[Franz Kafka](https://www.enotes.com/topics/franz-kafka) : Letter to My father

Franz Kafka wrote a 47-page letter to his abusive father . He wrote to his father in November 1919 and the letter was published in 1966 in the form of a book.  The theme of Franz Kafka's letter to his father is dysfunctional relationships between fathers and sons. It is very straightforward and clear what was the nature of the tumultuous relationship Franz Kafka had with his father. The letter is inherently stream of consciousness in style, as most personal letters are, and it offers a view of not only Kafka's relationship with his father but also of his psychological makeup. Kafka’s letter to His Father, along with his other correspondences, is considered significant by literary critics because it showed the personal basis for many of the themes found in his work, such as identity crises, self-loathing, troubled relationships, abandonment, and hopelessness. It was the closest thing to an autobiography Kafka ever produced.

The letter was initially an attempt to reconcile with the man who had caused him a great deal of trauma. He is broken because of the abuse and trauma he suffered at his father’s hands. The theme of this letter is the criticism of his father’s actions. Kafka starts out by acknowledging that he is afraid of his father. He spends much of the volume of the letter analyzing his relationship with his father and discussing the reasons why he fears him. This abuse haunted Kafka for the rest of his life. In his adulthood, he decided that he wanted to try and have a fresh start and forgive his father. However Kafka never actually sends out this letter to his father.  He probably realizes that, no matter what he says, and no matter how skillfully he says it, he is never going to change his father.  The writing of the letter seems to have been a purely cathartic exercise for Kafka. It is an exercise to express the anger, stress, and fear that his father evoked. Although he never let his father read the letter, the emotion he put into his words were deeply meaningful and heart-felt. Kafka does not hold back at all. He recalls memories from his past about his father that still haunt him. Through the use of accusatory tone, sarcasm, and juxtaposition, Kafka expresses his feelings toward his father in a remarkably memorable letter.

It is clear that Kafka understands the vital role a father plays in his child’s development and future confidence, since he spends so long decrying the pain and torment through which his father put him. He goes through a long-winded, winding train of thought sequence, bringing up all the painful events he experienced as a result of his father, just to drive the point home. Kafka’s letter had an accusatory tone. He accuses his father of not being a good father, and of not encouraging Kafka as he should have. He writes about how his father mentally abuses him his entire life. Kafka states, “What I would have needed was a little encouragement, a little friendliness, a little keeping open of the road, instead of which you blocked it for me…” Kafka is accusing his father of not giving him enough encouragement. He tells his father that he was not there for him in times of need. Kafka is also stating that his father did not even show him a little friendliness when he needed it. This quote directly accuses Kafka’s father of not being a supportive one. He expresses that his father did not understand the suffering of his own son, nor did he realize how much shame he brought with his words. Kafka, again, accuses his father of not being supportive, and of actually being destructive. His father did not even understand the suffering he put on his son with his words. Following a train of thought like most letters do, however, it gradually devolved into anger and bitterness—with Kafka railing at his father for the emotional damage he caused him. It seems that in attempting to raise Kafka to be strong and brave, Kafka's father failed to show his son any of the kindheartedness that he did, inherently, have. Because of his father’s attitude, Kafka felt that he could never be right. He also felt physically inferior to his father due to the differences between their physiques. He accused his father as not being supportive and for being so cold toward him his entire life. The conclusion of the letter states that Kafka has a significant lack of trust in himself. That mistrust, according to Kafka, was fostered by his father