Why Fire Spread

Trace the causes and effects of a factory disaster

6-12.HT1.2 "Explain how events and developments in the past stem from multiple causes and have multiple effects."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two conditions that helped the flames spread, circle two barriers to escape or rescue, and number two effects of the disaster in the last paragraph.

The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire

1 On March 25, 1911, fire broke out at the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory in New York City. Workers on the upper floors made shirtwaists, a popular kind of blouse. The factory held piles of cloth scraps, and its tables and wooden floors could burn. Investigators never proved exactly what sparked the fire, although a tossed match or cigarette was considered likely. Dry materials helped the flames spread quickly. A busy workday meant many people were inside when the fire began. These conditions did not all start the fire, but together they made it dangerous.

2 Smoke and flames trapped workers on the eighth, ninth, and tenth floors. Some doors were locked during work hours, limiting escape from part of the factory. Other workers reached a narrow fire escape, but it collapsed under the weight of people fleeing. Firefighters arrived, yet their ladders could not reach the highest floors. Without sprinklers to slow the flames, workers had little time to find another way out. In all, 146 people died, most of them women and girls. The disaster's terrible toll came from several failures acting at once, not from one blocked path alone.

3 New Yorkers saw people jump from the building and read reports of the deaths. Grief and anger pushed workers, labor groups, and other residents to demand safer workplaces. The state created the Factory Investigating Commission, which examined working conditions in many industries. New York then passed laws that improved fire safety and workplace rules. The fire also became a lasting symbol for people seeking workers' rights. These results had more than one cause: the deadly fire drew attention, while existing worker organizations and public pressure helped turn attention into action. Changes did not erase the loss, but they affected workplaces beyond this one factory.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did the materials in the factory and the busy workday each make the fire more dangerous?

2. Choose two different escape or rescue problems. Explain how each could increase the number of deaths.

3. How did the fire and public pressure work together to bring about new safety laws?

4. Describe two effects of the fire beyond the deaths. Explain how the disaster contributed to each.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine New York did not pass new safety laws after the fire. In four or five sentences, predict two different effects this might have had on workers or public action, and connect each prediction to a different detail in the passage.

ANSWER KEY

Why Fire Spread

GRADES 6-12 · 6-12.HT1.2

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two conditions that helped the flames spread, circle two barriers to escape or rescue, and number two effects of the disaster in the last paragraph. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did the materials in the factory and the busy workday each make the fire more dangerous?	**Cloth scraps and wooden surfaces helped flames spread, while the busy workday meant many people were inside.**
2	Choose two different escape or rescue problems. Explain how each could increase the number of deaths.	**Locked doors blocked some workers from escaping. The collapsed fire escape removed another route. Accept that firefighters' ladders could not reach the highest floors.**
3	How did the fire and public pressure work together to bring about new safety laws?	**The deaths drew attention to unsafe workplaces, and workers, labor groups, and residents demanded change. The state investigated working conditions and passed new laws.**
4	Describe two effects of the fire beyond the deaths. Explain how the disaster contributed to each.	**The deaths prompted an investigation that led to safer workplace laws. The disaster also became a lasting symbol for people seeking workers' rights.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Without new safety laws, workers in other factories might have faced more danger during fires. The locked doors and collapsed fire escape at Triangle show why rules about exits mattered. Public protests might also have continued longer without laws to address the anger. Labor groups and residents had already demanded safer workplaces, so they might have kept pressing officials.

Accept other supported cause-and-effect connections from the passage. For the open task, look for two distinct predictions, each linked to a different passage detail.