

Fellowship

AUTHOR	Kafka, Franz
GENRE	Short Story
OVERVIEW	<p>Franz Kafka, a Jewish Czechoslovakian who wrote in German, was one of the most acclaimed writers of the twentieth century. Contrary (or conducive) to his literary success was his hectic, miserable life--after a youth of self-loathing, estrangement by his father and over-indulgence, his health declined. He was soon forced to recover in a sanatorium, to which he returned many times throughout the rest of his life, overwhelmed with anxiety and what would today be termed clinical depression. During his lifetime, Kafka wrote many stories about oppression, failure, alienation, and despair in his own unclassifiable style--a mixture of the surreal, the fanatical, and darkly humorous. His one-paragraph story "Fellowship", published in 1909, depicts a group of five friends responding to an "annoying" man who would join them as a sixth. This short story raises questions about why these five men stand together, why the latecomer wants to join them, and why they resist accepting him as their sixth, bringing up questions of shared identity and what it takes to create a community.</p> <p>For a possible pairing with this text, see German artist Elke Rehder's pen-and-ink drawing inspired by it, Franz Kafka - fellowship</p>
FULL TEXT*	<p>https://adwilkin.wikispaces.com/file/view/Fellowship.pdf</p> <p><small>*CCR cannot guarantee the accuracy or continued availability of this online text. Please notify us if you encounter any problems.</small></p>
SOURCE	"Fellowship," by Franz Kafka, translated by Tania and James Stern, from <i>Franz Kafka: The Complete Stories</i> , edited by Nahum N. Glazer. Random House, 1946.
TYPE	Reading - Short Enough to Read Aloud.
THEMES	Diversity and Difference Exclusion and Belonging Identity and Community
BIG QUESTIONS	How do we connect with those who are different from us? Why is difference sometimes threatening? What do people gain from joining a group? What do they lose? What does it mean to be a stranger or an outsider? What does it feel like? Who gets left out and why?
PUBLICATION	Civically Engaged Reader

SAMPLE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why does the narrator say that he and the other four are "friends"? What is the reason that they continue to associate with one another?
2. How is the sixth one annoying to the first five? Why don't they "want to be six"?
3. Is there anything that the first five would need to know about the sixth for him to join them?
4. Why is the narrator skeptical about "long explanations"?
5. Why does the sixth keep coming back?
6. Why do you think Kafka titled this piece "Fellowship"?
7. Have you ever been "the sixth"?

Fellowship
by Franz Kafka

We are five friends, one day we came out of a house one after the other, first one came and placed himself beside the gate, then the second came, or rather he glided through the gate like a little ball of quicksilver, and placed himself near the first one, then came the third, then the fourth, then the fifth. Finally we all stood in a row. People began to notice us, they pointed at us and said: Those five just came out of that house. Since then we have been living together, it would be a peaceful life if it weren't for a sixth one continually trying to interfere. He doesn't do us any harm, but he annoys us, and that is harm enough; why does he intrude when he is not wanted? We don't know him and don't want him to join us. There was a time, of course, when the five of us did not know one another, either, and it could be said that we still don't know one another, but what is possible and can be tolerated by the five of us is not possible and cannot be tolerated with this sixth one. In any case, we are five and don't want to be six. And what is the point of this continual being together anyhow? It is also pointless for the five of us, but here we are together and will remain together; a new combination, however, we do not want, just because of our experiences. But how is one to make all this clear to the sixth one? Long explanations would almost amount to accepting him in our circle, so we prefer not to explain and not to accept him. No matter how he pouts his lips we push him away with our elbows, but however much we push him away, back he comes.