Evidence After the Fire

Trace how a historical essay builds and supports a thesis

OKH.P.4.1.A "Compose informative essays and written products, developing a thesis, citing and incorporating evidence from multiple sources and maintaining an organized, formal structure."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline the essay's thesis, circle one fact from each of its three named sources, and number the sentences that explain how those facts support the thesis.

The Triangle Fire and Workplace Safety

(1) On March 25, 1911, a fire swept through the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory in New York City. The fire killed 146 workers (Cornell University Kheel Center). Most were young immigrant women who made clothing in crowded rooms. A death toll cannot explain every cause of the disaster, but it makes the scale of the loss impossible to ignore. The fire changed debates about workplace safety because its deadly conditions exposed failures in factory exits and helped prompt a systematic state response. To understand that claim, the number of deaths must be read alongside accounts of escape and records of what officials did next.

(2) Workers found an exit door locked, and an outside fire escape collapsed as people tried to flee (Occupational Safety and Health Administration). These details show why a crowded workplace could become a deadly trap, rather than simply showing that a fire occurred. The locked door blocked one possible route, while the collapsing structure made another route unsafe. The agency's account therefore connects the death toll to specific weaknesses in access to exits. Yet evidence about conditions during the fire cannot, by itself, show whether anyone later acted to change workplace rules. For that, the essay must turn to evidence about the state's response.

(3) The Factory Investigating Commission was created in 1911 after the fire. It examined factory conditions and recommended changes to protect workers (New York State Archives). Its creation and investigations demonstrate a response that went beyond mourning the victims: officials gathered evidence about hazards in many workplaces. The archive's record does not prove that every workplace became safe. It does show that the fire was followed by organized scrutiny of factory conditions. Taken together, the Kheel Center's death toll, the safety agency's account of failed exits, and the State Archives' record support a measured conclusion: the disaster exposed risks and helped drive public action.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. State the essay's thesis in your own words. What two developments does it connect to the fire?

2. Which fact from the Kheel Center supports the thesis, and how does the essay use it?

3. Choose one detail about escape, name its source, and explain how it supports the thesis.

4. How do the commission's creation and its investigation of factories support the essay's claim about a systematic state response? Name the source.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Which evidence best shows that the Triangle fire became a turning point: the death toll, the failed exits, or the state's response? Write one formal paragraph with a thesis that differs from the passage's thesis. Use and explain evidence from two different named sources, citing each source in parentheses.

ANSWER KEY

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HIGH SCHOOL · OKH.P.4.1.A

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline the essay's thesis, circle one fact from each of its three named sources, and number the sentences that explain how those facts support the thesis. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	State the essay's thesis in your own words. What two developments does it connect to the fire?	**The fire changed workplace safety debates by exposing dangerous factory exits and helping prompt an organized state response.**
2	Which fact from the Kheel Center supports the thesis, and how does the essay use it?	**The Kheel Center reports that 146 workers died. The essay uses the figure to establish the scale of the disaster.**
3	Choose one detail about escape, name its source, and explain how it supports the thesis.	**The Occupational Safety and Health Administration reports that an exit door was locked. This supports the claim that unsafe exits made escape difficult. The collapsed fire escape is also acceptable.**
4	How do the commission's creation and its investigation of factories support the essay's claim about a systematic state response? Name the source.	**According to the New York State Archives, the state created the Factory Investigating Commission in 1911, and it examined factory conditions. These actions show an organized effort to identify workplace hazards.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The strongest evidence that the Triangle fire became a turning point is the state's organized response, not the death toll alone. The Factory Investigating Commission was created in 1911 and examined factory conditions (New York State Archives). Those investigations show that officials treated unsafe workplaces as a public problem requiring study. The loss of 146 workers explains why the disaster attracted attention (Cornell University Kheel Center), but the commission's work shows how attention developed into action. Together, these sources distinguish the scale of the tragedy from its effect on public policy.

Accept any defensible choice in Part 3 if the paragraph makes a distinct thesis, accurately uses evidence from two named sources, explains its reasoning, and includes parenthetical citations. For question 3, either the locked door or the collapsed fire escape is valid.