

Script sample- from *PANDORA and her Top Secret and Exceptionally Important Scientific Mission*
By Sarah Bierstock

ACT ONE, SCENE ONE

Lights up on PANDORA, (9), center stage, clutching an over-sized suitcase.

PANDORA
to audience

Psst! You! Hey, you there! Can you keep a secret?

(she waives the audience in closer to her)

I just snuck out of my house. I am on a Secret Mission. I know, it's kinda crazy. Nobody knows what I'm up to. Or even that I left! Not my mom or sister or anybody. I haven't really gotten too far yet- I'm just down the street from my house. See?

(she points upstage)

The blue house with the red door? That's where we live. My sister, Elpis, me and my mom. That's my room with the light on. I left it on so it wouldn't be *Suspicious*. Normally I wouldn't do that because it's not Environmentally Friendly. Wasting electricity is a major No-No! But today is a different! Today I'm sneaking to the river, which is exactly 3.2 miles from our house. If I my suitcase doesn't slow me down too much, I'll arrive in 2.5 hours and 35 seconds.

beat

See, tomorrow's my first day at Smarty Pants Elementary. It's my new school, and it's right down the street from my Dad's house. He lives in another town, not too far from here. I'm going to stay with him during the week now instead of at my regular house with my Mom and Elpis. I just have to complete this one Exceptionally Important Experiment before my Dad picks me up tonight. Then I'll know for Super-Duper Certain that I've made the right decision to change schools. If I leave right now, I'll have just enough time to complete my Experiment before he gets here. Follow me!

beat

See, what *happened was...* there was some stuff going on at school. It all started when Mrs. Jellyfish, that's my science teacher, well, that's not her real name but that's what we all call her because she's Obsessed with Oceanic life. And, she holds the World Record of number of times to be stung by a jellyfish! Really! She's been stung like one hundred and fifty times or something- it's crazy!

MS. JELLYFISH appears. PANDORA raises her hand with a question.

PANDORA

Ms. Jellyfish?

MS. JELLYFISH

Yes, Pandora?

PANDORA

How many stingers does a jellyfish have?

MS. JELLYFISH

Jellyfish have tentacles with multiple stingers, Pandora.

PANDORA

So, did one jellyfish sting you *one hundred and fifty times* ?

MS. JELLYFISH

No, Pandora. Jellyfish travel in blooms, or large groups. I was actually stung by more than one jellyfish. But I was also stung on multiple occasions, believe it or not.

PANDORA

That's extremely Unusual, isn't it?

MRS. JELLYFISH

It is, Pandora.

PANDORA raises her hand again.

PANDORA

Ms. Jellyfish?

MS. JELLYFISH

slightly exasperated

Yes, Pandora.

PANDORA

In your opinion, is there a Reason that jellyfish seem to like you so much?

MS. JELLYFISH

I'm would say so, Pandora. Either that, or I'm just extremely unlucky.

PANDORA

Do you think it has to do with a smell your body might be Exuding, or giving off into the water?

MRS. JELLYFISH

I beg your pardon?

PANDORA

Oh, no offense, Ms. Jellyfish! It's just that my dad told me about an article he read where some people give off certain scents because of their Hormones and that can attract all kinds of unwanted attention from other Species.

MR. JELLYFISH

Pandora, while I appreciate your interest in my jellyfish run-ins, I must insist that we continue this conversation privately so that we do not further disrupt the lesson plan.

PANDORA

deflated

Yes, Ms. Jellyfish.

MS. JELLYFISH exits.

PANDORA

to audience, sitting on her suitcase

Anyway, Ms. Jellyfish gave our class the assignment of creating a model of oceanic life. And I just happen to be extremely interested in oceanic life because there is such a thing as Global Warming, where the earth's getting too hot to function normally. Global Warming is creating a huge amount of havoc for oceanic life! So I became extremely Enthusiastic about it. And I went to work building the most thorough paper mâché oceanic model that any third grader has ever built. It was Amazing. There were deep sea tunnels made of green slime that looked like seaweed, an underwater café made out of pipe cleaners where scuba-divers could refresh their air supplies, and even a baleen tooth cleaning area for whales that I made out of the bristles from our kitchen broom. I brought it to school and *that's* when everything went downhill. Marjoree Tenenbaum, the most popular girl in my whole school, started making fun of me.

MARJOREE TENENANBAUM enters. PANDORA sets her suitcase aside.

MARJOREE TENENANBAUM

to the other kids

Hey, look what Pandora the Pain made.

(gesturing to her model)

This is so super lame. You obviously have *way* too much time on your hands, teacher's pet. What did you do, stay up all night for the last month building this with your Daddy? I bet he made this for you, didn't he?

PANDORA

My Dad doesn't even live with us. Keep him out of it!

MARJOREE TENENANBAUM

Whatever. Don't you know you make the rest of us look bad when you show up with something like that?

PANDORA

I do?

MARJOREE TENENANBAUM

You're always showing off, Pandora. You're such a pain! You and your lame little model!

(sing-song)

MARJOREE TENENANBAUM *(cont'd)*

Pandora-The-Pain!

PANDORA

Stop it!

MARJOREE TENENANBAUM

singing, louder

Pandora-The-Pain!

PANDORA

Stop calling me that!

MARJOREE TENENANBAUM starts circling around her, teasing her.

PANDORA

to audience

And all her minions, the kids that follow her around, joined in and started Chanting at me all together: Pandora-The Pain, Pandora the Pain! Faster and louder and faster and louder,

MARJOREE TENENANBAUM

singing

Pandora-The-Pain!

PANDORA

STOP IT!!

to audience

Until one of Marjoree's minions kicked my Incredible paper mâché Oceanic life model to the ground and stomped it to pieces!

PANDORA screams

My model! Oh, no! Oh, no! Oh-no, no, no, no, no!!!

PANDORA has a mini panic attack where she can't quite catch her breath as she desperately tries to put her model back together. MARJOREE TENENBAUM laughs and points her finger at PANDORA.

MARJOREE TENENBAUM

What's the matter, Teacher's Pet!?

(mocking her shortness of breath)

You can't catch your breath over that stupid paper mâché model? So pathetic.

MARJOREE TENENBAUM laughs again and exits. Pandora runs back over to her suitcase, opens it slightly, appearing to whisper into it, breathing heavily.

PANDORA

I'm not gonna lie. It really hurt my feelings. And was super embarrassing. Sooo-- I told my Dad. My Dad's been telling me forever that it would Behoove me to take the exam for the Gifted and Talented school, other-wise known as Smarty-Pants Elementary, which is right down the street from his house. He wants me to go there because it's a Specialty school for kids that show Unusual Promise, which I guess means we're gonna end up doing something great, or something. No pressure, right? He wouldn't stop saying *Be-Hoove*- so I figured it was something important- and just went ahead and took the silly test. And I got in. So my Dad and enrolled me there. Like I said, I just have this one last Experiment to do first!

Off-stage voices call out urgently,

MOM

(off-stage)

Pandora? Pandora where are you?

ELPIS

(off-stage)

Pandy? Pand-ee!??

PANDORA

Shoot! They're looking for me! Quick- I've gotta hide!

(to audience)

Shhhh!

She ducks into a [redacted], dragging her heavy suitcase.

ELPIS

off-stage

The light's on in her room!

MOM

off-stage

She's not there. I just checked.

(calling)

Your father's coming to pick you up shortly!

ELPIS

off-stage

I'm sure she's nearby.

MOM

off-stage

Pandora? Where are you?

PANDORA

They're already on my tail! I've gotta keep moving! Let's go!

ACT ONE, SCENE TWO

PANDORA waves for the audience to follow her, dragging her large suitcase in tote.

PANDORA

to audience

The most Direct route to the river is the path in the woods behind my house. But here's the thing- it winds right past my neighbor, Ms. Solomon's, house. It's what you call Private Property. That part of the path belongs to her. So, we're not allowed back there, unless she says its ok. And Ms. Solomon is Super Scary. Not Monster scary or anything, just scary like she never, ever smiles. She scrunches up her eyebrow all the time, like this-

PANDORA exaggerates a furrowed face

Like she knows about "that bad thing you did" and she's just waiting for you to spill the beans? My mom says she's it's just her Thinking Face. I sneak back there sometimes because she has these Gigantic and Amazing Solar Panels all over her roof. They practically make up the whole house and I've been dying to take a closer look at them forever! But now, the only way we're going to make it there and back before my dad gets here is if we ask Scary Ms. Solomon for permission to use her path. I'm hoping once she understands the Unusual and Incredible importance of my mission, she'll say yes.

PANDORA shudders

It's now or never. We have to be Brave! And- be careful as we run past my house. If Elpis happens to be looking out her bedroom window, she'll see us—so stay low to the ground!

She ducks down low, running past her house struggling with her heavy suitcase, and indicates for the audience to follow suite. She checks to make sure no one has spotted them.

PANDORA

to the audience

The coast is clear! Follow me! See, in addition to being Super Scary, Ms. Solomon is what my mom calls, a Vanguard. She says that means she's *ahead of her time*, or something.

(climbing nervously through the wood toward the house)

Ms. Solomon has had the Solar panels since 1979, when Jimmy Carter was president! That was a Super long time ago, even before my mom was born! Apparently, President Carter had a peanut farm so he knew a thing or two about the sun. See, look!

(she points to her neighbor's roof, which is covered in solar paneling)

Isn't it Amazing?

PANDORA walks closer to the house, fearfully.

PANDORA

(whispering)

Did you know that the sun is 92 Million Miles away from the earth?

She lays her suitcase down heavily and stands on it to peak into the windows.

PANDORA (*cont'd*)
(*whispering*)

It's a pretty big house. I wonder how many rooms there are? I mean, do you think the solar panels really make enough energy to heat up the whole house?

(*smushing her face up to the window, peaking in*)

I wonder how many bathrooms she has? What if more than one person wants to take a shower at the same time? Will there be enough hot water? And what if she runs all the electrical devices at once? Like, the dishwasher *and* the laundry machine *and* the lights are on *and* she's working on her computer AND/

Ms. SOLOMON, an eclectic 65-70 year old woman appears, with a largely furrowed brow.

MS. SOLOMON

Who's there?

Startled, PANDORA slips off the suitcase with a plop.

PANDORA

Oh! Ms. Solomon! I'm, I was just, I'm- I, I didn't mean to snoop. I was just/

MS. SOLOMON

/Admiring the solar paneling? It's remarkable, I know.

PANDORA nods, embarrassed.

MS. SOLOMON
noticing her suitcase

Your Terry's daughter, from next door, right?

PANDORA nods.

MS. SOLOMON

You do know this is private property, yes?

PANDORA

I do.

MS. SOLOMON

And?

PANDORA

And- I was hoping to-to-to

MS. SOLOMON

Yes?

PANDORA
(*taking a big gulp and talking very fast*)

To-ask-for-your-permission-to-use-your-path-because-I'm-trying-to-get-to-the-river-really quickly-because-I-have-a-top-secret-and-exceptionally-important-scientific-experiment-to conduct-there-before-my-Dad-comes-to-pick-me-up!

MS. SOLOMON

Scientific Experiment, you say?

PANDORA

Yes, Ms. Solomon.

MS. SOLOMON

Interesting. What's in the bag?

PANDORA
improvising

Oh this? Um, just my-- Experimental Instruments.

MS. SOLOMON

I'm intrigued. Why don't you come in for a moment?

PANDORA

In-side? I- well, I really am in a bit of a hurry.

MS. SOLOMON

Live a little, kid. I'll show you how the paneling works since you're clearly interested.

PANDORA
to audience

I know we're in huge hurry, but I just cannot resist the solar paneling!

to Ms. Solomon

May-be I could spare just a few minutes...

MS. SOLOMON
gesturing to come in

You can set your bag down there by the door.

PANDORA
clutching the suitcase

Oh. Would you mind if kept it? It's very important to me.

MS. SOLOMON

As you wish.

PANDORA
(looking up at the ceiling in awe)

Jiminy Cricket!

MS. SOLOMON

It's majestic, isn't it?

PANDORA nods in awe.

MS. SOLOMON (*cont'd*):

I'm having tea. Would you care to join me?

PANDORA
to audience

She offered me tea! I feel so Sophisticated!

(to Ms. Solomon)

No, thank you, Ms. Solomon. I really am on an Especially tight schedule.

MS. SOLOMON

I'll just turn the kettle off.

PANDORA explores the space with her eyes.

MS. SOLOMON (*cont'd*)
yelling from the other room

You see that box over there on the floor?

PANDORA locates the box she's referring to, MS. SOLOMON enters from the kitchen with tea.

MS. SOLOMON (*cont'd*)

The energy the sun produces is called direct current. Home appliances can't run off of that type of energy.

PANDORA

So, how does it work?

MS. SOLOMON

That box converts the direct current to what we call alternating current- or AC. And that energy runs all the appliances.

PANDORA
in awe

Alternating Current. Fascinating.

MS. SOLOMON smiles.

MS. SOLOMON

I'm glad you think so, too. It really is quite a marvel.

PANDORA
taken aback by her smile

My mom says that you were the first person in the whole state to put solar paneling in your house.

MS. SOLOMON

I was.

PANDORA

But, how did you know to do it? Weren't you worried about spending all that time installing it and it might not work?

MS. SOLOMON

Well, I didn't install it myself. And you know, my work is in Science. And in Science, we collect a lot of evidence to help us make good decisions. I had enough evidence to confidently guess that it would work. And if my Hypothesis was wrong, I knew I'd adapt. Being able to change is extremely important. I was, what you'd call *rather renowned* in the field of Atmospheric Science.

PANDORA

You're famous for studying the atmosphere of the Earth, right?

MS. SOLOMON

nodding

Your mother tells me you're very interested in climate change.

PANDORA

Do you know there are people out there that still think that climate change isn't real?

MS. SOLOMON

Indeed I do, Pandora.

PANDORA

working her way back over to her suitcase

People-that-don't-even-believe-that-glaciers-are-melting-at-Alarming-rates, that-polar-bears are-becoming-extinct-because-they-can't-find-anymore-ice-caps-to-live-on, that-the-Whole-in-the-Ozone-layer-isn't-even-really-a-Whole??

PANDORA clutches her suitcase very tightly to her chest.

MS. SOLOMON

I do. But, remember.

PANDORA

Yes?

MS. SOLOMON

We have something very powerful on our side.

PANDORA

What?!

MS. SOLOMON

Evidence.

MS. SOLOMON takes a deep, full breath and PANDORA follows suite.

MS. SOLOMON (*cont'd*)

So, what's your experiment?

PANDORA

Well, I'd love to tell you all about it, Ms. Solomon- really I would. But if I don't get going right this very second I'm just not going to have time to get there and back before my dad comes. And it's Critical, Scientifically speaking, that I know the results tonight.

MS. SOLOMON

I see.

PANDORA

So... is it ok, then?

MS. SOLOMON

Is what ok?

PANDORA

Can I please use your path, just this once?

MS. SOLOMON

Considering

Do you know why those private property signs are out there, Pandora? Because I believe in the privacy and the integrity of one having their own space to work. And it sounds as though you have some important work that needs to be handled. So, I will grant you use of my path.

PANDORA

Oh, thank you, Ms. Solomon!

MS. SOLOMON

With one condition! I want to know the results of the experiment. When its completed. Can you commit to that?

PANDORA

Does it have to be tonight?

MS. SOLOMON

No. But I'd like to know what you learn from the evidence.

PANDORA nods and starts to go.

PANDORA

reconsidering

Ms. Solomon?

MS. SOLOMON

Yes?

PANDORA

How exactly do you collect scientific evidence to help you make a good decision?

MS. SOLOMON

You look at the data.

PANDORA

The Data?

MS. SOLOMON

The data are the facts that you know to be true. For instance, evidence tells me that you've snuck into these woods to get a gander at my solar paneling four or five times just in the last month. I've logged where you hid, how long you stayed, even how you positioned yourself to study the paneling. And yet, today, you ventured all the way to my house for the first time. Based on your previous actions, the data, I can assume that something is different about today. Something has changed. And something important might be happening, as in fact, you have just confirmed. Now that I know this to be correct, I can use that information to decide if the data, the facts, support my decision to let you use my path or not. What would you have done if I had said no?

PANDORA

Well, you mentioned before that Scientists need to be able to change. I'd have adapted, I guess. Come up with something else. But, since you *Did* say yes, which I am Extremely grateful for, I better be on my way.

MS. SOLOMON

We all need to be able to change, Pandora. Not just Scientists. And sometimes asking for help is the only way to do that.

PANDORA

(She starts to leave)

Well, thank you for the permission, Ms. Solomon. And for showing me how your solar panels work.

MS. SOLOMON

If you ever want to talk science, Pandora, there's nothing I value you more than an inquisitive mind. One minute before you go.

PANDORA

getting to the door, dragging her suitcase.

MS. SOLOMON exits. While she waits, PANDORA opens her suitcase privately, ever so slightly so no one can see what's inside, and whispers something into it. She zips it up very quickly as MS. SOLOMON returns.

MS. SOLOMON

One other thing that might be useful.

She hands PANDORA a compass.

PANDORA

Wow! A compass!

MS. SOLOMON

pointing to the sky

The path does lead to the river. But it can get a little confusing back there in the woods. If you get lost, just follow the sun.

PANDORA

I shall treasure it always.

MS. SOLOMON

Safe travels, now. I'll expect to see you again to report back your evidence.

PANDORA

Yes, Ms. Solomon!

PANDORA exits MS. SOLOMON'S house, studying her compass. MS. SOLOMON picks up the phone and calls PANDORA'S MOM, TERRY PEPPERDINE.

MS. SOLOMON

on phone

Hello, Terry? It's me, Susan, next door. I wanted you to know Pandora was just here. No, she's not headed home just yet. She says she's off to conduct her top secret experiment at the river yet. Yes, I will. I will certainly be in touch if she comes by again. Alright now. Try not to worry. Bye.