

GREAT WORKS

AN ENRICHMENT SERIES



WHY STUDY ENGLISH?

- For the answer to this question; I will direct you to the following aphorisms from Franz Kafka:
- ‘The task of literature is to reconnect us with feelings that might otherwise be unbearable but desperately need our attention.’
- ‘A book must be the axe for the frozen sea within us’



*A CLASSIC
REASON TO
STUDY ENGLISH*

- You will be studying the ideas that matter under the tutelage of some of the greatest writers, thinkers and philosophers who ever put pen to paper.
- A student of literature is a person who grapples with the tragedies of the human condition and puts them into coherent order.
- Study the ideas that matter.



GREAT IDEAS – KAFKA

- The writer that we are going to explore today is Czech Author Franz Kafka.
- The writings of Kafka comment on the very real situations we find ourselves in everyday; we are in the world of Kafka when we feel powerless in front of authority, judges, aristocrats, industrialists, politicians and most of all fathers.
- We are in the world of Kafka when we feel that our destiny is out of our control; When we are bullied, humiliated and mocked by society, especially our own families.
- We are in Kafka's orbit when we are ashamed of who we are, and we would be better off being squashed without mercy as if we were an inconvenient and rather disgusting bedbug.
- I'm sure some if not all us can relate to some of the ideas here and *this* is the power of literature and why it is studied both past, present, and now hopefully by you in the future.
- Powerful themes such as the ones already mentioned speak to us and help us to make sense of the world that it is around us.



THE LITERATURE – THE METAMORPHOSES

- In this short story a travelling salesman, Gregor Samsa wakes up one morning transformed into an insect akin to a beetle or a bed bug.
- It's a story of self disgust treachery and the terrifying power people's judgments can have on our own self worth.
- When Gregor crawls across the floor he is in danger of being stamped on by his own father.
- Gregor's family find that they manage quite well without him. They confine him to his room and chuck rubbish at him.
- The family hold a council and decide that the insect in the bedroom can't really be Gregor. They start to refer to the insect as 'it' instead of 'him'.
- They decide that somehow the insect needs to go and Gregor, listening, agrees and dies quietly.
- After Gregor's death the family are slightly ashamed, but only slightly.



AN EXCERPT – THE METAMORPHOSES

- “He thought back on his family with deep emotion and love. His conviction that he would have to disappear was, if possible, even firmer than his sister's. He remained in this state of empty and peaceful reflection until the tower clock struck three in the morning. He still saw that outside the window everything was beginning to grow light. Then, without his consent, his head sank down to the floor, and from his nostrils streamed his last weak breath. – *Franz Kafka, The Metamorphoses*



UNDERSTANDING THE LITERATURE



One of the major keys to understanding Kafka is to fathom the nature of his relationship with his father



Kafka never wrote directly about this man in any of his works, but the ideas shown within the Metamorphoses are directly related to the dynamics he endured as the very unfortunate of son of Herman Kafka.



Any child who has ever felt inadequate in front of, or unloved by a powerful father will at once relate to what Kafka went through in his childhood.



CONTEXT

- In November 1919, at the age of 36, five years before his death Kafka wrote a 47-page letter to his father in which he tried to explain how his childhood had deformed him.
- Like many victims of abuse, Kafka never stopped hoping for some kind of forgiveness from the person who had so wronged him.



THE LETTER

Dearest Father,

You asked me recently why I maintain that I am so afraid of you. As usual I was unable to think of any answer to your question partly because of the very reason that I am afraid of you and partly because an explanation of the ground of this fear would mean going into far more details that I could ever keep in mind while talking.

What I would have needed was a little encouragement, a little friendliness but I wasn't fit for that. What was always incompressible to me was your total lack of feeling for the suffering and shame you could inflict on me with your words and judgements. It was as though you had no notion of your power. I recall as a young boy calling out in the night for a glass of water only to be pulled out of bed and thrown out into the balcony to freeze in my nightshirt.

I was quite obedient after that period, but it did me so much incalculable inner harm. – *Kafka 1919*



UNDERSTANDING THE MEANING THROUGH RESEARCH

- To understand Kafka's relationship with his father is to understand the psychology and power behind the *Metamorphoses*.
- Kafka is the bug
- It is Kafka's self disgust and shame brought on by the tyrannical insults and abuse suffered at the hands of his father that we can relate to.
- It is Kafka's self disgust and shame that is inspiration for *The Metamorphoses*
- The phrase 'made to feel small' springs to mind here and I am sure it is a feeling we can all relate to which further grounds the power of Kafka's work and why literature needs and deserves future study by people like you.





RESEARCH SKILLS

- The material we have just looked at here is evidence of the research and independent skills needed to be a strong literature student.
- Being a good literature student is not just about skimming the book; it is about really thinking about the text in front of you.
- You will need to utilize further reading and research to understand the texts you study at A level and undergraduate level, along with showing good original independent thought.
- Utilising these skills of independent critical thinking and research are extremely valuable in the workplace and will make you a sought-after employee.



WHY STUDY
ENGLISH –
PRACTICAL

- Aside from the explicit reasons for studying literature such as a passion for literature and a desire to grapple with complex moral and human ideas.
- The practical reasons for studying English are that you will become an independent critical thinker and a strong analyser of complex written material.
- These skills here are highly valued in complex professions such as law, civil service, finance, leadership and management.
- In these careers ***you will*** be required and trusted by your employer to work independently with complex material where you will be expected to analyse, and then articulate a sensible position.



THE PURPOSE OF EDUCATION

- ‘If you guys can come out of university [education] capable of making coherent arguments and using language properly you’re so powerful that its ridiculous. Your goal is to make yourself as articulate in writing, thinking and speaking as you possibly can, because that opens the door to anything you will want to do in the future. The more articulate person always rises.’ – *Dr Jordan Peterson, Toronto University*
- For me I can’t think of a better indictment to study the beautiful and complex subject that is English or any other humanities subject.





THANK YOU

