

# Chapter 3

## Sand Art, on Deadline





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### **Synopsis**

Mike Angelo, a sculptor, goes to the seashore with all his sculpting equipment and over a period of several hours begins to build a majestic castle of sand. The passing crowd is drawn by the power of his talent as he creates medieval doorways flanked by U-shaped towers, elaborate systems of bridges and gates, battlements, and spiral staircases. The beach people begin to form a large appreciative audience who are captured by the romance of his work. When Angelo completes the last refinements on this miniaturized masterpiece, the crowd is enthralled and then dumbfounded by what follows.

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**Talent Is a Divine Gift—Not to Be Squandered**

**Anonymous**



The young man arrived on the Massachusetts beach early carrying a portable radio, a shovel, and an odd assortment of tools. There were a bricklayer's trowel, a palette knife, spatulas, spoons, and a spray bottle.

He walked down near the water—the tide was out—put down the radio and tuned it to soft rock. Then he shoveled wet sand into a pile nearly four feet high and as many feet across. He took up the trowel and used it to slice large hunks off the pile, creating a rectangular shape.

After that, he set to work with palette knife, spatulas, and spoons. He shaped a graceful tower, topped walls with crenelated battlements, fashioned elegant bay windows, and carved out a massive front gate.

The man knew his sand. With deft strokes, he smoothly finished some surfaces, embroidered baroque designs on others. As delicate shapes began to dry, he gently moistened them with water from the spray bottle, lest they crumble in the breeze.

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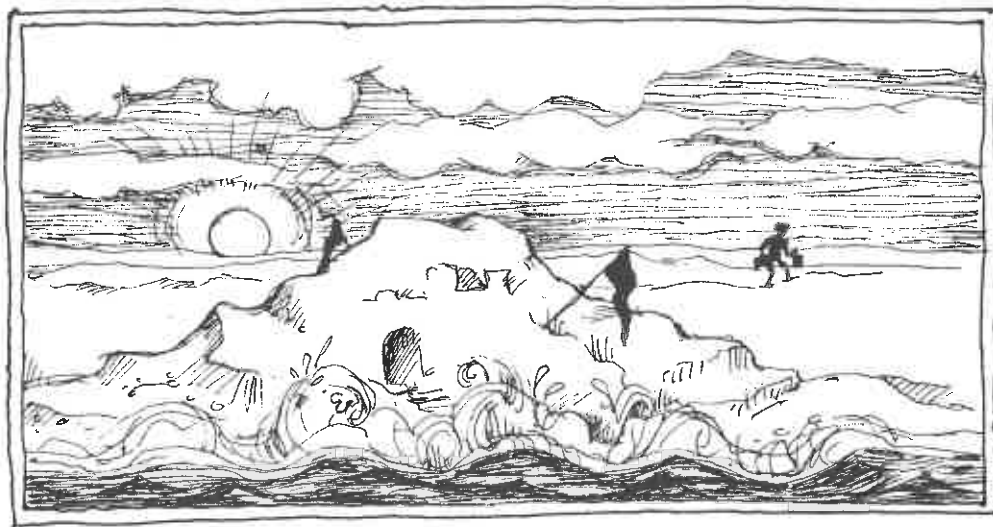
All this took hours. People gathered, commenting to each other and asking questions of the sculptor. Lost in concentration, he gave only perfunctory replies. At last he stood back, apparently satisfied with a castle worthy of the Austrian countryside or Disneyland.

Then he gathered his tools and radio and moved them up to drier sand. He had known for a while what many in the rapt crowd still overlooked; the tide was coming in. Not only had he practiced his craft with confidence and style, he had done so against a powerful, immutable deadline.



As the spectators looked on, water began to lap at the base of the castle. In minutes it was surrounded, a miniature Mont-Saint-Michel. Then the rising flood began to erode the base, chunks of wall fell, the tower tumbled, finally the gate's arch collapsed. More minutes passed, and small waves erased bay windows and battlements—soon no more than a modest lump was left.

Many in the crowd looked distraught; some voiced dismay. But the sculptor remained serene. He had, after all, had a wonderful day, making beauty out of nothing, and watching it return to nothing as time and tide moved on.





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### For the Teacher:

Here is another twist to the end of the sand castle story which demonstrates that not all people who build castles in the sand are drifters, dreamers, or leisure time artisans!

In California there is a unique enterprise which sells sand sculpting, to order. The castles (and other scenes) are constructed to be used as a promotional lure to attract crowds to shopping malls, conventions, and special events of all kinds. The structures, further described in the brochure of *Sand Sculptors International*, are remarkable in their grandeur and accuracy:

“Todd Vander Pluym and his SSI staff are not only the current U.S. Open, World, and International Sand Sculpture Champions, but they also hold all current world records for sand sculpture. SSI artisans, supervised by Todd, have been creating sand sculpture for more than 40 years. Todd is an architect by training, an artist by design and a sculptor by desire. He holds more than 160 sand sculpture championships including 4 world championships and 6 U.S. Open championships.”

Sand sculpture is described in this literature as “The Ultimate Promotion.” And so we have a double twist on a story when we are later informed that building things out of sand has been turned into a profit-making business by some people with extraordinary vision and enterprise. As immigrants to our shores would say, “Only in America!”



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## Point of View—Discussion Questions:

1. Why would a talented person such as Mike Angelo, the sculptor, put hard work into a creative project and be willing to see it disappear or be destroyed irretrievably by time and the elements?

### Possible Answer:

Perhaps Mike Angelo, the artist, had hardly been able to sell his art, and the financial return was not worth the cost of his materials. But more importantly he realized that his greatest fulfillment was in the genuine pleasure he experienced in the process of making his sculpture. His castle was an expression of his talent and his interest in working with sand as a medium. This fact was more important to him than profit or recognition.

2. Some people think that creative women and men in the arts have a gift which they should share with others. First, they believe that those with talent have an obligation to the future. Secondly, they believe that the work of such artists should be created to endure as part of human history and as a chronicle of the times. Another point of view holds that talent belongs to the fortunate few, and it is theirs to use as they please. If some artists choose to create works that do not last for future enjoyment, there are those who believe that is the artist's decision and no one else's business. What do you believe?
3. What would the world be like if nothing was handed down in the arts, the sciences, or in technology? How would it be to reinvent the wheel with every new generation? What are the implications of having no previous information to draw on from the past? What do our achievements owe to the past in all fields of endeavor?\*
4. Theodore Dreiser, an American novelist (1871-1945), described the arts as "The stored honey of the human soul, gathered on wings . . . ." How would you explain that quote?

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\*The oldest (1909) not-for-profit arts service organization in the U.S. organizes and circulates art exhibitions which travel to cultural institutions all over the country. Their mission is to foster art appreciation nationally. For more information write to: The American Federation of Arts, Public Information Officer, 41 East 65th St., New York 10021.







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### Writing Suggestions:

1. If, at this time, you could be an accomplished musician, artist, singer, sports figure, dancer, writer, or scientist, what would you choose to be and how important would it be to you to win the recognition and applause of the public? Would personal satisfaction be enough? Explain your attitude.
2. Yesterday you read in the newspaper that in November, 1987, a painting by Vincent Van Gogh entitled *Irises* was sold at Sothebey's auction establishment in London, England, for \$54 million dollars. The picture was not bought by an art lover but was bought as an investment. You know that the artist, Van Gogh, died sick and in poverty! Write a letter to the man who bought the picture. What is your reaction to the purchase and what would you say? Express your outrage, or dismay, or your admiration for the purchaser's keen business sense. How would the artist, Van Gogh, feel if he were to come back from the grave and hear about this purchase?
3. All art and folk art does not hang in museums. Included in this rich category are the comics which are a serious part of American mythology and a unique artistic expression. There is a highly individualized style to the characters and a special language that is demonstrated through the dialogue balloons. The art, the characterization, and the dialogue combine to impart a strong impression on the reader. Bring in your favorite comic strip and describe the qualities that you believe make it an effective artistic expression. (For some interesting insights, read *My Life in the Comics* by Will Eisner).



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**Talent Is a Divine Gift—Not to Be Squandered**

**Student Comment**

Characters: Mike Angelo, artist  
                  TV newscaster  
                  Audience at the beach

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In a paragraph express your feelings about any aspect of this story which you liked or disliked. How would you have changed it?

Alternative: Now that the story has been discussed, explain the proverb above from your point of view.

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Lined writing area consisting of multiple horizontal lines.