

## Dream Job

In an extremely fashionable part of New York City, there is a tall, beautiful skyscraper. It's on a very wide avenue, shooting nearly 100 stories into the air (in fact, it was the world's tallest building for a brief period in 1934). This building, The Spurlock, casts a very heavy shadow on the buildings around it. This shadow is so thick and black that on the rare occasions the sun does happen to shine on those nearby buildings, it would be easy to miss. They remain gray and sooty, and look as if sunlight simply slid off without leaving a trace. Jonathan Smeek lives in one of these buildings.

Jonathan Smeek is a young man, but he seems older. He tends to dress in gray suits that don't quite fit, eats the same vaguely gray egg salad sandwich for lunch every day, and has a gray cat whom he can never quite manage to name. He calls it simply "Cat," or "You" in emergency situations, as in, "Hey, don't eat that, You!" or "Don't knock that off the shelf, You!"

Smeek's apartment is in the middle of his building, which he likes a great deal. The people at the top often seem quite upset about the number of stops the elevator has to make on its slow, rumbling journey. The ones near the bottom do not get to take a fun elevator ride every morning, as the elevators only stop at floors 4 and up. The poor people on the third floor have it the worst, huffing up several flights of stairs every day. Smeek, on the sixth floor, however, has a smooth ride down to the lobby.

Smeek has a lot of time to think about relatively minor things, like the ways in which his apartment floor affects his day. This is because he does not have a job. He has been out of work for months, and spends most of the day watching television he hates and arguing with Cat, who doesn't like the cheap food Smeek is forced to buy him, as it is all he can afford.

"I know it's not the best, Cat," Smeek says, leaning against a wall in his kitchen, still in his pajamas even though it is late in the afternoon.

"Meow," says Cat, in a tone that Smeek does not like.

"Now look here, You," he says, beginning to get a little upset. "It's not like I'm not trying to get a job. I *am* trying. But it's very difficult. Until then, we're all making sacrifices."

Cat seems to sigh and takes a polite nibble of his food. Smeek sighs, as well, as he sits down to open his old and graying laptop.

As he glumly checks his email, not expecting much, he finds an interesting email.

"MEDICAL SALES – EARNING POTENTIAL UNLIMITED!" reads the subject line. Smeek is suspicious. He has only run into one "unlimited" thing in his life, a breakfast buffet he'd been to with his parents as a child. And a nasty waiter there stopped him from going back for a fifth serving of bacon, so how unlimited had it been, really?

He reads on. "This position with Allied Medical Technologies sells a digital suite of over 19 products to a targeted audience of medical institutions. The earning potential is uncapped! Interested parties please reply referencing Job No. 97742."

Jonathan Smeek finds this job listing very confusing. What is a digital suite? Exactly what are these products? Still, he thinks that he is hardly in a position to be picky. He's lately been sneaking bits of stale bread into Cat's food to stretch it out a bit.

Smeek begins his reply. "To whom it may concern -- Good afternoon. I am very interested in position number 97742. I have long been fascinated by medical technology, and am excited to hear more about the position. Please find my resume attached. I look forward to hearing from you."

He sits back and sighs. Cat jumps on his lap and looks at the screen. "Meow?" He asks.

"I know," Smeek says, guiltily. "I may have fibbed a bit. Still, just because I'm not interested in medical technology today, doesn't mean I won't be tomorrow. I'm open to change."

"Meow," says Cat, before jumping off to chase a shadow. Smeek isn't quite sure what Cat has meant with that last meow.

He lays down on the couch, and quickly falls into a deep sleep. Just like always, his dreams seem very real. Also just like always, he dreams of cartoons.

Since he was a small boy, Jonathan Smeek has dreamt of making cartoons. He loves watching them, of course, sprawled on the couch with a bag of chips and laughing his head off on the edge of his seat. But they are more than entertainment to him. He starts to notice the styles of different animators, the kinds of shows different companies produce, and feels a unique sense

of betrayal the first time a smart show he loves suddenly swerves to become simple, uncreative, but suddenly more popular.

In this dream, Smeek is 13 years old, and drawing his first cartoon, Tennisotro, about a mild-mannered boy tennis player who one day uses radioactive sunscreen and grows a cannon arm that shoots tennis balls. Smeek sits at a small desk in his childhood room, lovingly filling in Tennisotro's neon-green eyes. He sits back and admires his work.

Just then, his father comes into the room. "WHAT'S THIS MESS?" He bellows. "STOP WASTING YOUR TIME WITH THESE IDIOTIC DRAWINGS!" He rips the paper from under Smeek's hands, crumples it into a ball, and throws it back in his face.

Smeek wakes with a shudder, and remembers again why he's never shown his drawings to anyone. He can't help but keep doing them, and couldn't stop if he wanted to, but keeps them for himself even though he knows it's a waste of time.

Smeek checks his computer and sees a reply.

"Dear Sir – Thank you very much for your reply. Please come for an interview today at 4 PM." The address listed is easy for Smeek to remember. It is in the Spurlock.

Jonathan Smeek has never been inside the Spurlock before. He tries to walk straight to the elevators, holding his only nice folder with his important papers in it and looking like a man of business, his eyes straight ahead. They are so straight ahead that he slams into a frosted glass barrier a few feet tall without noticing it. He gives it a gentle push, thinking it might swing open. It does not. So, he gives it a somewhat harder push, with no result. He is just about to step over it when he hears a stern voice.

"SIR. STEP AWAY."

Smeek freezes mid-step, with his left leg high in the air. A muscular security guard is standing behind a wide marble desk. His arms are crossed, and he does not look very happy. Smeek notices, somewhat embarrassed, that the guard's suit is much nicer than his.

"Sir," the guard says again. Smeek realizes he is still frozen in place. He walks over, explains himself to the guard as best he is able, and is (very hesitantly) allowed to enter the building.

The elevator banks are huge. Brushed steel doors ten feet high are snugly fit into black stone walls that are so clean Smeek can see his reflection in them. He presses the elevator's "UP" button, and leaves a big oily fingerprint. He tries to slyly edge up close to the button panel, and begins rubbing the button with his shirt tail. The smudge won't come off. He rubs harder.

"I'm pretty sure we don't have an elevator genie. But keep rubbing and see what comes out, I guess."

For the second time, Jonathan Smeek froze. Behind him, there is a beautiful woman, with black hair hanging neatly to her shoulders, a black-and-white polka dotted top, and a purple skirt covered in cartoon characters.

"Oh, ah, ha, yes, of course." Smeek manages. "I was just trying to, ah, clean it off a bit."

"Oh, of course. Nothing worse than a dirty button," the girl says to him with a smile. "I'm Katherine."

"Oh. Great," Smeek replies. "Not great that you're Katherine, but, uh, great to meet you. I'm Jonathan."

Just then, the elevator arrives. They both got in, and Katherine pushed the button for a floor just a few above the one Smeek's interview is on. He is so pleasantly surprised that he drops his folder on the ground and his papers go everywhere. Most embarrassing of all, Smeek has totally forgotten that his folder is full of his drawings. Now Katherine will see all of his silly characters, he thinks, even Tennisotro.

Katherine bents down to help him collect his things. "Are these yours?" she says.

"Oh, uh, yes?" Smeek says, bracing himself for her laughter. He shuts his eyes and listens, but the laugh never comes. Instead, she makes a sort of "ooooo" sound. Puzzled, Smeek opens his eyes and looks over. Katherine is excitedly shuffling through his papers.

"I love these! They're great! Look at how green this guy's eyes are!"

"Uh, that's Tennisotro. He used some radioactive sunscreen, and now he uses his supersonic tennis ball cannon to fight crime."

“That rules. Look, I’m sure you get a lot of work, I mean, you’re obviously very talented. But, I work for a magazine here, and we’re always trying to find great new people to illustrate for us. I mean, it wouldn’t be stuff as creative as this, just portraits of people in the news, the odd little cartoon here and there. Would you like to come up to my office and talk it over?”

Smeek is absolutely bowled over. He can’t believe his luck. Of course, he has had many years of bad luck, he figures, so isn’t he entitled to just a bit of *good* luck? Of course, luck is only part of it, he thinks. Now it is up to him to take advantage of his opportunity and do something positive. Also, he wishes he had started sharing his work with people years ago.

“Oh, well, I understand if you’re busy,” says Katherine. Smeek realizes he hasn’t spoken for several seconds. “You’ve probably got an important meeting here?”

“I can say with absolute confidence,” says Smeek, “that talking with you is the most important thing I have going on at this moment.”

Katherine smiles. When the doors open at the floor of Allied Medical Technologies, Smeek leans forward and presses the Door Close button. He rides up with Katherine, and into the future.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Who is Jonathan Smeek?

- A an employee of Allied Medical Technologies
- B the head of the company that owns the Spurlock building
- C a lazy guy who refuses to look for a job
- D a cartoonist who works at a magazine

2. The author describes where Jonathan Smeek lives, and how Jonathan lives. The author writes:

The buildings “remain **gray and sooty**, and look as if sunlight simply slid off without leaving a trace. Jonathan Smeek lives in one of these buildings.”

Jonathan “tends to **dress in gray suits that didn’t quite fit, eats the same vaguely gray egg salad sandwich** for lunch every day...”

Jonathan “has a **gray cat whom he can never quite manage to name**. He calls it simply ‘Cat,’ or ‘You.’”

“This is because he does not have a job. He has been out of work for months, and **spends most of the day watching television...**”

What does the author communicate to the reader by using the words and phrases that are bolded above?

- A how boring and depressing Jonathan Smeek’s life is
- B that Jonathan Smeek loves his boring and dull life
- C that gray is Jonathan Smeek’s favorite color
- D that Jonathan Smeek has dreams about his life

3. Luck plays a role in Jonathan Smeek’s life.

What evidence below best supports the above statement?

- A Jonathan Smeek has a cat.
- B Jonathan unexpectedly runs into a woman that can offer him a job.
- C Jonathan is a talented illustrator.
- D Jonathan Smeek lives in New York City.

4. What does the story suggest about Jonathan’s luck?

- A His luck is starting to change from bad to good.
- B His luck is starting to change from good to bad.
- C He will continue to have bad luck.
- D He will have the same good luck as before.

5. What is a theme of the story "Dream Job"?

- A People shouldn't dream because you just get disappointed when dreams don't come true.
- B Luck and talent can be factors contributing to success.
- C If you work hard your dreams will come true.
- D Creative jobs always make for the best kind of jobs.

6. The author ends the story with the sentence: "He rides up with Katherine and into the future."

What does the author mean by this?

- A Jonathan is riding the elevator to Allied Medical Technologies, which represents the future of medical technology.
- B The name of the company Jonathan will be working for is "Future Inc."
- C The elevator is a time machine that will travel into the future.
- D Jonathan Smeek's professional dreams might come true.

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence below.

Jonathan has kept his art to himself \_\_\_\_\_ he was young when his father yelled at him to stop wasting time with his drawings.

- A but
- B so
- C since
- D before

8. What is Jonathan Smeek's talent?

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9. What evidence from the story shows that Katherine thinks Jonathan Smeek is a talented illustrator?

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10. What are the two most important factors in Jonathan Smeek possibly getting his dream job?

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## Teacher Guide &amp; Answers

Passage Reading Level: Lexile 880

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8. What is Jonathan Smeeke's talent?

**Suggested answer:** He draws cartoons very well.

9. What evidence from the story shows that Katherine thinks Jonathan Smeeke is a talented illustrator?

**Suggested answer:** After seeing his drawings, Katherine says to Jonathan, "I'm sure you get a lot of work, I mean. You're obviously very talented."

10. What are the two most important factors in Jonathan Smeeke possibly getting his dream job?

**Suggested answer:** Answers may vary but students should explain that the two most important factors contributing to Jonathan Smeeke possibly getting his dream job are his talent as an illustrator and the luck he has running into Katherine, a woman who works for a magazine.