

StudySync Lesson Plan

The Metamorphosis

Objectives

1. Engage students in the strange world of Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*, preparing them for in-depth discussion and critical analysis of the excerpt.
2. Practice and reinforce the following Grade 9-10 ELA Common Core Standards for reading literature, writing, and speaking and listening:
 - **READING: LITERATURE – RL.9-10.1-7, 9-10**
 - **WRITING – W.9-10.1-7, 9-10**
 - **SPEAKING AND LISTENING – SL.9-10.1-6**

Time

130 minutes (with an additional 250 minutes of extension possibilities)

Materials

SyncTV Premium Lesson on Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*

Overview

As one of the few works of his published while he was still alive, Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* is now regarded nearly a hundred years later as one of the most seminal pieces of literature of the 20th century. It explores the same themes and fascinations as much of Kafka's other work: loneliness, alienation from society, personal transformation, and a shared worldview that had been burgeoning among writers and philosophers of the era, later to be known as *existentialism*. Kafka is one of the formative names when discussing existentialist writers: his work depicts existence as irrational and absurd, and it has been cited by other existentialist writers (Borges, Camus, Sartre) as a great influence for its vision and perspective. Students will read an excerpt from the beginning of *The Metamorphosis*, in which traveling salesman Gregor Samsa wakes one day up to find that he has inexplicably transformed into a giant roach. They will inevitably search for the key to unlocking this bizarre, random occurrence, but they will not find answers or explanations; instead, they will come to find that it is more Kafka's intent to depict life and existence as absurd, grotesque and bereft of meaning. Supporting their exploration of the text will be in-depth class discussion and critical written analysis, both of which are consistent with ELA Common Core Standards for Grades 9-10.

Background (10 minutes)

1. **Watch the Preview** (*SL.9-10.1-2*). As a group, watch the video preview of the premium lesson. After viewing, use the following questions to spur a discussion:
 - a. Imagine you wake up one morning and find yourself transformed, like Gregor Samsa of *The Metamorphosis*, into a giant bug. Would you tell your parents? Go to school? How do you think others would react?
 - b. When Samsa wakes up and finds himself transformed, his initial reaction is that he must be dreaming. Share any particularly frightening nightmare of your own that you've had recently. How did you feel during the dream? How did you feel after you awoke?
 - c. Though surely not a desirable situation, discuss as a class both the pros and cons of transforming into a giant beetle. Then, choose another creature or animal you'd rather wake up as, offering a similar list of both pros and cons for your preference.

Extension (additional 60 minutes)

- d. **Create a Plan** (*SL.9-10.4 and W.9-10.4*). Gregor Samsa has found himself in quite a tough situation. For a short in-class assignment, after students have watched this preview, have them compose a plan for Gregor in his predicament. Where should he go? How will he survive? What should he do about his family and his boss? Plans should be written in paragraph form. Once finished, have students share their plans with the class.
- e. **Visual Timeline** (*SL.9-10.1-2, 4-5*). Split the class into small groups and have each group create a visual timeline of author Franz Kafka's life, including any noteworthy events and/or achievements. Once groups are finished, have them present their timelines and create a master list of all the different events and/or achievements students have found. You may quiz them on these topics, if desired.
- f. **Journal** (*W.9-10.4 and SL.9-10.1*). Ask students to write a short journal entry about a time they felt isolated or lonely. What caused them to feel this way? How did it affect them? How were they able to get past it? If desired, have a class discussion about this shared predicament. Why do we all, at some point or another, feel this way? What, if anything, can we do to fight it?

Engaging the Text (120 minutes)

2. **Read the Text (30 minutes)**
 - a. **Read and Annotate** (*RL.9-10.1-6*). Have students read and annotate the introduction and excerpt. If students are completing as a homework assignment, ask them to write any questions they have into the annotation tool—these questions are visible to you after the students submit their writing assignments or beforehand if you use the “Mimic” function to access the students' accounts.
 - b. **Discuss** (*SL.9-10.1, 3*). Have students get into small groups or pairs and briefly discuss the questions and inferences they had while reading.

Extension (additional 30 minutes)

- c. **Listen and Discuss** (*SL.9-10.1-2*). As a class, listen to the audio reading of the text. Ask students to share how their understanding of the text changed after listening. What additional images came to mind? What words did the author use to develop the setting?
- d. **Comprehend** (*RL.9-10.1-6, 10*). Have students complete the multiple-choice questions. Collect papers or discuss answers as a class.
- e. **Draw** (*ELL, RL.9-10.1*). As one of the most vivid and memorable scenes from 20th century literature, have students work on an illustration of Gregor Samsa's horrific morning. Encourage them to incorporate at least three pertinent details from the text into their drawings.

3. Watch SyncTV (30 minutes)

- a. **Watch** Either watch the SyncTV discussion as a class or ask students to watch it on their individual computers.
- b. **Focus** (*SL.9-10.1-3 and RL.9-10.1-2, 4*). First, watch from 1:48-2:32 as the SyncTV students discuss the possible significance of the title, *The Metamorphosis*, using its precise meaning to key into different interpretations of the text.
- c. **Focus** (*SL.9-10.1-3 and RL.9-10.3*). Continue from 2:33-3:31 as the discussion turns to Gregor Samsa and what little we know about his character. Model how students piece together different details about Gregor from both explicit passages and textual inferences.
- d. **Focus** (*SL.9-10.1-3 and RL.9-10.2*). Lastly, 5:34-6:36 introduces us via the SyncTV discussion to the concept of 'existentialism', as the SyncTV students use it to speculate about Kafka's intent, as well as the deeper significance of the text.
- e. **Discuss** (*SL.9-10.1-5 and RL.9-10.1-6, 10*). After watching the model discussion, have a conversation with the class about the ideas discussed in the SyncTV episode. What new thoughts do they have after hearing the students' discussion? Next, divide students into small groups (3-4 students). Move around the room monitoring groups as students follow the SyncTV episode as a model to discuss some of the following questions:
 - i. Is Gregor's "metamorphosis" a completely random, inexplicable occurrence, or does Kafka give us any clues or insights into his character to suggest why this may have happened? If his metamorphosis is, in fact, another stage in a cycle, what is it about Gregor's life that might have caused this? Offer specific examples from the excerpt.
 - ii. Why do we naturally wonder, at first, if what's happening in this excerpt is "real"? Does your attitude about its "realness" change by the end of the excerpt? Why or why not? How does Kafka's writing style influence this?
 - iii. What is Gregor Samsa's attitude about his chosen work as a traveling salesman? Describe, in a few sentences, his feelings about his job and his place in society. Then, speculate about Kafka's feelings as storyteller. How do you think Kafka felt about the society in which he lived?
 - iv. What does it mean to be having an "existential crisis"? Is Gregor Samsa having, among other things, an existential crisis in *The Metamorphosis*? Why or why not? How does this term tie into existentialism and its tenets?

- v. How would you categorize *The Metamorphosis* if you were describing it to a friend? Is it funny, sad, or something entirely different? Is the fate that befalls Gregor Samsa one of comedy or tragedy? How would you categorize Gregor Samsa: a hero, a protagonist, or what?
- vi. What challenges will Gregor Samsa face as the story progresses? What will happen when his family and his employers find out what has happened? How do you predict they will react? How will *he* react?

Extension (additional 60 minutes)

- f. **Mind Map** (*RL.9-10.1, 3*). Though Gregor Samsa has physically transformed into a giant vermin, he still retains many human qualities. On a blank sheet of paper, have students work on a mind map defining Gregor’s dual selves, both human and insect. On one side, they should list all of Gregor’s human characteristics; on the other, they should list the insect-like. Each example should point directly to a passage or quote from the excerpt.
 - g. **Investigate** (*W.9-10.4, 9*). Have students pretend that they are each reporters from a notable scientific journal investigating the strange metamorphosis of Gregor Samsa. Ask them to write a list of ten questions they will ask Gregor to better understand his transformation.
 - h. **Interview** (*SL.9-10.1-6*). Then, split the class into pairs and have each pair conduct and record their “interviews” with Gregor Samsa as podcasts, with one student playing the interviewer and the other playing the vermin. Encourage creativity in students’ approaches and answers in this assignment.
4. **Think (10 minutes)**
- a. **Respond** (*W.9-10.1, 4*). Ask students to read the “Think” questions, watch the corresponding video clips, and respond to the questions, either in class or for homework.
5. **Write (50 minutes)**
- a. **Discuss** (*SL.9-10.1*). Read the prompt you have chosen for students, and then solicit questions regarding the prompt or the assignment expectations. Whichever prompt you have chosen, make sure you are clear about the assignment expectations and the rubric by which you and the other students will be evaluating them.
 - b. **Organize** (*RL.9-10.1 and W.9-10.1-2, 5*). Ask students to go back and annotate the text with the prompt in mind. They should be organizing their thoughts and the points they’ll address in their writing as they make annotations. If you’ve worked on outlining or other organizational tools for writing, this is a good place to apply them.
 - c. **Write** (*W.9-10.1-2, 4-6, 8-10*). Have students go through the writing process of planning, revising, editing, and publishing their writing responses.
 - d. **Review** (*W.9-10.4-6*). Use the StudySync “Review” feature to have students complete one to two evaluations of their peers’ work based on your chosen review rubric. Have the students look at and reflect upon the peer evaluations of

their own writing. What might you do differently in a revision? How might you strengthen the writing and the ideas?

Extension (additional 100 minutes)

- e. **Write** (*W.9-10.1-2, 4-6, 9-10*). For homework, have students write an essay using one of the prompts you did not choose to do in class. Students should publish their responses online.
- f. **Write Argumentatively** (*W.9-10.1, 4-6, 9-10*). Some readers have argued that Gregor is insane, and that the story of *The Metamorphosis* is all happening inside of his head. Search the text for evidence supporting or refuting this assertion, and write an argumentative essay of at least 300 words offering your own take. Is this all a nightmarish fantasy? Or does Kafka intend for us to take this story literally? How do selected passages, as well as the author's overall style, offer insight into this?
- g. **Write Argumentatively** (*W.9-10.1, 4-6, 9-10*). As the protagonist of *The Metamorphosis*, is Gregor Samsa a sympathetic character? Is he a likeable character? Write an argumentative essay of at least 300 words offering your opinion on this topic. Do we "root" for Gregor? Do we pity him? How best can we describe our attitude (as readers) towards Gregor Samsa? Point to specific passages to help illustrate your point.

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS

Key Vocabulary

1. vermin (n.) – Pest(s), either as an insects or small animal
2. gilt (adj.) – Colored or made of gold
3. harem (n.) – A part of a house in a Muslim household where women (frequently the wives of a man) live
4. ravenous (adj.) – Extremely hungry
5. insistent (adj.) – Repetitive and annoying; demanding
6. meticulous (adj.) – Careful and exact about doing something
7. broad (adj.) – Wide, in measurement across
8. perpetual (adj.) – Happening all the time, not stopping
9. agitation (n.) – A state of disturbance, especially in anger or excitement
10. shroud (v.) – To hide or cover

Reading Comprehension Questions

1. As a salesman, we can infer that Gregor Samsa works for _____.
 - a. a car company
 - b. a fabric company
 - c. a furniture store
 - d. none of the above
2. “He was lying on his back as hard as an armor plate, and when he lifted his head a little, he saw his vaulted brown belly, sectioned by arch-shaped ribs, to whose dome the cover, about to slide off completely, could barely cling.”

A good synonym for the underlined word above is _____.

- a. rotting
 - b. monstrous
 - c. curved
 - d. wide
3. “Gregor’s eyes then turned to the window, and the overcast weather--he could hear raindrops hitting against the metal ledge--completely depressed him.”

We can infer from this sentence that overcast means _____.

- a. bright
 - b. unpleasant
 - c. cloudy
 - d. frigid
4. All of the following are true about Gregor EXCEPT _____.
 - a. he finds his job tiring and unfulfilling
 - b. he owes his parents a significant sum of money

- c. he feels that he travels too much
 - d. he recently broke up with a girlfriend
5. After realizing that he has transformed into a monstrous vermin, Gregor's foremost concern is _____.
- a. missing his train
 - b. starving to death
 - c. drowsiness
 - d. people seeing him
6. "Gregor was shocked to hear his own voice answering, unmistakably his own voice, true, but in which, as if from below, an insistent distressed chirping intruded, which left the clarity of his words intact only for a moment really, before so badly garbling them as they carried that no one could be sure if he had heard right."
- A good synonym for the underlined word above is _____.
- a. echoing
 - b. confusing
 - c. distorting
 - d. silencing
7. All of the following words could be used to describe Gregor EXCEPT _____.
- a. rational
 - b. depressed
 - c. anxious
 - d. emotive
8. Gregor lives with his _____.
- a. mother
 - b. father
 - c. sister
 - d. all of the above
9. Gregor struggles to get himself out of bed because _____.
- a. he is afraid of being seen
 - b. he is too tired and depressed to go into work
 - c. he has little to no control over his new body
 - d. all of the above
10. "And for a little while he lay quietly, breathing shallowly, as if expecting, perhaps, from the complete silence the return of things to the way they really and naturally were."
- This passage suggests that Gregor _____.
- a. is still in denial about his new state
 - b. is still dreaming
 - c. will never be able free himself from bed
 - d. all of the above

Answer Key

1. B
2. C
3. C
4. D
5. A
6. C
7. D
8. D
9. C
10. A

Further Assignments

1. After completing this StudySync Premium Lesson, have students read the entirety of Franz Kafka's novella *The Metamorphosis*. Ask them to keep a reading journal or blog while reading and write one entry every day about the topics and events that happen in the book. Continue to discuss and expand upon the themes and issues that came up in the initial discussion, and once completed, have students write critical responses to the text. (RL.9-10.1-6, 10 and SL.9-10.1-3 and W.9-10.4, 9)
2. Have students write their own creative stories about waking up one morning as a strange or horrific creature, similar to Gregor Samsa in *The Metamorphosis*. Encourage students to be imaginative in their storytelling choices; they can wake up as any creature of their choosing, but the general framework of the stories should be inspired by the excerpt. Stories may conclude indefinitely, or students can choose to finish their narratives. Once finished, have volunteers read their stories to the class. (W.9-10.3-4, 9 and SL.9-10.4)
3. Have students read and complete the StudySync Premium Lesson for Albert Camus' *The Stranger*. Camus was a French author who was greatly influenced by Franz Kafka, both stylistically and philosophically. Once students have completed the activities in this Premium Lesson, have them compose a comparative essay of at least 300 words discussing some of the ways in which *The Stranger* is indebted to *The Metamorphosis*. How are the works similar, and in what ways do they diverge? (RL.9-10.1-6, 9 and W.9-10.2, 4, 9)
4. For as famous and widely read as it is, there is no well-known film adaptation of *The Metamorphosis*. Screen for the class an experimental short film based on *The Metamorphosis*, which is titled "Metamorphosis: Immersive Kafka" and can be viewed at <http://www.imdb.com/video/wab/vi1470471449/>. After screening this film for the class, have students talk about this adaptation and some of the respective differences between the two mediums. What are some of the choices the filmmakers made in translating the book to the screen? Does the film adequately represent Kafka's vision? What are the challenges in adapting *The Metamorphosis* to a visual medium? (RL.9-10.7 and SL.9-10.1-3)
5. Some scholars have noted that *The Metamorphosis* possesses many distinctive characteristics of a parable or fable. As a class, define these two terms and their respective differences, then discuss: is *The Metamorphosis* a parable or fable? Encourage debate about this issue, and after a short class discussion, have students write a couple of paragraphs arguing their point. If *The Metamorphosis* can be read as a parable or fable, what is its message? If there is a lesson learned, what is it? (RL.9-10.2 and W.9-10.1, 4, 9 and SL.9-10.1, 3)
6. Have English language learners "re-write" a portion of this excerpt from *The Metamorphosis* from the perspective of one of Gregor's family members. Use this in-class activity to discuss the concept of perspective in storytelling, the different kinds of perspectives that exist, and how the perspective an author chooses can influence the story being told. (ELL)