdity, anxiety, or isolation—themes that came to characterize Kafka's life and works.

Existential Insects

Although Franz Kafka, like many of his similarly grouped peers, did not accept the label at the time, most modern scholars agree that Kafka was one of the principle figures to come out the Existential movement; and *The Metamorphosis* is considered to be among the seminal Existential texts. Thus, in reading *The Metamorphosis* it is helpful to have some background information on the philosophy that inspired it.

Defining the terms

Philosophical or literary movements are often hard to define. A philosophical movement often has no definitive beginning or end, no set of rules or guidelines, no canon of agreed upon principles, like a religious movement. In fact, most philosophical movements are named long after their peak cultural relevance; the name applied in retrospect coming to serve as more of a reference for historians or people studying philosophy.

However, as in the case of Existentialism, the name is helpful, not only because it serves as a unifying force in identifying common attributes among various thinkers, but also because common usage has supplied the word with a connotation that carries inherent meaning. The very word, Existentialism, although still shrouded in mystery and allure because of its grandiose implications, has over time and through repeated use come to take on some of the character of the ideas that created the movement in the first place. For, although philosophical movements (and perhaps Existentialism even more so than others) defy definition, they can be *characterized* by the tendencies that make up their core notions. And it is in this light, and with an open mind, that we must study philosophy—always taking into account what came before, what was happening at the time, and what sort of long-term influences came as a result.

The rise of existentialist thought:

True to this notion, Existentialism—whatever it truly was or is—was not born as an organized movement of any kind, but rather emerged as a trend in thought that came to characterize a new way of thinking in the late 19th and early 20th Centuries—even down to a simple matter of perspective. Existentialism then, as a reaction, in many ways, to the trends and ways of thinking that preceded it, was nothing more than a new way of looking at things; a way people had never contemplated before for one reason or another. But it was also a product of its time; a logical conclusion of everything that had come before it, leading up to that particular day and age. In fact, many argue that the onset of the Industrial Age, which continues to have a powerful effect on social conditions throughout the world, had much to do with this new perspective. Indeed, the political landscapes of the day, the rise of bureaucracy, and the corresponding dehumanization of many aspects of society were great influences on Kafka's Existential thinking. But also, the newly availed political vulnerability of the church and social institutions such as the family, facilitated some of the new voices, which were largely atheistic and iconoclastic at their core.

Reactionary Roots:
On a strictly philosophical level, most scholars agree that Existentialism was, at least in part, a reaction against the more linear thinking of the dueling Rationalists and Empiricists—schools of thought that dominated most of the 18th and 19th Centuries.

Essentially, the thinkers who would later be called Existentialists came together over the notion that these two seemingly antagonistic philosophies were actually arguing two sides of the same coin, and each was neglecting to address the most fundamental question of all—what does it mean to be an individual in this world?

The Existential Mind:
Perhaps the most significant characteristic of Existential thinking was marked by the shift in focus, away from the bigger picture of the human race at large, and onto the individual. Rather than trying to find a unifying order to the universe, many new thinkers rejected the notion that such a thing existed outright. Many of the new school thinkers came to see the world as, not a rational place, but an irrational, hostile place, where the greater part of one's energy must be geared toward survival, whether physically or socially. Further, the social idea notions of right and wrong would soon fade, as—from the Existentialist standpoint—right and wrong were things that were determined only by circumstance and necessity,values invented to urge social compliance.

Themes of Isolation, Angst, Alienation and Disillusion all came to characterize early Existential thought.

The Nihilistic Bent:
In some ways, Existentialism represented a shift in focus away from the idea of a goal-oriented philosophy. Empiricism and Rationalism, despite criticism, had at least been largely attempts at deriving a pattern for the betterment of all of humanity; Existentialism, by comparison, tended to focus instead on the paradox and absurdity of existence—the human life awakening into an uncertain and often cruel world, essentially charged by a non-present force of necessity to try to make sense of the world, only to have all its progress and accomplishments taken away by the equally senseless fact of death.

On the surface, this description may sound Nihilistic, and indeed there is a Nihilistic bent to Existentialist thought; however, what is easily overlooked is that Existentialists often rejoice in the uniqueness of the human experience, and revel in its successes despite the inherent paradoxes. The idea that life is valuable *because* it is finite, *because* the only meaning is in the individual search for meaning—these are at the core of Existential thought and resonate in its influences on uniquely American movements such as the Lost Generation writers (Hemingway, Faulkner, Fitzgerald) in the 1910s and 20s, and the Beats (Kerouac, Ginsberg, Ferlinghetti, et al.) in the 1950s and 60s.

Kafka's Ideal

Interpreted in a certain light, it would seem that Kafka ascribed to a sort of Existential ideal—a way of being that would garner success for the individual who practiced its methods. Kafka's own inability to live up to this ideal—coupled with an inexorable consciousness of the fact that anything, at any time, could come along to wipe out all the successes one might have achieved in this vein—caused Kafka a great deal of angst in life.

Like Kafka, his character Gregor, in *The Metamorphosis*, suffers due to his failures to exist within the ideal established by the Existential framework. Gregor's failures to successfully confront the world, or even to defend his own existence, result in his annihilation; first symbolically, as he is systematically stripped of meaning and humanity, and then corporeally, as his body can no longer take the alienation from its spirit and relinquishes its frail grasp on life in an anti-climactic death scene.

The Existential Framework (as relates to *The Metamorphosis*)

1. **Existence precedes essence:** The schools of thought that preceded existentialism sought to define human existence from the outside, inward—starting with the rules of the universe and natural orders, then defining meanings and prescribing those meanings for human beings; attempting to derive, in essence, a model for human behavior.

   On the contrary, existentialist thought now sought to define existence from the inside, out; and focus was shifted from the world at large to the individual's experience inside the confines of that world.

   Existentialists began to explore the individual and its desire to make rational decisions despite living in an irrational world. In essence, existentialists were claiming that there was no underlying order or ultimate logic that would reveal the great truth of existence. On the contrary, their belief was that existence itself was the original mystery, and the existential creature could make sense of the world only as it pertained to its own existence. Meaning was created by existence.

   In *The Metamorphosis*, it can be said that Gregor's primary failure is his neglect of self-definition; or in other terms, his spinelessness, which is manifested symbolically in his insect form. Gregor is passive at every turn. He seeks to define his existence, not by searching within himself, but by the world around him: his family and his job, society at large and its views. He shows no inclination at all toward free thought or self-determinism. He seeks others to make choices for him, or simply waits for his hand to be forced by circumstance.

   Thus, inside the Existential framework, Gregor is a total failure, and he becomes a victim to forces in the world around him.

2. **The Look:** The "look" is central to Existential thought. This idea is centered on the idea that something as simple as being conscious of being observed by another creature, whether human or animal, has a profound effect on the way the receiver of that look perceives his or her environment. This notion is readily apparent in the case of animalistic behavior that presents an immediate threat; but in the case of human social interaction, it can be much more subtle.

   The fact that we, as individuals, are aware of other creatures—thinking creatures, with the same or similar capacities for rational or irrational thought, rational or irrational action, and even rational or irrational judgment, all within the constructs of a shared society—has a profound impact on our own perceptions of situations, or even our perceptions of ourselves as creatures functioning within the same rules and limitations. One simple way of thinking about this is thinking about seeing yourself through someone else's eyes. Being conscious of being perceived is a very powerful thing in the eyes of Existentialist thinkers, in that it can be a great motivatior. The way others perceive us changes the way we perceive ourselves, our thoughts, our notions of self, and of right and wrong.

The notion of the Existential look can be applied to many aspects of *The Metamorphosis*. The sister's affection that Gregor covets almost more than anything else can be considered a look of approval. Conversely, Gregor fears his father, and in many animal-like showdowns between Gregor and the father throughout the story, Gregor acquiesces. Through the look, here, roles of power are established. Gregor is always the one to look away.

The notion of the look can also be applied to Gregor's and his family's fears of being judged by society. The idea of shame as a motivational factor is relevant here, and is illustrated by such events as the situation in which Gregor frets over the way he will be perceived by his family when the attorney comes to check on him. It is also relevant in instances in which Gregor hides himself from his family, to grant them respite from suffering his grotesqueness.

It has been suggested that the idea of social judgment is central to the entire story—that Gregor's change was only a symbolic manifestation of the way society made him feel, as seen though the eyes of social judgment.

In turn, by coming to see himself this way; by his existential weakness, in letting others define him, Gregor allowed himself to be transformed.

3. **Beyond Good and Evil (beyond rationalism and moralizing):** This idea, promulgated by Nietzsche, among others, was that there was no absolute good or absolute evil in the world. All was relative, created by human beings in their attempts to rationalize and make sense of the world. Various iterations of this thought run through Existentialist thought, whereby, once again, the individual is defining its own environment, and its existence is affected by this process of definition.

   The way this notion is manifested in *The Metamorphosis* is in Kafka's lack of judgment of his characters. Take the father and the sister as examples. There is no castigation of guilt put upon them by the narrator for neglecting and even turning against Gregor. They, as far as the text supplies, act in a way to better their own lots in life. They make themselves stronger. They break away from dependence and become free-moving, self-sufficient entities. This, it would seem, is what Kafka suggests is more important than notions of good or evil, right or wrong. In fact, at the end of the story, the family, freed from their burdens, are presented in a pleasant light. Gregor, who brought guilt onto himself at every turn, and who dies to lessen the burden of himself on his family, is presented as pathetic. In the end, it is difficult for the reader to sympathize too much with Gregor, or to judge his family too harshly for wanting to be free of the burden he had become.

4. **Existential Angst:** Existential angst describes the internal conflict experienced by every conscious individual due to the fact that the world is not a rational place and existence can be maintained only by constant struggle. The implications of this idea range from the notion of something as basic as finding a means to provide the most basic needs for survival, to struggling with the idea of searching for and defining meaning in the world, trying to communicate and to establish meaningful relationships with other creatures, etc. All existential struggles represent the conflict that naturally opposes the original state of human existence, which is the simple kharmic existence in the womb.

   In this framework, the point of birth, the exit from the safety and peacefulness of the womb, into the world of horrors and uncertainties, is a very crucial moment where existence is defined inside the framework of the world as we know it—a world from which, no matter how we try (drugs, medicines, meditation, sleep and dreams), we can never truly escape while we are here.

   In *The Metamorphosis*, it is this womb-like state, without conflict, decision or self-definition that Gregor longs to return to. But, of course, this is impossible, and Gregor's escapist attitude is largely responsible for his failure in life.

   Gregor's desire to escape is illustrated throughout the text. Escape, in fact, is a motif which manifests itself in Gregor's sleeping to escape, avoiding decisions, and his eventual physical and mental exhaustion, all of which lead to his ultimate escape through death.

   A second manifestation of Existential angst resides, ironically, in free choice. That ultimate prize coveted by all of humanity, says the Existentialist, is also one of the biggest burdens on the human, and a source of omnipresent anxiety. With complete freedom of choice, the average individual would quickly become overwhelmed. This is compounded by the fact that as conscious beings, humans know that every decision they make is irreversible and determines outcomes they cannot even fathom. Further, the individual operating solely for the good of its own existence, without regard for society as a whole, becomes quickly alienated.

   Despite these threats to mental well-being, mastery and command of the free will are the Existential ideals. Gregor clearly fails in this vein as he seeks to avoid decisions at every turn. He lets decisions make themselves. In fact, one of Gregor's biggest moments of self-determination in the story could be said to occur when he decides to open the door in Chapter I. However, his motivation is telling: he wants to open the door only so that others can make subsequent decisions for him.

   It is Gregor's denial of self-definition and choice that has put him at the whim of the world. His faith in the world as a rational place has been proven absurd by his irrational transformation into an insect.

5. **The Difficulties of Communication:** Communication is a prime source of Existential angst. This is in part due to the fact that communication always involves struggle. There is no pure communication; in every instance, something is inherently lost because the tools of communication are imperfect.

   Communication is a major motif in *The Metamorphosis*. Gregor's inability to communicate is central to his difficulties at the outset of the story. His words soon become unintelligible, perhaps mirroring his feelings about communication, and symbolizing his relinquishing of any real effort to make it work. Throughout the story, Gregor attempts to communicate with body language, a fundamental communication, but in most instances, this fails or is misinterpreted.

6. **The Irrational World:** Central to the Existential framework is the notion that at any moment, everything could change. There are no givens in life. There are no universal truths. There is no certainty.

   Whereas the modern person has seen major scientific developments occur over the span of a few years, and great unifying theories of existence proven, only to be completely reversed by a new theory in five years' time, things happened much more slowly in Kafka's day. The Industrial Revolution, however, marks for many historians the beginning of such rapid change and heavily influenced late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century thought.

   Gregor's transformation—coming out of sleep to find that things were far from the way he had left them—is a powerful illustration of this idea, this fear of the existentialist thinker.

   However, from Kafka's portrayal of Gregor's life before the change, we can see that the transformation is also a logical continuation of certain changes that were occurring inside Gregor's mind—and his demise can be understood, in part, as a failure to address or to try to interrupt any of these things before it was too late. Gregor failed to change with the changing world.

   Further, *The Metamorphosis* can be read as an irrational text from its outset. Given the overnight transformation of a man into a hideous creature, even the subdued reactions of Gregor and his family are surreal. This, in itself, is a rejection of rationalism and realism (the literary equivalent of empiricism). The text does not make an attempt to explain or justify the gross transformation of Gregor's body, but rather just encourages the reader to accept it—acceptance of the absurd, the irrational.

7. **The Grotesque** (also the absurd, or bizarre): Although the idea of the grotesque dates back to ancient Rome, its popularity had a resurgence in the mid-19th Century with writers like Victor Hugo, whose grotesque character, Quasimodo, in *The Hunchback of Notre Dame,* was not a villain, but a victim of social castigation, an outsider. This is an important distinction for "grotesque" characters.

Essentially, the grotesque was a reaction against Romantic writing that presented an ordered and benevolent world, where things worked out in the end and all loose ends tied together neatly. The notion of the grotesque was also a statement about aesthetics, presenting the ugly and distorted rather than the beautiful or commodified. The idea was further popularized by its usefulness as a vehicle for social commentary; it had something counter-culture at its essence and stank of rebellion. It is almost obvious why the notion of the grotesque had such appeal to Existentialists, and Kafka was no exception.

The writers of Kafka's day felt a need to comment on the changing social conditions precipitated in part by the onset of the Industrial Age and the resultant devaluing of human life in the name of progress. Further, World War I, in which humans would use weapons of mass-destruction to wreak havoc on the earth as never before, was soon to begin; and the social and political world was dominated by a faceless bureaucracy.

It might also be said that Kafka, in part because of his feelings about himself, and in part because of powerful social influences around him, came to view human beings as grotesque, pathetic beings that would stay mired in their own filth if not prevented from doing so by society.

In *The Metamorphosis*, Gregor's withdrawal into himself is portrayed symbolically as his transformation into a giant, grotesque insect. However the transformation is interpreted—symbolically, allegorically, etc.—the idea and the imagery are grotesque, further emphasizing the ideas of alienation, and subsequent isolation.

Gregor needed his family to give his life a purpose. They, in turn, relied on him for their sustenance. When he could no longer provide for them, he became repulsive, or grotesque. Kafka's turning Gregor into an insect to illustrate this idea is an example of his bizarre sense of humor and irony.

8. **Style**: Besides its being associated with philosophy, Existentialism can also be said to characterize a movement in literary style—away from sentimentality and romanticism, toward realism; away from flourish and detail, toward a more pragmatic, legalistic language and more concise account; away from objectivism, toward a more subjective and often introspective vantage-point, and completely devoid of moral interpretations or judgments.

   Kafka's style was very much shaped by this new trend. The language is plain and efficient; the story is told from the third-person point of view, but the perspective is limited to Gregor's subjective experience, and all judgments in *The Metamorphosis* are left to the reader. Characters who, it seems, should be condemned in the end (such as the father and the sister), are not; and the impression left on the reader by this non-judgmental style is more of contemplation than of either acceptance or rejection. Similarly, certain questions the narrator should obviously address—such as details about Gregor's transformation—are left unaddressed, and the focus is placed on Gregor's experience of the change. Only the things Gregor sees as relevant are discussed.

Lost in Translation

The translation of fiction from one language to another is an art in itself. Not only are the connotations of words different in different languages and cultures, but sometimes no direct translation even exists—one language may simply have a word or phrase that does not exist in another language. Then, beyond the sheer task of trying to correctly convey the information, the translator must also attempt to translate subtle things like humor, irony, tone and cadence—or else "meaning" is surely lost.

It is well known that Franz Kafka wrote *The Metamorphosis* in German. What is not as well known is that the name "The Metamorphosis" is somewhat of a mis-translation. "The Transformation" is, in fact, a more accurate translation. However, in English, the title the book has had ever since its first translation—*The Metamorphosis*—has much more impact. Also, English-speaking readers have simply grown used to it. To change the name at this point would be a disservice to the legacy of the text.

However, there is still much debate over the translation of the critical first lines of the story, which originally translated:

"*As Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from uneasy dreams he found himself transformed in his bed into a gigantic insect.*"

Most scholars have come to agree that the word, *Ungeziefer,* as it appears in the German, conveys an idea that is significantly more abstract than the English "insect."

In fact, it is suggested that Kafka intentionally chose a vague noun to leave some doubt as to whether Gregor had actually transformed physically, or whether the change was supposed to be read as symbolic. The German word, *Ungezeifer*, carries with it the connotation of something of the lowest value in the eyes of society; a scourge or bane. This connotation would suggest the idea that society was partially responsible for Gregor's change, in keeping with the Existential idea of the power of the "look." Much of this is lost in the translation to the word, *insect*.

In the end, the reader always has the option of further researching a translation, and it is important to note how powerfully a translation can affect the way a story is read and interpreted.

Literary conventions and plot devices:

Although he put a unique twist on them, the techniques used by Franz Kafka in his writings were not unique. All writers owe a great deal of credit to the writers who have come before them, and all share the same pool of resources from which to craft their tales. But just as Kafka was a product of many influences, many of the ways Kafka used these common tools has had a lasting effect on modern writers.

Allegory—In the allegorical interpretation of *The Metamorphosis*, as compared to the symbolic one, the physical change to Gregor's body is taken literally. However, the way Kafka treats Gregor's transformation—casually, with scant description or explanation—allows the reader to focus more on the message inherent in the story than on the corporeal change in Gregor's body, leaving this fact obscure and vague—unimportant as compared to the notions that are conveyed.

Anagnorisis—This describes a revelation of sorts that happens to a character, often helping the character to make sense of things and better his or her lot. This sort of device is very important in the Existential framework. Gregor never comes to any conscious realizations that are helpful to him, failing again, in this sense, to live up to the Existential ideal. The reader is almost frustrated by Gregor's seemingly obtuse and naïve way of looking at things, the way he refuses to acknowledge the truth of his situation and the motivations of the characters around him. In fact, as the reader realizes the point Kafka is trying to make about the insignificance of any one life, Gregor seems to continue to wait for things to come back around for him.

Whereas reflecting on his past life and his failures to be a self-determined man may have proven helpful to Gregor, he does not do this. None of the characters, in fact, seem to reflect much, but all proceed in a rote (insect-like) way, to the very end. Even the family, who at the end of the book are much rejuvenated, revived, ready to proceed in life as self-determined and strong, fail to reflect back on the reasons behind their change and new motivation; all simply proceed along the path that is laid out before them. There is no anagnorisis, and this suggests that they may indeed fall back into failed patterns.

Antagonist—At the beginning of the story, we get the idea that there has been some antagonism between Gregor and his father—but the father is too weak to confront the son. As the story develops, however, the father gains strength and challenges Gregor. Gregor's acquiescence is symbolized by the apple that, although not thrown as a death blow, remains in Gregor's back.

Grete, on the other hand is sympathetic to Gregor at the beginning of the book. As time goes on, however, she develops her own sense of self-determinism, and she begins to resent Gregor for his helplessness and weakness. In her youthful exuberance, and her search for self-expression, Grete becomes Gregor's primary antagonist. In fact, it is Grete who first suggests that the family dispose of Gregor.

Grete, like a true opportunist, succeeding here in the Existential ideal, finds prominence in the role vacated by her incapacitated brother. Gregor is the last obstacle standing in the way of her actualization as a "woman," a person of importance.

Autobiographical—Many critics suggest that the metamorphosis is an autobiographical projection of sorts—Kafka's feelings of isolation, and his alienation from an indifferent society and family. It can also be interpreted as a sort of paranoid projection, based on the idea that everything in life is uncertain—the question Kafka may have asked himself, what would happen if I awoke as a bug?

It is because people could identify with this absurd notion that the book remains popular and relevant, one hundred years after it was created.

Black Humor—Reading the definition of black humor, it could almost seem that the term was invented to suit the style of humor Kafka uses in *The Metamorphosis*. By definition, black humor describes a form of comedy that sources from the pathetic absurdity of human suffering and human existence. Certainly, this notion is widespread in *The Metamorphosis*, as the hapless Gregor flails about in his non-responsive body, just as he has flailed about in a non-responsive society. Kafka's peers, to whom he read the story, roared with laughter.

The humor in the story is derived in part from its dryness. Gregor's transformation, his and his family's reaction to this grotesque and seemingly horrible fact, and all the subsequent drama that occurs as a result (down to the assault of apples from Gregor's father) is presented in a light and tongue-in-cheek manner.

Of course, the modern English-language reader must remember that much of the humor is lost in the fact that the text is translated out of both its native language and its native social setting.

Climax—It can be said that *The Metamorphosis* begins with its climax—the transformation of Gregor into some sort of non-human thing and that the rest of the story is the resolution of this fact. However, there is also a sort of climax when Gregor is attacked by his father—the injury he receives leads to the book's denouement and eventual conclusion in Gregor's death.

Title—On a very obvious level, the title, *The Metamorphosis* refers to Gregor's apparent transmogrification into a non-human form. However, this title also refers to the changes in character that this circumstance elicits in the secondary characters—primarily Herr Samsa and Grete.

Confidant—Grete, at the outset of the story, is presented as Gregor's confidant. He longs for her as the one who understands him, the one who will not turn her back on him. However, concurrent with the motifs of isolation and the impossibility of true communication, it soon becomes evident that this bond is frail and ephemeral. Grete's eventual rejection of her deformed and needy brother renders Gregor's isolation absolute.

Conflict—The most important conflict in *The Metamorphosis* is man versus society. It is society that has crippled Gregor and turned him into an insect. Gregor's focus on the social implications of his grotesque transformation is evidence of the fact that he is a slave to this mentality and cannot even think selfishly in a time of personal crisis. Gregor's failure in society, leads to the rejection of his family, who, having not suffered as Gregor has, are in a position to confront the outside forces effectively, and are able to fend for themselves. This may not last however, as it is quickly apparent that the father returns to something of his old insect-like form, refusing to abandon his uniform—his exoskeleton.

The family's rejection of their social obligation toward Gregor presents this convention as a sham, and because Gregor had put stock into this notion, he suffers as its mock front dissolves in the privacy of the home—behind closed doors. The family, on the other hand, is deeply influenced by society's laws of appearance; fearing social castigation, they keep Gregor hidden away as a dark secret.

The conflict of man vs. man is evident in Gregor's conflicts with his boss, his father, and eventually his sister.

The conflict of man versus self manifests itself in Gregor's sense of guilt, which is also a form of man versus society, as Gregor cannot shake this notion, even though it would benefit him to do so.

There is also social conflict not directly involving Gregor represented by the lodgers. These three symbolically stand for society's oppression of the working class family. Gregor's family is beholden to them, even in their own house. The lodgers are the cause of some of the conflicts between the family members.

The conflict of man versus nature is manifested in Gregor's struggles with his alien body and its eventual failure to sustain him.

It is interesting to note that almost all of the conflicts in the story, including the lodgers' refusal to pay and Grete's being restrained from actualization as a woman, are resolved by Gregor's death.

Denouement—The story is resolved by Gregor's death. Things are looking up for the family, and as we leave them, they are in good spirits, ready to tackle life.

Crisis—A number of minor crises make for drama and suspense throughout the story. The way Gregor responds to the crises is significant, and indicative of his state of mind. The biggest crisis in the story—Gregor's transformation—is downplayed to show how dependent he has become on society to define him. Guilt is the source of further crisis to Gregor. But as the story progresses, apathy takes over Gregor, finally resulting in his death.

Dystopia—It can be said that the notion of dystopia is at the heart of Existential thought. Surely Kafka saw the world in this light.

Despite his refusal to acknowledge it, Gregor lives in a sort-of hell-on-earth, a life that Kafka was surely insinuating mirrored the lives of many of his unfortunate peers—working their lives away in hope of a better life that was in reality only an illusion.

Kafka's presentation of a world in which a man must slaver like a dog for a bone, and in which not even one's family can be counted on for gratitude is surely dystopian at heart.

It has been suggested that the apple lodged in Gregor's back is a religious symbol from the original utopia—the Garden of Eden; and serves as a reminder to Gregor as he diminishes into oblivion that this utopia never existed at all.

Epiphany—Similar to the notion of Anagnorisis, Gregor's only epiphany is that it may not be worth the effort to even move.

Exposition—Through Gregor's reflections, the reader learns about his life before the fateful morning when the story actually begins. We can deduce through Gregor's internal monologues that, before the story began, he was a traveling salesman, and a largely underappreciated one at that. He was unhappy and ineffectual, though he did manage to support his family. It is primarily through this accomplishment that Gregor came to define his existence. His one long term goal, as far as we can infer, was a secret plan to send his sister to the violin conservatory, so that she would not have to endure the miseries of an existence like his. Although this seems like a selfless motivation, it is also apparent that Gregor depended on valuing his life through service to others.

He counted on reciprocation, at least in the way of appreciation for his efforts, but he received none.

Foreshadowing—*The Metamorphosis* is rife with foreshadowing, and Kafka does not try very hard to conceal it. Kafka uses foreshadowing in the first part of the book to suggest to the reader that Gregor's condition will worsen, and his alienation from humans will increase. This is evident in Gregor's trouble with communication, and in his perception of fog outside, which is actually the foreshadowing of his losing his sight. Grete's change of attitude toward her brother occurs slowly, and her ultimate feeling of outright repulsion towards Gregor is hinted at along the way. Gregor's death, as his ultimate resignation, is foreshadowed in his disassociation with his human past and his general apathy toward the filth in his room.

Grotesque—*The Metamorphosis* is a grotesque in that it is made intentionally bizarre and moribund for dramatic effect: descriptions of Gregor as a bug, oozing when he injures himself; the apple lodged into his back that remains rotting there; the butcher's assistant coming to collect the remains, suggesting that Gregor's corpse might be filleted and sold? Perhaps. Part of Kafka's comedic technique relies on his readers' association with his images and implications.

Tone—Tone is a powerful and important element in Kafka's writing, especially in *The Metamorphosis*, where the audience is asked to suspend its disbelief. The tone used by Kafka is bizarre, while remaining ironical and light. Never does the language become too grave or dark, or even melancholy. Everything, even Gregor's death, is taken with a certain alacrity, which helps the reader to go along with the story. If the tone were serious, the audience might feel it was supposed to take the transformation literally, making the work more like science fiction, and changing the impact of the allegorical meaning. Further, the moribund details Kafka offers his reader are largely superficial. There is not a lot of detail and the details given are not overly developed. Yet, there remains a certain eeriness to the tone conveyed by the pacing of the story, the dialogue and a careful selection of details.

Setting—The setting in *The Metamorphosis* is very limited. Only Gregor's room and the dining room, and a little bit of the street are described. Keeping the setting simple helps maintain the focus on the internal issues that Kafka wants to address. Also, this helps to add to the sense of isolation. Further, this suggests the setting as symbolic.

Microcosm—It can be said that both Gregor's bedroom and the dining room are representative of the world at large. Gregor's room would represent his private, internal experience, while the dining room signifies interaction with society at large. Further, the behavior of occupants of the rooms can be said to mirror the larger world. In this way, the story is presented as a microcosm of the world.

Character types—Kafka's characters in *The Metamorphosis* are intentionally flat. This is because Kafka wants to suggest that the family interplay is typical, not specific to these characters. However, besides the mother, the characters are all dynamic. Grete, Gregor and the father all undergo drastic changes as the story progresses.

However, looked at in another light, it could be said that Gregor does not actually change at all; that his insect form is a symbolic manifestation of his prior life. Also, the father is only reverting to his former state as well. In this way of looking at things, only Grete actually changes, undergoing the metamorphosis of the teenager emerging as an adult.

Suspense—For the most part, the story proceeds in a slow and deliberate fashion. However, this pacing builds suspense, so that the dramatic scenes become more powerful. Of note are the scenes in which Gregor tries to protect his belongings from his mother and sister, and the scene in which Gregor comes out of his room, into the view of the lodgers, in pursuit of Grete and her violin.

Anti-Hero—Gregor is a seminal anti-hero. His non-action, passivity, cowardly, self-effacing manner at first elicits sympathy, and even empathy from the reader, but soon, it becomes too much for even the most sensitive reader to endure. Gregor's demise is a lesson in some ways. His failures allow us to see how to avoid this in our own lives.

In Medias Res – Popularized in the writings that came out of Ancient Greece, this notion of beginning a tale in the middle of the action can be said to apply to *The Metamorphosis* in the way many suggest, that the action of *The Metamorphosis* starts with its climax—Gregor's awakening, transformed into a bug. However, the way Kafka plays down this possible climax makes it more of a crisis than a climax. Obviously, the story proceeds from here, and all the important developments occur after this point. Through the process of exposition, we learn of Gregor's life before the fateful event that marks the beginning of the narrative. Thus, it is more accurate to call Kafka's beginning the story with Gregor's transformation an instance of *in medias res*, than a climax.

Mood – The mood of *The Metamorphosis* is an important element. In fact, such was Kafka's ability to set a certain eerie, absurd mood, coupled with a sort of black humor, that his name entered common use in the form, "Kafkaesque." This word now describes the sort of mood that characterized Kafka's works—dark, yet comedic; eerie, yet palatable.

Naif—In some ways, Gregor is a naif, which contributes to his failure in the Existential framework. Gregor is never conscious of himself; never values himself, and always gives the benefit of the doubt to others, when he should be looking out for himself. A little paranoia, it seems, could have been good for Gregor.

Grete can be said to be a naif at the outset of the story; however, she goes through her own metamorphosis, and like a butterfly, emerges from the cocoon of childhood innocence into womanhood—for the good or bad. It is important to remember that the non-judgmental attitude of all things being beyond good and evil is at the heart of the existential framework.

Objective Correlative—In a certain light, Gregor's state can be viewed as the objective correlative of his inner self. Before his transformation, Gregor *felt* like an insect—helpless, on his back, one of millions, nameless and faceless, trapped in the mindless flow of the bureaucratic business world, having no purpose other than to bring food back to the hive, etc. With his transformation, he becomes the manifestation of these feelings.

This idea can be taken further if the reader looks at the way Gregor's mental state correlates with changes in his body throughout the text.

Symbols

The following is a list of the most commonly cited symbols:

the apple—a religious symbol, said to represent a fall from grace, a dystopian symbol.

the hospital—an interface between society and the individual, a place to which Gregor could have gone for help, so near for Gregor—just across the street—and yet so far, because what stood between him and the hospital was the faceless bureaucracy of society. Note how the building is described as austere and ominous, unwelcoming.

blindness, nearsightedness—Gregor's increasing alienation from society, preventing him from even seeing the hospital where he might have been helped.

music—universal communication. When Gregor tries to reach out to his sister (the source of the music), his efforts are misinterpreted and he is chased away.

the lodgers—society's control over the middle and lower classes, which are beholden to the upper classes and must live lives governed by the pursuit of money within the pre-established channels of the system. In this case, the lodgers have control even in the Samsa household, showing the extent of this oppression.

the charwoman—the outsider, or the savage, who—unlike the maids—is not affected by society and lives outside its rules. The charwoman is able to deal with Gregor on an almost animal level, being somewhat crude and animal-like herself. In this way, she is able to communicate with Gregor in a more natural way than the rest of them.

Also, the charwoman represents the departure from social judgments—beyond good and evil.

marriage—Grete's maturation into womanhood, and a foreshadowing of the endless cycle of domestication. By entering into the folds of society, Grete will give up the independence she has achieved throughout the story, and Gregor's life and death both will have truly been meaningless.

the doors to Gregor's room—originally locked from the inside, representing Gregor's desire to isolate himself, they eventually come to be locked from the outside, representing his being stripped of free-will or choice. Society has locked him out.

the rooms of the house—the interior and exterior realms of human existence. Gregor's room comes to represent his internal state, which, as he depends upon others, becomes more and more neglected, until it is in a state of utter dereliction. On the outside, the family, engaged in society, goes on about its business.

the number three—three doors, three lodgers, etc. The number three has deeply religious connotations, and it is suggested that this was an extension of a religious metaphor in the story.

The Metamorphosis

Discussion Questions

1. Discuss the title of the story. Include some discussion of the translation and possible interpretations. Does the title apply only to Gregor?

2. How does the fact that Gregor's transformation is introduced so casually affect the tone of the story, and consequently, how it is read?

3. Discuss Grete's transformation throughout the story—from Gregor's acolyte to an independent woman. What will become of her after the window of the novel? What about Gregor's parents?

4. Using evidence from the text, support the theme that life is unpredictable and change happens quickly.

5. Discuss *The Metamorphosis* in an Existential framework. Include themes of alienation, isolation, self-determination, attribution of meaning, etc.

6. Discuss the characteristics of an existential novel that are prominently illustrated in *The Metamorphosis*.

7. Is there a protagonist in this story? Is there an antagonist? Think about these questions in an Existentialist framework and discuss Gregor as an anti-hero.

8. Discuss Gregor's passive adaptation to the massive change he undergoes as an allegory for his life before the "transformation."

9. What, if anything, is Kafka saying about Gregor as a being in this world? Is Gregor's fate his fault, or was he helpless/hopeless all along?

10. Discuss the end of the story in which the family is rejuvenated and possessed of a new hopefulness about their lives. Has Gregor made the ultimate sacrifice for his family? Could Gregor be considered a Christ figure in this sense? Why/ why not?

11. After reading *The Metamorphosis*, what do you infer would be traits possessed by Kafka's ideal human, which are not possessed by Gregor?

12. What is the message of *The Metamorphosis*?

13. Discuss the choice of apples as the weapon that eventually proves lethal to Gregor.

14. Explain how the term "a willing suspension of disbelief," as coined by Samuel T. Coleridge, applies to Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*.

The Metamorphosis

PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE QUESTION 1:

Read the following passage from Chapter III and write a well-organized essay in which you discuss the techniques Kafka uses to create suspense. Include a discussion of the impact of word choice, imagery, and pacing on the mood and tone. Do not merely summarize the passage.

The sister began to play; the mother and father each from their side followed the movements of her hands with their eyes. Gregor, drawn by the playing, had risked coming forward a little bit more; his head was already in the living room.

He hardly wondered at the fact that he had recently had so little consideration for the others; earlier, he had been quite proud of this solicitude. He would have had much more reason right now to hide himself, as the dust that lay over the whole of his room and which flew about at the slightest movement now covered him completely as well; he dragged threads, hair, and food scraps with him on his back and sides; he was far too indifferent about everything to lay on his back and rub himself on the carpet as he used to do multiple times during the day. In spite of these circumstances, he had no inhibitions about moving forward a little bit over the immaculate floor of the living room.

At any rate, nobody paid any attention to him. The family was completely engrossed by the violin playing; the tenants, on the other hand, who had placed themselves behind the music stand (far too close behind the sister) so that they could see all of the musical notes, must have disturbed the sister, and soon drew near the window, bowing their heads and speaking in low tones with one another, where they remained as the father anxiously observed them. It quite clearly appeared as if they were disappointed in their assumption that they were going to hear a beautiful or entertaining violin performance, had had quite enough of the entire presentation, and now allowed themselves to be disturbed only out of politeness. The way that they all blew the smoke of their cigars up in the air out of their noses and mouths especially brought one to the conclusion that they were rather annoyed. All the same, his sister was playing so beautifully. Her face was turned to the side, and her gaze, scrutinizing and full of sadness, followed the lines of notes. Gregor crawled a little bit further forwards and held his head close to the floor in order to meet her gaze, if possible. Was he an animal, that music would so move him? It was as if the way to the unknown nourishment that he longed for was shown to him. He was determined to get as far as the sister, to tug at her skirts, and thereby to express that he would like her to come into his room with her violin, as nobody here thought that her playing was worth their time (although he thought it was worthwhile). He did not want to let her out of his room, at least not as long as he lived; his terrifying form should for the first time be useful as he would hiss back at the attackers from all doors of his room at once...and yet the sister shouldn't be forced to stay with him, but instead, remain of her own free will: she should sit near him on the couch, bend her ear down to him, and he would then confide to her that he had every intention of sending her to the conservatory and that, if this unfortunate event had not happened in the interim, he would have told her all this last Christmas—Christmas had already gone by?—without listening to any contrary arguments. After this clarification, the sister would erupt in a fit of emotional tears, and Gregor would lift himself up to her shoulders and kiss her throat, which she had left uncovered without a band or collar since she started going to work.

"Mr. Samsa!" cried the tenant in the middle to the father as he pointed, without speaking another word, with his index finger at Gregor, who was moving himself slowly forward. The violin fell silent as the tenant in the middle smiled at his friends and, shaking his head once, looked at Gregor again. The father appeared to consider it more important to calm the tenants than to drive away Gregor, despite the fact that the tenants were hardly upset and that Gregor entertained them more than the violin performance. He hurried to them and sought with open arms to force them back into their room, while, at the same time, trying to obstruct their view of Gregor with his body. They were actually a little angry at this point, although one no longer knew whether it was due to the father's conduct or whether it was the fact that they just now realized that they possessed a neighbor such as Gregor in the next room. They requested explanations from the father, raised their hands, pulled at their beards in restlessness, and retreated to their rooms only slowly. Meanwhile the sister, initially feeling quite lost after the sudden disruption and disintegration of the performance, letting her hands hang motionless with the violin and bow while she had looked at the music as if she were still playing, had overcome her confusion and had laid the instrument on the lap of the mother (who had sat down on her chair because she was short of breath); the sister then ran into the neighboring room, which the tenants were quickly approaching because of the father's pressure. One could see how, under the sister's proficient hands, the sheets and pillows from the bed flew into the air and arranged themselves. Before the gentleman had even reached the room, she was finished with the bedcovers and had slipped out. The father appeared once again to have been seized by his stubbornness, as he forgot every courtesy that he owed his tenants; he pushed forward and pushed again, until the middle gentleman, already in the door, stamped his foot with a crash and thereby brought the father to a halt. "I hereby declare," said the tenant, raising his hand and searching out the mother and sister as well with his gaze, "that upon consideration of the revolting conditions"—at this he spat resolutely on the floor—"that prevail among this family and in this apartment, I am giving notice of the immediate termination of my occupancy. I will, of course, pay not even the least amount for the days I have lived here; on the contrary, I will contemplate whether or not I will file against you some sort of plea, which—believe me—will be substantiated very easily." He then became silent and looked directly in front of him as if he expected something. Actually, his two friends chimed in with the words: "We also immediately give our notice." Upon that, the middle one grabbed the door handle and slammed the door shut.

The father fumbled about with his hands, staggered to his chair, and fell into it; he looked as if he were stretching out for his usual evening nap, but the way his head deeply nodded, as if totally slack, indicated that he could hardly be sleeping. Gregor had been lying still at the same spot where the tenants had caught him. He was too weak to move because of his disappointment over the fact that his plans had gone awry; he was also weak, possibly as a result of his extreme hunger. He feared, in the next few moments, that it was positively certain that everything would flare up and collapse upon him, and he waited. He wasn't even startled when the violin, held by the mother's trembling hands, fell from her lap and sent out a sonorous tone.

"Dearest parents," said the sister as she struck the table with her hand as an introduction, "this can go no further. If you perhaps don't recognize that, I recognize it. I will not pronounce the name of my brother in the presence of this monster, and will say merely this about it: we must be rid of it. We have attempted every method humanly possible to serve and tolerate it, and I believe that nobody can blame us in the least."

"She is a thousand times right," interjected the father. The mother, who could never manage to catch her breath, had a maniacal look in her eyes as she held her hand up and began to muffle her coughs. The sister hurried to mother and felt her forehead. The father appeared to have been lead to contemplate certain things by the sister's words; he sat upright, played with his servant's cap between the plates that the tenants had left on the table from the evening meal, and looked from time to time at the motionless Gregor.

"We must try to get rid of it," the sister now said exclusively to the father because the mother, in her coughing, heard nothing. "It's doing both of you in; I can see it coming. If people have to work as hard as we all do, they can't endure this endless torment at home as well. I can't do it either." And she burst into tears that were so strong that they flowed down onto the mother's face, from which the sister wiped the tears with mechanical motions of her hands.

"Child," said the father with compassion and obvious sympathy, "what then should we do?"

The sister just shrugged her shoulders as a sign of the helplessness that, in contrast to her former sureness, had seized her while she cried.

"If he understood us," said the father half-questioningly; the sister, in her tears, shook her hand fiercely to signify that this was unthinkable.

"If he understood us," repeated the father, who, by shutting his eyes, admitted to the sister's conviction regarding the impossibility of the matter, "then it might be possible to come to an agreement with him. But as it stands..."

"He must be sent away," cried the sister; "that is the only way. You just have to try to banish the thought that it's Gregor. The fact that we have believed this for so long is our true misfortune. How can it really be Gregor? If it were Gregor, he would have long recognized that it isn't possible for humans to live together with such a beast and would have gone away of his own free will. Then we would have had no brother, but would have lived our lives and honored his memory. But this animal persecutes us, drives away the tenants, and evidently will occupy the entire apartment and let us spend the night in the alleyway. See, father," she suddenly screamed, "he's starting again now!" And, with a horror that Gregor couldn't understood at all, the sister even abandoned the mother, suddenly pushing away from her chair as if she would rather sacrifice the mother than remain in Gregor's presence, and hurried behind the father, who, only worked up because of her behavior, also stood up and half-raised his arms as if to protect the sister.

But Gregor hadn't any ideas or intentions of causing anxiety for anyone, let alone his sister. He had just started to turn himself around so that he could wander back into his room, and this actually looked quite strange, as he, in his wounded condition, had to facilitate his difficult rotation by raising and then dropping his head many times on the floor. He stopped and looked around. His good intentions seemed to have been recognized; the horror had only been temporary. Now they all silently and sorrowfully looked at him. The mother, with her legs crossed and stretched out in front of her, sat in her chair, with her eyes almost shut from exhaustion; the father and the sister sat near one another, with the sister having laid her hand around the father's neck.

"Now, maybe I'll be allowed to turn myself around," thought Gregor as he began his work once more. He couldn't suppress his wheezing at the effort and had to rest now and then. In addition, nobody was urging him onwards; it was all left up to him. When he had finished turning around, he immediately began to traipse directly back. He was amazed at the great distance separating him from his room, and he could hardly comprehend how he, in his weakness and almost without noticeable effort, had traced the same path only a short time ago. Concentrating the whole time on crawling quickly, he hardly paid attention to the fact that no word, no cry from his family disrupted him.

He first turned his head when he was already in the door, although he didn't turn it fully because he felt his neck getting stiff; at any rate, he saw that even now nothing behind him had changed, except that the sister was standing up. He last glanced fleetingly at the mother, who was now completely asleep. He was hardly inside his room when the door was swiftly shut, bolted, and locked. Gregor was so startled at the sudden noise behind him that his little legs buckled. It was the sister who had hurried like that. She already stood upright and had then waited, quickly springing forward (Gregor hadn't even heard her coming), calling out "Finally!" to the parents while she turned the key in the lock.

PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE QUESTION 2:

Read the following passage and write a well-organized essay in which you discuss the significance of Gregor's passive attitude on the rest of the story; discuss this scene as important to establishing the notion of passivity as a motif.

> While Gregor was quickly blurting all this out, hardly aware of what he was saying, he had moved close to the chest of drawers without effort, probably as a result of the practice he had already had in bed, and now he was trying to stand up straight using it. He actually wanted to open the door. He really wanted to let himself be seen by and to speak with the attorney. He was eager to see what the others, who were making such demands of him, would say once they caught a glimpse of him. If they were startled, then Gregor had no more responsibility and could be calm. But if they took in everything quietly, then he would have no reason to get excited and could, if he hurried, actually be at the train station around eight o'clock. At first he slid down a few times on the smooth chest of drawers, but eventually, he gave himself a final swing and stood upright there; he paid no more heed to the pains in his lower body, no matter how they might still sting. Now he let himself fall against the back of a nearby chair, on the edge of which he braced himself with his thin limbs. By doing this, he gained control over himself and kept quiet, for he could now hear the attorney.

PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE QUESTION 3:

Read the following passage and write a well-organized essay in which you discuss how the motif of guilt helps to establish Gregor's character. You may cite other instances in the text where this is evidenced if you choose.

> But Grete's words had worried the mother; she stepped to the side, saw the giant brown mark on the flowered wallpaper, and, before she really came to the realization that it was Gregor she saw, she said in a hoarse, shrieking voice, "Oh, God, oh, God!" and, with her arms wide, as if giving everything up, fell on the couch and didn't stir.
>
> "Gregor, you..." cried the sister as she raised her fist and shot him an intense glare. These were the first words that she had addressed directly to him since the transformation. She ran into the neighboring room to get some sort of medicine that could wake the mother from her faint; Gregor wanted to help as well—there was still time to save the picture—he was, however, stuck fast to the glass and had to forcefully tear himself away. He then ran into the nearby room, as if he could give the sister some sort of advice as he had done in the past, but stood there doing nothing behind her while she rummaged around in various little bottles. She was startled when she turned around; a bottle dropped to the floor and shattered; a sliver of glass injured Gregor's face; some acrid medicine spilled on him; Grete now, without delay, took as many little bottles as she could carry and rushed in to the mother with them, shutting the door closed with her foot. Gregor was now cut off from the mother, who was perhaps near death, with him to blame; he was not permitted to open the door as he didn't want to chase away the sister who had to remain with mother; he now had nothing to do except wait, and, plagued by self-reproach and anxiety, he began to crawl; he crawled all over everything: walls, furniture, and ceilings, and when the whole room had just begun to spin around him, he finally fell, in his despair, onto the middle of the large table.

PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE QUESTION 4:

Read the following passage—the final passage in the book—and discuss the ending in the context of the Existential framework; specifically the notion that all things are beyond judgment—beyond good and evil.

> At this, the gentleman immediately went, with long strides, to the hall; his two friends had already been listening for a while with motionless hands and now hopped directly after him, as if worried that Mr. Samsa could step into the hallway before they did and interfere when they joined up with their leader. All three of them took their hats from the coat rack in the hall, took their canes from the cane holder, bowed silently, and quit the apartment. In what turned out to be completely groundless suspicion, Mr. Samsa and the two women stepped out on the porch, leaned on the railing, and watched as the three gentlemen descended the stairs very slowly but surely, disappeared at every floor where the stairs turned, and after a few moments came out once again. The deeper they managed to go, the more the Samsa family lost interest in them, and when a butcher's apprentice walked proudly to them and then went high above their heads on the stairs with a basket on his head, Mr. Samsa and the two women deserted the railing, turned around, and then all, as if relieved, went back into the apartment.
>
> They decided that day to spend time relaxing and going for a walk; not only had they earned this break from work, but they absolutely needed it. And so they sat at the table and wrote three letters of excuse, Mr. Samsa to his manager, Mrs. Samsa to her customer, and Grete to her supervisor at the store. While they were writing, the servant came in to say that she was leaving because her morning work was done.
>
> The three writers at first just nodded without looking up, and only when the servant would still not go away, did they look up in annoyance.
>
> "Well?" asked Mr. Samsa.
>
> The servant stood smiling in the doorway, as if she had something auspicious to announce but would do so only if she were specifically asked about it. The small ostrich feather in her hat which was not quite upright (and which had annoyed Mr. Samsa during the entire time she served them) swayed gently in all directions.
>
> "Well then, what is it you actually want?" asked Mrs. Samsa, whom the servant usually respected.
>
> "Ahem," answered the servant, who couldn't continue speaking right then because she stood there cheerfully smiling. "Okay, so, about that trash that needed to be gotten rid of, you guys don't worry about that. It's done taken care of."
>
> Mrs. Samsa and Grete bent down over their letters as if they wanted to continue writing; Mr. Samsa, who noticed that the servant now wanted to begin describing everything explicitly, promptly nipped that in the bud with an outstretched hand.
>
> When she wasn't allowed to narrate, she remembered what a great hurry she was in, and, obviously insulted, called out "Adjoo, folks," turned around fiercely, and left the apartment with a violent slamming of the door.
>
> "She'll be let go this evening," said Mr. Samsa, who received neither from his wife nor daughter any reply because it appeared that the servant had disrupted the tranquility that they had just gained once again. They rose, went to the window, and remained there with their arms around each other. Mr. Samsa turned his chair in their direction and observed them quietly for a little while. Then he called: "Come now. Let's finally put aside the old things. And let's also have a little consideration for me."

The women obeyed him immediately, hastened to him, caressed him, and quickly concluded their letters.

Then all three of them left the apartment together (something that they had not done in months) and took the tram into the open air of the city. Warm sunshine permeated the car in which they all sat. They discussed with one another their prospects for the future as they leaned back comfortably in their seats, and found upon closer examination that they were by no means bad, as the employment of all three of them, which they had not previously asked each other about at all, was favorable and (especially in the future) looked very promising. The most notable immediate improvement of their situation would arise from a change of apartments; they now wanted to take one that was smaller, cheaper, in a better location, and, most importantly, was more practical than their current one that had been chosen by Gregor. As they talked pleasantly about these things, it occurred to Mr. and Mrs. Samsa almost at the same time that their daughter, despite all the recent difficulties that had made her cheeks pale, was growing livelier all the time and had blossomed to become a beautiful and voluptuous young woman. Growing quieter, they almost unconsciously communicated with each other through their glances, thinking that it was soon going to be time to look for a worthy man for her. And it was like a confirmation of their new dreams and good intentions when, as they reached their destination of their trip, the daughter rose up first and stretched her young body.

PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE QUESTION 5:

Read the following passage and write a well organized essay in which you discuss Kafka's use of foreshadowing and anti-climax to present this scene in an Existential style—devoid of emotion.

> "And now?" Gregor asked himself as he looked around in the darkness. He soon made the discovery that he could no longer even budge. He wasn't too amazed at this; it actually seemed unnatural to him that, until now, he could actually get around with these thin little legs. Moreover, he felt relatively comfortable. It was true that his whole body hurt, but it seemed to him as if the pains gradually grew slighter and slighter and that they would eventually go away completely. He now hardly felt the rotten apple in his back and the inflammation around it, which was now covered in soft dust. He remembered his family with affection and love. His opinion of it all, which was that he had to disappear, was even more resolute than his sister's, if such a thing were possible. He stayed in this state of vapid and peaceful contemplation until the clock tower struck the third hour of the morning. He lived to see the beginning of the general illumination outside the window. Then, apart from his will, his head sank down completely, and his last breath streamed weakly out of his nostrils.

PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE QUESTION 6:

While most authors strive to create well-rounded, fully developed characters, others are quite successful in their use of stock or conventional characters. Discuss the use of stock characters in *The Metamorphosis* and what this adds to or takes away from the story.

PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE QUESTION 7:

Setting is often the means by which an author establishes the reality or non-reality of a story. Write a well-organized essay in which you describe the effect Kafka creates with the setting of The Metamorphosis. Do not merely describe the setting.

PRACTICE MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS 1—8:

Read the following passage from chapter I carefully before you choose your answers.

Gregor Samsa awoke one morning out of restless dreams, he found himself in bed, transformed into a gargantuan pest. He lay on his hard, armored back and saw, as he raised his head a little, his domed, brown belly, divided into arched segments; he could hardly keep the bed sheets from sliding from his stomach's height completely to the floor. His numerous legs, lamentably thin in comparison to his new girth, flickered helplessly before his eyes.

"What has happened to me?" he thought. It was no dream. His room, a proper room for a human being (albeit a little too small), lay still between the four familiar walls. Above the table, upon which a collection of sample cloth goods was spread out in stacks—Samsa was a traveling salesman—hung the picture which he had cut out of an illustrated magazine a little while ago and set in a pretty gilt frame. It depicted a woman who, with a fur hat and a fur boa, sat erect, lifting up in the direction of the viewer a solid fur muff into which her entire forearm had disappeared.

Gregor's glance then turned to the window, and the dreary weather—one heard raindrops falling upon the window ledge—made him quite melancholy. "How would it be if I kept sleeping for a little while longer and forgot all this foolishness," he thought; but this was entirely impractical, for he was accustomed to sleeping on his right side, and in his present circumstances, he couldn't bring himself into this position. No matter how hard he threw himself onto his right side, he always rolled again into a prone position. He tried it a full hundred times, closing his eyes because he had to avoid seeing the wriggling legs, and gave up trying when he began to feel a slight, dull pain in his side that he had hitherto not felt.

"Oh God," he thought, "what a strenuous occupation I've chosen! Always on the road, day out, day in. The rigors of the job are much greater than if I were working locally, and, furthermore, the nuisances of traveling are always imposed upon me—the worries about train connections, bad meals at irregular intervals, fleeting human contact that is ever-changing, never lasting, and never expected to be genuine. To the devil with it all!" He felt a slight itching on the top of his abdomen. He slowly pushed himself on his back closer to the bedpost so that he could lift his head more easily, found the itchy area, which was entirely covered with small white spots—he did not know what to make of them—and wanted to feel the place with a leg. But he retracted it immediately, for the contact felt like a cold shower all over him.

He slid back again into his earlier position. "This getting up early," he thought, "makes one completely idiotic. A man must have his sleep. Other travelers live like harem women. For instance, when I come back to the inn during the course of the morning to write up the necessary orders, these gentlemen are just sitting down to breakfast. If I were to try that with my boss, I'd be thrown out on the spot. "Who knows, though—that might not be such a bad thing. If I didn't hold back for my parents' sake, I'd have quit ages ago. I would go to the boss and state my opinion out loud from the bottom of my heart. He would've fallen right off his desk! He's a strange sort, sitting up on that desk and speaking down to the employee from on high like that. Moreover, the boss has trouble hearing, and one has to step up close to him.

At any rate, hope is not completely gone: once I've collected the money to pay off my parents' debt to him—that should take another five or six years—I'll do it for sure. I'll cut all ties and move on. In any case, right now I have to get up; my train leaves at five."

He saw the alarm clock over there, ticking on the chest of drawers. "Good God!" he thought. It was half past six, and the hands were going quietly on. It was past the half hour, almost quarter to seven. Shouldn't the alarm have sounded? One could see from the bed that it had been properly set for four o'clock. Certainly it had rung. And was it even possible for one to sleep quietly through the noise that made even the furniture shake? Now, he certainly hadn't had a peaceful sleep, but apparently it was deep nonetheless. But what should he do now? The next train left at seven o'clock. To catch that one, he would have to make a mad dash; his assortment of wares wasn't packed up yet, and he really didn't feel particularly fresh and active. And even if he caught the train, there was no way to avoid those storm clouds brewing over the boss' head, because the firm's errand boy would've waited for the five o'clock train and reported the news of his absence long ago. He was the boss's minion, without backbone or intelligence. Well then, what if he called in sick? But that would be extremely embarrassing and suspicious, because during his five years' service Gregor hadn't been sick even once. The boss would certainly come with the doctor from the health insurance company and would reproach his parents for their lazy son, cutting short all objections with the comments from the insurance doctor, who thought everyone was completely healthy but work-shy. And besides, would the doctor in this case be totally wrong? Apart from an excessive drowsiness after the long sleep, Gregor, in fact, felt quite well and even had an especially strong appetite. As he was thinking all this over in the greatest haste, without being able to make the decision to get out of bed (the clock struck quarter to seven), there was a cautious knock on the door near the head of the bed.

"Gregor," a voice called—it was mother. "It's quarter to seven. Don't you want to be on your way?"

The soft voice! Gregor was startled when he heard his voice answering. It was clearly and unmistakably his earlier voice, but in it was intermingled, as if from below, an irrepressibly painful squeaking, which left the words positively distinct only in the first moment and distorted them in the next moment, so that one didn't know if one had heard correctly. Gregor wanted to answer in detail and explain everything, but in these circumstances he confined himself to saying, "Yes, yes, thank you mother. I'm getting up right away."

1. After he awakes to find himself transformed and the weather outside dismal, Gregor's first impulse is to
   A. go back to sleep.
   B. find an umbrella.
   C. summon the doctor.
   D. call his sister for help.
   E. hide.

2. Before he was transmogrified into an insect, Gregor worked as a(n):
   A. traveling salesman
   B. lawyer
   C. railroad conductor
   D. entomologist
   E. errand boy

3. Gregor says that he would go back to sleep, but for the fact that "he was accustomed to sleeping on his right side, and in his present circumstances, he couldn't bring himself into this position."

   What does this detail convey about Gregor's character?
   A. Gregor is open to new ideas.
   B. Gregor is a creature of habit.
   C. Gregor has trouble sleeping.
   D. Gregor is a narcissist.
   E. Gregor needs more sleep.

4. Which of the following is NOT one of Gregor's complaints about his occupation (as compared to other occupations)?
   A. the nuisances of traveling
   B. no prolonged human contacts
   C. poor meals
   D. never being at home
   E. carrying heavy sample cases

5. The literary device used in this passage to convey information about Gregor's past is
   A. reflection.
   B. climax.
   C. in Medias Res.
   D. anagnorisis.
   E. exposition.

6. Why might it be considered ironic that Gregor calls his boss's errand boy a "minion, without backbone or intelligence?"
   A. As an insect, Gregor has neither backbone nor intelligence.
   B. The errand boy is in a higher position than Gregor within the company.
   C. A minion would have no authority over Gregor.
   D. This is Gregor's attitude toward his boss.
   E. Gregor used to be the boss's errand boy.

7. Based on the tone of the passage, in what light do you think Kafka is attempting to portray Gregor to his readers?
   A. easy-going
   B. pathetic
   C. panicky
   D. melodramatic
   E. self-determined

8. Interpreted as symbols, what might the myriad tiny legs, over which Gregor has no control, indicate about Gregor's life before his transformation?
   A. the many choices Gregor struggled with in life
   B. Gregor's haste in life
   C. the multiple tasks encountered in Gregor's work
   D. Gregor's position as a messenger
   E. Gregor's feelings of futility and frustration

PRACTICE MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS 9—14

Read the following passage from Chapter I carefully before you choose your answers.

While Gregor was quickly blurting all this out, hardly aware of what he was saying, he had moved close to the chest of drawers without effort, probably as a result of the practice he had already had in bed, and now he was trying to stand up straight using it. He actually wanted to open the door. He really wanted to let himself be seen by and to speak with the attorney. He was eager to see what the others, who were making such demands of him, would say once they caught a glimpse of him. If they were startled, then Gregor had no more responsibility and could be calm. But if they took in everything quietly, then he would have no reason to get excited and could, if he hurried, actually be at the train station around eight o'clock. At first he slid down a few times on the smooth chest of drawers, but eventually, he gave himself a final swing and stood upright there; he paid no more heed to the pains in his lower body, no matter how they might still sting. Now he let himself fall against the back of a nearby chair, on the edge of which he braced himself with his thin limbs. By doing this, he gained control over himself and kept quiet, for he could now hear the attorney.

"Did you understand even a single word?" the attorney asked the parents. "Is he making a fool of us?"

"For God's sake," cried the mother, already in tears. "Perhaps he's very ill, and we're upsetting him. Grete! Grete!" she then cried out.

"Mother?" called the sister from the other side. They were communicating through Gregor's room.

"You must go to the doctor immediately. Gregor is sick. Hurry to the doctor. Have you heard Gregor speak yet?"

"That was an animal's voice," said the attorney with a voice that was remarkably quiet in comparison to the mother's screaming.

"Anna! Anna!" yelled the father through the hall into the kitchen, clapping his hands. "Fetch a locksmith right away!"

The two young women ran immediately through the hall with swishing skirts—how had his sister dressed herself so quickly?—and tore open the front door. No one heard the front door close at all; it was left wide open, as is customary in apartments where a huge tragedy has occurred.

Gregor, however, had become much calmer. All right, people did not understand his words any more, although they seemed clear enough to him, clearer than before, perhaps because his ears had become accustomed to them. But at least people now thought that things were not well with him and were prepared to help him. The confidence and assurance with which the first arrangements had been carried out made him feel good. He felt himself included once again in the circle of humanity and was expecting from them both, from the doctor and from the locksmith, without exactly differentiating between them, splendid and surprising results. In order to get as clear a voice as possible for the decisive discussion to come, he coughed a little, and yet he took pains to ensure that this was muted, since it was possible that even this noise sounded like something different from a human cough, and he no longer trusted himself to discern whether it was or not. Meanwhile, in the next room, it had become completely quiet. Perhaps his parents were sitting with the attorney at the table whispering about him; perhaps they were all leaning against the door, eavesdropping.

Gregor pushed himself slowly towards the door with the help of the chair, let go of it there, threw himself against the door, held himself upright against it—the balls of his tiny legs had a little adhesive on them—and took a brief respite from his labors. But then he took it upon himself to rotate the key in the lock with his mouth. Unfortunately it seemed that he had no real teeth—with what then was he to grab hold of the key? But for this, of course, his jaws were very strong; with their help, he really brought the key into motion, and didn't quite pay attention to the fact that he was undoubtedly causing some harm to himself, because a brown liquid came out of his mouth, flowed over the key, and dripped onto the floor.

"Just listen," said the attorney in the adjacent room; "he's turning the key."

This really cheered Gregor up, but they all should have called out to him, including his father and mother; they should have shouted, "Come on, Gregor, get right near it; hold fast to that lock!"

Imagining that all his efforts were being followed with suspense, he focused, with all the determination and strength he could summon, on the lock. After each progression of the key's rotation, he danced about the lock; he held himself upright now only with his mouth, and he had to hang onto the key or, as necessary, to press it down once more with the whole weight of his body. The clear noise of the bolt as it finally snapped back positively woke Gregor up. Out of breath, he said to himself: "So I didn't need the locksmith," and he set his head against the door handle to open the door completely.

The door had already been opened wide without him yet being completely visible, seeing that he had had to open it in this way. He first had to turn himself slowly around the edge of the door, very carefully, of course, if he didn't want to fall clumsily on his back right at the entrance into the room. He was still preoccupied with this difficult movement and had no time to pay attention to anything else when he heard the attorney shout out a loud "Oh!"—it sounded like the wind whistling—and now he saw him, the nearest one to the door, pressing his hand against his open mouth and retreating slowly, as if pushed back by an invisible, constant, inexorable force. The mother—she stood here, in spite of the presence of the attorney, with her hair standing on end all over the place from the night—was looking at the father with her hands clasped. She then took two steps towards Gregor and collapsed right in the middle of her skirts, which were spread out all around her; her face was sunk on her breast, completely concealed. The father clenched his fist, showing a hostile expression, as if he wanted to push Gregor back into his room, then looked uncertainly around the living room, covered his eyes with his hands, and cried so that his mighty breast shook.

9. Gregor says that, if upon seeing him, his family and the attorney were to "[take] in everything quietly, then he would have no reason to get excited and could, if he hurried, actually be at the train station around eight o'clock."

What does this statement suggest about Gregor's character?

A. Gregor is considerate of others.
B. Gregor loves his job.
C. Gregor's perceptions rely heavily on others.
D. Gregor is independent and self-reliant.
E. Gregor wants to be accepted.

10. The attorney thinks Gregor is trying to make a fool of him because Gregor
    A. laughs when the attorney questions him.
    B. is eager to please.
    C. will not open the door.
    D. uses speech that is unintelligible and sounds like an animal's.
    E. will not respond to his questions.

11. As a reaction to his family's decision to "fetch a locksmith right away," Gregor
    A. is horrified, and looks for a place to hide.
    B. waits for the reaction of the others with great anxiety.
    C. faints.
    D. feels himself included again and expects great results.
    E. becomes calm and anxiously awaits being taken care of.

12. The fact that Gregor thinks that the introduction of outsiders (locksmith, doctor) will mean inclusion and understanding is an example of:
    A. dramatic irony.
    B. cosmic irony.
    C. antithesis.
    D. parallelism.
    E. imagery.

13. The following passage:

    > "… [Gregor] coughed a little, and yet he took pains to ensure that this was muted, since it was possible that even this noise sounded like something different from a human cough, and he no longer trusted himself to discern whether it was or not."

    is relevant in an Existential framework because
    A. it is uniquely concerned with bodily maladies.
    B. the focus of the passage is on Gregor's trust in his own perceptions.
    C. it involves Gregor's search for ultimate truth.
    D. the passage focuses on the idea of polar opposites.
    E. it reinforces the idea that there is no ultimate truth.

14. How does Gregor's statement that his family "should have" vocally encouraged him when he was attempting to open the door support the idea that Gregor is a failure within the Existential ideal?
    A. Gregor is independently motivated.
    B. Gregor longs for appreciation.
    C. Gregor is primarily motivated from without.
    D. Gregor was unsure if the family really wanted him to open the door.
    E. Gregor is terribly forgetful.

PRACTICE MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTION 15—19

Read the following passage from Chapter II carefully before you choose your answers.

Gregor couldn't find out at all with what excuses they had previously sent the doctor and locksmith out of the house that first morning; as he could not be understood by the others, not even sister, nobody thought that he could understand them, and so when the sister was in his room, he had to be content hearing her sighs and appeals to the saints. Only later, when she had grown used to everything—of fully becoming accustomed to it there was never any discussion, of course—did Gregor sometimes manage to hear comments that were meant in a friendly way or could be so construed. "But today, it tasted good to him," she said when Gregor had really put away the food; while in the opposite situation, which gradually began to repeat itself more and more often, she was in the habit of sadly saying, "Now it's all come to a standstill again."

While Gregor could find out no news directly, he did overhear some things from the neighboring room; he ran immediately to the appropriate door and pressed against it with his whole body as soon as he heard voices. There wasn't any conversation (especially in the early days) that didn't somehow concern him, even if it only hinted at it. For two entire days there were discussions at every meal about how they should now go about things; but between mealtimes, they spoke about the same subject because there were always at least two family members at home—nobody really wanted to remain alone in the apartment, and yet, under no circumstances could they entirely abandon it. On that first day, the maid—what and how much about the occurrences she knew was entirely unclear—had also fallen to her knees and begged the mother to dismiss her immediately, and when she said goodbye a quarter of an hour later, she thanked mother for the dismissal with tears, as if it were the greatest favor that anybody had done for her, and, without anyone requesting it of her, swore a terrified oath never to tell anyone the slightest word. Now, the sister had to cook in conjunction with the mother; this was not a lot of trouble, mind you, because they hardly ate anything. Time and time again, Gregor heard one of them extend to another a futile invitation to eat and receive no other answer than, "Thank you, I've had enough," or something similar. Perhaps they also drank nothing. Sister often asked the father whether he wanted to have a beer and gladly offered to get it herself; when the father remained silent, she said that she would send the doorkeeper to go get it, but then father finally voiced an emphatic "No," and no more was said about it.

During the course of the first day, father had already laid out the entire financial situation and prospects to both mother and sister. Now and then he stood up from the table and took some receipt or ledger out of his small lockbox, saved from the successful collapse of his business five years ago. One could hear as he opened wide the complicated lock and, after removing the sought-after item, locked it again. These declarations of his father were in part the first delightful thing that Gregor had heard during his imprisonment. He had had the impression that the father had nothing at all left from his former business, or, at least, father had not said anything to the contrary, and at any rate, Gregor hadn't asked about it.

Gregor's only concern had been to do everything in his power to allow his family to forget, as quickly as possible, the bad business luck that had brought them to complete despair.

And since that time, he had begun to work with a particular fervor, going almost overnight from being a minor clerk to a traveling salesman, who naturally had a lot of other possibilities for earning money because his success at work was transformed immediately into the form of a cash commission that could be laid on the table at home before his astonished and delighted family.

Those had been fine times, and they had never thereafter been repeated—at least not with the same splendor—despite the fact that Gregor later earned so much money that he was capable of bearing the expenses of the entire family, as he also did. They had become quite used to it, the family as well as Gregor; they accepted the money gratefully, and he gladly handed it over, but it no longer resulted in that special warmth. Only the sister still remained close to Gregor, and his secret plan was to send her, who differed from Gregor in that she loved music and knew how to play the violin movingly, to the conservatory next year, without any consideration for the significant cost that it must entail; they would recoup that in other ways. During Gregor's brief layovers in the city, the conservatory was often mentioned in conversations with the sister, but always as a mere, beautiful dream, the realization of which was unthinkable; the parents never relished listening to the mention of these things, but Gregor had considered it in detail and intended to formally explain his thoughts on Christmas Eve.

15. The use of the *limited*, rather than omniscient, third-person narrator in this passage, emphasizes
    A. Gregor's overall sense of isolation.
    B. the idea that Gregor can get no news directly.
    C. Gregor's feelings of futility.
    D. the humor of passage.
    E. the social satire inherent in the passage.

16. Grete's responses to Gregor's eating or not eating signify her
    A. notion that if, Gregor eats, it means he is getting better.
    B. desire for Gregor's transformation to be completed as quickly as possible.
    C. desire for things to go back to the "standstill" that existed before the transformation.
    D. struggle to understand her brother's needs.
    E. desire for Gregor to feed himself.

17. Grete's addressing Gregor in the third person signifies that she
    A. has begun to think of Gregor like a doll.
    B. thinks this will help Gregor to understand her.
    C. is patronizing Gregor because she thinks he is not listening to her.
    D. has begun to think of Gregor as a thing.
    E. has always addressed her brother in this way.

18. The fact that the father has some money put aside reveals that the father
    A. is very forgetful.
    B. was doubtful of his son's ability to provide for the family.
    C. is deceitful and manipulative.
    D. was secretly planning to send Grete to the conservatory.
    E. is an obsessive personality.

19. The following passage serves to support the _____ interpretation of *The Metamorphosis*:

> "On that first day, the maid—what and how much about the occurrences she knew was entirely unclear—had also fallen to her knees and begged the mother to dismiss her immediately, and when she said goodbye a quarter of an hour later, she thanked mother for the dismissal with tears, as if it were the greatest favor that anybody had done for her, and, without anyone requesting it of her, swore a terrified oath never to tell anyone the slightest word."

    A. biblical
    B. allegorical
    C. symbolic
    D. realistic
    E. absurd

PRACTICE MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS 20—23

Read the following passage from chapter II carefully before you choose your answers.

He really didn't know what father intended; at any rate, the father raised his feet unusually high, and Gregor was amazed at the gigantic size of his boot soles. He didn't dwell on that, though, as ever since the first day of his new life, he had surely known that the father considered only the harshest severity appropriate for him. And so he ran away from the father, froze in place when the father stood still, and hurried away further when the father even stirred. In this way they circumnavigated the room several times without anything decisive happening, and as a consequence of the slow tempo of the whole thing, it didn't have the appearance of a pursuit. Because of this, Gregor remained on the floor for the time being, especially as he feared that the father could consider flight up the walls or on the ceiling to be particularly malicious. Regardless, Gregor had to keep telling himself that he wouldn't be able to keep up this running any longer because every time the father took a step, Gregor had to carry out innumerable movements. He already began to noticeably lose his breath, as he had in his former days when his lungs hadn't been quite trustworthy.

As he now staggered about to gather his strength for running, he could barely keep his eyes open; in his witlessness, he could hardly think of deliverance through any method other than running, and he had almost forgotten that the walls were available to him, although they were blocked by the painstakingly-carved furniture full of points and pinnacles, when something small that had been lightly tossed flew close beside and rolled in front of him.

It was an apple; a second one flew after it.

Gregor stood still in terror and further running was useless because the father had decided to bombard him. He had filled his pockets from the fruit bowl on the credenza, and now, without aiming precisely, threw apple after apple. These small red apples rolled about on the floor as if electrified and bumped against one another. One weakly thrown apple grazed Gregor's back but slid off harmlessly. One direct hit that flew immediately afterward penetrated Gregor's back; Gregor wanted to drag himself a little further, as if the unexpected and unbelievable pain would go away with a change of position, and yet he felt like he was nailed down and stretched out, all his senses being completely confused. Only with his last glance did he see how the door of his room had been torn open, how the mother ran out in front of the screaming sister (mother was in her underwear because the sister had undressed her to help her breathe more easily when she fainted), and how the mother then ran to the father; on her way to him, her fastened skirts slid one after another to the floor and as she tripped over the skirts, she assaulted the father and threw her arms around him, uniting wholly with him—Gregor's sight then failed him—as she put her hands on the back of the father's head and bade him spare Gregor's life.

20. What is the significance of Gregor's noting the "gigantic" size of his father's boot soles?
    A. This detail foreshadows Gregor's death.
    B. This detail provides comic relief.
    C. This detail suggests Gregor's relationship with his father.
    D. This detail reinforces the father's antagonism toward Gregor.
    E. This detail substantiates Gregor's fears.

21. What literary technique is used in this scene to create humor?
    A. slapstick
    B. cosmic irony
    C. imagery
    D. verisimilitude
    E. absurdity

22. The sister's role in the apple-bombardment is to
    A. cheer the father on.
    B. try to stop the father from killing Gregor.
    C. carry the fainting mother from the room.
    D. do nothing but scream.
    E. watch silently, paralyzed by indecision.

23. What does Kafka's choice to have the father use apples as a weapon add to this scene?
    A. existential angst
    B. black humor
    C. realism
    D. suspense
    E. verisimilitude

PRACTICE MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS 24—26

Read the following passage from chapter III carefully before you choose your answers.

Gregor's severe wound, from which he suffered for over a month—the apple remained in his flesh as a visible memento because nobody ventured to remove it—seemed of its own accord to remind the father that Gregor, despite his present miserable and revolting form, was a member of the family that one wasn't permitted to treat like an enemy. Instead, with regards to the dictates of family obligations, swallowing revulsion, one must endure, if nothing else—endure. And now if Gregor, because of his wound, had, probably forever, lost his mobility and, like an old invalid, currently needed many, many minutes to cross the room—crawling up in the air was unthinkable—he received what, in his opinion, was entirely sufficient compensation for this worsening of his condition.

In the evenings the living room door, that he only two hours previously had been in the habit of closely observing, would be opened so that he, lying in the darkness of his room, could, without being seen from the living room, see the entire family at the illuminated table and, to a degree, with their common consent (which had previously been otherwise), listen to their conversation. It was admittedly not the lively discussion of the earlier times that Gregor had always thought about longingly in the small hotel rooms when he, tired, had had to throw himself on the damp bedding. What went on was now mostly very quiet. The father fell asleep in his armchair immediately following the evening meal. The mother and sister cautioned one another to be quiet; the mother, bent down under the light, sewed lingerie for a fashion boutique; the sister, who had accepted a position as a saleswoman, studied stenography and French in the evenings so that sometime later she, perhaps, would get a better position. Sometimes the father woke up and, as if he was unaware that he had slept, said to the mother, "My, you've already been sewing for such a long time!" Then he immediately fell asleep again, and, fatigued, the mother and sister smiled with fatigue at one another. The father refused with a sort of obstinacy to take off his servant's uniform even at home, and while the sleeping gown hung uselessly on a coat hook, he slumbered fully clothed in his place, as if he were always to serve and even here awaited the voice of his superior. Consequently, the uniform, which even at first had not been new, lost all semblance of cleanliness, despite the care of the mother and sister, and Gregor, often all evening long, would look upon the clothing, covered in stains and with gold buttons that were always polished, in which the father would quite uncomfortably and yet peacefully sleep.

As soon as the clock struck ten, the mother tried to wake the father with quiet words and convince him to go to bed, as this was no proper place for a sleep that the father, who had to report to work at six o'clock, especially needed. But in the obstinacy that had seized him since he became a servant, he insisted on remaining a while longer at the table, even though he regularly fell asleep, and only with the greatest effort could he be moved to exchange the chair for the bed. Regardless of how many times mother and sister would besiege him with coaxing, he would slowly shake his head for a quarter hour with his eyes closed and did not stand up. The mother would tug his sleeves, speak flattering words in his ear; the sister would abandon her tasks to help her, but it didn't cut any ice with the father. He sank even deeper into his armchair. Only when the two women grabbed him by the underarms would he open his eyes, look alternately at the mother and sister, and usually say, "Live and let live. This is the peace of my old age."

And, supported by both women, he would laboriously raise himself as if it were an immense burden, allow himself to be led to the door by the women, wave them aside there, and continue on from there while the mother quickly threw down her sewing kit and the sister her quill pen so that they could run after the father and continue to be helpful to him. Who in this overworked and fatigued family had time to look after Gregor any more than was absolutely necessary? The household shrank ever smaller: the maid was now dismissed, and a big bony servant with white hair flying about her head came in the mornings and evenings to do the hardest work; the mother took care of everything else, in addition to her copious sewing work. It even happened that various pieces of family jewelry, which the mother and the sister had joyously worn when they entertained company or on festive occasions, were sold, as Gregor found out during the general discussion in the evening about the price they had fetched. However, the biggest complaint was always that they could not leave this apartment, which was too large for their current income, because relocating Gregor was inconceivable. But Gregor fully understood that it was not only consideration for him that forestalled a move, because one could easily transport him in a suitable box with a few air holes, but it was much more the complete hopelessness and the thought that they had experienced a stroke of bad luck unlike any known in their entire circle of family and friends.

24. What is illustrated by the fact that Gregor considers the family's allowing the door to remain open a crack so that he can see into the living room as "entirely sufficient compensation" illustrate about Gregor's development as a character?
    A. Gregor has come to see life as a rationalist.
    B. Gregor has developed a deep sense of duty toward his family.
    C. Gregor has become completely selfless.
    D. Gregor has been a thoroughly static character.
    E. Gregor has reverted to hatred of his family.

25. According to Gregor, the true reason the family does not move to a new apartment is that
    A. they have a sentimental attachment to their current apartment.
    B. the cost of moving is even greater than the cost of staying.
    C. the family fears that more bad luck will accompany them if they move.
    D. they simply cannot move Gregor.
    E. they are paralyzed by a feeling of despair.

26. What literary device is at work in Gregor's description of family obligations?
    A. subtlety
    B. anagnorisis
    C. dramatic irony
    D. crisis
    E. humor

PRACTICE MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS 27—30

Read the following passage from chapter III carefully before you choose your answers.

"Mr. Samsa!" cried the tenant in the middle to the father as he pointed, without speaking another word, with his index finger at Gregor, who was moving himself slowly forward. The violin fell silent as the tenant in the middle smiled at his friends and, shaking his head once, looked at Gregor again. The father appeared to consider it more important to calm the tenants than to drive away Gregor, despite the fact that the tenants were hardly upset and that Gregor entertained them more than the violin performance. He hurried to them and sought with open arms to force them back into their room, while, at the same time, trying to obstruct their view of Gregor with his body. They were actually a little angry at this point, although one no longer knew whether it was due to the father's conduct or whether it was the fact that they just now realized that they possessed a neighbor such as Gregor in the next room. They requested explanations from the father, raised their hands, pulled at their beards in restlessness, and retreated to their rooms only slowly. Meanwhile the sister, initially feeling quite lost after the sudden disruption and disintegration of the performance, letting her hands hang motionless with the violin and bow while she had looked at the music as if she were still playing, had overcome her confusion and had laid the instrument on the lap of the mother (who had sat down on her chair because she was short of breath); the sister then ran into the neighboring room, which the tenants were quickly approaching because of the father's pressure. One could see how, under the sister's proficient hands, the sheets and pillows from the bed flew into the air and arranged themselves. Before the gentleman had even reached the room, she was finished with the bedcovers and had slipped out. The father appeared once again to have been seized by his stubbornness, as he forgot every courtesy that he owed his tenants; he pushed forward and pushed again, until the middle gentleman, already in the door, stamped his foot with a crash and thereby brought the father to a halt.

"I hereby declare," said the tenant, raising his hand and searching out the mother and sister as well with his gaze, "that upon consideration of the revolting conditions"—at this he spat resolutely on the floor—"that prevail among this family and in this apartment, I am giving notice of the immediate termination of my occupancy. I will, of course, pay not even the least amount for the days I have lived here; on the contrary, I will contemplate whether or not I will file against you some sort of plea, which—believe me—will be substantiated very easily." He then became silent and looked directly in front of him as if he expected something. Actually, his two friends chimed in with the words: "We also immediately give our notice." Upon that, the middle one grabbed the door handle and slammed the door shut.

The father fumbled about with his hands, staggered to his chair, and fell into it; he looked as if he were stretching out for his usual evening nap, but the way his head deeply nodded, as if totally slack, indicated that he could hardly be sleeping.

Gregor had been lying still at the same spot where the tenants had caught him. He was too weak to move because of his disappointment over the fact that his plans had gone awry; he was also weak, possibly as a result of his extreme hunger. He feared, in the next few moments, that it was positively certain that everything would flare up and collapse upon him, and he waited. He wasn't even startled when the violin, held by the mother's trembling hands, fell from her lap and sent out a sonorous tone.

"Dearest parents," said the sister as she struck the table with her hand as an introduction, "this can go no further. If you perhaps don't recognize that, I recognize it. I will not pronounce the name of my brother in the presence of this monster, and will say merely this about it: we must be rid of it. We have attempted every method humanly possible to serve and tolerate it, and I believe that nobody can blame us in the least."

"She is a thousand times right," interjected the father.

The mother, who could never manage to catch her breath, had a maniacal look in her eyes as she held her hand up and began to muffle her coughs. The sister hurried to mother and felt her forehead. The father appeared to have been led to contemplate certain things by the sister's words; he sat upright, played with his servant's cap between the plates that the tenants had left on the table from the evening meal, and looked from time to time at the motionless Gregor.

"We must try to get rid of it," the sister now said exclusively to the father because the mother, in her coughing, heard nothing. "It's doing both of you in; I can see it coming. If people have to work as hard as we all do, they can't endure this endless torment at home as well. I can't do it either." And she burst into tears that were so strong that they flowed down onto the mother's face, from which the sister wiped the tears with mechanical motions of her hands.

"Child," said the father with compassion and obvious sympathy, "what then should we do?"

The sister just shrugged her shoulders as a sign of the helplessness that, in contrast to her former sureness, had seized her while she cried.

"If he understood us," said the father half-questioningly; the sister, in her tears, shook her hand fiercely to signify that this was unthinkable.

"If he understood us," repeated the father, who, by shutting his eyes, admitted to the sister's conviction regarding the impossibility of the matter, "then it might be possible to come to an agreement with him. But as it stands..."

"He must be sent away," cried the sister; "that is the only way. You just have to try to banish the thought that it's Gregor. The fact that we have believed this for so long is our true misfortune. How can it really be Gregor? If it were Gregor, he would have long recognized that it isn't possible for humans to live together with such a beast and would have gone away of his own free will. Then we would have had no brother, but would have lived our lives and honored his memory. But this animal persecutes us, drives away the tenants, and evidently will occupy the entire apartment and let us spend the night in the alleyway. See, father," she suddenly screamed, "he's starting again now!" And, with a horror that Gregor couldn't understand at all, the sister even abandoned the mother, suddenly pushing away from her chair as if she would rather sacrifice the mother than remain in Gregor's presence, and hurried behind the father, who, only worked up because of her behavior, also stood up and half-raised his arms and if to protect the sister.

But Gregor hadn't any ideas or intentions of causing anxiety for anyone, let alone his sister. He had just started to turn himself around so that he could wander back into his room, and this actually looked quite strange, as he, in his wounded condition, had to facilitate his difficult rotation by raising and then dropping his head many times on the floor. He stopped and looked around. His good intentions seemed to have been recognized; the horror had only been temporary. Now they all silently and sorrowfully looked at him. The mother, with her legs crossed and stretched out in front of her, sat in her chair, with her eyes almost shut from exhaustion; the father and the sister sat near one another, with the sister having laid her hand around the father's neck.

27. What is significant about the following line?:

> "Now they all silently and sorrowfully looked at him. The mother, with her legs crossed and stretched out in front of her, sat in her chair, with her eyes almost shut from exhaustion; the father and the sister sat near one another, with the sister having laid her hand around the father's neck."

A. The passage shows how tired all are.
B. The passage shows the finalizing of the alliance between the father and sister.
C. The passage shows the mother as helpless for the first time.
D. The passage foreshadows a power struggle between the father and the sister.
E. The passage indicates the sister's desire to usurp the mother's position.

28. The middle tenant's smile signifies
A. his inability to articulate his horror.
B. his indifference toward Gregor's and the family's suffering.
C. that the tenants now have an excuse not to pay for their lodging.
D. his suspicion that Gregor is wearing a costume.
E. amazement at Gregor's transformation.

29. What evidence does sister suggest to prove that the insect is not Gregor?
A. She calls Gregor by his name, but he does not answer.
B. She says that if the thing were truly Gregor, it would have left long ago.
C. She plays a song on the violin that Gregor once loved, but gets no response from the insect.
D. She says that if it were Gregor, it would like sweet milk, one of Gregor's favorite treats.
E. She says that if it were Gregor, it would have attacked the tenants.

30. "They were actually a little angry at this point, although one no longer knew whether it was due to the father's conduct or whether it was the fact that they just now realized that they possessed a neighbor such as Gregor in the next room."

The above sentence serves to
A. strengthen the idea that the narrator is unreliable.
B. distract the reader's attention from the unrealistic nature of the scene.
C. create an instance of parallelism.
D. add a serious tone to the scene.
E. establish Gregor as a symbol of divisiveness.

31. The father's exclamation, "she is a thousand times right!" is an example of:
    A. irony
    B. verisimilitude
    C. antagonism
    D. placation
    E. hyperbole

32. The following passage:

> "And, with a horror that Gregor couldn't understand at all, the sister even abandoned the mother, suddenly pushing away from her chair as if she would rather sacrifice the mother than remain in Gregor's presence, and hurried behind the father, who, only worked up because of her behavior, also stood up and half-raised his arms as if to protect the sister."

reinforces the theme that
    A. families stick together.
    B. strength lies in numbers.
    C. appearances are more important than truth.
    D. everyone is alone.
    E. life is uncertain.

MULTIPLE CHOICE ANSWERS
With Explanations

1. (E) is tempting, but Gregor does not actually hide. He merely remains in his room, thankful that years of being on the road in various lodgings has trained him to lock all the doors. There is never any mention of an umbrella (B), nor is the fact that a doctor might be needed ever considered. Gregor's initial response to his condition is quite nonchalant, and we might assume that this is because he is still half-asleep, though he does realize "this is not a dream." He does not call for help (C) even from his sister because he fears the reaction he will elicit. We are told that the rain makes Gregor feel melancholy, and Gregor says "what if I kept sleeping for a little while longer and forgot all this foolishness," making (A) the correct answer.

2. The answer is (A), traveling salesman.

3. This detail clearly points out the fact that Gregor is deeply engrained in his habits (B). (D) is tempting, as this might be the attitude of a narcissist, but it is not the most relevant answer, nor is there any other evidence to corroborate this notion.

4. The only complaint Gregor does not list about his occupation is (E) carrying heavy sample cases.

5. (A) is tempting, as Gregor does reflect on his past, but the literary convention describing this manner of divulging a character's past through reflection (or other methods) is exposition (E).

6. There is no evidence to suggest that Gregor was an errand boy before he became a salesman (E). (B) is clearly not true and, while (C) is, this would not make it ironic for Gregor to call him a brainless minion. (D) is eliminated by the fact that Gregor more or less fears his boss. Thus (A) is the only acceptable answer.

7. Gregor is clearly not panicky, (C), as if he were, he would have had a much stronger reaction to waking up transmogrified into an insect. Although (A) is tempting because of Gregor's nonchalant reaction to his change, other details, such as his dwelling on the hardships of his occupation run counter to this notion. (D) is also tempting because of Gregor's self-pitying tendencies, however, it is Gregor's lack of any sort of self-determination (E), or will; his absolute passiveness throughout the passage that makes (B), pathetic, the strongest answer.

8. We are not told of any choices (A) that Gregor may have had in life. It seems as if his choices were preempted by the necessities of supporting his family. Nor is there any mention of haste (B). Gregor was indeed a sort of messenger (D), touting the word of his company's products, and may have had many tasks (C), but it is (E), Gregor's feelings of futility and frustration, that provides the strongest answer. The new legs are not helpful to Gregor who can only lay back and watch them without being able to control them at all. This is what he felt about his life, from what we can infer based on the information we are given.

9. Although (A) is tempting, it is not so much that Gregor is considerate of others, as he defines himself through others and longs to serve them in order to give his life meaning. Although (E) is true, the strongest answer in this case is (C). Gregor makes no decisions, and has no opinion of his own. He waits for outsiders to force his hand. Without outside influence, he might never move at all.

10. The answer is (D). It is because Gregor's speech sounds as if it were coming from an animal that the attorney thinks Gregor is mocking him.

11. Although Gregor expresses anxiety at other moments, this event does not cause him any anxiety or fear (A), (B) and (C), but rather calms him. (E) is tempting, but Gregor is not certain how his discovery will be received. The most relevant answer is (D).

12. Antithesis (C) is tempting, because the reaction will be the opposite of the one Gregor expects, but (A), dramatic irony is the best answer. Gregor's ignorance is easily recognized by the audience, which does not share Gregor's optimism. Readers know full-well that the response to Gregor's change will be dramatic and negative. Cosmic irony (C) is also tempting, but because the example involves Gregor's subjective expectations, (A) is clearly the correct choice.

13. While (E) may be tempting, as within the Existential framework the lines of right and wrong, as well as any empirical definitions, become blurred, the strongest answer, relevant to the passage is (B), as this relates to Gregor's perceptions. Existentialists focused on the unique experience of the individual in the world. The individual's perceptions, and here, Gregor's inability to trust his own perceptions, are central to the Existential inquiries on existence.

14. While Gregor does long for appreciation (B), it is not this that makes him a failure in the Existential ideal, for if Gregor had been more assertive and self-determined, he may have commanded the appreciation he deserved. The most relevant answer is (C). Gregor's need for constant reinforcement and direction from others, his lack of self-determination or will, make him an Existential failure.

15. Although it may be argued that this element adds to the humor (D) in the passage, the most relevant answer is (A). Since the narrator conveys to the reader only what information is available to Gregor, the reader is able to understand Gregor's isolation. (B) is tempting because it is true, however, this idea could be just as easily conveyed with an omniscient narrator.

16. While (C) is tempting, because it is somewhat true, Grete's responses to Gregor's eating reflect the fact that she is still hopeful that Gregor might get better (A). She is looking daily for signs of improvement and is depressed when she sees none, referring to this as a "standstill."

17. The significance of this manner of Grete's is that it signifies her identifying Gregor as a thing (D), rather than as her brother.

18. There is nothing to suggest that the father forgot (A) that he had put money aside, nor that he doubted (B) Gregor's ability to provide for them all. There is no evidence that the father was obsessive, and needed the security of the concealed money (E), nor is it likely that the father had any plans to send Grete to the conservatory. Despite Gregor's rationalizing of his father's motives in keeping a store of secret cash while he slaved away to pay off his father's debts, it can be logically inferred that the father had deceived Gregor to some extent about the family's situation in order to manipulate him into indentured servitude (C).

19. This passage is one of the few in the text that shows any characters expressing a violent or extreme reaction to Gregor's transformation. In this way, it supports the (B) allegorical interpretation of the story, in which the transformation would be taken literally. (D) is tempting because the passage reinforces the notion that Gregor's change is real, rather than symbolic (C), however, the story is clearly not meant to be read as realistic as the event upon which it is based (Gregor's transformation into an insect) is absurd. In turn, (E) is true, as the story is absurd, but the nurse's reaction is more realistic here than absurd; a word which could be said to characterize the nonchalant reactions of the others.

20. (A) would be tempting if Gregor's ultimate death was the result of being stepped on. Comic relief (B) is a comic scene that comes after a highly dramatic scene. This is not the case here. (C) is tempting, but far too vague, especially when compared to (D). (E) is so vague as to be meaningless. (D) is the correct answer.

21. (A) is tempting, but the effect used here is not slapstick, which would be faster and involve more action. (C) is also tempting, but it is not the imagery, *per se*, which conveys the comedy, but rather the overall absurdity (E) of the situations—from the slow-motion chase scene to the choice of apples as a lethal weapon. The correct answer is (E).

22. (E) is tempting, but we are told that Grete is screaming as her mother runs past to stop the father from killing Gregor (D).

23. (C) and (E) are clearly not plausible. Why would an apple be a more "realistic" weapon than any other, given the absurd circumstances? (D) is possible, but the suspense certainly is not long-lived as Gregor is mortally wounded by the third propelled apple. (A) is absurd. Thus (B) is the only choice. The image of the father chucking apples at his son-turned-giant-bug, while the bug is scampering around the floor, is laughable—or would be if the act didn't have such horrendous undertones. And, the fact remains that Gregor is mortally wounded in this "comic" scene.

24. (B) and (C) represent character traits Gregor has possessed all along. It is his failure to develop as a character (D), which leads to his demise.

25. The most tempting answer is (D); however, Gregor notes that this problem could be overcome by transporting him in a box with holes, and whether this is true or not, the question asks what *Gregor* believes to be the reason. Gregor believes that the true reason the family does not move is that they feel cursed (E) by what has happened to him.

26. Gregor's description of his notion of familial obligations is an instance of dramatic irony (C) because the reader knows that Gregor is the only one who holds this opinion. The father has already attacked him, and the sister is rapidly losing patience. The reader can sense that none will endure Gregor much longer.

27. The family is certainly mentally and physically drained (A); however, the significance of this passage is clearly the alliance of the father and the sister in their mission to be rid of Gregor (B), while the mother is powerless and defeated. The hand on the neck, in different circumstances, could be taken as an urging for peace, but in this situation, it is an alliance of war and a show of support.

28. Although (C) is tempting, it is not the most relevant answer, nor the motive that put the smile on the tenant's lips. The tenant is showing his utter indifference (B). He takes some delight in seeing the suffering of others and shares this with his fellows.

29. Although (D) is tempting, because Gregor in his insect form no longer likes sweet milk, it is not the evidence chosen by Grete. She says that if the thing were truly Gregor, it would have left (B), knowing that humans could not exist with such a monster.

30. This passage reinforces the idea that the narrator is limited to Gregor's perspective, and thus unreliable (A).

31. (E) hyperbole

32. The motif reinforced by this passage is (C). The way the passage is written clearly indicates that the family members do not truly care for each other, but make a show of solidarity, seemingly more for the benefit of an unseen audience than for any practical purpose.

The Metamorphosis

Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition Teaching Unit

Study Guide
Teacher's Copy

Chapter I

1. The first sentence of this story is quite famous in literature. However, over the years since its first translation, many voices in academia have complained that the word "insect" does not fairly translate Kafka's original meaning. Offer your own interpretation of this debate. Why do many critics dislike the original translation?

   The translation of the word Ungeziefer *to "insect" is not a fair translation because insect is too literal. Kafka's intention was to be more abstract. Kafka purposely gives only a peripheral description of Gregor's new form throughout the text. Using the word "insect" in the first sentence gives the reader a much more concrete image than Kafka intended.*

2. As Gregor is lying in his bed, he reflects a bit on his situation. He decides that he will not reach any sensible conclusions as to how to proceed until he gets up and gets moving. What reasoning does Gregor use at this point to convince himself that he still may be suffering only from a temporary delusion?

   First, Gregor says—"this getting up early makes one completely idiotic" (p. 14). This shows that he still believes himself to be suffering some delusion from lack of sleep. On page 16, Gregor remembers that he had often (in the past) felt pains in bed that turned out to be imaginary when he stood up. He reasons that "his present fantasies" may also dissipate upon standing. Further, he reasons that his change in voice might be the onset of a cold or flu.

3. How does Gregor's reference to "harem women" (p. 14) show that he is a bit of a naïf, delusional about the outside world, and by extension, his own situation in life?

   Harem women, outside of Gregor's fantastic projections, did not have lavish or luxurious lives. They would have had to work probably longer hours than even he; selling much more than Gregor was required to sell. This statement shows Gregor's naiveté about the world. He thinks of himself with pity, thinks everyone has it better than he.

   Despite his difficult situation (one that he has taken onto himself in many ways), Gregor's complaints are, in general, a bit petty. He is a petty and small man. He has no plans or desires to change his situation, but enjoys complaining about his hardships, and he makes himself out to be a sort of martyr. This may have something to do with why Kafka transformed him. Metaphorically speaking, he already was one.

4. What does the fact that Gregor seems to ignore his physical symptoms in lieu of harping on his psychological hardships say about Gregor as a character?

   The fact that Gregor ignores his physical symptoms is something that can be interpreted in many lights.

   Most importantly, Kafka is showing the reader how deeply ingrained Gregor's societal brainwashing had become. Rather than show immediate concern for the gruesome transformation that has occurred in his body, Gregor is concerned with the social ramifications of this change.

   Further, Gregor does not accept the transformation as more than a temporary delusion. Perhaps he has suffered these sorts of delusions before. He does not seem to be very strong of mind. In fact, he mentions imaginary pains he has suffered in the past. Further, and in Gregor's defense, it would be difficult for any human, upon waking up transmogrified, to come to immediate acceptance of this fact.

5. Explain the significance of Gregor's focusing solely on how his inability to go to work will affect his family, rather than on the fact of his transformation.

   The fact that despite awaking transformed into a gruesome creature, Gregor worries more about his position at the firm where he supports his family than about his own health, shows how deeply Gregor identifies with his societal role. Obviously this exaggeration is meant to be taken comically in some sense, but it also serves the purpose of overstating a criticism of Gregor's character. The story, if read symbolically is, in fact, based upon a hyperbole of sorts.

6. What is Kafka's angle in treating the transformation with such aloofness? What is the shift of focus attained by this technique?

   Kafka's treatment of this transformation as psychologically unimportant allows the reader's interpretation of the change that has occurred in Gregor to remain on a symbolic or allegorical level. It is a technique that promotes a suspension of disbelief; the reader accepts the absurd so that the lessons of the allegory might come through.

   The reader's focus shifts away from the what or how of the transformation, onto the why and the repercussions it enacts.

7. A seemingly insignificant detail is noted in the first chapter when Gregor looks out his window and sees only fog. The hospital that was directly across from his window is no longer visible to him. Interpret this fact in a symbolic light.

   The fact that Gregor cannot see the hospital is significant. It speaks to the fact that the transformation Gregor has undergone is one that will continue to isolate and alienate him. As Gregor's senses and communication abilities change (sight here being visual communication) he will become more and more isolated. The Hospital is a symbol of help, but because Gregor cannot communicate, he cannot reach it. It is teasingly within his grasp, but just out of reach.

   It can be deduced that the "fog" that Gregor perceived, so thick that it was still blocking his view of the buildings across the street at 7 a.m. on the morning of his transformation, was actually the onset of his deprivation of sight.

8. Comment on Kafka's use of foreshadowing through Gregor's difficulties communicating with words.

   This difficulty, as Gregor becomes more and more insect-like, will become worse. His difficulty in communicating with the family foreshadows alienation and distance from the family, and society at large.

9. Kafka often uses language crafted in a peculiar, yet methodical way. His use of round-about ways of saying things is not due to his inability to write clearly, but rather carries with it some intended meaning. In the following sentence: "At the same moment, however, he didn't forget now and then to remember that the calm and calmest contemplation would be much better than desperate conclusions," what does the choice of language in this passage serve to illustrate?

   The way the wording is crafted, that Gregor "doesn't forget to remember" gives the impression that Gregor has, perhaps, been chastised for his forgetfulness or absent-mindedness in the past.

10. What is Gregor's interpretation of why the attorney comes to check on him personally, rather than some lesser messenger? How is the choice of limited-omniscient narrator important here?

    The way Gregor sees things, his employer is looking for a bone to pick with him, wants to ridicule him, or make an example of him before his family. The fact that the narrator is limited to Gregor's point of view in this instance prevents the reader from knowing the truth. However, the keen reader will likely ascertain that Gregor has more than likely drawn some attention to himself of late by being absent-minded and neglectful. We learn later that, in fact, his sales have been down and he is suspected of stealing from the company.

11. Based on information from the text, explain Gregor's transformation as an objective correlative for his internal state. Then explain his transformation as a symbolic one.

From the text, we learn that Gregor's performance at work has suffered in the months leading up to his transformation. He was once a good salesman, and was a top earner within his company; a self-determined vital young man on the rise. However, something happened to him—a change, or a transformation, long before the narrative begins. Now, just before we are introduced to Gregor, his sales have reached close to zero, and he is suspected of stealing from the company. We get the idea that something has broken Gregor—made him, in a sense, a bug. In this way, his transformation can be seen as an objective correlative of his life.

We also know, from Gregor's complaints, that he has been terribly unhappy and dissatisfied with his work. He feels unappreciated and largely disrespected. He feels that most people have it better than he does, and he is given to self-pity. However, we can also deduce that Gregor never voices any of his complaints, either to his boss, or to his family, but goes along, playing the role of the dutiful martyr.

Kafka's transformation of Gregor into an insect can be seen as symbolic. Gregor's new form is simply a physical manifestation of his emotional state. He considered himself to be a human insect, and now he is *an insect.*

12. What is the significance of Gregor's legs fighting against each other as he lies helpless on his back?

Gregor's flailing and useless legs are symptomatic of Gregor's inner strife. He is actually fighting himself on the inside and has no control of his own desires. He has become paralyzed by feelings of futility, when it seems as if he should be able to effect change in his life.

13. While the attorney is outside, waiting to gain entrance to Gregor's room, Gregor muses that perhaps at one time, the attorney had also undergone a similar experience. "One had to concede the possibility of such a thing," Gregor thinks to himself (p. 19).

    The narrator then informs us that, "as if to give a rough answer to [Gregor's] question, the attorney now, allowing his polished shoes to creak, took a few determined steps in the next room" (p. 20).

    a. Interpret the attorney's "rough answer," as Kafka gives it. What is conveyed by the attorney's actions? Take into account Kafka's description, "allowing his polished shoes to creak."

       It would seem that the attorney is answering, "No," by his "determined steps." The idea of isolated, determined steps seems to run counter to the manifold, barely controllable, autonomous legs at Gregor's disposal as an insect. However, the reference to "polished shoes," creaking, gives one an image similar to that of an insect's exoskeleton. Again, here, Kafka is being intentionally vague. The attorney clearly sees himself as a self-determined, powerful man, but he may in fact be a figurative insect (taking orders and moving in accordance to the rules of society) without realizing it.

b. What is evidenced by Gregor's assumption that the attorney must have experienced a similar thing? What is Gregor seeking at this point? How does this assumption fit into an Existentialist framework?

This assumption is evidence that Gregor is still seeking some sense of common experience between himself and the attorney (here, representing society at large). Gregor is seeking understanding, the opposite of isolation—a concept central to the Existential framework. The seasoned Existentialist thinker would accept isolation as the natural state of things and would not seek to invent understanding where there is none—especially between those who will clearly, by circumstance, become antagonists.

14. Interpret the following statement from an Existentialist viewpoint.

> If they were startled, then Gregor had no more responsibility and could be calm. But if they took in everything quietly, then he would have no reason to get excited and could, if he hurried, actually be at the train station around eight o'clock. (p. 22-23)

Gregor is looking for release from all responsibility for making any more decisions. He has decided he wants to resign as an active participant in his life. From an existential viewpoint, this is the equivalent of entropy. To cease to define or determine one's own world, is, in a sense, to cease to exist.

15. After Gregor's attempts to talk to the attorney through his door, what is the result?

The attorney cannot understand a word Gregor says, and wonders if Gregor is mocking him. The mother, alarmed by Gregor's "animal" voice, tells Grete to call for the doctor and the locksmith.

16. Why does this make Gregor "become much calmer?" (p. 23)

Gregor is relieved that at least now, people "thought that things were not well with him and were prepared to help him." (p. 23) The idea that they are sending for people to help him makes Gregor feel "included," again.

17. What does Gregor anticipate as a result of the arrival of either the doctor or the locksmith? What does this say about Gregor's character?

We are told that Gregor expects, "splendid and surprising results" (p. 23).Gregor is naïve and foolishly hopeful.

18. What is significant about the fact that Gregor "no longer trusted himself to discern" whether the noises he was making were intelligible to humans?

Gregor has begun to realize that he is completely isolated in his own world. Alienation will ensue, but Gregor has not yet fathomed this, and throughout the story never quite accepts it.

19. What is significant about Gregor's observation that he "didn't need the locksmith" to open the door? Why is this a case of too little, too late?

Gregor's opening the door for himself is his last self-determined act in the first chapter before he resigns himself to complete passivity. From an Existential standpoint this is significant. However, it is "too little, too late," because all of Gregor's other acts have put him in a position where this one decisive act cannot help him. Really, he is looking for outside help again, where, in reality, he should know better, and should be trying to fix his problem some other way.

20. When Gregor does finally manage to get the door open, what are the actual results? Describe each character's reaction to Gregor.

The attorney is repulsed by Gregor's appearance, and, after blurting out an explicative "Oh!," begins to back away, horrified. Gregor's mother tries to go to her son, perhaps to help him, but faints. Herr Samsa reacts with blatant hostility and threatens Gregor with a raised fist, trying to scare him into retreating into his room. Grete is not in the room, but across the way, in her own room.

21. What is the symbolic significance of the setting details Kafka offers the reader at this point?

This scene is laden with symbolism. Gregor's appearance corresponds with light, which will continue to be a symbol of society throughout the story as Gregor moves closer and closer to darkness. The hospital across the street, gray and severe, is not welcoming as a place of assistance, but menacing, as an institutionalized façade, distancing the outsider from what it promises inside. The rain is now coming down in huge, individual drops, "one by one." These separate drops represent the separation between all humans, whereas rain as a whole would represent all of society. The abundance of breakfast dishes are a symbol of the family's laziness, as they spend their days idly, while Gregor goes off to toil for them all, never enjoying breakfast himself. The photograph of Gregor in uniform is a symbol of the respect he received in the past; fleeting, as it was and attached to the uniform, rather than to the person inside it. This also symbolizes society's way of looking at people, judging them superficially. (The fact that Kafka suggests that it was ridiculous that Gregor should have demanded respect for wearing a uniform is also significant, showing how Gregor bought into the social ideas.) The doors, both open, symbolize freedom and free will, neither of which Gregor chooses, though this would be one of his last chances to do so.

22. How does Gregor discover that his myriad feet now suddenly work perfectly in unison to carry his body? What is the significance of this discovery?

He falls down, thoughtlessly pursuing the attorney out to the landing. The significance is that, again, the only successes Gregor has are accidental and mindless. Yet he still refuses to obey his instincts and mires himself in the angst of indecision.

23. What is suggested by the fact that Gregor's jaws snap at the sight of the flowing coffee?

Gregor has lost control of his body and is being taken over by his animal instincts.

24. What sort of comedy could be said to dominate this scene?

This would be an example of slapstick, or physical comedy. The fainting mother, the attorney paralyzed with fright, Gregor's snapping jaws and his funny, insect-like movements carried out on myriad tiny legs, all are sources of physical humor. The scene reads like something out of a vaudevillian farce.

25. In what manner does Gregor try to communicate with his father?

Gregor tries to use body language to communicate with his father, hanging his head in deference.

26. The father's aggressive voice is described repeatedly as a "hissing noise" which bothers Gregor terribly. How is this description significant?

The hissing noise and the father's wild aggression depicts him as a strong animal compared to Gregor, the weak bug. This is a definitive setting of roles. The father is reclaiming his role as the power of the household, while Gregor backs away, meekly. This is the first instance in which the father is shown as strong.

27. What stops Gregor's retreat into his room?

He is too wide to fit through the single open doorway.

28. Explain the black humor apparent in Gregor's internal monologue throughout the scene.

Gregor is ridiculous. While his father is behind him, threatening him with a potentially fatal blow from the attorney's cane, Gregor's seeming nonchalance and his fussing about like an old woman, criticizing the father for his rashness and lack of consideration, while at the same time excusing him—all these things are blatantly comedic in a dark way.

29. What is significant about the last line of Chapter I?

The last line of chapter one is, "It was finally silent." This thought shows that Gregor, beyond wanting to resolve the situation, is just glad to be left in peace. Gregor covets silence. This is a subtle foreshadowing of the final resolution, in which Gregor will attain this by dying.

Chapter II

1. How does Kafka set the tone for Chapter II? Explain the significance of his choices.

   Gregor awakes in the night, aware of the furtive and evasive movements of his family in the house. The tone set here is one of uncertainty in a place that was once a sanctuary. Gregor can not be sure what his family are up to, but he is conscious of the fact that they are hyperconscious of his presence, and fear him. His consciousness of the movements of his family as furtive makes him feel alien and self-conscious.

2. What is significant about Gregor's waking up in the nighttime?

   Nighttime, darkness, are traditionally symbols of the unknown. Gregor, awaking at night, the natural time for insect activity, is becoming more and more dissimilar to humans, more alienated and isolated from the society of humans.

3. What, upon discovery, first gives Gregor joy, then causes him distress?

   The discovery of his favorite foods makes Gregor "almost [laugh] for joy." However, he is soon deeply dismayed when he realizes that he no longer enjoys the foods he used to as a human.

4. What clues at the beginning of Chapter II suggest that Gregor's transformation will continue?

   Waking in the night. Distaste for human food.

5. What deeply symbolic change in the way things work around the house (the power-structure) has occurred at the outset of Chapter II?

   The doors, which Gregor used to lock from the inside, are now locked from the outside.

6. What is suggested by this change?

   The fact that the doors are now locked from the outside suggests that things are completely beyond Gregor's control. Gregor will, from here on out, be at the mercy of his family, dependent on them, when previously, they were dependent on him.

7. What is signified by the fact that Gregor feels anxiety in the room he has inhabited for the past five years?

   Gregor is changing and becoming alien to his own environment.

8. What is shown by the fact that Gregor thinks the father's not reading aloud to Grete and the mother at his accustomed hour is simply "a custom that, of late, had been entirely abandoned?"

   Kafka is illustrating the depth of Gregor's stubbornness by these statements. Even after the dramatic scene in the dining room, and even though Gregor is aware of his family's movements around him as "furtive," he somehow still has not accepted his own role in changing things.

9. Considering the notion of Gregor's denial in an Existential framework, what does this way of perceiving say about Gregor's character and his inability to cope with his previous human life?

   Obtuse statements like his speculation about the stopped reading prove time and again that Gregor is completely out of touch with himself as a thing inside his environment and thus cannot have any influence over it. Going against the Existentialist ideal, Gregor fails to see himself as a unique creature in his environment and fails to ascribe meaning to his environment through his own existence. In essence, he is cowardly, and prefers to factor himself out of every situation by being oblivious to his own consciousness. This is a form of escape. Gregor looks at himself as predetermined and insignificant, rather than free and influential.

10. What gives Gregor "great pride" to think back on? Why is this significant?

    Gregor relishes the fact that he provided for his family. He keeps hoping that he will be rewarded for past deeds. He fails to exist in the present, which is another failure against the Existential ideal. Living in the past will not help Gregor's present. The past is another form of escape—a motif in the story.

11. What does Gregor's pride in taking care of his family say about his character? Why is this significant?

    Gregor had placed his sense of self-worth almost entirely on the fact that he provided for his family. He denied himself many things in order to maintain this status as provider. The irony is that the family never needed him. Gregor was willingly manipulated by his father so that he would not have to make any choices for himself.

12. What evidence does Kafka provide that Grete, despite her servitude to her brother, is repulsed by him?

    Grete lifts the bowl of milk that Gregor has drunk from with a rag.

13. When does Gregor first begin to accept the effect of his transformation on his family? What does he decide he will do? What is the significance of this decision?

Despite his stubborn obtuseness, clues regarding his effect on the family are accumulating for Gregor, but it is finally during the long night that Gregor comes to the realization that:
- *his family is staying up extra late, most likely too afraid to sleep, and*
- *tiptoeing about so as not to be heard by him.*

Gregor decides that he will try to stay out of the family's way in order to spare them the sight of him. This fact is significant because Gregor still defines himself by serving his family.

14. What is significant about the fact that Gregor cannot fit himself completely under the couch?

Gregor, despite his wish to be free of the guilt of being a burden, cannot escape this fact. He is a failure in his service to the family.

15. How does Gregor interpret his sister's locking of the door when she leaves his room?

Gregor interprets this action as being for his own benefit, so that he "might make himself as comfortable as he wanted."(p. 34)

16. What is Gregor astonished to discover about his body? Explain the significance.

Gregor is astonished to find that his body has healed so rapidly. This is significant because it represents Gregor's first acceptance of his transformation.

17. It is obvious to the reader that the sister locks the door because the family is horrified that Gregor might escape from his room. What kind of irony does this represent?

This is an example of dramatic irony. The reader knows more than Gregor does, and can laugh at his folly.

18. Though Grete still attends to him at this point, how is it suggested that she is becoming frustrated with the job of taking care of Gregor?

At the bottom of page 35, we are told that more and more often, Grete comments that Gregor's condition has "all come to a standstill again."

19. What does the following sentence from Chapter II tell the reader about Gregor's attitude toward his family?

> "They surely would not have wanted Gregor to starve, but perhaps they couldn't have endured any experience of his eating other than hearsay; or perhaps sister was trying to save them from what was possibly only a small sorrow, as they had actually suffered quite enough already." (p. 35)

Gregor feels a great deal of guilt for not being able to provide for his family, and especially now for actually burdening them. He forgives his family completely for any shortcomings in their abilities to care for him. When he says things like "what was possibly only a small sorrow," he shows his lack of self-worth and general deference to others. He doesn't want them to "endure" the experience of his eating. He considers himself grotesque and of no value.

20. What are we told is the maid's reaction to "the occurrence" of Gregor's transformation? Explain the significance of this reaction.

The maid begs to be dismissed and thanks the mother in tears when she is granted dismissal, swearing never to speak a word of what she has seen.

The maid's reaction makes Gregor's transformation seem more real, and less symbolic. It reinforces the strangeness of Gregor's and the family's relatively calm reaction to the transformation and stands in stark contrast to the way it is called, simply, "the occurrence."

21. The use of the phrase "the occurrence" to describe Gregor's transformation is an example of what literary device?

Understatement.

22. What had Gregor planned to "formally explain" to his family on Christmas Eve?

His plans to send Grete to the conservatory for violin.

23. What are we told about the family's reliance on, and gratitude toward Gregor, prior to his transformation?

We are told that the family had become used to relying on Gregor, and hardly appreciated him anymore. Only Grete, with whom he secretly consorted over plans to send her to the conservatory for violin study, still showed affection for Gregor.

24. Based on the changes that occur in Grete's attitude toward Gregor and what we are told about the family's general attitude toward Gregor's role as a provider, what do you think Kafka wants the reader to think about the relationship between Grete and Gregor, before the transformation?

Kafka is trying to tell the reader that Grete's affection for Gregor was essentially bought. When she begins to find she can do things for herself, and no longer needs Gregor, her affection fades, and she becomes openly hostile toward him. This is a statement about human nature, as Kafka does not seem to judge Grete here, but only observes.

25. Why are there are always at least two members of the family (other than Gregor) home at once?

We are told that "nobody really wanted to remain alone in the apartment, and yet, under no circumstances could they entirely abandon it."

26. Why does Gregor "suffer through" his sister's cleaning up his room and preparing his food dish?

Gregor is still consumed by guilt—a motif of the story.

27. What does the sister do with Gregor's stool after she has noticed Gregor has been moving it under the window? What does this signify?

She places it under the window after she cleans. This signifies communication between Gregor and Grete and some small attempt on her part to act kindly toward him.

28. When Gregor hears that the father not only has some money left over from his old business, but that he had also been saving some of the money Gregor had given to him to pay the debt to his old boss, what is Gregor's reaction? What does this illustrate about the relationship between father and son?

Explain the significance of Gregor's reaction in terms of the Existential ideal.

Gregor's first reaction is delight at his father's "unexpected foresight and frugality," because this revelation relieves Gregor of a huge weight of guilt. On the other hand, however, Gregor realizes that he has been deceived and manipulated by his father. Still, Gregor dismisses this as an insignificant detail, saying to himself, "things were undoubtedly better the way his father had set them up."

This illustrates the father's exploitation of his son, and Gregor's willing acquiescence. Gregor's rationalization is a failure against the Existential ideal.

29. Kafka writes on page 39 that Gregor looks out of his window, "Obviously with some sort of memory of the freedom he formerly enjoyed" (p. 39). Why does Kafka include the qualifier, "obviously" in this sentence? What does this word choice convey?

The word, "obviously" in the sentence is ironic. Kafka is suggesting that, although Gregor might try to think back to the "freedom" of his former life, there was not actually any freedom in his former life at all.

If the reader picks up on the irony of tone here, this passage serves to foreshadow Gregor's passive acceptance of total and complete transformation, rather than a reversion to his human ways—which would require a choice of will on his part.

This passage also suggests to the reader that, as Gregor's transformation proceeds, he will lose all desire for any connection with his former life. This notion supports the idea again that, although the main part of Gregor's transformation happened overnight, the completion of the change is happening gradually. This gradual change mirrors the change that had been happening inside Gregor for a long time prior to his drastic overnight change, making him more "bug-like" every day.

30. Where are the first clues offered that Grete may soon change her attitude toward Gregor?

At the bottom of page 39, we learn that each time Grete comes into the room, she does so with great haste and commotion, throwing open the window because she finds it impossible—whether because of some smell or simply because she is repulsed by the thought of him—to stay in the room with Gregor with the windows closed. Whatever the exact reason, she is beginning to experience a strong aversion toward Gregor, which will only grow stronger. At the top of page 40, a major clue is provided, whereby Grete is startled by Gregor, and backs away from him, as if threatened. This shows the reader that Grete fears Gregor. She no longer identifies him as her brother and sees him more and more as a monster.

31. Explain the dramatic irony in Gregor's observation that "a stranger would have thought that [he] had been lying in wait there and had wanted to bite her."

The irony in the statement is rooted in the fact that the observations Gregor is making in a hypothetical manner are clearly becoming true to life. Grete indeed already fears Gregor. Gregor realizes that his actions be could construed as aggressive, but he doesn't seem to realize the extent to which his grotesqueness encourages others to interpret his actions as aggressive.

Further, Gregor is so completely unaware of even his own motivations that this statement may represent some subliminal urge on Gregor's part to harm his sister, perhaps because he senses her rejection of him and is spiteful.

Gregor's failures in his ability to be self-aware and to accurately understand his relationship to his environment are Existential failures.

32. For what reason does Gregor imagine that he catches a "glimpse of gratitude" from Grete?

Having completely surrendered to the idea that he is repulsive, Gregor still hopes for some form of human emotion—affection, gratitude—from those who are now only repulsed by him.

33. From an Existentialist framework, explain why the fact that Gregor thinks he perceives a look of gratitude from Grete is more important than whether or not she actually offered him any gratitude.

In the Existentialist framework, the way a person perceives a situation is what makes it real. This is related to the notion that the individual experience of reality is what gives it meaning. Whatever is actually the truth, Gregor's perception of the truth is what will affect his behavior.

34. Where do we see the parents' change of attitude about sister's value?

Gregor notes on page 40 that the parents often acknowledged the service the sister was doing them in taking care of Gregor, where before "she appeared to them to be a fairly worthless girl." A role reversal has occurred between Gregor and his sister in his parents' esteem.

35. What sorts of details are the parents interested in hearing from Grete? Why?

Every time Grete comes out of Gregor's room, the parents want to know details of how things looked inside the room, what Gregor had eaten, and whether there had been "any improvement." They ask about improvements out of politeness, but they are not hopeful and don't seem to really care whether Gregor gets better. Primarily, the parents are just curious. They are fascinated by Gregor, but also fearful. Usually, changes predict instability; thus, they are keeping their eyes open for change.

36. What in Chapter II points to the fact that Gregor is becoming even more insect-like, and detached from human thought and emotion?

Gregor begins crawling about on the floors and ceiling, and finds great pleasure in hanging upside down in a mindless state. He is headed toward oblivion.

37. What is the mother's opinion of removing the furniture from Gregor's room? What does she worry it might imply?

The mother decides, at the last minute, that she is opposed to removing the furniture from Gregor's room. She feels it will signify that the family has given up all hope of Gregor's recovery and has decided to abandon him. She shows herself to be like Gregor here, stubbornly clinging to a small hope that when Gregor "returns," he will be put at ease by finding his room just as he left it, and this will speed his recovery.

38. When his sister and mother come to remove his furniture, Gregor is conflicted. What is the source of this feeling? What does he both long for and fear?

Gregor realizes that he might already be drifting away to a place where he will no longer remember his human life at all. It is a sort of sentimentality that holds him back. Seeing his mother sparks that nostalgic memory. But truly, in Gregor's heart, he longs to complete the transformation into an insect. In this way, we can see the transformation as a means of escape—a motif throughout the story.

39. Where is it first suggested that Grete may be thinking only of herself in the changes she makes to Gregor's room?

At the bottom of page 43, it is suggested that perhaps it is not her concern for Gregor that pushes her to have the room changed, but in fact, a childish desire to have her enthusiasms gratified. The narrator informs us that the changes Grete makes to Gregor's room do not help him, but rather "make Gregor's situation even more infuriatingly terrifying so that she could do even more for him than she did now." This suggests further that Grete is seeking out things that will intensify her role as a person of responsibility.

40. After being rather ambivalent at first, Gregor decides on page 44, that his mother and sister are "robbing him of everything he held dear." He mentions, specifically, his fretsaw. Why is this object especially meaningful?

The fretsaw represents Gregor's former independence and freedom of action and motion. It was the one thing through which he showed the potential for a creative act, which is paramount to freedom and valuable to the Existential ideal.

41. When Gregor "ventures forth" to save his things, this represents his first self-determined and definitive act in the story since he opened his door in Chapter I. What object does Gregor choose to protect? Why? What is the result of this action on his part? What does this suggest from an existentialist framework?

Gregor chooses to protect the picture of the woman clad in only fur. This represents two things—first it is his only creation in the room (the frame), the only thing he has made himself. Second, it represents a fantasy—something Gregor used to long to possess—a symbol which he thought would make him happy and successful if he attained it: a beautiful woman. This, he feels, is especially threatened by his sister, whom he now begins to see as desiring to emasculate him. Earlier these feelings were confused, as it is suggested that there is some underlying sexual tension between Gregor and his sister.

42. Where is it first suggested that Gregor may become aggressive? Interpret this sequence as a statement on human behavior.

Determined to save the picture of the woman clothed in only fur, Gregor says he would, "rather jump in Grete's face," than allow her to chase him away from his possession. This is a statement about human possessiveness—that objects are valued more than human contacts. This is Gregor's attempt to retain at least some part of his human life, which is ironic because it alienates him further from his sister, who was his last connection to humanity.

43. What is the context of Grete's first direct address of Gregor since his transformation?

Grete scolds Gregor for surprising the mother (p. 45) when he is guarding his picture on the wall. She raises her fist, threateningly, and glares at him.

44. Where are the motifs of isolation and guilt developed in this chapter?

The motif of isolation is developed where Gregor is cut off from his mother after causing her to faint. He feels helpless to aid her. He is riddled with guilt and anxiety.

45. The reader is told that the father appears "both furious and glad," when he encounters Gregor. What is suggested by Kafka's word choice here?

The father has had a vendetta against Gregor for some time. He is anxious, and glad to have an excuse to confront Gregor.

46. What does Gregor do as an attempt to pacify his father? What kind of communication is he trying to use? What is the result?

Gregor flees the scene of destruction, where he has fallen onto the table, and situates himself in front of his door, pushing on it, in an attempt to show by body language that he means to retreat back to his room. The father is not impressed and bombards Gregor with apples, inflicting the wound that eventually leads to Gregor's demise.

47. Who saves Gregor's life at the end of the chapter?

The mother pleads with the father, begging him not to kill Gregor.

48. What metamorphosis is described in detail in Chapter II? What is suggested by this metamorphosis that supports a theme of the book?

On page 47, Gregor describes the father as he was before Gregor's metamorphosis—a feeble, disabled, self-crippled man who had "greeted Gregor upon his return home at night sitting in an armchair in a dressing gown, hardly able to stand up, and only raising his arms as a sign of pleasure…" This is a marked change from the angry, aggressive, strong, and self-determined father Gregor is facing at the end of Chapter II.

Kafka is saying that people become things due to outside forces. The father who was a feeble shell is the same man, but his circumstances are completely different.

Chapter III

1. Explain the irony in Gregor's description of "the dictates of family obligation," whereby he observes: "swallowing revulsion, one must endure, if nothing else—endure." (p. 51)

   This statement represents another instance of dramatic irony in The Metamorphosis. *Gregor is still clinging to societal notions even though he is no longer a member of the society in which those notions apply. Further, he is the only one who truly believes in this idea of familial obligation, as it is the idea that defined his past life. The others do not feel this way and are ready to forsake their obligations to Gregor altogether.*

   Kafka's own bitter feelings toward family relationships (and human relations in general) are well illustrated by Kafka's word choices here. There is sarcasm in this description of family obligation, suggesting that underlying most family obligation there is revulsion, and that most duties are carried out only because of social convention, and for appearances (a motif throughout the story) rather than for any true altruistic motive inherent in the familial structure.

2. Why is Gregor allowed certain new privileges at the outset of Chapter III?

   Perhaps the family knows Gregor will most likely die from the wound inflicted by the father's apple. Here, we see the motif of guilt again, in the behavior of the family. However, none of the family members is willing to try to remove the apple or to tend to Gregor's wound. Nor do they attempt to get any help for Gregor. The small concessions made to Gregor are an expression of guilt, but they still keep Gregor in the dark, out of sight, as appearances (motif) are a stronger motivational factor for the family than guilt. Gregor is the family's dark secret—this notion emerges as yet another motif. This is all part of the social statement Kafka was making on the modern family structure, which he saw as primarily a farce.

3. Where is Gregor's rationalization of his treatment by the family (a technique he uses to avoid conflict) evident at the beginning of Chapter III?

   Where he says "he received what, in his opinion, was entirely sufficient compensation for this worsening of his condition." (p. 51) Gregor is hardly able to move at all anymore; however, he takes a simple gesture of tolerance as ample compensation. This is another example of how weak and capitulatory Gregor is, rationalizing the downright awful behavior of his family at every turn and excusing them—this represents yet another failure to exert himself as an Existential creature.

4. How does Kafka elicit sympathy for the father in Chapter III?

   Kafka describes the father sleeping in his uniform, "as if he were always to serve and even here awaited the voice of his superior" (p. 52). He also describes the father's fatigue, eliciting sympathy from the reader who knows hard work.

   This is important in Kafka's non-judgmental style. He is reminding the reader that no character is perfect, and everyone suffers.

5. What does Kafka suggest the father's "obstinacy" (p. 52) is a reaction to? Interpret this as a social statement.

   On page 52, Kafka describes, "the obstinacy that had seized [the father] since he became a servant." This little observation suggests how many people, powerless in the real world as servants, react by expressing certain behaviors at home—the only setting in which they have power. This is an indictment of the social structure at large.

6. During evening discussions, what was the biggest complaint of the family?

   The family complained incessantly that they could not leave the current apartment because relocating Gregor was inconceivable.

7. What does Gregor "understand" about the causes of the family's woes? What is illustrated by his projection?

   Gregor believes the family feels utterly hopeless, superstitiously "cursed" by the string of bad luck that began with Gregor's transformation. This projection is typical of Gregor's mindset. People suffer due to outside forces beyond their control.

8. What makes the wound in Gregor's back begin to "hurt anew"? (P. 53)

   The wound begins to hurt anew when Gregor is shut into his room by his mother and sister.

9. Why does Kafka include the following sentence: "and, when Gregor was once more in the darkness, the women, mingling their tears or tearless, stared at the table." (p. 53)

   This is another instance of the recurrent motif of darkness and light. Gregor is in the dark, whence it is impossible to interact or communicate. He is the dark secret of the family, swept under the rug, and in time, he will be forgotten completely, or disposed of. Kafka describes the women as "mingling their tears or tearless," to illustrate Gregor's loss of touch with them emotionally. Gregor does not know if the women still have any feelings of sadness for him or not. He is literally and figuratively, in the dark.

10. After Gregor is locked away in his room, what is conveyed by his memories of the people from his former life?

Gregor remembers many people from his former life, including one woman whom he had unsuccessfully courted. This memory reinforces the idea of Gregor's ineffectiveness in life. Further, he describes these people as "unapproachable" in even his memories, showing that he is distancing himself even further from painful memories of a completely unsuccessful social life. Here, parallels to Kafka's failed romantic life are evident.

11. Where is a change in Gregor's attitude toward his family's care for him evident in Chapter III?

On page 54, Gregor says, "he was hardly in the mood to care for his family, filled as he was with blind rage over their negligent care of him." Gregor plans to sneak into the pantry to take "what was his due," even though he wasn't hungry.

This behavior by Gregor is reactionary and childish and not at all helpful—showing him as a failure even in retribution. The underlying irony being that he still thinks he may be able to do something to elicit an emotional reaction from the family.

12. How does he try to display his feelings? What is the result?

Gregor is angry at the lack of care he is receiving from his sister who still goes through the motions of feeding him without any real concern for his well-being. Also, she has abandoned all efforts to clean up Gregor's room.

Gregor tries to use body language again here, standing in a particularly filthy part of the room, to express a sort of accusation, but it goes unnoticed.

13. What happens when the mother decides to take on the task of cleaning Gregor's room?

The mother cleans Gregor's room completely. However, instead of gratitude, Gregor, who becomes sick from the dampness, plots revenge against her; and the sister, feeling her duties had been usurped, flies into a tantrum causing the father to scold both of them.

14. What is Gregor's reaction to the commotion in the living room? Why is it ironic? How is this a symbolic gesture of change?

Gregor hisses at the family, angry that they had not been considerate enough to close the door to spare him the "scene and commotion."

This is ironic because, previously, Gregor had wanted his door left open, so he could be with the family.

This desire on Gregor's part to be shut away from the family is a symbolic change, suggesting he is internalizing even further, and moving closer to slipping away completely. His hissing is symbolic of the growing tension and suggests a possible violent encounter, mirroring the behavior of the father from earlier scenes.

15. What is Gregor's response to being addressed by the charwoman? What is illustrated by this? Explain the humor inherent in Gregor's reaction.

Gregor seems to be offended by the way the charwoman addresses him. We are told that, "Gregor did not answer," when the maid would call out to him. The irony here is that Gregor, having in many ways rejected the ways of humans and moved into himself, is still a social snob—still caught in the social conventions that have led to his demise in many ways. He rejects being addressed by the crude woman, as if she is beneath him. This is profoundly ironic because Gregor is an insect—the lowest form of existence. This shows that he still has not fully accepted the fact of who he is—another Existential failure. It is further ironic because the charwoman—who is above the trap of social convention—is the only one who will show Gregor any affection or care—the only one whom he might have befriended.

16. How does the charwoman react to Gregor's attempt to threaten her? What is significant about this interchange?

The charwoman shows no fear, but raises a chair and threatens Gregor in return, taunting him when he backs down from this challenge.

This scene manifests the motif of Gregor's emasculation. Not only has he been bested by one from a lower social class, but also by a woman.

17. How does Gregor react to his room being made into a junk pile? What is conveyed here?

At first, Gregor does not like it. He attributes his lack of appetite to a feeling of dejection about the state of his room. However, soon, he begins to enjoy wriggling about in the junk and dirt—becoming more and more of an insect.

The way things work out here underscores an idea of natural order. It is not fate that has put Gregor's room into this state, but Gregor adapts to it because it is actually in accordance with his new form. This supports the notion that Gregor is spineless, and malleable. This is a parallel to his work in his former life, a situation which was not ideal, but which he accepted and learned to identify with.

18. What do the three tenants symbolize in the story?

The three tenants symbolize the oppression of the poor by society. Gregor's family is poor and must ingratiate themselves to the lodgers, even in their own house—there is no respite. Part of the burden falls on Gregor's shoulders. He is responsible for making servants of his family who cannot afford to leave their apartment for a smaller one, and must serve others even in their own home.

19. Why does Gregor notice the tenant's chewing?

Gregor becomes conscious of the chewing because he himself has no teeth. This is yet another way he is isolated and outcast. He could no longer exist in the world of humans even if he wanted to. The lack of teeth correlates to the notion of Gregor's overall ineffectualness.

20. What is ironic about the violin scene?

The violin has not been played since Gregor's transformation. It was the thing that bonded Gregor and his sister and symbolized the universal connection between all people through music. In this scene, however, what had been a symbol of human affection becomes almost a desecration. Grete is made to play as a means of further ingratiating the family to the lodgers.

21. Interpret the father's uniform as an objective correlative. What does the uniform represent symbolically?

The state of the father's uniform—a social badge that he comes to identify with, seems to represent his internal mental state. It is haggard, but enduring, like the father himself.

Symbolically, the uniform represents a sort of farce. It is meant, as is suggested earlier when Gregor's military service uniform is mentioned, to elicit respect. However, as Gregor ironically notes, there is no truth behind it. Anyone can wear a uniform, but not everyone in uniform deserves respect. In this way, the father's uniform, as it gathers wrinkles and dirt, becomes more representative of the father's actual character.

22. What is accomplished by the rhetorical question on page 60, in which Gregor asks, "Christmas had already gone by?"

This shows that Gregor is only partly conscious of the goings-on of the human calendar. Time is passing for him without being marked by events. Again, he is not included.

23. Where is body language again featured as a form of communication in Chapter III? (Note: This time Gregor is the interpreter of the body language)

The tenants express their disappointment in Grete's violin playing by body language—they distance themselves from her, bow their heads, speak in low tones, and blow smoke from their cigars in a way that Gregor interprets as displaying annoyance. Of course, Gregor, whose primary communication is now done through body language, notices this.

24. What is Gregor's response to his sister's violin playing?

Gregor is moved deeply by the playing. He finds it beautiful. Covered in the filth of neglect, he wonders if he is indeed truly an animal, "that music would so move him." He desires to get close to the sister. (p. 59)

25. While entranced by the music, Gregor fantasizes about having his sister all to himself in his room, "of her own free will." He imagines himself defending her, and kissing her exposed neck (p. 60).

    What is implied here about Gregor's feelings toward his sister?

    Gregor's sister, having begun to expose her neck, is attempting to attract the attention of men. Gregor, with limited contact with women in his prior life, and now completely isolated, is perhaps confused. Moved by the music, he begins to desire his sister. This is perhaps a statement on the confusion that can result from social isolation within society. But there is also the sense that Gregor desires his sister to desire him, to come into his room "of her own free will."

    It is significant that Gregor realizes these feelings while Grete is playing the violin because the violin was, earlier, one of their closest means of contact, and represented the "great gift" Gregor was going to bestow on her.

26. What are the tenants' reactions to Gregor? Is this a case of unreliable narrator? What does this detail add to the story?

    We are told that the tenants were "hardly upset and that Gregor entertained them more than the violin performance." (p. 60) This detail adds to the absurdity of the tale. It would seem that, if Gregor were actually a giant insect covered in filth, the reaction of the tenants would have been much more severe, one of utter horror, in fact—more similar to the attorney's reaction, though also presented in a comical way. This vagueness, or general aloofness on Kafka's part, adds to the sense of the bizarre or surreal throughout the work. Later, the tenants demand a refund for their room and board, based on "consideration of the revolting conditions" (p. 61). This suggests that Gregor's perception might be unreliable at points.

27. Why is Gregor "too weak to move," after he is caught by the tenants?

    We are told that Gregor, "had been lying still at the same spot where the tenants had caught him,"…"too weak to move because of his disappointment over the fact that his plans had gone awry." It is also possible that he was actually weak as a result of extreme hunger. However, this notion goes along with the idea that the mind's will is more powerful than the body—an Existential notion whereby the perception of a truth is *that truth.*

28. After their discovery of Gregor, what do the tenants "declare?"

    The tenants tell father that they will not pay.

29. What is significant about the way Grete refers to Gregor when she addresses her parents at the bottom of page, 61, saying: "we must be rid of it" (p. 61).

Grete refers to Gregor for the first time as a thing. It illustrates that she has totally separated herself from the idea of Gregor as her brother. He is now, an insect, an animal, in full.

30. On page 60, Kafka, again uses the phrase, "one," to refer to the reader, saying, "one could see how, under the sister's proficient hands, the sheets and pillows from the bed flew into the air and arranged themselves." What is accomplished by addressing the audience in this removed, anonymous way?

This method of address leaves the reader unsure whether he/she is seeing through the eyes of an objective narrator. The impressions are partial to Gregor's mind, and even offers clues to Gregor's thinking.

31. What is the mother's reaction to the agreement between the sister and the father that Gregor must be disposed of? What motif is illustrated here?

The mother faints to escape the reality of it. She does not try to intercede. The motif of escape is illustrated—here, as before with Gregor, through sleep, or fainting. Gregor's transformation into a bug can be seen as a sort of escape from the responsibilities, pressures and demands of the human world. His death, at the end of the chapter, is Gregor's ultimate escape.

32. What is suggested by the use of the phrase "mechanical motion of her hands" to describe the way the sister wipes the tears from her mother's eyes on page 63.

The idea that the sister's gesture is mechanical is layered. Mechanical motion obviously mirrors the idea of insect movement. However, specifically, here, it represents the idea that the sister's actions were completely meaningless. She wipes away the mother's tears out of habit, suggesting that they are wasted on Gregor.

Mechanical motion is a motif throughout the story. Like Gregor's little legs, in Chapter I, moving all at once—so many, in fact, that it would be impossible to attend to each individually. This can be seen as a metaphor for society.

The suggestion here is that social behaviors are inherently mechanical; for show and hollow at their core, and without thought, intent, or emotion.

33. In another example of body language, Grete shakes her hand fiercely to indicate her feelings when father suggests the possibility that Gregor might understand what they are saying about him. Why is this gesture significant? What does this show about Grete's feelings toward Gregor?

Grete, in tears, conflicted by her old emotional ties to Gregor and her pragmatic need to be rid of him, fiercely rejects the idea that Gregor might still be anything of his former self. It hurts her to think it. If she believes there is anything left of the real Gregor, she would not be able to go on with her selfish plan to dispose of him.

34. How does sister rationalize her statement that, "The fact that we have believed this for so long is our true misfortune" (p. 62)?

Grete says that if it were truly Gregor, he would have gone away of his own free-will, rather than burden the family.

35. How is this ironic? What does it foreshadow?

It is probably true, except that Gregor was not capable *of leaving. This statement foreshadows Gregor's death—the only way he* can *leave.*

36. What does the sister say the family would have done if Gregor had chosen to leave on his own? What are the implications of this statement in terms of Kafka's view of society?

Grete says they would have "honored [Gregor's] memory," (p. 62.) The sister says that, given the circumstances, the honorable thing for Gregor to have done would have been to leave. Then, free from shame or disgrace, the family would have honored Gregor's memory.

Taken as a social commentary, Kafka is saying here again that appearances are more important than familial obligations or ties, which are a sham. Honor, so valued by society, is part of the cause of this. Honor was a deep part of the social structure of the culture of warring nations (noting that the world was on the brink of World War I at the time, a war that was started—at least symbolically—by a gesture of insult involving an obscure baron in an obscure part of Europe, not at all central to the war. To the Existentialist, there is no honor in dying for a cause or a greater idea. The existence of the self is all. Sacrificing is not realistic; survival is.

Gregor was a failure for never realizing or actualizing himself in the first place. This is the ultimate irony—that Grete should expect from him the same type of non-self-affirming behavior that originally caused his metamorphosis into a spineless thing.

37. What is signified by the sister's crying on page 62?

Grete's crying seems to signify the fact that she has come to the realization that the family must be rid of Gregor. Her uncertainty is caused by her last inclinations of sentimentality for the memory of her brother. In this way, this scene represents Grete's loss of innocence.

38. Explain why Gregor's statement, "in addition, nobody was urging him onwards; it was all left up to him," (p. 63) is significant in an Existentialist framework.

This statement represents an Existentialist theme running through the story—that most people would not move if not urged on by society.

39. Explain the significance behind the wording of Gregor's death scene in an Existential framework: "Then, apart from his will, his head sank down completely, and his last breath streamed weakly out of his nostrils." (p. 64)

The phrase, "apart from his will" is important here—as the Existential will is to stay alive. Relinquishing this will is the equivalent of death. Gregor was dead long before his actual demise.

40. We are told that Gregor's contemplation of his resolution to disappear put him into a state of "vapid and peaceful contemplation" (p. 64). Explain the significance of this statement to the major theme of the story.

Gregor is finally relieved of all his burdens. He has finally found his escape—free from all obligations and all guilt.

41. What literary technique is employed by the appearance of the charwoman after the description of Gregor's death scene?

Comic Relief.

42. Interpret the choice of language in the following sentence: "The married Samsa couple sat upright in their marriage bed and had to force themselves to overcome their fright of the servant before they understood her announcement" (p. 65). How does this illustrate the differences between the Samsas and their servant?

This formal language, using the word marriage twice provides contrast—the civil versus the savage. The Samsas fear their servant in an animalistic way, which is ironic. They fear the visceral honesty of the servant which stands in stark contrast to their civilized ways . It is because she is animal-like that she was able to get close to Gregor without being too bothered.

43. Explain the use of the motif of lightness and darkness surrounding Gregor's death scene.

On page 66 we are told Gregor's room "had already become bright" now that Gregor is gone. Gregor's presence carried a darkness with it. It inhibited the others from being availed of the light. Now that he is gone, the light, symbolizing freedom and good fortune to come, has returned.

44. After the announcement of Gregor's death, Grete emerges from her bedroom fully clothed, "as is she hadn't slept at all," (p. 65) What is the significance of this detail?

Grete's emerging from her room, dressed and appearing pale, as if she hadn't slept, adds to the sense of the bizarre. It is almost as if she predicted Gregor's death and sat awake in a sort of vigil of guilt. Her wandering into the scene as if out of a waking dream conveys a dreamlike tone.

45. Comment on the resolution of the story in which, following Gregor's death, there is a great sense of relief, and the tone brightens.

The sense of relief caused by Gregor's death is a statement about the selfishness of humans. Freed from its burden, the family can now pursue selfish endeavors in the world. However, the reader will note that Kafka's narrator does not judge or criticize the family. There is no hint of negative light, no suggestion of ominous retribution in the future. In the Existential framework it is a dog-eat-dog world, and there is no good or evil, no judgment. The reader is left to be the judge for him or herself, and this is important—it is not that no judgment exists, but that each must judge for him or herself.

Note how Kafka's criticisms of society are never stated outright in the text, but only hinted at through sarcasm and irony and left to the reader's discretion to ultimately decide.

46. Interpret Grete's reaction when she notes of Gregor's body: "look how emaciated he was" (p. 65).

Grete is feeling one last tinge of guilt, for it is her neglect that left her brother's body so emaciated.

47. Interpret the addition of the butcher's assistant coming up the stairs at the end of the story. We are not told why, but what might this suggest? Why might Kafka have included this unqualified detail?

The suggestion here is that the butcher will try to sell Gregor's body as meat, society getting one last use out of Gregor even though he wouldn't contribute any more on his own. This joke was also probably an inside joke among Kafka's friends, commenting on the low quality of meat the butcher would sell.

The Metamorphosis

Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition Teaching Unit

Study Guide
Student Copy

Chapter I

1. The first sentence of this story is quite famous in literature. However, over the years since its first translation, many voices in academia have complained that the word "insect" does not fairly translate Kafka's original meaning. Offer your own interpretation of this debate. Why do many critics dislike the original translation?

2. As Gregor is lying in his bed, he reflects a bit on his situation. He decides that he will not reach any sensible conclusions as to how to proceed until he gets up and gets moving. What reasoning does Gregor use at this point to convince himself that he still may be suffering only from a temporary delusion?

3. How does Gregor's reference to "harem women" (p. 14) show that he is a bit of a naïf, delusional about the outside world, and by extension, his own situation in life?

4. What does the fact that Gregor seems to ignore his physical symptoms in lieu of harping on his psychological hardships say about Gregor as a character?

5. Explain the significance of Gregor's focusing solely on how his inability to go to work will affect his family, rather than on the fact of his transformation.

6. What is Kafka's angle in treating the transformation with such aloofness? What is the shift of focus attained by this technique?

7. A seemingly insignificant detail is noted in the first chapter when Gregor looks out his window and sees only fog. The hospital that was directly across from his window is no longer visible to him. Interpret this fact in a symbolic light.

8. Comment on Kafka's use of foreshadowing through Gregor's difficulties communicating with words.

9. Kafka often uses language crafted in a peculiar, yet methodical way. His use of round-about ways of saying things is not due to his inability to write clearly, but rather carries with it some intended meaning. In the following sentence: "At the same moment, however, he didn't forget now and then to remember that the calm and calmest contemplation would be much better than desperate conclusions," what does the choice of language in this passage serve to illustrate?

10. What is Gregor's interpretation of why the attorney comes to check on him personally, rather than some lesser messenger? How is the choice of limited-omniscient narrator important here?

11. Based on information from the text, explain Gregor's transformation as an objective correlative for his internal state. Then explain his transformation as a symbolic one.

12. What is the significance of Gregor's legs fighting against each other as he lies helpless on his back?

13. While the attorney is outside, waiting to gain entrance to Gregor's room, Gregor muses that perhaps at one time, the attorney had also undergone a similar experience. "One had to concede the possibility of such a thing," Gregor thinks to himself (p. 19).

    The narrator then informs us that, "as if to give a rough answer to [Gregor's] question, the attorney now, allowing his polished shoes to creak, took a few determined steps in the next room" (p. 20).

    a. Interpret the attorney's "rough answer," as Kafka gives it. What is conveyed by the attorney's actions? Take into account Kafka's description, "allowing his polished shoes to creak."

    b. What is evidenced by Gregor's assumption that the attorney must have experienced a similar thing? What is Gregor seeking at this point? How does this assumption fit into an Existentialist framework?

14. Interpret the following statement from an Existentialist viewpoint.

> If they were startled, then Gregor had no more responsibility and could be calm. But if they took in everything quietly, then he would have no reason to get excited and could, if he hurried, actually be at the train station around eight o'clock. (p. 22-23)

15. After Gregor's attempts to talk to the attorney through his door, what is the result?

16. Why does this make Gregor “become much calmer?” (p. 23)

17. What does Gregor anticipate as a result of the arrival of either the doctor or the locksmith? What does this say about Gregor’s character?

18. What is significant about the fact that Gregor “no longer trusted himself to discern” whether the noises he was making were intelligible to humans?

19. What is significant about Gregor’s observation that he “didn’t need the locksmith” to open the door? Why is this a case of too little, too late?

20. When Gregor does finally manage to get the door open, what are the actual results? Describe each character’s reaction to Gregor.

21. What is the symbolic significance of the setting details Kafka offers the reader at this point?

22. How does Gregor discover that his myriad feet now suddenly work perfectly in unison to carry his body? What is the significance of this discovery?

23. What is suggested by the fact that Gregor's jaws snap at the sight of the flowing coffee?

24. What sort of comedy could be said to dominate this scene?

25. In what manner does Gregor try to communicate with his father?

26. The father's aggressive voice is described repeatedly as a "hissing noise" which bothers Gregor terribly. How is this description significant?

27. What stops Gregor's retreat into his room?

28. Explain the black humor apparent in Gregor's internal monologue throughout the scene.

29. What is significant about the last line of Chapter I?

Chapter II

1. How does Kafka set the tone for Chapter II? Explain the significance of his choices.

2. What is significant about Gregor's waking up in the nighttime?

3. What, upon discovery, first gives Gregor joy, then causes him distress?

4. What clues at the beginning of Chapter II suggest that Gregor's transformation will continue?

5. What deeply symbolic change in the way things work around the house (the power-structure) has occurred at the outset of Chapter II?

6. What is suggested by this change?

7. What is signified by the fact that Gregor feels anxiety in the room he has inhabited for the past five years?

8. What is shown by the fact that Gregor thinks the father's not reading aloud to Grete and the mother at his accustomed hour is simply "a custom that, of late, had been entirely abandoned?"

9. Considering the notion of Gregor's denial in an Existential framework, what does this way of perceiving say about Gregor's character and his inability to cope with his previous human life?

10. What gives Gregor "great pride" to think back on? Why is this significant?

11. What does Gregor's pride in taking care of his family say about his character? Why is this significant?

12. What evidence does Kafka provide that Grete, despite her servitude to her brother, is repulsed by him?

13. When does Gregor first begin to accept the effect of his transformation on his family? What does he decide he will do? What is the significance of this decision?

14. What is significant about the fact that Gregor cannot fit himself completely under the couch?

15. How does Gregor interpret his sister's locking of the door when she leaves his room?

16. What is Gregor astonished to discover about his body? Explain the significance.

17. It is obvious to the reader that the sister locks the door because the family is horrified that Gregor might escape from his room. What kind of irony does this represent?

18. Though Grete still attends to him at this point, how is it suggested that she is becoming frustrated with the job of taking care of Gregor?

19. What does the following sentence from Chapter II tell the reader about Gregor's attitude toward his family?

> "They surely would not have wanted Gregor to starve, but perhaps they couldn't have endured any experience of his eating other than hearsay; or perhaps sister was trying to save them from what was possibly only a small sorrow, as they had actually suffered quite enough already." (p. 35)

20. What are we told is the maid's reaction to "the occurrence" of Gregor's transformation? Explain the significance of this reaction.

21. The use of the phrase "the occurrence" to describe Gregor's transformation is an example of what literary device?

22. What had Gregor planned to "formally explain" to his family on Christmas Eve?

23. What are we told about the family's reliance on, and gratitude toward Gregor, prior to his transformation?

24. Based on the changes that occur in Grete's attitude toward Gregor and what we are told about the family's general attitude toward Gregor's role as a provider, what do you think Kafka wants the reader to think about the relationship between Grete and Gregor, before the transformation?

25. Why are there are always at least two members of the family (other than Gregor) home at once?

26. Why does Gregor "suffer through" his sister's cleaning up his room and preparing his food dish?

27. What does the sister do with Gregor's stool after she has noticed Gregor has been moving it under the window? What does this signify?

28. When Gregor hears that the father not only has some money left over from his old business, but that he had also been saving some of the money Gregor had given to him to pay the debt to his old boss, what is Gregor's reaction? What does this illustrate about the relationship between father and son?

    Explain the significance of Gregor's reaction in terms of the Existential ideal.

29. Kafka writes on page 39 that Gregor looks out of his window, "Obviously with some sort of memory of the freedom he formerly enjoyed" (p. 39). Why does Kafka include the qualifier, "obviously" in this sentence? What does this word choice convey?

30. Where are the first clues offered that Grete may soon change her attitude toward Gregor?

31. Explain the dramatic irony in Gregor's observation that "a stranger would have thought that [he] had been lying in wait there and had wanted to bite her."

32. For what reason does Gregor imagine that he catches a "glimpse of gratitude" from Grete?

33. From an Existentialist framework, explain why the fact that Gregor thinks he perceives a look of gratitude from Grete is more important than whether or not she actually offered him any gratitude.

34. Where do we see the parents' change of attitude about sister's value?

35. What sorts of details are the parents interested in hearing from Grete? Why?

36. What in Chapter II points to the fact that Gregor is becoming even more insect-like, and detached from human thought and emotion?

37. What is the mother's opinion of removing the furniture from Gregor's room? What does she worry it might imply?

38. When his sister and mother come to remove his furniture, Gregor is conflicted. What is the source of this feeling? What does he both long for and fear?

39. Where is it first suggested that Grete may be thinking only of herself in the changes she makes to Gregor's room?

40. After being rather ambivalent at first, Gregor decides on page 44, that his mother and sister are "robbing him of everything he held dear." He mentions, specifically, his fretsaw. Why is this object especially meaningful?

41. When Gregor "ventures forth" to save his things, this represents his first self-determined and definitive act in the story since he opened his door in Chapter I. What object does Gregor choose to protect? Why? What is the result of this action on his part? What does this suggest from an existentialist framework?

42. Where is it first suggested that Gregor may become aggressive? Interpret this sequence as a statement on human behavior.

43. What is the context of Grete's first direct address of Gregor since his transformation?

44. Where are the motifs of isolation and guilt developed in this chapter?

45. The reader is told that the father appears "both furious and glad," when he encounters Gregor. What is suggested by Kafka's word choice here?

46. What does Gregor do as an attempt to pacify his father? What kind of communication is he trying to use? What is the result?

47. Who saves Gregor's life at the end of the chapter?

48. What metamorphosis is described in detail in Chapter II? What is suggested by this metamorphosis that supports a theme of the book?

Chapter III

1. Explain the irony in Gregor's description of "the dictates of family obligation," whereby he observes: "swallowing revulsion, one must endure, if nothing else—endure." (p. 51)

2. Why is Gregor allowed certain new privileges at the outset of Chapter III?

3. Where is Gregor's rationalization of his treatment by the family (a technique he uses to avoid conflict) evident at the beginning of Chapter III?

4. How does Kafka elicit sympathy for the father in Chapter III?

5. What does Kafka suggest the father's "obstinacy" (p. 52) is a reaction to? Interpret this as a social statement.

6. During evening discussions, what was the biggest complaint of the family?

7. What does Gregor "understand" about the causes of the family's woes? What is illustrated by his projection?

8. What makes the wound in Gregor's back begin to "hurt anew"? (P. 53)

9. Why does Kafka include the following sentence: "and, when Gregor was once more in the darkness, the women, mingling their tears or tearless, stared at the table." (p. 53)

10. After Gregor is locked away in his room, what is conveyed by his memories of the people from his former life?

11. Where is a change in Gregor's attitude toward his family's care for him evident in Chapter III?

12. How does he try to display his feelings? What is the result?

13. What happens when the mother decides to take on the task of cleaning Gregor's room?

14. What is Gregor's reaction to the commotion in the living room? Why is it ironic? How is this a symbolic gesture of change?

15. What is Gregor's response to being addressed by the charwoman? What is illustrated by this? Explain the humor inherent in Gregor's reaction.

16. How does the charwoman react to Gregor's attempt to threaten her? What is significant about this interchange?

17. How does Gregor react to his room being made into a junk pile? What is conveyed here?

18. What do the three tenants symbolize in the story?

19. Why does Gregor notice the tenant's chewing?

20. What is ironic about the violin scene?

21. Interpret the father's uniform as an objective correlative. What does the uniform represent symbolically?

22. What is accomplished by the rhetorical question on page 60, in which Gregor asks, "Christmas had already gone by?"

23. Where is body language again featured as a form of communication in Chapter III? (Note: This time Gregor is the interpreter of the body language)

24. What is Gregor's response to his sister's violin playing?

25. While entranced by the music, Gregor fantasizes about having his sister all to himself in his room, "of her own free will." He imagines himself defending her, and kissing her exposed neck (p. 60).

    What is implied here about Gregor's feelings toward his sister?

26. What are the tenants' reactions to Gregor? Is this a case of unreliable narrator? What does this detail add to the story?

27. Why is Gregor "too weak to move," after he is caught by the tenants?

28. After their discovery of Gregor, what do the tenants "declare?"

29. What is significant about the way Grete refers to Gregor when she addresses her parents at the bottom of page, 61, saying: "we must be rid of it" (p. 61).

30. On page 60, Kafka, again uses the phrase, "one," to refer to the reader, saying, "one could see how, under the sister's proficient hands, the sheets and pillows from the bed flew into the air and arranged themselves." What is accomplished by addressing the audience in this removed, anonymous way?

31. What is the mother's reaction to the agreement between the sister and the father that Gregor must be disposed of? What motif is illustrated here?

32. What is suggested by the use of the phrase "mechanical motion of her hands" to describe the way the sister wipes the tears from her mother's eyes on page 63.

33. In another example of body language, Grete shakes her hand fiercely to indicate her feelings when father suggests the possibility that Gregor might understand what they are saying about him. Why is this gesture significant? What does this show about Grete's feelings toward Gregor?

34. How does sister rationalize her statement that, "The fact that we have believed this for so long is our true misfortune" (p. 62)?

35. How is this ironic? What does it foreshadow?

36. What does the sister say the family would have done if Gregor had chosen to leave on his own? What are the implications of this statement in terms of Kafka's view of society?

37. What is signified by the sister's crying on page 62?

38. Explain why Gregor's statement, "in addition, nobody was urging him onwards; it was all left up to him," (p. 63) is significant in an Existentialist framework.

39. Explain the significance behind the wording of Gregor's death scene in an Existential framework: "Then, apart from his will, his head sank down completely, and his last breath streamed weakly out of his nostrils." (p. 64)

40. We are told that Gregor's contemplation of his resolution to disappear put him into a state of "vapid and peaceful contemplation" (p. 64). Explain the significance of this statement to the major theme of the story.

41. What literary technique is employed by the appearance of the charwoman after the description of Gregor's death scene?

42. Interpret the choice of language in the following sentence: "The married Samsa couple sat upright in their marriage bed and had to force themselves to overcome their fright of the servant before they understood her announcement" (p. 65). How does this illustrate the differences between the Samsas and their servant?

43. Explain the use of the motif of lightness and darkness surrounding Gregor's death scene.

44. After the announcement of Gregor's death, Grete emerges from her bedroom fully clothed, "as is she hadn't slept at all," (p. 65) What is the significance of this detail?

45. Comment on the resolution of the story in which, following Gregor's death, there is a great sense of relief, and the tone brightens.

46. Interpret Grete's reaction when she notes of Gregor's body: "look how emaciated he was" (p. 65).

47. Interpret the addition of the butcher's assistant coming up the stairs at the end of the story. We are not told why, but what might this suggest? Why might Kafka have included this unqualified detail?

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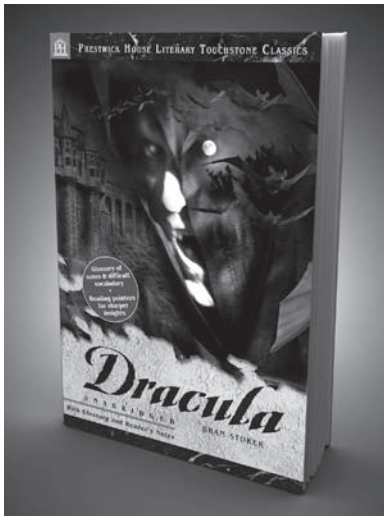

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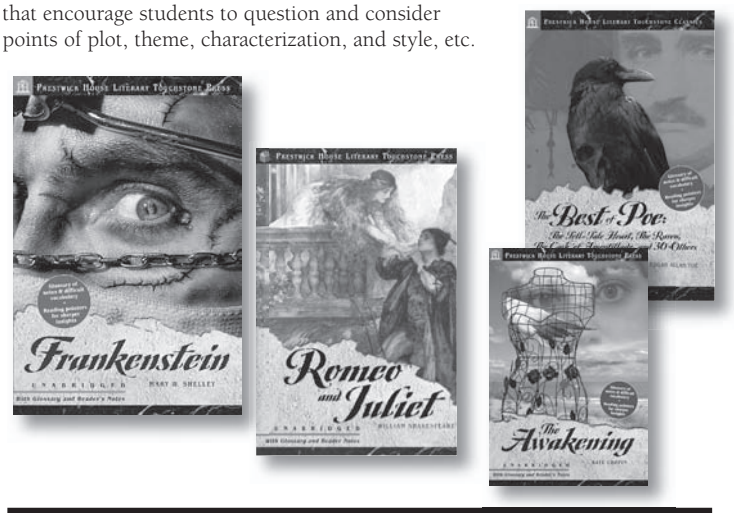

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