Behind the Letter

How a writer's position shapes a call for change

MWH.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 the writer's stated request, circle details that reveal her experiences or the public debate, and number two places where her perspective shapes an argument. Use your marks to judge how strongly her perspective affects her purpose.

An Imagined 1912 Letter to the Editor

(1) To the editor: Nearly a year has passed since the fire at the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory in New York City killed 146 people. I did not work there, but I sew shirts in another city factory, and I recognized the fear in the reports of crowded exits. My parents came from Italy, believing steady work could give our family a future. I still believe that. Yet when a worker must choose between a paycheck and speaking up about an unsafe door, the choice is not truly free. Please print this letter before the state debates new factory rules.

(2) Some owners say inspections will cost money and slow production. I know how much a closed factory can hurt; my wages help pay our rent. That is why I ask for regular inspections and exits that workers can open during a fire, not for factories to shut their doors. After the Triangle fire, many New Yorkers demanded safer workplaces, while others worried about government control of business. If I wrote only about grief, you might agree for a day. Rules that can be checked might protect workers long after the headlines disappear.

(3) An owner might describe a new lock as a way to stop theft. From a cutting table, a lock can look like a trap. Our positions change which risk we notice first. I cannot claim that every owner ignores safety or that every workplace is the same. Still, a city should not ask a worker to trust luck when a clear exit and a careful inspection could prevent deaths. I hope readers who have never sewn a seam will see that a worker's life is worth more than the minutes saved by a locked door.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. To what extent does the writer's experience as a worker in an immigrant family shape her call for new rules? Use two details from the letter.

2. How does the public debate after the Triangle fire affect when the writer sends her letter and the kind of change she requests?

3. The writer says an owner and a worker may see a lock differently. How does her position shape the further purpose implied by this comparison?

4. Does the writer's concern about wages weaken or strengthen her argument for safety rules? Evaluate its effect on her purpose using evidence from two paragraphs.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write 6 to 8 sentences as a fictional 1912 factory owner who supports inspections but worries about their cost. Include one detail from the letter, make your request clear, and evaluate how strongly your position as an owner shapes your reply.

Behind the Letter

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline the writer's stated request, circle details that reveal her experiences or the public debate, and number two places where her perspective shapes an argument. Use your marks to judge how strongly her perspective affects her purpose. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	To what extent does the writer's experience as a worker in an immigrant family shape her call for new rules? Use two details from the letter.	**It strongly shapes her call. Her parents came from Italy seeking steady work, and her wages help pay rent, so she argues for safety rules without asking factories to close.**
2	How does the public debate after the Triangle fire affect when the writer sends her letter and the kind of change she requests?	**She asks for publication before the state debates factory rules. Because people disagree about safety and government control, she requests specific, checkable measures: inspections and exits workers can open.**
3	The writer says an owner and a worker may see a lock differently. How does her position shape the further purpose implied by this comparison?	**As a worker, she sees a locked door as a danger rather than mainly protection against theft. Beyond requesting rules, she wants readers to value workers' lives when weighing those risks.**
4	Does the writer's concern about wages weaken or strengthen her argument for safety rules? Evaluate its effect on her purpose using evidence from two paragraphs.	**It strengthens her argument by showing she takes the costs seriously. In paragraph 1, she values steady work; in paragraph 2, she says her wages pay rent and asks for inspections rather than factory closures.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

I write to ask lawmakers to give factories time to meet new safety rules. I support regular inspections and exits workers can open during a fire, as the letter requests. My shop employs twenty people, and their wages help pay their rent. If I must change every door at once, I may have to cut hours. Please set a deadline that gives owners six months to install new hardware and have inspectors check our progress. As an owner responsible for both wages and bills, I am strongly influenced by costs, even while I accept the need to protect workers.

Accept judgments about extent that connect specific details to the writer's purpose, including answers that note limits to her perspective. For Part 3, look for a distinct owner's viewpoint, a clear request, a detail from the letter, and an evaluation of how that viewpoint shapes the reply.