



Sample Annotated Bibliography

Prompt #4: “In some stories, characters come into conflict with the culture in which they live.”

Working thesis:

Gregor Samsa’s physical transformation into a vermin is a physical manifestation of his already alienated state and demonstrates how his family viewed him as a thing instead of a son or brother that they loved.

Kafka, F. (1990). *The metamorphosis*. New York, NY: Scribner Paperback Fiction.

The Metamorphosis begins when Gregor Samsa wakes up and discovers he has been transformed into a large insect. The story tells how he and his family deal with his transformation, which a focus on the dehumanization that Gregor faces in his job and his family role. Gregor attempts to communicate, but cannot and, isolated and misunderstood, he slowly deteriorates. Kafka uses Gregor’s transformation into an insect as a metaphor for how modern life squashes our ability to interrelate with others and create meaning in our lives.

Ryan, S. (2007). Franz Kafka’s Die Verwandlung: Transformation, metaphor, and the perils of assimilation. *Seminar: A Journal of Germanic Studies*, 43(1), 1-18.

This source by Simon Ryan explores how Kafka’s Jewishness created anxiety about his body, particularly since anti-Semitism pervaded his Czech culture. The stereotypes of Jewishness did not allow Jewish people to easily assimilate into the dominant culture, though many Jews attempted to do so. Gregor Samsa’s transformation into an insect is a metaphor of the power and pervasiveness of anti-Semitism and the inability of a Jewish man to fully assimilate. The insect

body symbolizes how Jewish people were viewed and Gregor's quiet extinction foreshadows the Holocaust. This source helps to define how body image, coupled with Jewishness, can alienate a person from the culture around him.

Sokel, W. H. (1983). From Marx to myth: The structure and function of self-alienation in Kafka's *Metamorphosis*. *Literary Review*, 26(4), 485-496.

Walter Sokel discusses the concept of self-alienation and how Kafka's story represents it in a literal way. Using a Marxist analysis, Sokel shows how labor, as it is defined in the story, is structured within a capitalist system where the worker -- Gregor -- is alienated from the product of his labor. Therefore, his work has no meaning to him. However, describing this as a "mythical setting," Sokel shows how Gregor assumes guilt for his inability to provide labor and, as a result, dies without ever recovering his humanity. This source will help define why Gregor turned into an insect and how the economic system alienated him from himself and his family.