Doors and Decisions

Read a fictional 1912 letter through its writer's perspective.

E.P.3.2.A "Evaluate the extent to which historical or cultural perspectives affect an author's stated or implied purpose."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two details about the fire, circle two details about the writer's work or immigrant community, and draw an arrow from each detail to a sentence that shows what the writer wants readers to think or do. Use your marks to judge how each perspective shapes her purpose.

A Letter After the Fire, Fictional 1912 Letter

1. To the editor: On March 25, 1911, smoke filled the Triangle Shirtwaist factory in New York City. One hundred forty-six workers died, many of them young immigrant women like the people I sew beside. I did not work at Triangle, but I knew what a crowded workroom felt like when the day was long and the doors seemed far away. Some Triangle exit doors were locked, and the building's fire escape failed. I write now, in 1912, because a year of mourning has not made every workshop safe. How many more workers must risk their lives just to earn a living?

2. At our shop, several languages mingle over the sewing machines. When an inspector speaks only English, a new worker may not know how to report a blocked exit. Some readers call us careless for staying in dangerous jobs. They do not see the rent due each week or the relatives who depend on our wages. I want lawmakers to require regular inspections, clear escape routes, and doors that workers can open from inside. A rule on paper matters little if a worker cannot speak up without fearing dismissal. Safety must include a way for every worker to be heard.

3. Factory owners have bills to pay, and some may welcome fair rules that apply to every shop. Yet when an owner says a new door costs too much, I remember how quickly a family can lose its wage earner. A newspaper may print a death count, but it cannot show an empty chair at supper in every home. I ask my neighbors to support these laws, not because immigrant workers need special favors, but because our lives should count as much as the clothing we make. If we treat the fire as yesterday's tragedy instead of today's warning, the next locked door will be our choice.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How does the writer use the Triangle fire to support her stated purpose? Name that purpose and one detail she uses.

2. How does the writer's experience in a multilingual immigrant workplace shape what she wants safety rules to accomplish?

3. To what extent does the fire, rather than the writer's workplace perspective, shape her call for reform? Use one detail for each influence.

4. The writer acknowledges that owners have bills to pay. How does her response to that concern reveal a purpose beyond changing laws?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write three or four sentences as a 1912 factory owner who supports safer workplaces. State what you want readers to do and use one detail from the letter, then add one sentence explaining how your perspective changes the emphasis compared with the letter writer's.

ANSWER KEY

Doors and Decisions

HIGH SCHOOL · E.P.3.2.A

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two details about the fire, circle two details about the writer's work or immigrant community, and draw an arrow from each detail to a sentence that shows what the writer wants readers to think or do. Use your marks to judge how each perspective shapes her purpose. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How does the writer use the Triangle fire to support her stated purpose? Name that purpose and one detail she uses.	**She wants lawmakers to require inspections and safe exits. She cites the 146 deaths or the locked exits to show why those rules are needed.**
2	How does the writer's experience in a multilingual immigrant workplace shape what she wants safety rules to accomplish?	**She wants workers to be able to report hazards and be heard, since a worker may not understand an English-speaking inspector and may fear dismissal.**
3	To what extent does the fire, rather than the writer's workplace perspective, shape her call for reform? Use one detail for each influence.	**Both strongly shape it. The locked exits and deaths make the need for reform urgent, while her experience with language barriers and fear of dismissal leads her to seek a way for workers to speak up.**
4	The writer acknowledges that owners have bills to pay. How does her response to that concern reveal a purpose beyond changing laws?	**She also wants readers to value workers' lives over the cost of a new door. She points to families losing wage earners and empty chairs at supper.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

I own a clothing shop, and I cannot ignore the deaths of 146 workers at Triangle. My workers must be able to open the doors from inside. I support regular inspections because clear rules would protect workers and help responsible shops compete fairly. I ask other owners to back these changes instead of arguing only about their cost. Unlike the letter writer, I emphasize how shared rules can help owners run safer businesses.

Accept different judgments of which influence is stronger if students support them with details from both the fire and the writer's workplace experience. For the open task, look for a distinct owner perspective that still supports safety, not a claim that all owners held the same view.