

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

The Art of Sand-casting

If you have ever gone to a beach and spent time building a sandcastle, you already know that making statues and other objects with sand can be great fun and a true test of your imagination. You can create amazing structures with just some simple tools such as buckets, shovels, and sticks. Of course, you must build quickly and accept the fact that your art is temporary due to the tide or waves that will eventually erase your burst of creativity.

Sand-casting provides a way to preserve your sandy sculptures for years to come. This technique can be used at the nearest beach, but you can also do it at home—even in the middle of a cold, winter afternoon. Sand-casting requires only a few simple materials. Before starting a project, be sure an adult is available to help you.

You will need:

- sheets of newspaper
- shallow containers, such as a pie pan, shoebox, egg carton lid, or baking pan to use as the mold
- brown or white sand
- vegetable oil
- wooden paint stick
- spoon
- clean, empty coffee can or a gallon milk jug cut in half
- pebbles, shells, stones, marbles, twigs, old jewelry, aquarium gravel, or other colorful items for decorating
- plaster of Paris
- water
- paper clip or piece of wire
- paintbrush
- decorative gel glue

Here are the steps for making a unique sand-casting project:

1. Cover your work surface with a layer of newspaper to keep it clean.
2. Use a shallow container, such as a pie pan, as your mold. Fill the container half full with brown or white sand.
3. Add enough vegetable oil for the sand to stick together. Make patterns in the sand using your fingers, hands, a wooden paint stick, or a spoon.
4. Next, add the decorations you have gathered. Place them randomly or use them to create a unique design. Push the objects into the sand to make a clear impression.
5. Following the directions on the plaster of Paris package, carefully empty the mix into a coffee can or a gallon milk jug that has been cut in half. Add water to the plaster of Paris and stir with a wooden stick. Stir the mixture until it is the consistency of glue. Remember that you need to work quickly, because plaster of Paris hardens rapidly.
6. Slowly spoon one to two inches of plaster of Paris into the mold.
7. Smooth the surface of the plaster and then insert a paper clip or a loop of wire in the top center of your sand-cast. The paper clip or wire will be used to hang your project on the wall. Allow your sand-cast to dry overnight.
8. Carefully and slowly lift the sand-cast out of the mold and use a paintbrush to brush off any extra sand that might be clinging to it.
9. Brush a coat of decorative gel glue over the top surface of the sand-cast with a paintbrush. The gel glue will seal the sand-casting project and give it a glossy appearance.
10. After the glue is dry, find the perfect place to display your art.

Adding Pizzazz

- Use your creativity when thinking of new ideas for sand-casting.
- Make a handprint or a footprint—your own or someone else's.
- Use other objects as a mold, such as a large, clean seashell.
- Add unusual items to the mold, such as feathers, pinecones, plastic toys, or beads.
- Mosaic sand-casts can be made by including marbles and glass gems in the mold. Pieces of

beach glass or ceramic tiles could also be used, but these objects require careful handling because they have sharp edges.

- If you are making your sand-casting project at the beach, look around for items like seaweed, shells, starfish, rocks, or driftwood to add interest to your art.
- Use a toothpick to draw fine lines or include words in your pattern.
- Your sand-cast does not have to be displayed on a wall. You can create a special steppingstone for your garden. Your work of art can be the center of attention along a walking path in your yard. Building a sandcastle at the beach is a creative endeavor, but you have to leave your masterpiece behind and allow the tides or waves to wash it away. With sand-casting, you can create an art piece that will last a lifetime and provide a memento of enjoyable times at the beach.