

Grade 8 Informational

Phobias

Whether it's fear of taking tests, of going to the dentist, or of getting a haircut, there is a phobia for nearly everything. Some are quite common while others seem ridiculous. Either way, the names associated with phobias are as fascinating as the phobias themselves. Adding to the interest in phobias are their causes and treatments.

Phobia can be defined as an irrational fear or dread of something. The word dates back as far as the 18th century, and today there are more than 500 known phobias. Most people only know some of the more common words formed with the suffix *-phobia*. *Claustrophobia* is the fear of confined spaces. *Arachnophobia* is the fear of spiders. And then there are common fears with less common names. *Glossophobia* is the fear of speaking in public. The fear of darkness has at least three names: *scotophobia*, *achluphobia*, and *nyctophobia*.

The causes of some phobias cannot always be clearly explained. Since some individuals are born with a natural tendency to be overly careful or self-conscious, they appear to have been born with a phobia. Still other phobias could be the result of an experience. For example, a child could be bitten by a dog and develop a fear of dogs—*cynophobia*. There may also be a link between a child's phobia and that of his parents or other family members. This type of phobia may be learned by observing the family member's reaction to a fear, and then imitating it. Yet others could develop phobias as the result of an anxiety or panic attack occurring during an activity. For instance, while driving a car, a person could have an attack. He may not have had a fear of driving or of having a car accident before, yet he associates the attack with driving; thus a phobia is formed. Finally, a phobia could be the result of being told continuously about a potential danger. A child who is repeatedly warned about snakes could develop a fear of snakes without ever having seen one.

Treatment for those suffering from a phobia can be a challenge. Most people do not get over a phobia on their own. Usually a doctor or mental health professional will recommend medication, behavior therapy, or both. The object is to help the individuals reduce their fear and anxiety and to manage their reactions to the stimulus. This can be effective unless, of course, the patient suffers from *latrophobia*—fear of doctors—or *pharmacophobia*—fear of taking medicines.

Why are phobias of such interest to so many people? Is it because of the interesting names of phobias—like *bogyphobia* (fear of bogymen) and *hippopotomonstrosesquippedaliophobia* (fear of long words)—, the causes of phobias, or the phobias themselves? Whatever the reason, you can be sure there is a name for any fear you might have, and if there isn't, be creative, and make one up. The more interesting, the better!

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.