

Grade 8 Narrative

Temptation

Frank embraced his wife and child, pulled the lapels of his wool coat up around his face, and walked out into the bitter cold of a New York City morning. The snow had accumulated on the sides of the street, and what were soft, white snowflakes in December had become monoliths of hardened, black ice by this February morning. Lacking the proper accouterments for winter, Frank shoved his hands into his pockets to keep them warm. He believed that there would be several more weeks of freezing temperatures and sorrowfully wondered how much longer he and his wife could afford to buy coal to heat their apartment.

Frank walked to the Empire State Employment Agency as he had done every morning for about a year. Like many others during the winter of 1932, Frank had been unable to find steady employment once he lost his job the year before. He dreaded the pandemonium he would soon see—men furiously waving their arms in the air, clamoring for attention as they competed for the few available jobs.

An agency employee announced that there were no openings that day, and a somber feeling of defeat quickly spread through the crowd. Some of the job hunters seemed to be in listless stupors; others walked away, perhaps thinking about how the stock market crash and economic depression had become all too personal.

Feeling as though a black cloud hung over him, Frank sat on a curb. The fear and worry of another day without employment seemed unbearable. There had been talk that the government might pass legislation to help the elderly and unemployed, but no reprieve was in sight. By the time the government acted, Frank thought, it would be too late for the thousands of people living in extreme circumstances. He hated to think of the ramifications of inaction for these unfortunate citizens. He and Clara were lucky; they had managed by doing odd jobs. Even so, they barely made enough to pay the rent each month, and Frank felt that their time was running out. Their savings were depleted, and they had sold almost everything they owned. They faced the future with a great deal of trepidation. Little Grace would be two years old in a month, and Clara had announced yesterday that they would soon have a new addition to their family, news that Frank greeted with mixed emotions.

Frank stared at the ground, wondering what he would do and waiting for divine inspiration. When he noticed the silvery tips of a pair of shiny leather shoes pointing in his direction, he looked up to see a man dressed entirely in black towering above him. Grinning at Frank, the man said, "Good day, sir. I am Mr. D. V. Smith of Smith's Trucking Company. I'm always looking for good workers, and you seem like an honest man."

Frank knew what Mr. Smith did: he surreptitiously sold counterfeit and stolen goods through a variety of illegal retail establishments. He had become wealthy from his underground business and had recruited many out-of-work and desperate fortune-seekers as employees. The jobs were often dangerous, but the men were attracted by Smith's promise of quick and

easy money and a materialistic life. Frank thanked Smith for the opportunity but politely declined; Smith gave Frank his downtown address and encouraged Frank to contact him any time, day or night, if he changed his mind.

Frank heard jangling keys behind him, and he turned to see an employment agency employee locking up. The official commiserated with Frank and expressed his sympathy about the day's disappointing outcome. "Come back tomorrow," he said. "Word is we're getting several openings soon. A company's going to hire laborers for a big project on the Brooklyn Bridge. Pay's not great, but the work will be steady."

Tired of waiting for opportunities that never materialized, Frank was beginning to lose faith. As he contemplated his next move, he attempted to rationalize the immorality of working for Smith. Frank was not materialistic, but his family would enjoy the income that Smith would provide. He would have to compromise his principles, but everything comes at a cost, and the payoff might be worthwhile. Frank was more and more tempted by the prospect of a more comfortable life.

Just then, Frank's old friend Gus, who worked for Smith, joined Frank on the curb. Gus smiled, patted his protruding stomach, and bragged about the steak dinner he had the night before. Ever hungry to amass additional fortune in the illegal marketplace, Gus said that he had grown tired of working for Smith and hoped to create his own "trucking company." Others would do the work, he said, while he supervised and profited from their labor. Frank took advantage of the first opportunity to excuse himself and walk away.

Frank knew that Clara would disapprove of his working for Smith. He loved Clara for her integrity, her unwavering goodness. He thought about her steadfast loyalty to him and the love and patience she showed their daughter. The previous night, Clara told Grace a story about a fox and a hen:

"A fox encountered a hen digging for worms at the bottom of a tree. Hearing a loud noise at the top of the tree, he thought that it must be a larger hen, so he jumped out of the bushes, making a noise that frightened the hen away. With great effort, the fox scrambled to the top of the tree, only to find that the noise had been made by the wind blowing a large branch. Disappointed, he hung his tail and said, 'Because of my greed, I must go to bed with no supper.'"

Frank realized that he knew what he had to do. He turned around and began the long walk home.

Grade 8 Informational

Writings on the Wall

Graffiti. We've all seen it. Loathe it or admire it...defacing images or art, the writing on the wall and its writers intrigue the masses. Who hasn't had the urge to leave their mark?

Graffiti simply means *writing or drawings scribbled, scratched, or sprayed illicitly on a wall or other surface in a public place*. The word comes from the Italian word "grafitto" meaning a scratch.

Humans have been etching and painting on public surfaces forever. Prehistoric cave paintings and pictographs are examples of these first etchings. These focused on daily life events and objects. Although no one knows why these drawings were created, the assumption is that they were a way to communicate spiritual and daily life. Since it is believed their placement was not a mistake, but, rather, an acceptable and commonly used means of communication, some argue for the inclusion of these earlier carvings and paintings under the heading of "graffiti".

Another example of graffiti is "tagging". Tagging began in the late 1960's. Individuals began leaving their marks in various locations. Personal signatures, slurs, and political statements popped up. Taggings are still seen today. They mark buildings, train cars, bridges, and overpasses. Some referred to this type of graffiti as "latrinalia" since it was often found on the walls and stalls of bathrooms. It is where graffiti got its bad reputation as a form of vandalism.

In the early 70's, graffiti became more popular. It gained style. From the changes in the materials used, the evolution of the lettering, and the detail of the work, a new notoriety emerged. The word "art" was attached to graffiti. Graffiti "artists" were acknowledged for their pieces of work. The United Graffiti Artists formed and some were even asked to display their work in galleries.

Today, multi-colored graffiti can be found donning the sides of buildings, trains, and bathroom walls as well as in the halls of galleries and museums. Depending on the place and the observer, it may be considered vandalism or art. Either way, it remains a form of communication and evidence of humans trying to leave their marks.