

Questions on “The Metamorphosis” by Franz Kafka:

1. What characteristics of “The Metamorphosis” are specific to its being a novella? What would likely be sacrificed in the narrative had Kafka opted for the short-story form, particularly in terms of plot and character development? Would the meaning have been different? How so?
2. How does Kafka use Gregor’s metamorphosis into an insect as a metaphor? What does he seem to be suggesting about the human condition by using this particular image?
3. What are the practical implications of Gregor’s transformation for the Samsa family? What negative effects does it have on the family? What positive effects?
4. What is the significance of Gregor’s loss of appetite for food over the course of the novella? What does he become more “hungry” for, and how do his actions prior to his death signify this growing need?
5. How are alienation and isolation - prevailing themes of modernist fiction - exemplified in “The Metamorphosis”? In what ways does Gregor’s room become symbolic of his alienation? How does the treatment of the room by others both illustrate and exacerbate Gregor’s isolation?
6. How does time work in the story? How is it symbolized? Does your understanding of the passing of time change throughout the novella?
7. What is Gregor’s initial response to waking up as a cockroach? Does it seem proportionate to the event? What are his chief concerns? What does his response say about his personality or his situation?
8. What is the significance of Gregor’s job as a traveling salesman and of his particular work situation (the way he is treated by his superiors, his parents’ indebtedness to the director, etc.)?
9. The third-person narrator, until Gregor dies, tells the story from Gregor’s perspective. How does that perspective affect our experience as readers? What difference does it make that we don’t know what the other character’s are thinking? How likely are we to trust Gregor’s interpretations of his family’s actions?
10. How does Gregor’s relationship to his sister change over the course of the story?
11. What is the charwoman’s attitude toward Gregor and his family? What do you make of it?
12. What is the significance of the novella’s final paragraph, in which Mr. and Mrs. Samsa turn their attention to Grete’s marital prospects?