

The Little Lump of Clay

by Diana Engel

Way up high, in an old tower, there was a workshop. It was a pottery workshop, filled with barrels of colourful glazes, potter's wheels, kilns and, of course, clay. Near the window stood a big wooden bin with a heavy lid. There the clay was kept. Way at the bottom, squashed into the corner, was the oldest lump of clay. He barely remembered the last time he had been handled, a long time ago. Every day the heavy lid would open. Hands reached in, quickly grabbing bags or balls of clay. The little lump of clay could hear the cheerful sounds of people busy at their work.

"When will it be my turn?" he wondered. As each day passed in the darkness of the bin, the little lump of clay lost hope.

One day a large group of children came into the workshop with their teacher. Many hands reached into the bin. The little lump of clay was the last to be chosen, but he was out!

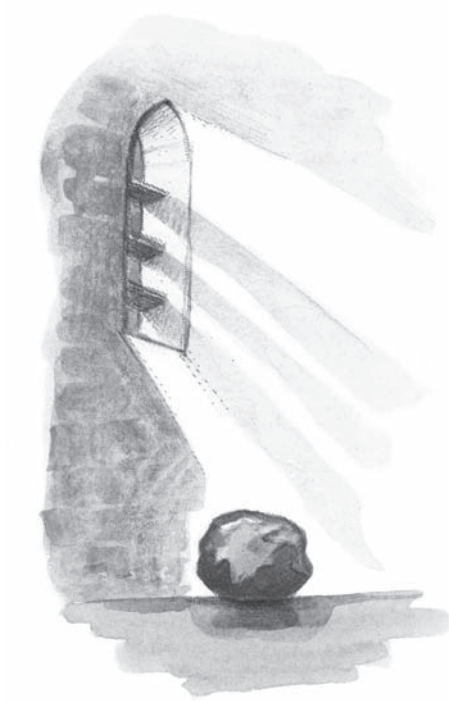
"Here's my big chance!" he thought, squinting in the light.

A boy put the clay on the potter's wheel, spinning it as fast as he could. "This is fun!" thought the little lump of clay. The boy tried pulling the clay up as the wheel went around. The little lump of clay felt the excitement of becoming *something*! After trying to make a bowl, the boy gave up. He pushed and pounded the clay into a neat ball.

"Time to clean up," said the teacher. The workshop was filled with the sounds of children sponging and wiping and washing and drying. Water dripped everywhere.

The boy plopped the lump of clay near the window and rushed to join his friends. After a while, the workshop emptied. The room was quiet and dark. The little lump of clay was terrified. Not only did he miss the moistness of the bin, he knew he was in danger.

"It's all over," he thought. "I'll just sit here and dry out until I'm as hard as a rock."



He sat by the open window, unable to move, feeling the moisture seep out of him. The sunlight beat down, the night breezes blew in, until he was rock hard. He was so hard he could hardly think. He only knew that he was filled with hopelessness.

But somewhere deep inside the little lump of clay, a tiny drop of moisture was left, and he refused to let it go.

“Rain,” he thought.

“Water,” he sighed.

“Please,” he finally squeezed out of his dry hopeless self.

A passing cloud took pity on the little lump of clay, and a wonderful thing happened. Huge raindrops hammered through the open window, falling on the little lump of clay. All night it rained, and by morning he was as soft as his old self.

Voices drifted into the workshop.

“Oh no,” said a woman. She was a potter who often used the workshop. “Someone has left the window open all weekend! We’ve got a mess to clean up. You can work with some clay while I find the towels,” she said to her daughter.

The little girl saw the lump of clay sitting at the window.

“This looks like a perfect lump for me,” she said.

Soon she was pressing and kneading the clay into pleasing shapes. To the little lump of clay, her fingers felt heavenly.

The girl thought as she worked, and her hands moved with purpose. The little lump of clay felt himself being gently pushed into a rounded, hollow shape. A few pinches, and he had a handle.



“Mommy, Mommy,” called the girl, “I made a cup!”

“It’s wonderful!” said her mother. “Put it on the shelf and it will be fired in the kiln. Then you can glaze it any colour you like.”

Soon the little cup was ready to be taken to his new home. Now he lives on a shelf in the kitchen, next to the other cups and saucers and mugs. They are all very different and some are very beautiful.

“Breakfast!” calls the mother, setting the new cup on the table and filling him with hot chocolate.

The little girl holds him gently. How happy he feels with the smooth lines of his new shape. How well he does his job!

The little cup sits proudly. “At last—at last I am something.”



Questions **The Little Lump of Clay**

1. Number the sentences below in the order the events happened in the story. Number 1 has been done for you.

___ The rain made the lump of clay moist and soft.

___ A boy tried to make the lump of clay into a bowl.

___ A girl made the lump of clay into a cup.

___ The lump of clay dried out.

¹
___ The lump of clay was in the bin.

2. Why was the lump of clay in the bin for such a long time?



3. At the beginning of the story, what did the lump of clay wish for?



4. Why was the clay eventually taken out of the bin?
- ★ (A) All the other lumps of clay were used.
 - (B) It was on top of the other lumps of clay.
 - (C) The boy chose that lump because he especially liked it.
 - (D) The teacher told the boy to use that lump.

5. What did the boy do that was careless?
- (A) He left the clay on the potter's wheel.
 - (B) He was spinning the wheel as fast as he could.
 - ★ (C) He put the clay near the window.
 - (D) He pushed and pounded the clay.

6. The boy left the lump of clay in danger. What was the danger?



★ Correct answer

7. How did the lump of clay feel right after the boy left the pottery workshop?

(A) satisfied

★ (B) scared

(C) angry

(D) proud

8. What wonderful thing happened after the lump of clay had been lying by the window for a long time? Why was this so wonderful for the lump of clay?



★ Correct answer



9. Which words in the story show that the little girl knew what she wanted to make?

- (A) 'her fingers felt heavenly.'
- (B) 'The little girl saw the lump of clay.'
- (C) 'The little girl holds him gently.'
- ★ (D) 'her hands moved with purpose.'

10. Describe the different feelings the clay had at the beginning and the end of the story. Explain why his feelings changed.



★ Correct answer

11. The little girl is an important person in this story. Explain why she was important to what happened.



12. The author of the story writes about the lump of clay as if it were a person. What is the author trying to make you imagine?

- (A) what it is like in the rain
- ★ (B) how a lump of clay might feel
- (C) what it is like to work with clay
- (D) how it feels to make something

13. What is the **main** message of this story?

- (A) People are easy to knead and shape like clay.
- (B) There is a great deal of unhappiness in the world.
- ★ (C) Everything is happiest when it finds a purpose.
- (D) Pottery is the best way to do good in the world.

★ **Correct answer**



Clay, Item 1

Number the sentences below in the order the events happened in the story. Number 1 has been done for you.

- ___ The rain made the lump of clay moist and soft.
- ___ A boy tried to make the lump of clay into a bowl.
- ___ A girl made the lump of clay into a cup.
- ___ The lump of clay dried out.
- 1 The lump of clay was in the bin.

Process: Focus on and retrieve explicitly stated information and ideas

1 – Acceptable Response

These responses identify the appropriate order of story events. The response accurately numbers the sentences as shown below. In order to receive full credit, each sentence must have the appropriate number.

Appropriate Ordering of Sentences

- 4 The rain made the lump of clay moist and soft.
- 2 A boy tried to make the lump of clay into a bowl.
- 5 A girl made the lump of clay into a cup.
- 3 The lump of clay was dried out.
- 1 The lump of clay was in the bin.

Clay, Item 2

Why was the lump of clay in the bin for such a long time?

Process: Make straightforward inferences

1 – Acceptable Response

These responses provide an appropriate inference for the lump of clay's initial predicament. The response demonstrates understanding that the lump of clay was not as accessible as the other clay. It may focus on the fact that it was at the bottom or in a corner of the bin.

Example:

Because he was at the bottom.

Or, the response may focus on the fact that the other clay was always used first.

Example:

Because people used the other clay.

Clay, Item 3

At the beginning of the story, what did the lump of clay wish for?

Process: Make straightforward inferences

1 – Acceptable Response

These responses provide an appropriate inference for the lump of clay's feelings at the beginning of the story. The response demonstrates understanding that the lump of clay wanted to be used like the other clay in the bin (its short-term wish).

Example:

To be chosen.

Or, the response may focus on the outcomes of being used like the other clay (its long-term wish) and having a purpose or use, or having a sense of fulfillment.

Example:

To be made into an object and used a lot.

Clay, Item 6

The boy left the lump of clay in danger. What was the danger?

Process: Interpret and integrate ideas and information

1 – Acceptable Response

These responses integrate ideas in the story to interpret the nature of the lump of clay's danger. The response demonstrates understanding that the lump of clay was in danger of drying out or becoming hard. (It is acceptable if the student's interpretation is that the clay is in danger of dying.)

Example:

The lump of clay's danger was that he might dry out.

Clay, Item 8

What wonderful thing happened after the lump of clay had been lying by the window for a long time? Why was this so wonderful for the lump of clay?

Process: Focus on and retrieve explicitly stated information and ideas

2 – Complete Comprehension

These responses demonstrate complete comprehension of events in the story related to the lump of clay's recovery. The response states that rain coming through the window was the wonderful thing that happened. In addition, the response explains that the rain made the clay wet again, or caused it not to become hard.

Example:

The wonderful thing was the rain because it moistened the clay.

1 – Partial Comprehension

These responses demonstrate partial comprehension of events in the story related to

the lump of clay's recovery. The response describes the wonderful thing that happened as rain coming through the window, or as the clay becoming wet or soft again. However, the response does not make a connection between the rain and its physical effect on the clay.

Example:

It made it go really soft.

Clay, Item 10

Describe the different feelings the clay had at the beginning and the end of the story. Explain why his feelings changed.

Process: Interpret and integrate ideas and information

3 – Extensive Comprehension

These responses demonstrate extensive comprehension by integrating ideas from across the text to fully support an interpretation of why the clay's feelings changed during the story. The response provides an appropriate description of the clay's feelings at the beginning and at the end. It includes information from the story to explain why they changed. In the explanation the response demonstrates understanding of one of the following aspects of the clay's proud feelings about himself at the end of the story: fulfillment, usefulness, or beauty/aesthetics. See examples in chart below.

Example:

At the beginning the clay was sad. At the end he felt proud because he had become a cup.

2 – Satisfactory Comprehension

These responses demonstrate satisfactory comprehension by integrating ideas from across the text to support an interpretation of why the clay's feelings changed during the story. The response provides an appropriate description of the clay's feelings at the beginning and at the end. It includes information from the story to explain why they changed. However, the explanation for why they changed does not demonstrate understanding of one of the following aspects of the clay's proud feelings about himself at the end of the story: fulfillment, usefulness, or beauty/aesthetics.



Example:

He was sad in the beginning. But he was happy in the end because of what the girl did.

Or, the response provides an appropriate explanation of his feelings at the beginning or the end (but not both) and in the explanation of that feeling demonstrates understanding of one of the following aspects of the clay's proud feelings about itself at the end: fulfillment, usefulness, or beauty/aesthetics (see examples in chart below).

Example:

He is happy because he has been made into something, he is proud of his shape and he is proud of sitting on the shelf with all the other mugs.

1 – Minimal Comprehension

These responses demonstrate limited comprehension of how the clay's feelings changed during the story. The response provides an appropriate description of the clay's feelings at the beginning or at the end, or both, but does not include appropriate information from the story to explain why they changed.

Example:

He was sad in the beginning. But he was happy in the end.

Or, the response provides an explanation of the change that demonstrates feelings of fulfillment, usefulness, or aesthetics, but does not describe his feelings at the beginning or the end.

Example:

He became something useful.

Explanations that Support the Clay's Feelings of Pride at End of Story: Examples

The following examples represent some of the different ways students may support the clay's feelings of pride at the end of the story.

Fulfillment

The girl made him into something.

He had become something.

Usefulness

He had a job to do.

He became a cup.

People could use him.

He was something useful.

Beauty/Aesthetic

The girl made him beautiful.

He liked his new shape.

Clay, Item 11

The little girl is an important person in this story. Explain why she was important to what happened.

Process: Interpret and integrate ideas and information

2 – Complete Comprehension

These responses demonstrate complete comprehension of the story's supporting character by integrating ideas from across the text to interpret the character's significance to the story's outcome. The response explains the little girl's central role as the facilitator of the clay's change and addresses how her role contributes to the theme of fulfillment.

Example:

She made the clay into something beautiful.

1 – Partial Comprehension

These responses demonstrate partial comprehension of the supporting character's significance in the story. The response identifies the central action of the little girl as the facilitator of the clay's change but does not address the theme of fulfillment.

Example:

She was the one who made the clay into a cup.

