

# The Metamorphosis Themes

Themes are overarching ideas and beliefs that the writers express in their texts including poetry, [fiction](#), and plays. Themes in The Metamorphosis include a sudden, unexpected transformation, family duty, responsibility, and alienation, etc. Franz Kafka has shown a surrealistic transformation in an individual and its impacts on the relationships. Some of the themes from this [novel](#) have been explored below. The quotes have been taken from Ian Johnston's translation of the [novella](#).

## Themes in The Metamorphosis

### Theme #1

#### Transformation

Transformation is a major theme of the novel and sounds shocking when Gregor Samsa turns into an ugly bug. The transformation starts from the very first line when he wakes up from an uneasy dream. His Manager who has come to call him for work is disgusted by the transformation and flees from the scene. Gregor is also confused as his transformation impacts his relationship with family members and it worsens. In the end, he dies due to isolation and injuries. Hence, Mikhail Bakhtin, a Russian critic, calls this an "unfinished metamorphosis," as in spite of the transformation as an insect, Gregor, thinks like a human being.

### Theme #2

#### Loss of Identity

Although Gregor Samsa changes into a bug, he keeps his thoughts and language intact. Kafka has captured his thoughts and reactions to various events. For example, when the Manager comes to threaten him to visit office or face sacking, he not only listens to him but also responds to him in squeals as he can't speak. However, as soon as people come to know his bizarre transformation, they become indifferent. In other words, his identity changes with his physical features. He is no more a breadwinner, but dependent and loses his importance. Eventually, he becomes a burden with time until he is no more.

### Theme #3

#### Social Isolation

Social isolation is another theme of the novel. When a person stays absent from his social circle, or achieves a position, or downgrades his position, or goes through a transformation like Gregor Samsa, he loses his previous status within that circle. He faces isolation until he adjusts himself and becomes a member of that social circle

again. Gregor Samsa tries to adjust himself to the circumstances, but he has lost an important position of the breadwinner in the family and the position of the traveling salesman in the company. He faces permanent isolation within his own family and dies of anguish and hunger.

#### Theme #4

##### **Human Relations and Economy**

Despite the triteness of the maxim of "Money makes the mare go," its truth is evident in the human relations in the novel The Metamorphosis. Only a writer like Franz Kafka can deliver such a transformation that downgrades the importance of a son in the eyes of his own family because he is now unable to earn money. The sudden respect first changes into indifferent sympathy and then into outright hatred and estrangement. The family thinks as if they are "struck by a misfortune like no one else in their entire circle of relatives and acquaintances."

#### Theme #5

##### **Family Responsibility**

Family responsibility is another major theme of the novel. It runs throughout the novel parallel to various other themes. The major character of Gregor Samsa immediately thinks of his job after his transformation how he would come out of this situation and return to work. This is a sense of realization that his hard-earned money is running his home where his entire family is living. Even when he has passed many days in that state, he carefully listens to the conversation of his family and thinks solutions in his mind as a bug. Gregor even reflects his inability to fulfill his responsibility which costs him profoundly as he is alienated from the family.

#### Theme #6

##### **Calm Reaction**

The story doesn't clarify the reasons for why and how Gregor Samsa changes. It is also not clear whether he could have done something to avoid this fate or escape this transformation. However, it can be noted that Gregor and the rest of the characters relatively remain calm since his transformation as if nothing unusual happened. Even after Gregor's death the family neither mourns nor reacts. Hence, calm reaction or no reaction is noticed as one of the prominent themes.

#### Theme #7

##### **Disability and Consequences**

Another important theme of The Metamorphosis is the theme of disability. Gregor Samsa's transformation has left in the room, and he is unable to perform his worldly duties. He has become a liability for the family. During his disability, he receives "wretched care" that further increases his depressive state of mind. The consequences of this disability of not supporting himself and his family's indifference finally lead him to his death.

## Theme #8

### **Alienation of Man**

Alienation of man is another main theme of The Metamorphosis. The first attack of alienation on Gregor Samsa has already restricted his thinking. He has lost touch with himself, his job and support of his family. When he notices that he has transformed into a bug, he further alienates himself from other human beings. This alienation leads him to consider his importance which is on the decline. Finally, he starts thinking, "Am I going to be less sensitive?" and this alienation completes when he loses his hunger and dies in the end.

## Theme #9

### **Sense of Guilt**

The theme of guilt also peeps through the text at some points. When Gregor Samsa is transformed into a bug, he immediately feels guilty of losing his job and not supporting his family. He constantly feels the guilt of making life difficult for his family when they discuss financial issues at home, and he hears their hardships. When he sees that he has rather created more difficulties for them, he concludes that he is better dead for them than alive. This sense of guilt costs him his life.

## Theme #10

### **Absurdity of Life**

The strange story of a man turns into a bug is entirely an absurd idea. This absurd idea has given birth to the absurdity of life when Gregor becomes unimportant due to his inability to do any work since his transformation. His family members start feeling his uselessness when he is no more valuable. Finally, as he realizes how the society and his family treats him, he loses hope and succumbs to death.