After the Fire

How public pressure changed workplace safety

S.8.1 "Describe how and why societies change over time."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two unsafe conditions, circle two ways people organized for change, and number three steps toward change after the fire in the order they occurred.

The Triangle Fire and Workplace Change

1 In 1911, the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory occupied the upper floors of a New York City building. Hundreds of workers, many of them young immigrant women, sewed blouses at crowded rows of machines. Factory owners wanted fast production, while workers had little power to demand safer conditions. On March 25, a fire spread through the factory. Some exits were locked, and an exterior fire escape collapsed. Firefighters' ladders could not reach the highest floors. The fire killed 146 people. Newspapers reported the disaster, turning dangers that workers had faced each day into a public issue that city leaders could no longer ignore.

2 The fire did not create concern about factory safety from nothing. Labor unions and reformers had already protested dangerous workplaces, but owners often resisted changes that cost money. After the fire, workers, relatives, and other New Yorkers joined marches and public meetings. Their demands kept pressure on elected officials after the first wave of grief faded. New York lawmakers created a Factory Investigating Commission in 1911. Its members visited workplaces and heard testimony about conditions. The investigation gave lawmakers evidence to support new rules, showing how organized public pressure and government research could turn anger into policy.

3 Over the next few years, New York passed dozens of workplace laws covering fire safety, building exits, and other conditions. New rules required changes in factories, and inspectors gained stronger tools to check whether employers followed them. This was a change in what society expected: safety was increasingly treated as a public responsibility, not just a choice made by each owner. The shift did not happen in one day or end all workplace hazards. It depended on earlier organizing, the shock of the fire, sustained demands, and lawmakers willing to act. Continued enforcement mattered because a law alone could not keep an exit open.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did conditions before the fire help make the disaster a turning point for change?

2. Why did organized action after the fire matter even after the first wave of grief faded?

3. How did the Factory Investigating Commission help turn public concern into new rules?

4. How did expectations about factory safety change, and why was the change incomplete?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine a school where cafeteria food waste is rising. In four or five sentences, explain how and why a group could change one school practice over time. Include the problem, an organized action, a decision, and one remaining limit.

After the Fire

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two unsafe conditions, circle two ways people organized for change, and number three steps toward change after the fire in the order they occurred. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did conditions before the fire help make the disaster a turning point for change?	**Workers already faced dangerous conditions and had little power to demand safety. The deadly fire and news coverage brought those dangers to wider public attention.**
2	Why did organized action after the fire matter even after the first wave of grief faded?	**Marches and public meetings kept pressure on elected officials to address factory safety.**
3	How did the Factory Investigating Commission help turn public concern into new rules?	**Its workplace visits and testimony gave lawmakers evidence they could use to support safety rules.**
4	How did expectations about factory safety change, and why was the change incomplete?	**Safety increasingly became a public responsibility backed by laws and inspections, but hazards remained and rules still needed enforcement.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

At a fictional school, unopened food and leftovers fill trash cans after lunch because students must take items they do not want. Students and cafeteria staff could measure the waste for a month and ask school leaders to allow a share table for unopened food, if local food safety rules permit it. Leaders could approve the table and track how much food is reused. Some waste would remain because opened food cannot go on the table.

Accept answers that connect existing conditions, collective action, and government decisions to change over time. For the open task, look for a plausible cause-and-effect sequence and a limit that fits the proposed practice.