Safety and Power

How work, money, and risk shaped views of safety laws

6-12.HT2.4 "Analyze complex and interacting factors that influenced the perspectives of people during different historical eras and how those perspectives are reflected throughout history."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two pressures that shaped workers' views of safety, and circle two pressures that shaped owners' views. Number two places where those views are reflected in a law.

Who Should Keep Workers Safe?

1 In 1911, a fire swept through the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory in New York City, killing 146 workers. Many employees were young immigrant women who sewed clothing for low wages. Some exits were locked during the fire, and the building's fire escapes failed. For workers, a job could mean rent and food for a family, yet unsafe conditions could mean death. Earlier, in 1909, garment workers had struck for better pay and conditions. Their demands grew from more than fear of fire: low wages, long hours, and the risk of losing work shaped what they wanted to change.

2 Factory owners faced a different set of pressures. They competed for orders and could lose business if production slowed or costs rose. Some argued that strict government rules would hurt factories and jobs. Workers and their allies argued that employers should not decide safety measures alone, because workers had less power to refuse dangerous work. After the fire, public anger helped drive investigations and new safety laws in New York State. These laws reflected a growing belief that government should protect workers, but they did not settle every disagreement about the cost and responsibility of safety.

3 Decades later, the debate reached workplaces far beyond clothing factories. In 1970, Congress passed the Occupational Safety and Health Act, creating a national system to set and enforce many workplace safety rules. Workers in industries such as construction and manufacturing faced hazards that a single state's laws could not address everywhere. Supporters saw national rules as protection for people with limited power at work. Some employers worried about the cost of meeting those rules. The 1970 law did not come from one fire alone. It reflected years of organizing, research on workplace hazards, and arguments about the roles of workers, businesses, and government.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Why might a garment worker in 1911 have wanted safer conditions but also feared losing a job? Use two details from the passage.

2. How did competition for orders and workers' limited power lead owners and workers to view safety rules differently?

3. Whose view was reflected in New York State's new safety laws after the fire? Explain how public anger helped that view become law.

4. How were the pressures behind the 1970 national law different from those behind New York State's laws after 1911?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine that a city in 2030 is considering a rule requiring paid breaks during extreme heat in warehouses. In four or five sentences, explain how two pressures might shape a worker's view and two might shape an owner's view, how each view might affect the rule, and how one view connects to a pattern in the passage.

ANSWER KEY

Safety and Power

GRADES 6-12 · 6-12.HT2.4

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two pressures that shaped workers' views of safety, and circle two pressures that shaped owners' views. Number two places where those views are reflected in a law. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Why might a garment worker in 1911 have wanted safer conditions but also feared losing a job? Use two details from the passage.	**Unsafe conditions could be deadly, but workers needed their low wages to pay for rent and food.**
2	How did competition for orders and workers' limited power lead owners and workers to view safety rules differently?	**Some owners feared that rules would raise costs or slow production, while workers wanted rules because they had little power to refuse dangerous work.**
3	Whose view was reflected in New York State's new safety laws after the fire? Explain how public anger helped that view become law.	**The laws reflected the view that government should protect workers. Public anger after the fire helped drive investigations and new laws.**
4	How were the pressures behind the 1970 national law different from those behind New York State's laws after 1911?	**Public anger after one factory fire helped drive New York's laws. The 1970 national law reflected years of organizing and research, as well as concern about hazards in workplaces across states.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

A warehouse worker might support paid heat breaks because hot shifts threaten health and missing wages could make rent harder to pay. An owner might worry that paid breaks raise costs while fast shipping deadlines already limit time. The worker could ask the city to guarantee pay during breaks. The owner might seek flexible break schedules to keep orders moving. Like the disagreement over factory safety in 1911, these views show how health, income, and business pressure can shape a public rule.

Accept other supported explanations of how pressures shaped each group's view. For Part 3, look for two distinct pressures for each person, a plausible effect on the proposed rule, and a clear connection to a pattern in the passage.