Voices for Change

Immigrant workers and reform in the early 1900s

IS.1.10 "Summarize the impact immigration had on social movements of the era including the contributions of specific individuals and groups."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline actions taken by immigrant workers and their allies. Circle the changes those actions helped bring about so you can trace their impact on reform movements.

Workers Who Changed the Rules

1 In November 1909, garment workers packed a meeting hall in New York City. Clara Lemlich, a Jewish immigrant from the Russian Empire, called for a general strike after years of low pay and long hours in clothing factories. Thousands of workers, many of them immigrant women, joined what became known as the Uprising of the 20,000. The International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union helped organize the walkout, while the Women's Trade Union League raised funds and public support. Some employers agreed to higher wages and shorter hours. But many factories still lacked strong protections against fires and other dangers.

2 That danger became painfully clear in 1911, when a fire at the Triangle Shirtwaist factory in New York City killed 146 workers, most of them young immigrant women. Rose Schneiderman, a Jewish immigrant from Poland and a labor organizer, spoke at a public memorial. She criticized people who expressed sympathy but ignored workers' earlier calls for safer conditions. The disaster and continued organizing helped push New York lawmakers to pass stronger workplace safety laws. These changes mattered, but laws had to be enforced, and they did not protect every worker in the country.

3 Immigrant workers also linked labor reform to the fight for women's voting rights. Schneiderman argued that women needed the vote to influence the laws governing their jobs. New York women won state voting rights in 1917, after campaigns involving many activists, including immigrant workers. Meanwhile, in Lawrence, Massachusetts, immigrant textile workers from many language groups struck in 1912 after a wage cut. The Industrial Workers of the World helped organize them across language barriers, and the strike won higher pay for many workers. Together, these efforts made immigrant workers visible leaders in campaigns for fair wages, safer factories, and a stronger political voice.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Summarize how Clara Lemlich and immigrant garment workers affected the labor movement in 1909.

2. How did the Women's Trade Union League help the garment workers' strike bring about change?

3. Summarize how Rose Schneiderman connected immigrant workers' experiences to workplace safety and voting rights.

4. What impact did cooperation across language groups have on the 1912 Lawrence strike?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a five- to seven-sentence museum label explaining how immigrant workers helped change both workplaces and political life from 1909 to 1917. Connect at least two named people or groups to their actions and effects, and explain one limit of the changes.

Voices for Change

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline actions taken by immigrant workers and their allies. Circle the changes those actions helped bring about so you can trace their impact on reform movements. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Summarize how Clara Lemlich and immigrant garment workers affected the labor movement in 1909.	**Lemlich called for a general strike, and thousands of workers joined it. Some employers then agreed to higher wages and shorter hours.**
2	How did the Women's Trade Union League help the garment workers' strike bring about change?	**It raised funds and public support for the walkout, which led some employers to improve pay and hours.**
3	Summarize how Rose Schneiderman connected immigrant workers' experiences to workplace safety and voting rights.	**After the Triangle fire, she criticized the failure to heed workers' safety concerns. She also argued that women needed the vote to influence workplace laws.**
4	What impact did cooperation across language groups have on the 1912 Lawrence strike?	**With help from the Industrial Workers of the World, immigrant workers organized across language barriers and won higher pay for many workers.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Immigrant workers helped change the rules of work and politics in the early 1900s. In 1909, Clara Lemlich called for a garment workers' strike against low pay and long hours. The union helped organize the walkout, which won better pay and hours from some employers. After the Triangle fire, Rose Schneiderman demanded safer workplaces, and New York passed stronger safety laws. Schneiderman also argued that women needed voting rights to shape those laws. New York women gained state voting rights in 1917. These gains were limited because safety laws did not protect every worker nationwide.

Accept summaries that accurately link immigrant individuals or groups to an action and its effect. For the museum label, students may use the Lawrence strike instead of the garment workers' strike.