

**Franz Kafka**

**GERM358, Fall 2024**

**Classroom:**

**Hours:**

Instructor: Benjamin Sauvé

Office: Sherbrooke 680, room 471

Office Hours: Wednesday/Friday 1:00 pm-2:00pm

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**Course Description**

This course will look at the works of Franz Kafka (1884-1924), one of the giants of Modern German Literature and World literature generally. We will look at a selection of Kafka's works through multiple lenses, focusing on Kafka's representation of modern life in the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In his stories, we will analyze themes regarding family dynamics, love interests, friendships, work and the desire to escape everyday life and trauma. Throughout the course, we will see how Kafka's work poses philosophical questions about modernity: What does it mean to be human? What is the meaning of work? How traumatic is the industrialized world through its absurdities and unresolvable situations? How Kafkaesque is the modern world?

For this purpose, we will analyze Kafka's fragmentary novels, novellas, short stories, and letters from a historical, literary and psychoanalytical perspective. This method will allow us to examine how the content and the form of these works give insights into the modern world and German Literature of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. We will also pay particular attention to how social construction and identity are presented in his literary work and through his sphere of influence. All readings and discussions will be in English.

During this class, we will ask ourselves important questions regarding Kafka:

- What is *Kafkaesque*? What elements of his work inspired the creation of this word?
- How are psychoanalytic principles reflected, and reflected upon, in Kafka's works? How does Kafka's work nuance the Freudian interpretation of the human condition?
- How can we interpret Kafka in his historical context? And how did he become so well known that he became a staple of World Literature?
- How do the social sciences of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, especially psychology, enable a new way of showing human relationships and justice in modernity?
- How does the history of Bohemia/Czechia in the Austrian-Hungarian Empire surround Kafka's literature and his contemporaries? How did modernization and industrialization alter the representation of bureaucracy, the human condition and trauma?

## Course Objectives

- The course is designed to teach skills in literary analysis, with an emphasis on both discussion and persuasive, critical writing.
- Students will acquire skills in critical thinking with a focus on textual interpretation.
- Students will learn how to write argumentative papers, and the course aims to help them improve their persuasive writing skills at an academic level.
- Students will learn how to use media analysis to present a piece of historical media in an argumentative way.

## Instructional Methods

The class will meet twice a week and in-person attendance is mandatory. If for some reason you can't come to class, you can miss up to 3 absences before each absence leads to a lowering of attendance grade. We will be discussing the texts that are on the **Weekly Schedule** at the date they are listed, so you need to have read the text before the class starts.

We will mostly discuss the texts in class and in small groups. We will also read parts of the texts in class, so you need to bring them to class. I will make other texts and media, such as films, music, and photography, available as needed. This class will be conducted in the style of a seminar, which means that the class discussion will be the main conveyor of the material. Therefore, I would prefer it if participants could address in class all questions they might have about the readings. All pertinent questions will bring the discussion further and will help the classmates in their comprehension of the material.

**Some of the Required Readings (all readings will be available on MyCourses):**

**Short stories:**

Children on a Country Road (1913), Franz Kafka.  
*The Judgement* (1913), Franz Kafka.  
*The Metamorphosis* (1915), Franz Kafka.  
*In the Penal Colony* (1919), Franz Kafka.  
*A Hunger Artist* (1922), Franz Kafka.

**Letters:**

Dearest Father (1919), Franz Kafka.  
*Letters to Felice Bauer* (1912-1917), Franz Kafka.  
*Letters to Milena* (1920-1923), Franz Kafka.

**Fragmented Novel:**

*The Trial* (1925), Franz Kafka. (Part *Before the Law* (1915), Franz Kafka.)

**Weekly Schedule:**

Week	Date	Reading Due:
1		<i>The Trees</i> (1913). Franz Kafka.
		<i>Children on a Country Road</i> (1913), Franz Kafka. <i>Kafka and his Precursors</i> (1951), Jorge Luis Borges
2		<i>The Judgement</i> (1913), Franz Kafka. (p.19-24)
		<i>The Judgement</i> (1913), Franz Kafka. (p.24-28)
3		<i>Dearest Father</i> , (Introduction), Hannah and Richard Stokes. p.7-13 <i>Dearest Father</i> (1919), (First part p. 17-40)
		<i>Dearest Father</i> (1919), (First part p. 40-87)
4		<i>The Married Couple</i> (1920), Franz Kafka <i>The Unhappiness</i> (1913), Franz Kafka

		<i>The Metamorphosis</i> (1915), Franz Kafka. (p.1-22)
5		<i>The Metamorphosis</i> (1915), Franz Kafka. (p.22-47) <i>Competing Theories of Identity in Kafka's The Metamorphosis.</i> Kevin S. Sweeney (1990)
		<i>In the Penal Colony</i> (1919), Franz Kafka. (p.74-90)
6		<i>In the Penal Colony</i> (1919), Franz Kafka. (p.91-106) Neumaier, Peter. <i>Do not Teach Kafka's „In The Penal colony”</i> <b>Writing Assignment Draft Due 11:59 PM</b>
		<i>The Great Wall of China</i> (1917), Franz Kafka. <i>The Tradesman</i> (1913), Franz Kafka. <i>Excursion into the Mountains</i> (1913), Franz Kafka.
7		<i>America</i> , Franz Kafka (Only the first chapter – The Stoker)
		<b>Mid-Term Exam</b>
Reading Week		No Classes
8		<i>Wedding Preparations in the Country</i> , Franz Kafka. (p.7-37)
		<i>A Country Doctor</i> , Franz Kafka. (A collection of short stories) (p.59-96)
9		<i>The Trial</i> (1925), Franz Kafka. (Part one)
		<i>The Trial</i> (1925), Franz Kafka. (Part two)
10		Orson Welles: <i>The Trial</i> (1962) (First half)
		Orson Welles: <i>The Trial</i> (1962) (Second half)
11		<i>A Hunger Artist</i> (1922), Franz Kafka.
		<i>Parables and Paradoxes</i> , Franz Kafka. (p.10-35) <b>Writing Assignment Due</b>
12		<i>Parables and Paradoxes</i> , Franz Kafka. (p.101-149)
		<i>Letters to Felice</i> (1912-1917) <i>Letters to Milena</i> (1920-1923), Franz Kafka. Elizabeth Boa: Kafka : gender, class and race in the letters and

		fictions (1996) (Intro)
13		<i>Josephine, the Singer; or, The Mouse People, Franz Kafka.</i>
		<i>Franz Kafka, a Biography</i> (1960), Max Brod (Chapter 8: New Aspects of Kafka)
14		<b>Final Exam</b>

### Structure of the Course and Course Policies:

- Class time will be a mixture of lecture, discussion, and other activities designed to develop the students' skills in literary analysis.
- I am available to see you in my scheduled office hours, or by appointment if you have a conflict that does not allow you to come at those times. I can be reached by email as well.
- In this class we will be discussing political, cultural, and environmental issues. While robust debate is good, you are expected to respect your classmates' rights to their opinions and beliefs. This includes not interrupting people, dominating the floor, raising your voice, insulting, threatening, etc.
- Under no circumstances should you be texting, playing games, checking social media, checking your email, surfing the web, talking on the phone, or otherwise engaging in activities that are unrelated to what is happening in class. Please turn off your phone when you enter the classroom. You may bring a laptop to class.

### Assignments:

- **Attendance and Class Participation:** This course is based on literature that should not be passively absorbed but must be actively engaged with. To that end, the discussions in class are essential, which requires attendance and participation. You are expected to have completed the assigned reading before coming to class and to arrive each day prepared to discuss it. Attendance will be monitored, and after 3 absences, an absence will result in a lowering of the course grade.
- **Writing Assignment:** For this assignment you will analyze a part of a primary text (it may be a page, a passage, a chapter or just a sentence) using evidence from the text, you will have 4-5 pages (double spaced) in which to make an argument and show how your passage supports this argument: a one-point essay, concise, precise and to the point. This assignment will be in 2 parts, a draft, and a final copy. We will workshop the drafts in class, for a pass/fail mark, and the second part will be graded.

- **Mid-Term Exam:** The Mid-Term Exam will be mostly short and medium length questions. This exam will be on all the material and texts we have read so far in the course. This will be in class.
- **Final Exam:** The Final exam will be questions with medium to long length answers. There will be questions (1-2 pages max per response), and I will give a study guide before the exam so you can have an idea of what kind of questions will be given. This will also be in class.

Grade	Percentages
A	100%-85%
A-	84%-80%
B+	79%-75%
B	74%-70%
B-	69%-65%
C+	64%/-60%
C	59%-55%
D	54%-50%
F	49%-0%

### Final Grade Breakdown:

- Attendance and Participation: 10%
- Writing assignment Draft: 10%
- Writing assignment Final: 25%
- Mid-Term Exam: 20%
- Final exam: 35%

### McGill policy statements:

McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures : “McGill places a great deal of importance on honest work, the art of scholarship, and the fair treatment of all members of the university community, and demands a rigid insistence on giving credit where credit is due. Offences such as cheating and breaches of research ethics undermine not only the value of our collective work, but also the academic integrity of the University and the value of a McGill degree.” (see [www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/](http://www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/) for more information).

L'université McGill attache une haute importance à l'honnêteté académique. Il incombe par conséquent à tous les étudiants de comprendre ce que l'on entend par tricherie, plagiat et autres infractions académiques, ainsi que les conséquences que peuvent avoir de telles actions, selon le Code de conduite de l'étudiant et des procédures disciplinaires (pour de plus amples renseignements, veuillez consulter le site [www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/](http://www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/)).

As the instructor of this course, I endeavor to provide an inclusive learning environment. However, if you experience barriers to learning in this course, do not hesitate to discuss them with me and the Office for Students with Disabilities, 514-398-6009.

End-of-course evaluations are one of the ways that McGill works towards maintaining and improving the quality of courses and the student's learning experience. You will be notified by e-mail when the evaluations are available on Mercury, the online course evaluation system. Please note that a minimum number of responses must be received for results to be available to students.

"In accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded. This does not apply to courses in which acquiring proficiency in a language is one of the objectives." (Approved by Senate on 21 January 2009 - see also the section in this document on Assignments and Evaluation.)

« Conformément à la Charte des droits de l'étudiant de l'Université McGill, chaque étudiant a le droit de soumettre en français ou en anglais tout travail écrit devant être noté (sauf dans le cas des cours dont l'un des objets est la maîtrise d'une langue). »

McGill University is on land which has long served as a site of meeting and exchange amongst Indigenous peoples, including the Haudenosaunee and Anishinabeg nations. We acknowledge and thank the diverse Indigenous people whose footsteps have marked this territory on which peoples of the world now gather.

L'Université McGill est sur un emplacement qui a longtemps servi de lieu de rencontre et d'échange entre les peuples autochtones, y compris les nations Haudenosaunee et Anishinabeg. Nous reconnaissons et remercions les divers peuples autochtones dont les pas ont marqué ce territoire sur lequel les peuples du monde entier se réunissent maintenant.

Additional policies governing academic issues which affect students can be found in the McGill Charter of Students' Rights" (The Handbook on Student Rights and Responsibilities is available here <https://www.mcgill.ca/deanofstudents/rights> )

*In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University's control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change.*