Reading, Seeing, and Teaching Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* in Translation

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In an era of plagues that have kept many living in intermittent periods of isolation, teaching Franz Kafka's *Die Verwandlung* (*The Metamorphosis*) is timely as it addresses issues concerning family responses to sudden illness. Given modern man's predicament, Ebrahim Estarami asks, "Why the human has become a wild beast entrapped in unimaginable issues such as suicide, manslaughter, homicide and madness, corruption and a dehumanized humanity?" (101). Among other German authors, Estarami identifies with Johann J. W. Heitze's focus on the novella's roots of narrating new experiences of human nature (104). The novella is an exceptional retelling of a crisis of an unheard story (Gailus 759). Jeffrey High compares Schiller's novellas to those of Kant and Kleist: "[…] unlike the majority of his immediate German literary predecessors, he seeks not to condemn the monsters he creates but to encourage audiences to understand them as a way of better understanding their own situations" (191). There is a literary tradition to tell the stories of monsters, as High explains, "Eighteenth-century science had thus created literary monsters, and the monsters were human" (192). Some scholars question if novellas are even written in the subsequent periods of the modern era; however, Henry H. H. Remak mentions Kafka's novellas together with Musil's as works that seem "to move back in the direction of the fairy tale" (278). Ryder, too, argues that there are examples of novellas written in the twentieth century (xiii). Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* shares many of the same stylistic and structural aspects of novellas. Given the Germanness of the reshaped genre from thirteenth-century Italian novellas and their brevity of ten to one hundred pages (Ryder, Foreword), novellas can easily be included in a German course. Southern Illinois University (SIU) includes Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* as part of a second semester introductory German language and culture course (German 101b) because of its timelessness, the length of the text, and the fascinating writing style of Kafka. Carl Jung's ideas concerning transformation help the reader decode Gregor's inner reflections after his physical transformation.

This essay explores teaching Franz Kafka's novella *The Metamorphosis* in German 101b, the second part of the German 101 two-semester series. In German 101b students receive an overview of German historical developments together with the acquisition of elementary-level written and spoken German. At this level of instruction, some German literature and some extended profiles of classical German composers are taught in English translation. The English translation of Kafka is necessary because the students in 101 have not yet reached a proficiency level to work with more complex texts. By the end German 101b, our students have

achieved the following German language abilities: 1) an active German vocabulary of approximately 1000–1500 words; and 2) the ability to read, write, speak, and comprehend basic German that uses modal verbs, the imperative, separable prefix verbs, interrogative pronouns, and the nominative, accusative, and dative cases. Reading Kafka in English is not the only reading done for class. Teaching some culture in English is conducted alongside a variety of literary and non-literary cultural texts in the target language from the chapters of Robert Di Donato's textbook *Deutsch: Na Klar!*. The German readings are much shorter and appropriate for beginning students. Writing and reading exercises including skimming and close reading exercises help our students develop their reading ability in German. Kafka's novella builds on other texts taught in German during the semester, such as Leonhard Thorna's intercultural story of migrant salespeople in Germany, "Die Obstverkäuferin" (168), and the comic genre, "Die Kulturszene in Deutschland" (121), to introduce the names of German cultural icons. Inclusion of Kafka's text complements the cultural material in German, thus allowing beginning German language students to make more nuanced cultural comparisons.

Ruth A. Kauffmann states that students of German systematically develop their ability to read literature by taking first and second years of college German. However, by the third year, they do not often have "enough experience with either the target foreign language (L2) or enough knowledge about the cultural and historical context of the author in question to understand even the simplest L2 texts" (396). Her observations followed the comprehension-oriented models that dominated the discussions of reading and literacy in the 1980s and early 1990s, such as Krashen & Terrell, and her reading-to-write scholarship, which helped to give shape to curriculum design concerning the literacy and language learning discussions of the 2000s. At the time there was a lack of critical framing at all teaching levels which resulted in instructor-centered discussion of literary texts. In response, a multiliteracies framework is now encouraged in second-language instruction which is also made possible with the advent of digital media. The multiliteracies in Di Donato's *Deutsch: Na Klar!* that are employed in teaching second-semester German include a variety of genres, such as videos, poetry, chronological city histories, excerpts of longer literary texts, surveys, and graphic art with dialogue thematizing German daily life. SIU's second-semester German includes Peter Kuper's graphic novel adaptation of Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* to supplement reading Kafka's novella in an effort to reach out to our twenty-first century graphic-reading students across disciplines by showing them its resonance worldwide.

Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* is taught to introductory German students who have not had German in high school and may not be familiar with German culture outside of German representations in American pop culture or through their own German familial and midwestern immigrant and religious traditions. Established

forms of German culture (authors, composers, cultural history) are for the most part new to our students given that students enrolled in introductory German represent a wide variety of academic fields from the campus at large. Rarely do German majors begin their study of German in our introductory series. More often, our German majors begin at SIU with a background in German in high school or community college. Hence, teaching these students in first year German may be our only chance to introduce German culture and its impact on music, world literature, and popular culture. However, German's UCC (University Core Curriculum) courses in translation have lasting influence on students, as informal conversations with former students attest. Working within the framework of possibilities at each university must be considered to keep humanities and language courses from disappearing. For that reason, SIU German submitted an application in the 2023-2024 academic year for the German 100 sequence to be readmitted to the humanities pillar of the core curriculum and it has been a success.

While reading Kafka alone may not motivate students to continue with German or literature, Kafka's text is an artifact that helps our students gain an understanding of the richness of German-language cultural products. The majority of our students who enroll in first-year German are driven by both some interest in the language as well as 101's ability to count for the UCC requirement for the humanities. The remainder of the students within the College of Liberal Arts have a one-year language requirement. For those introductory students who go on to major or minor in German, they may encounter the text again in an upper-level course such as German 337 ("The Germans II"), in which Kafka's *Die Verwandlung* is read in the target language. *The Metamorphosis* was first included in second-semester German in the spring 2024 semester in honor of the one-hundredth anniversary of Kafka's death (1883–1924).

This essay addresses the way that teaching the multiliteracies of Kuper's graphic novel alongside Kafka's novella can help students experience the lasting cultural reverberations of German literary culture. Gregor's family story and his metamorphosis into an "ungeheures Ungeziefer" (monstrous insect) is grounded in ambiguity. Kafka wrote to his publisher that he wanted to intentionally keep the type of *Insekt* undefined and visibly unrepresented, as Iris Bruce explains (*Illness* 177–178). Kuper's remake is highly acclaimed as representative of the uncanny situation in which Gregor finds himself within his sudden existential crisis. Although Kuper's adaptation is grounded in Kafka's literary text, the visible representation goes against Kafka's intention. However, Kuper's adaptation is an example for our students to experience German cultural resonance within the popular culture of graphic art. Bruce generally states: "Kafka's writings are a good example of how iconic texts that used to belong to 'high culture' can be 'reborn' in popular culture in generically different formats" (*Popular* 245). Dynamic texts such as Kuper's appeal to a wide range of readers in the German 101 sequence. In

classroom discussions, Kuper's graphic novel can be employed to help reach out to a broad representation of students with various learning needs. My paper is informed by visually- and structurally-oriented studies of *The Metamorphosis.* One such example is Vladimir Nabokov's widely available online Cornell University lectures (1980) which Margit M. Sinka's article in the MLA series *Approaches to Teaching Kafka's Short Fiction* (1995) builds on. Other such concepts that inform my paper are novella theory and Jungian concepts of transformation. I demonstrate how Kafka's *Metamorphosis* can be approached through the intersection of texts that invite a rereading of modernist material that is over a century old.

SIU is a rural midwestern public R1 university with a total student enrollment of over 11,000 which provides student access and inclusion. German is one specialization within the Languages, Cultures, and International Studies Program of the new School of Languages and Linguistics as a result of university-wide restructuring that began in 2020 that led to the dissolution of the Department of Languages, Cultures, and International Studies. In fall 2024, three sections of German 101a were offered for the first time since 2019. With a total of thirty-two students enrolled, the semester marks the largest enrollment in German 101a since prior to the reorganization. First-year German enrollments declined when the two largest departments within the college were removed through restructuring to new colleges without a language requirement. Fall 2024 enrollment in first-year German experienced immediate growth and has nearly doubled since fall 2023.

The Logistics of Teaching Kafka in Translation within a German Language Course

On the syllabus for second-semester German, Susan Bernofsky's translation of Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* is noted under required texts, but, given the economic limitations of some of our students, we have allowed students to use other editions. Each Friday a third to half of the class time is devoted to discussion of German language culture in English led by a teaching assistant. Six of these Fridays are reserved for discussions of Kafka's novella which is covered within the second half of the semester. Other discussions focus on composers. In preparation, students are assigned readings along with the accompanying Kafka worksheet. There are six Kafka worksheets to encourage students to read closely for detail which also facilitates classroom discussions. In a recent *PMLA* article that addresses the foreign language discipline and Artificial Intelligence (AI), Eduardo Ledesma mentions close reading as one of our strengths in the humanities which can broadly benefit student education and development (536). The culture worksheets were the main tool that measured student learning about the novel, but there were also questions concerning Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* included on tests as well as on the general education assessment that assessed the overall student learning in the

course (see appendix I). In the following, I report on the material for six discussions including the introduction.

Introduction to Kafka and *The Metamorphosis*

In week seven of the semester before the students begin reading Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*, there is a brief introduction to the material. Whereas Nabokov begins his lectures on Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* philosophically, our program provides a basic timeline for Kafka's life to chronologically place his work. *The Cambridge Companion to Kafka* provides a chronology to make students aware of autobiographical connections (Preece xvi–xix). In addition to the troubled relationship between Gregor and his father and Kafka and his father, at the end of section two shortly before Gregor's father throws apples at him, Gregor's breathing problems from his childhood are mentioned (Kafka 83). Kafka became sick with tuberculosis in 1917 within two years of the publication of *The Metamorphosis* (1915). Kafka's illness was not brought on by fighting as a soldier, whereas Gregor's illness may be rooted in his military service which the framed picture of him understatedly suggests. Recently, in the introduction to Bernofsky's translation, David Cronenberg speaks of Gregor's illness having more generally resulted from aging (17).

Pointing out additional personal information concerning Kafka's biography—such as belonging to the minority of German-speaking Jews within the Austro-Hungarian Empire—is significant in understanding Kafka's oeuvre. Miriam Jaffe discusses Kafka's secular Eastern Europe Jewish identity that Philip Roth modeled as a writer critical of European Jewish fathers (73). Kafka's writing may be viewed through the perspective of an immigrant's son in Central Europe who tackles his own questions of humanity in an absurdist comical way, such as in *The Metamorphosis* (Jaffe 72). Business that Kafka describes in *The Metamorphosis* is an avenue into life of the hierarchy of workers that he may have been familiar with from his father's own business endeavors in Prague. Prague as Austro-Hungarian's industrial center was located then in a jointly ruled constitutional monarchy between 1867 and 1918. For many of our students, this may be one of their first views of family life in Central Europe in the early twentieth century. Speaking broadly of this history provides students with a geopolitical, economic, and societal framework for the story.

Lastly, this first discussion is also a good place to begin to introduce the genre of the German novella given its *Sonderform* (special form) in the nineteenth century. Heinrich Henel explains how the German novella comes from the *Kunstmärchen* (literary fairy tale) because of the poetic form, but it does not signify anything about the reality of the event at a time when the rest of Western Europe was more focused on the real thus making this special literary form distinctive

(444). Andreas Gailus calls Kafka's text an urban novella in which the city does not constitute so much a physical place as a carnivalesque place (774). Gailus sees novellas as more often in a border space or a no-man's-land, which he demonstrates by looking at the landscapes in a survey of novellas. There is a wealth of scholarship on novellas, and Gailus's psychoanalytic reading of novellas in general is a highly convincing place to start. In addition to Gailus, I find Henel's lecture from his teaching especially helpful in fleshing out the distinctions between an *Erzählung* (short story), a novella, and a novel. Throughout the following discussions, I have included information about the genre for others to consult for their own teaching. Kafka wrote many short prose pieces with his novella, *The Metamorphosis*, being one of the most widely known. His style here and elsewhere is an austere and precise everyday language shaped by his German law studies (Scholz *Motivik* 91).

First Discussion: Overview of Kafka's Novella and Animal Symbols

The first larger discussion of the story is in week eight of the course on the day that the students' first Kafka worksheet is due and after they have read to the end of the paragraph in which the sister begins to cry after Gregor's states he will not let the general manager in (page 35 in Bernofsky's translation). It is an appropriate time to begin to talk about the animal metaphor following the reading of Gregor's incredible physical transformation. For background target language instruction for students, writing the words "ungeheures Ungeziefer" (monstrous insect) on the board or on a PowerPoint slide along with other German words Kafka could have used in the first mention of Gregor's transformed state but did not builds on beginning students' language skills while helping them learn more about the protagonist Gregor's physical form. An "Ungeziefer" has also been referred to as vermin in several scholarly texts (See Bruce, Duttlinger, and Gross). Some words that Kafka could have chosen are: *das Insekt* (insect), *der Käfer* (beetle), *das Krabbeltier* (bug), *die Wanze* (bug), *der Schädling* (pest), *die Parasiten* (parasite), *das Pack* (vermin), *das Geschmeiß* (vermin), *das Gesindel* (vermin), or *der Schmarotzer* (parasite). In the translated story, the word "dung beetle" is used by the charwoman (94). Scholz discusses the possible type of beetle (stag beetle, cockchafer, black beetle, or *Geotrupidae*) (Scholz *Erzählung* 15), and the cover of Bernofsky's 2014 translation somewhat resembles a picture of a beetle on the front cover. Knowing which type of beetle is less important than helping students to recognize the dismissive way Gregor is treated within his family after the onset of his transformed physical state. Bruce explains, by drawing on Susan Sontag's idea from *Illness as Metaphor* that the more general a disease, the better suited it is to represent societal and ethical dilemmas (*Illness* 176). According to Henel, novellas

bring up problems that are not solved, and the subject of the novella is useless but represents other situations (440).

Kafka's text uses the animal metaphor throughout the book. Mentioning the thematic thread early on can help students make connections later in their reading. For example, the father's hissing noise before the end of section one upsets Gregor (50), and the image of the lady in all furs that conceals her human body in Gregor's room (22), for which Gregor has made the gilt frame (34), and desperately hangs on to when his sister and his mom are cleaning out his room (77). Like all animals, Gregor possesses special abilities, as he is now able to walk on the walls and hang from the ceiling (71).

The animal metaphor is also an important characteristic of a novella, as "a well-defined body of imagery and symbolism which serves to unify and reinforce the meaning of the story" (Ryder xxiv). For Ryder, this symbolism is essential to the narrative and it is predominant in many novellas. A second characteristic of the novella that is appropriate to bring up in the overview concerns the dream: "When Gregor Samsa woke up one morning from troubled dreams, he found himself transformed right there on his bed into some sort of monstrous insect" (Kafka 21). High explains that losing one's identity and then creating another out of desperate acts is isolating economically and socially, as novella's characters react instead of decide (194). The narrator as an observer confirms Gregor's state: "It was no dream" (Kafka 22). These statements lead the reader to believe not only that the dream is over, but also that Gregor is awake and now experiencing real life. The detail further follows the characteristic of novellas as Gregor's story is a unique central event that has taken place.

According to Jung, transformation of a person follows death in rebirth and can happen in a number of ways. Natural transformation (*individuation*) is one such way that happens in dreams (130). For Jung, inner transformation and rebirth can result in another being who is strange and uncanny, such as a twin or a shadow. He describes shadows as underachievers (123). This second being is an interlocutor/soul that one might communicate with by talking to oneself, or the second voice can be understood as an inner voice, such as God or ego (Jung 131). Jung's general description helps the reader of *The Metamorphosis* to understand the function of Gregor's inner conversations with himself once physically transformed. Gregor's conversations reflect a great deal about his earlier pre-transformed life and allow him to point out the contrast between then and now.

Gregor's thoughts are not presented chronologically but in a non-linear narration which provides additional evidence that the text is a novella. As Henel points out, the novella, unlike the *Erzählung*, does not follow a chronological order (438). The consciousness of the narrator is where the action takes place; the story is shaped by his own consciousness (440).

Both aspects of the novella are demonstrated through Gregor's reflection of the past. Gregor communicates to the reader through his self-dialogue until shortly before his death. Gregor's inability to communicate in a human language can also be considered alongside Jung's ideas concerning human-animal transformation. Gregor's ability to think demonstrates his hybrid-humanity to readers and signifies that his bodily change is misleading. The transformation shifts him into becoming the "ungeheures Ungeziefer" as his family wants to see him, since his body has weakened and he cannot financially support them.

As context for this discussion, Bernofsky writes in her translator note that the word metamorphosis evokes the idea of the process of a caterpillar becoming a butterfly or the fantasy from Greek mythology (126). However, Nabokov argues against the idea that the story should be seen as one example of fantasy in its departure from reality by pointing out that each person's subjectivity prevents one objective reality. His comments further underscore the description of Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* as a novella. Ryder generally also explains: "the happenings of the plot are often said to be extraordinary, unprecedented, even bizarre" (xviii). As a follow up in this initial class discussion one can ask: What similarities and differences there are between the function of animals in fairy tales or fables versus in *The Metamorphosis?* Citing Kafka's "A Little Fable," the anecdote or short story concerning the mouse's path to the cat is a good example to bring in the class to use as a basis for the discussion from Scholz's *Franz Kafka: Motivik und Sprache in exemplarischen Texten seiner Prosaminiaturen* (2008) ('Franz Kafka: Motifs and Language in Exemplary Texts of his Prose Miniatures'). Different from the novella, both fairy tales and fables are fantasy-imbued genres which include talking animals. In the stories, however, animals can be understood to offer guidance to humans.

Second Discussion: Three Sections of Novellas, Industry, and Kuper's 2004 Graphic Novel Adaptation

For the second discussion during week nine of the course, students will have read to the end of section I, page 52. Kafka's story *The Metamorphosis* has three parts which can be taught by following Nabokov's Cornell University lectures. Sections of his lecture could be read as a prompt to begin discussion or as a quick in-class writing prompt. Nabokov describes three sections of the plot with additional background information on each character and focuses on the physical in the story, such as the doors in the apartment. On this note, Heinrich von Kleist's *Das Erdbeben in Chili* (*The Earthquake in Chile*, 1807) is a novella with three parts (Henel 444). Whereas Kleist's novella has two main parts and a middle section that connects them, Kafka's three sections are more equally distributed as seen in Bernofsky's translation: thirty pages in section one; thirty-two pages in section two

and thirty-three pages in section three. The structure of the three parts to the story that Nabokov's lecture on Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* lays out is also memorable, as Nabokov stresses physical abuse that ends each section.

In the first section, industry is represented in the procurist/general manager who says he speaks for the company as well as for the Samsa family demanding an explanation for Gregor's behavior during his brief visit. In terms of the novella's structure, procurist/general manager might be seen structurally as a characteristic of the novella. Ryder explains that novellas have an intrusion of the irrational, a pervasive uncontrollable force (Ryder xxiii). In procurist/general manager's monologue he suggests the company thinks very little of Gregor and implies that he is not going to work because he steals from the company. He even criticizes Gregor's sales (Kafka 36). At this point in the novella, however, Gregor's family relies on his dependability to go to work to support them. Hence, they are kind to Gregor and want to heal him, as seen, for example, when his mother tells Grete to fetch the doctor, but the doctor does not come (Kafka 39). Henel states generally that the outside world has no answers for a subject's problems (440).

This is an appropriate time to introduce Peter Kuper's graphic novel, because his images depicting the procurist/general manager's visit to the Samsa residence capture the raw energy of Gregor's crisis. Kuper's graphic novel adaptation is a type of picture book. David Lewis elsewhere explains that, in general, a picture book shares words and pictures to communicate: "A picture book's 'story' is never found in the words alone, nor in the pictures, but emerges out of their mutual interanimation" (36). My idea to include Kuper stems from Frederick Luis Aldama's brief mention of Peter Kuper's 2004 graphic novel adaptation, *The Metamorphosis: The Illustrated Edition* featured in *STTCL*'s 2017 special issue on comics, "ReDrawing of Narrative Boundaries" (1). Kuper's adaptation conveys empathy through Gregor's story in a very accessible way for a twenty-first-century audience. Kuper explains that his adaptation is based on Kafka's words whether or not Kafka was a comics fan (5). Many of today's college readership have been exposed to illustrations during our "golden age of graphic novels" (Kick 1). Kuper's version works well as a guide to students through the description of the room, because it helps students get a sense of the confines in which Gregor and his family live. In the appendix, I provide a slide with my close readings and analysis of Kuper's graphic novel that could be used in teaching as a way to explain the connection between Kafka's and Kuper's texts. (See appendix II).

Gregor's thoughts are non-linear and at times difficult for students to follow. Using Kuper's text is meaningful because in Kuper's adaptation, Gregor's memories are complemented by images. An example comes when Gregor thinks about the rush and inconvenience of travel associated with his career that he continued in order to take care of his family's financial needs despite his deep

dissatisfaction with his job. In a series of frames, the reader sees Gregor's discussion with potential clients, Gregor eating food on the train, and Gregor climbing up the stairs exhausted after a long day of work while other salesmen relax and socialize (Kuper 10-11). Diagonally-aligned frames underline the tension as he thinks about his workday and how he feels compared to other salesmen whom he perceives as better off than himself.

Third discussion: Familial Violence

For the third discussion, students will have read until the middle of the second section to page 68 in the Bernofsky translation where Gregor describes his sister opening up the window every time she entered his room. Students will also have completed the third worksheet as homework in preparation. Familial violence is central to the plot of *The Metamorphosis*. Some of the bodily changes Gregor experiences are in part a result of beatings. Designating time in the third discussion during week ten of our class schedule to talk about the violence helps the students to recognize the family's brutality. One way to help students identify the darkness of the novella is by discussing the colors of the illustrations and the frames employed in Kuper's version as seen in the slide discussion of the graphic novel in appendix II.

As a follow up one could next teach the autobiographical aspect of Kafka's strained relationship with his father, a secular Jewish immigrant businessman in Prague, as communicated in his *Brief an den Vater* (*Letter to His Father*, 1919), a letter that was never delivered to his father. His father spoke German instead of Yiddish. Michael Kimmage explains that Kafka was raised alongside Christians and uprooted from his Eastern European grandparents' Jewish traditions in his societal yet generational isolation (28). Kafka's protagonists illustrate his situation comically and relatedly, "reality and fiction are delicately balanced, such that one can easily metamorphose into the other" (Kimmage 28–29). Kimmage further explains that "Kafka's letter charts the enormous influence of parents upon the imagination of their children, establishing the writer's task as liberation from parents and in his case as a son's liberation from his father: such liberation then becomes the freedom to write about the father" (27). Writing for Kafka was in defiance of his stronger father, and Kafka's protagonists are riddled with guilt due to the path he chooses (Jaffe 73).

In looking more closely at the examples of violence, the three parts of Kafka's novella show the way in which the violence escalates as identified by Nabokov. In section one of the story, Gregor's room is orderly, looking the same as it did prior to his transformation. Before Gregor's confrontation with the members of his family and the procurist/general manager from his work, Gregor

realizes that he is now an "ungeheures Ungeziefer," though when he thinks about his situation, he sees himself as a man as we see in the illustration in appendix II.

Kuper's images are particularly helpful to students to better follow the plot as it swings between Gregor's state of consciousness and the events at home during his new hybrid state as a "ungeheures Ungeziefer" who cognitively functions as a human being. Once Gregor opens the door for his employer, violence ensues when his father beats him. This section shows two perpetrators of violence against Gregor, his father at home and his supervisor at work. As the story continues to unfold, Gregor becomes less concerned with the bullying treatment from his supervisor, and his family takes center stage as his abuser.

Fourth Discussion: Section II of *The Metamorphosis*

For the fourth discussion, students will have read through the second section to page 85 and completed the fourth worksheet. In section two, when Gregor awakens in the evening from the beating, he thinks about how he provided for his family and prophetically worries that his situation may come to a tragic end. Hence, the teacher can talk to students about Gregor's behavior after the beating by asking the question: How does Gregor protect himself after his father pushes him? For protection from his father, Gregor crawls under the sofa where he sleeps. Gregor's concerns shift this section's focus, leading to the question: What does Gregor think about in section two? In the beginning of part two, the focus is on Gregor's relationship with his sister, Grete, as she takes on the role of his provider. While Gregor still has memories about his past professional successes, he begins to focus on the family by listening to them complain about him. Gregor's family could have used his transformation as an opportunity to build a relationship with him now that he is back home and no longer on the road for his sales job. Instead, Gregor's new situation does not endear his family to him, because the sight of him repulses them while they tend to some of his physical needs. His sister instead of his mother cleans his room, and his father shows little regard for his son in his transformed state. They are oblivious to Gregor's ability to understand them.

As this second section progresses, Gregor's perceived relationship to his sister changes. He notices this *Wendepunkt* (turning point) about a month after his transformation, when the sister leaves the door open as she races to open the window while she is in his room (Kafka 67). Ryder explains that generally a *Wendepunkt* moment in the novella is a reversal that reveals a character's true intentions (xxii). The family gives up on the idea of Gregor healing to return to work, as they remove his personal belongings and transform his room into storage without his consent. This is well demonstrated by the joint moving venture of Gregor's sister and mother to remove his furniture. When the mother protests his sister's plans, Gregor tries to save the picture in his room of the woman with the

fur muff that makes her arms vanish (Kafka 77). This animal reference is symbolic imagery that reinforces the story of Gregor's physical transformation. During their work, Grete and her mother talk about Gregor instead of speaking to him, and the mother faints when she sees Gregor in his transformed state on the wall. Gregor then demonstrates his human compassion through his attempts to help Grete get medicine for their mother before his father beats Gregor a second time. This time his father beats him with apples and one lodges in his back. Nabokov discusses who is cruelest to Gregor, his father or his sister. The first part ends when his father beats him, whereas his sister ultimately betrays him by the end of the story (76). Students can become involved by responding to the question: Are Grete's actions betrayal or sibling rivalry?

In these passages the violence enacted is home grown. It is a very introspective moment in the text in which Gregor spends his time watching out the window, examining the pleasant and unpleasant periods over the course of his life. Losing his sight is his third sense to go following his ability to talk and taste. It is really the fourth sense he loses, if you consider his loss of human touch, which Gregor experiences from his earliest transformed moment when he experiences different sort of touching abilities than what were formerly possible. Margit Sinka raises the point about the senses—how Gregor cannot be understood and how he is to be perceived in his present grotesque hybrid state (109). While she concentrates on structure, specifically his diminishing range of motion, it is the loss of his humanity which is at stake, and it is important that this is conveyed to the students. After Gregor's illness begins, the transformation of his room parallels the altered relationship to his family and the lingering disease instantly destroys his body—such as his ability to speak—and ultimately destroys his humanity. With an absence of conversation between Gregor and his family, their relationship becomes one miscommunication upon another. The room in which Gregor lives is depleted, paralleling his deteriorating relationship with his family as well as his physical state, such as losing the ability of his senses. The struggle that Gregor wrestles with now is communication with his family about his needs and how he can fit into the family in his new role. Marie-Louise Von Franz discusses the general impact on one's surroundings: "those in the immediate surrounding do not like a person to change, for that means that they also have to re-adapt" (6). Gregor's struggle to communicate the way he once could before he became a hybrid being continues until the end of Kuper's adaptation.

In the third section, which begins with Gregor's permanently marked scar and Gregor in a state of deterioration, the family tolerates Gregor's alienated existence in his room until his death. As his ability to move is restricted with the apple in his back, he is no longer a threat. The family opens the door at night so that he can listen to their conversation. For Jung, physical change represents an internal struggle (122). Gregor is so conflicted, however, that he has adopted the social

expectations that others have of him. Their act of opening the door acknowledges that he can hear them, making their behavior even more reprehensible. Despite his situation, Gregor worries about the family and is upset about the filth in his room. His mother starts to clean it, and she and Grete have a fight about cleaning responsibilities.

A charwoman is hired to clean the flat, and she takes over responsibility of cleaning up after Gregor. She is simple and strong. Her introduction into Gregor's life upsets him, but at this point, he can only hiss (Kuper 59). Gregor tries to attack her, and afterwards in Kuper's graphic novel he looks as if she too beats him. However, as Bernofsky's translation explains, the charwoman was protecting herself from Gregor's intended attack, and when he retreated, she put the chair down instead of hitting him (Kafka 96). His room becomes a storage for the Samsas when they take on three paying lodgers whom they feed while they neglect and starve him.

Fifth Discussion: The *Metamorphosis* as a Novella

For the fifth discussion, students will have read through the second section to page 101 and completed the fifth worksheet. In this discussion, any aspects of the novella can be reviewed and explained by consulting Remak's list of structural characteristics of the novella: extraordinary occurrence, novelty, object symbols, report matter-of-fact, tension, crisis, *Pointe, Wendepunkt*, release of conflict (2-3). There may also be time for additional questions concerning the readings.

Sixth Discussion: Death and Transformation

Week eleven is an appropriate time to talk about death and transformation given that Gregor is now dying of starvation and his family does not seem to notice or care (Kafka 92). After dinner, the sister plays music in the kitchen and the lodgers invite her to play music for them. During and after the dinner are the only times that the father has facial expressions anything other than anger. He looks eager to please the lodgers, is very happy when they like the food, and allows his daughter to play the violin for them (Kuper 62–63).

Gregor is so deeply moved by his sister's music that true to character he believes he is being inconsiderate and no longer wants to hide himself (Kafka 99). While his physicality may reject the notion of being fixed, his inner goodness is steadfast, and his selfish family remains "in essence the same from beginning to end" (Ryder xvii). Ryder explains it is common in novellas that characters are fixed despite experiencing crisis, suffering, and being destroyed (Ryder xvii). Imagining that his sister will want to play violin for him alone, he leaves his room to talk to her and is discovered by the lodgers. The narrator asks: "Was he a beast, that music

so moved him?" (Kafka 101). This scene is important to discuss and can begin with the question: How do you answer the text's question? Grete publicly displays her lack of compassion at this point calling him a beast, though he looks anything but ferocious (Kuper 107). She acts in exact opposition to his motivation to go see her. He wants to be near her, as her music performance seduces her brother to his death.

Now that Gregor's physical condition has worsened, Grete argues that the creature is not Gregor because her brother would have left their family voluntarily. The family has shown some sense of responsibility for Gregor by allowing him to stay at home after his transformation until this point in the story. Ultimately his sister states to her father: "You just have to let go of the notion that this thing is Gregor. The real disaster is that we have believed this for so long" (Kafka 107). However, Gregor's interest in music demonstrates his humanity. Nabokov sees this differently. He argues that Gregor does not value music and suggests the story makes a point concerning animals' interest in music (99). However, Gregor does think enough of music to want to pay for music lessons for his sister, and he crawls out to his death to hear her play music once last time. Even though his family is not *menschlich*, or "humane," enough to recognize it, Gregor has always longed to be accepted by the family even now in his current state. He goes to the room where his sister is playing to express himself the only way he still can: through his presence.

At the end of the story Gregor can only hiss; therefore, the reader must access his thoughts through the narrator's description. Gregor's ability to speak in language comprehensible to the reader is gone. He returns to the room to die, and Grete slams the door once he is back inside his room. The narrator tells the reader Gregor's thoughts. After Gregor dies, next to his body is the portrait of him as a soldier in Kuper's version (70–71). Asking students to respond to the military connection may help students with family in the military or ROTC students to better relate to the reading. A possible question is: What is the text suggesting by including information about Gregor's past military service? The inclusion of Gregor's portrait is subtle, yet it is the graphic that hints his illness may stem from his military service. A photo of Gregor's time as a lieutenant is also included in Kafka's version, but it is placed in the hall of the flat. His service is never discussed in the story. The order depicted in the portrait contrasts his defeated grotesque bodily form that lies motionless on the floor.

When the charwoman finds Gregor dead in the morning, the family thanks God. The charwoman, who is used to being given unpleasant work, takes care of his corpse disposal, arrangements typically left to the next of kin. She is not bothered by cleaning up after him. In response, the father suggest that he will fire her later and kicks out the lodgers and the family takes the day off from work and leaves the apartment, seemingly leaving their troubles behind. It is here where I ask the students if they are surprised by the family's response to Gregor's death and if

the family's response differs from our own cultural tradition. After leaving, the father is happy again; they speak of moving to a better situated location; and the parents notice how physically beautiful Grete has become.

The last line of written text is a remark about Grete's body which upon reflection contrasts with the demise of her brother. This is a third point of discussion to see how the students interpret the final scene by asking: How is Grete's body described compared to Gregor's and what could the description mean? Estarami notes in general that "Kafka's realm . . . is a world of nihilism and alienation wherein humans are hopeless and suffer from despair and depression" (99). Her stretch may be seen as a victory stance of the little sister over the big brother. Nabokov's reading of Gregor's sister as the cruelest to Gregor is supportable when considering his sister's action together with Remak's discussion of the *Pointe*, a frequent ironic twist in the last or penultimate sentence of a novella (2). In the novella, Grete suppresses her mother's affection for her brother by scolding her not to clean the room. She is apathetic towards her starving brother, and she advocates that the creature is not Gregor. However, Grete stretching at the end of the story is the way forward for Gregor's family. She embodies the hope of the family for a more carefree future unbound by caring for her sick brother. While that may be, the ending does not offer final answers. As Ryder ends his general conclusion: "The *Novelle* seems to say that the human condition has meaning and that the remarkable things which happen to the characters of its story are significant beyond their isolated context. At the same time, however, it gives no covering interpretation or ultimate answer. The writer does not identify his vision. The reader is wiser, but he is not in possession of the whole truth" (xxviii). Talking to the students about the development of Grete once the story moves outside into the light, as well as Gregor's death in the early morning light, facilitates student understanding at the end of the story.

While Grete's stretch is beautiful, so too is Gregor's death depicted by Kuper as a lonely but spiritually poignant moment in time as the sun shines in his window. Gregor is arguably pictured saint-like, which is a reading that Nabokov long ago dismissed, given that Kafka was not religious (Nabokov 70). He calls Gregor "tragically absurd" as he dies trying to be among the absurd world around him (Nabokov 69). Ryder writes that the short story is a more appropriate genre for "the conviction that the universe is random and human existence absurd" (xiv). In contrast to his colleague, Remak calls the direction of Kafka's and Musil's novellas "the future of the novella, if there is to be one" (281).

Concluding Essay Remarks

The Metamorphosis is Kafka's response to living up to the demands of family life in modern society. The Samsas are not isolated in their struggle to

balance work and family and in allowing the values of industry to shape their opinion of their own family members. The young professional Gregor in unable to live up to these expectations because of his body. Gregor's story of his withdrawal from his responsibilities makes for an unbelievable, extraordinary novella.

Our current students have openly discussed how they have been affected by the social and physical isolation that accompanied the Covid pandemic, and their experiences have given them particular sensitivity to Gregor Samsa's situation of a sudden onset illness that leaves him alienated. In Gregor's new state, he depends on his family more than he had previously as a young professional. Gregor's physical change affects his daily existence except for his ensuing goodness and love for his family. The lingering disease that instantly destroys his human body ultimately extinguishes his humanity and highlights his family's true disposition. Specifically, his family rejects him after his physical breakdown and withdrawal from the working world.

Whereas Kafka's novella, *The Metamorphosis* does not answer Estarami's question—why humans have become entrapped—it provides an example of a family's dehumanized humanity in response to Gregor's crisis. Gregor's alienation helps us to reflect on our own recent period of living through isolation. The richness of Kafka's novella speaks to us directly and is illustrated through Kuper's graphic novel adaptation.

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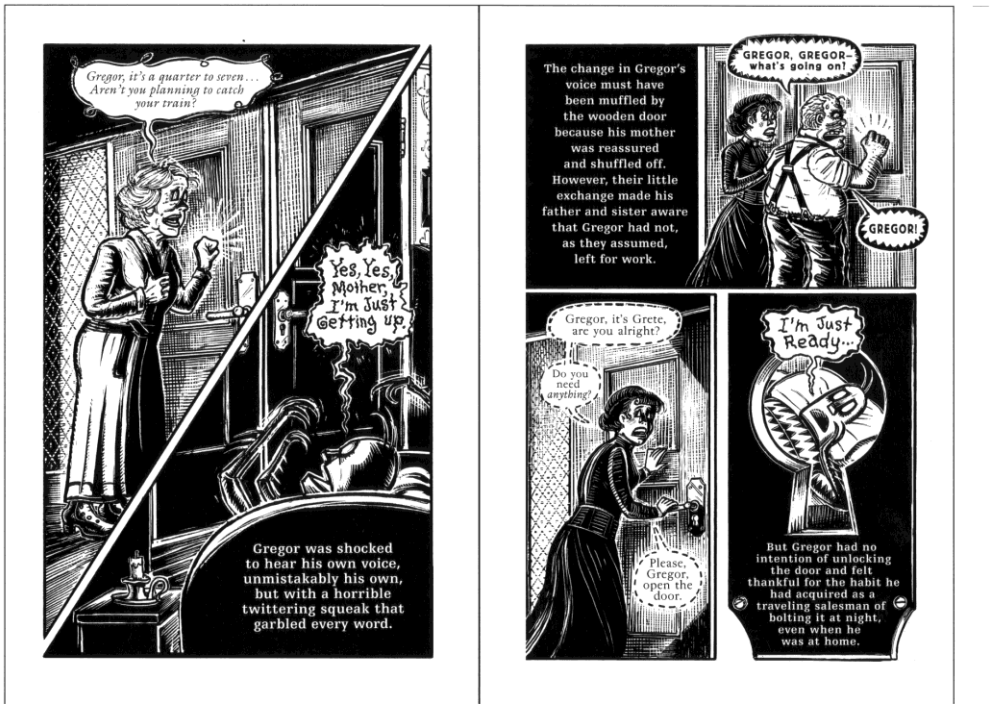
Appendix I: Data from the General Education Assessment

Data collected from the General Education Assessment administered in the beginning and at the end of the second semester German demonstrates the students' acquired knowledge concerning Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*. The assessment for German 101 gathers data regarding the advancement of enrolled students' German language skills and the cultural historical information for the core curriculum report. There are fourteen assessment questions on the assessment and one of the questions relating to Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* is: "What role does familial violence play Kafka's *The Metamorphosis?"* The open-ended questions allowed students to describe what they know of the plot from Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* before and after reading the novella.

Of the responses, three students did not answer the question; and five of the students who had some familiarity with the novella prior to the German course had more detailed responses by the end of the semester, as they were able to cite specific acts of violence by the family against Gregor, such as the father physically pushing Gregor, Gregor transforming through the stress inflicted on him to support the family financially, and the family's exploitation of Gregor. The other five students who were unable to answer Kafka questions at the beginning of the semester did so in detail at the end and made autobiographical connections between the story and Kafka in discussing violence; reflected on the father's physical violence again Gregor; perceived their familial violence as a form of neglect of Gregor even before his metamorphosis; identified the themes of alienation, abandonment, and dehumanization of Gregor post his transformation.

Appendix II: Copies of Power Points Slides and Instructor Analysis of Peter Kuper's Graphic Novel *The Metamorphosis*

Notes: Kuper's book starts with the narrator's words in white on a black background, setting the framework for the transformation: "When Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from disturbing dreams, he found himself transformed…" (7). No other image accompanies the words on this page conveying a feeling of dread, building on Gregor's nightmares, and sequencing into Gregor's waking up to his transformed state. Kuper's images depict him as an "ungeheures Ungeziefer," without inserting the words to explain his transformed state, and the transformation itself is not depicted. Gregor is in a balloon circle at the edge of the page that seems to signify he will tell his own story (8). To bring attention to the story's narration, ask students how Kuper's images tell the story following his transformation.



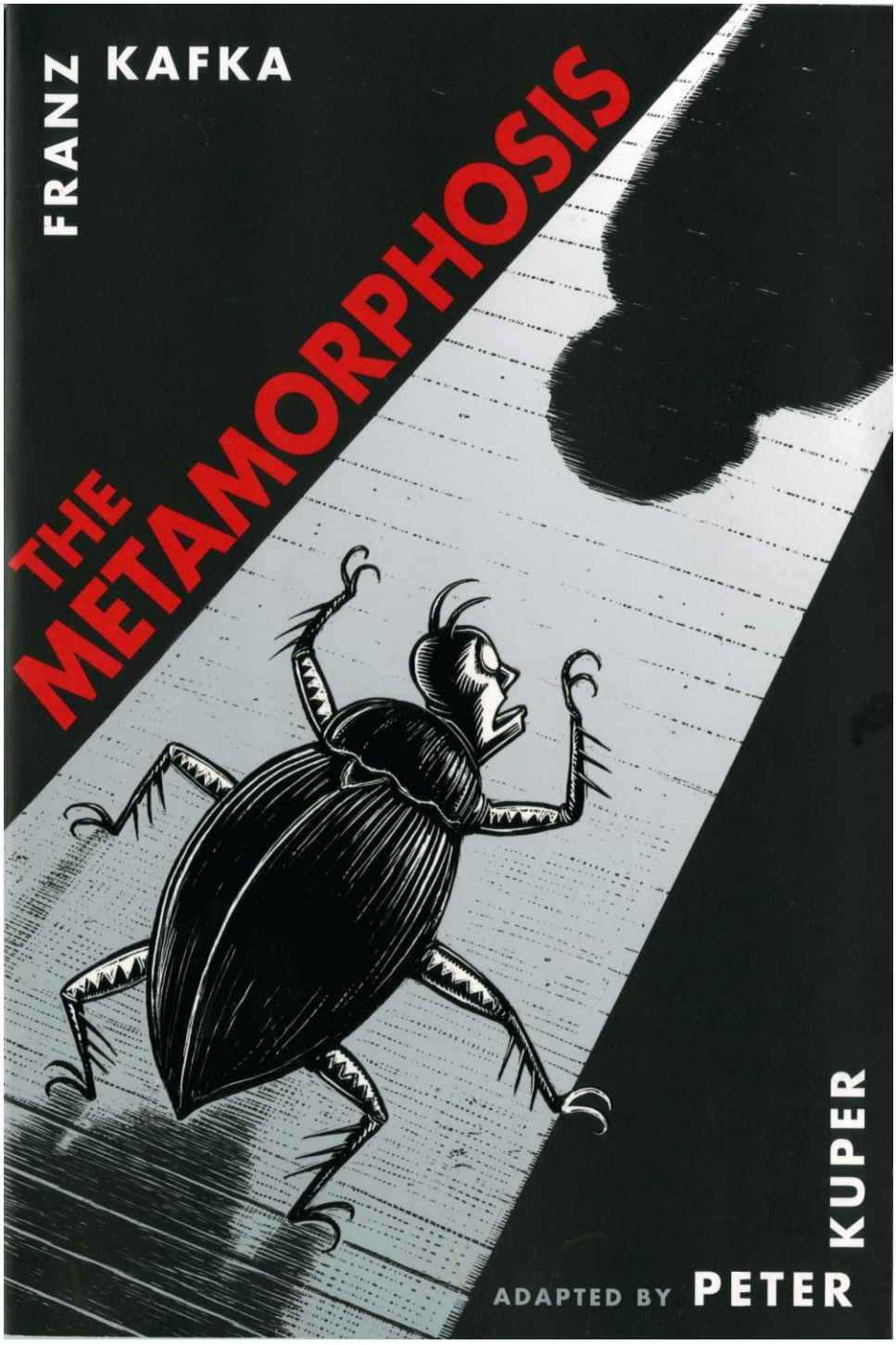
Notes: A stylistic element to point out in the above image of the mother knocking is that the panels are diagonally cut in half (Kuper 16). Diagonal lines symbolize tension, according to David A. Beronä in his analysis of another of Kuper's works, *The System* (1996) (25). One half shows the hall where his mother stands outside his room. The other half shows Gregor's garbled response in a jagged word balloon which conveys his squeaking response. This panel contains a circle

that narrates Gregor's own internal response to hearing his alien voice. Every time he tries to respond from this point onward, his words are in this type of balloon.

Kuper's above images depict when Gregor's family comes to his closed door to see why he is delayed in getting up for work. However, no one understands him, and he cannot move. The first of these panels pictures his mother. Ask students how the mother's words are conveyed when speaking to Gregor (16–17). The tone of her words is loving, as pictured by the rounded, flowing word bubble as she talks to him (16). This type of bubble is associated with the mother throughout the novel except when she enters his room to clean it, and he is surprised to see her (55). Ask students to also compare how the mother's feelings for her son are expressed in the novella. Given that the exchanges with each of the family members are brief, the students can see that Kuper's signage underscores the way that the family members treat Gregor.

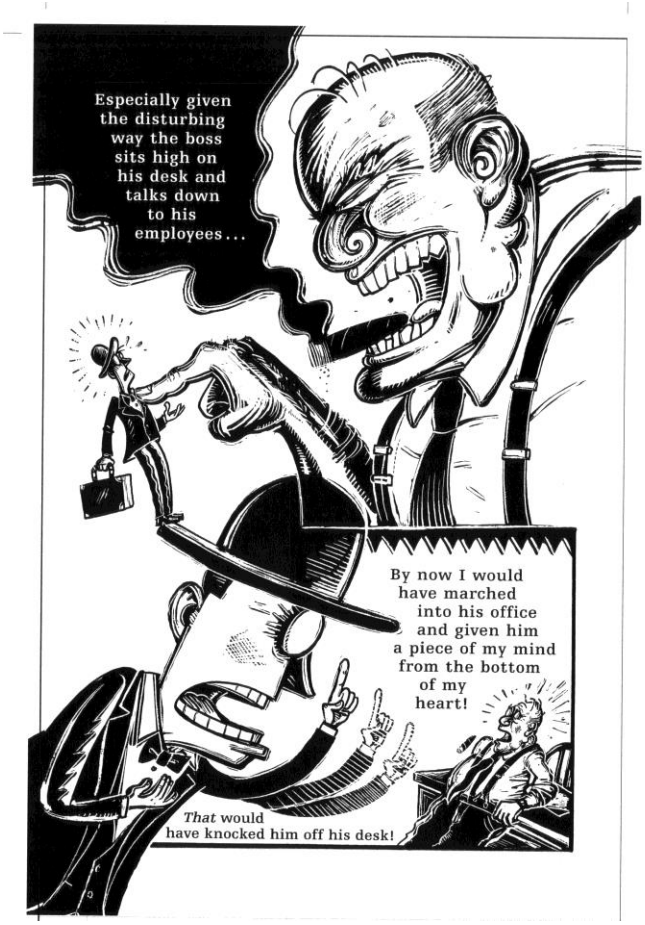
Notes: Before these scenes from Kuper's graphic novel depicted above where Gregor tries to open the door, the doorbell rings (24–25). The word "ring" appears

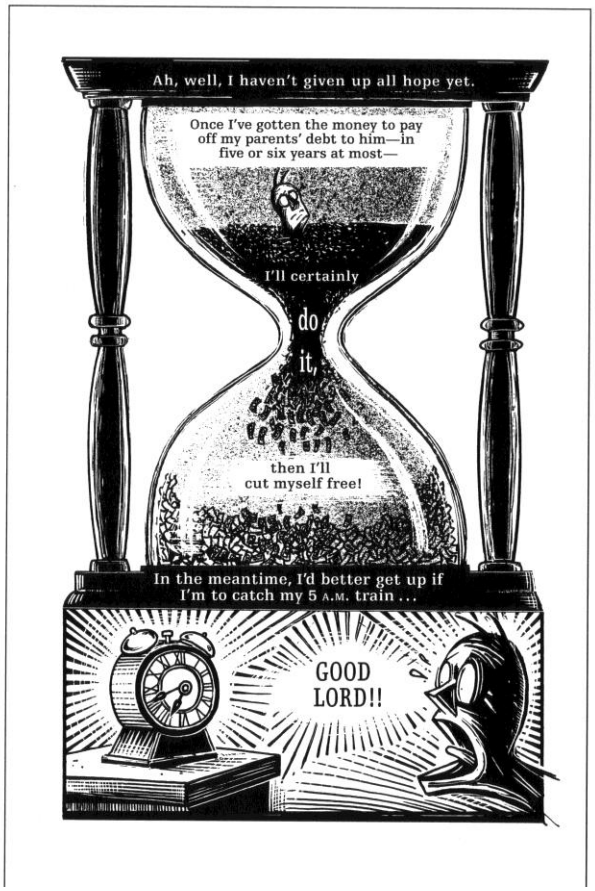
in a jagged word balloon (19). Gregor's concern that someone from work is at the door is expressed through a word balloon, and his gestures are very humanly oriented: he is biting his fingers, and sweat is shooting from his body because of nerves (20). The chief clerk's words are pictured in a rectangular panel in a business-like font, which contrasts the flowing words in his mom's curly lined panel. On the next page where Gregor's parents together with the chief clerk are knocking, there are two panels at the top (21). The readers are privy to the view behind the door where Gregor lies on the floor having fallen off the bed before trying to give excuses for his tardiness (21). As seen above, Gregor finally manages to open the door. At this point, the students can be asked to compare the word bubbles: What do the forms of the word bubbles show the reader? Instead of protecting Gregor in his helpless state, his father is angry, the chief clerk is shocked, and the mother faints (25). All three responses are pictured as the angle of the view shifts from outside Gregor's door in the top panel to the bottom panel where the angle is from behind Gregor looking outward (25). This is good time to ask the students to compare readers' knowledge from Kafka to Kuper: Are readers also able to see both perspectives in the novella? Gregor and the chief clerk share the center privileged space, pointing to the centrality of their characters in the scene. On the next page, Gregor leaves his room to try to talk more to the chief clerk, but it becomes a chase that shifts the energy (Kuper 26–27). The panels of the story follow the clerk's race out to the street and the chief clerk's loss of dignity. This is the first time Gregor leaves his room, and his father beats him. Instead of trying to figure out what is going on with Gregor, his father openly grimaces in response to his son in all of the scenes. The father is displayed as having a temper, as he clutches whatever is in his hand as he now kicks his son back into the room. This would be a good point to follow up with students to see if they believe the father is depicted differently in this scene than in Kafka's novella.



Notes: The cover presents Gregor as a helpless victim of violence. This is an appropriate time to ask students to think about the forms of violence enacted upon

Gregor. Kuper uses white and black shades in his adaptation as seen elsewhere in Kuper's graphic oeuvre style. His adaptation of *A Modest Proposal* as well as in his wordless novel *The System* (1997) are both examples of works where the white and black shades show the harshness of city life (Kick 411). Unlike some of Kuper's aforementioned works, in *The Metamorphosis*, violence is centered within the family instead of city life. Violence creates the framework on the front cover of Kuper's adaptation. On the cover, Gregor is depicted as a healthy giant insect running frantically in the light cast on the room when the door opens, and a menacing figure stands in the shadow looking into his room. This would be a meaningful time to ask students who they think the shadow in the doorway is. Each character is placed at the edge of the page, which generally represents tension, as the panel itself goes across two pages and is diagonal. Although Gregor's father never enters the room nor looks in until Gregor's death in the novella, the standing person on the (inside) cover may represent the father where violence against Gregor originates. Further autobiographical evidence comes from Kafka's "Letter to His Father" where Kafka writes that he perceives himself as small and weak compared to the strength and the enormity of his father (222). Kuper conveys that attitude shared in Kafka's letter and novella.





Notes: Kuper's above images can be used to discuss forms of violence against Gregor by focusing on the perpetrator depicted (12–13). Gregor identifies his work as an abuser larger than him and fantasizes about confronting his overbearing supervisor, but he restrains himself because he feels he needs to pay off the debt of his parents (Kuper 11). A money-filled hourglass is pictured, taking up two-thirds of page 13. Gregor is tiny compared to the clock, and he is pictured within it (Kuper 13). He is sinking—not in sand, but in money. The graphic shows he is resigned to the helplessness of his situation for the time being. Below the hourglass, the alarm clock's ring permeates the space and causes Gregor great concern. His alarm clock is on nearly every page in one or more panels until this page. Two pages after the hourglass illustration, an oversized alarm clock takes a center privileged space in which Gregor in his business attire runs on the face of the clock in front of the 12, 3, 6 and 9 (Kuper 15). The wording on this clock page displays Gregor's worries concerning the repercussions of calling in sick and highlights his work ethic.