Whose Safety Counts?

Read a fictional 1911 letter to examine perspective and purpose.

TOT.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 that show the writer's perspective, and circle the action she wants readers to take. Number one sentence that shows how her perspective shapes that purpose.

A Fictional Letter to a New York Newspaper, April 1911

(1) I am writing to our neighborhood newspaper after the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire. On March 25, flames swept through the upper floors of the building, and 146 workers died. Many were young immigrant women, like the women who share my tenement hallway. My sister sews shirts in another factory, so I cannot read the death toll as a distant number. I picture her coat hanging by our door each morning. Some exits at Triangle could not be used during the fire. Our city must require clear exits and inspect them, not merely praise the dead.

(2) I know why many families need factory wages. My parents came from Italy with little money, and my sister's pay keeps food on our table. Some employers warn that stricter rules will cost jobs. That fear matters to us, but it cannot excuse doors that trap workers. A manager may see a factory as a place of orders and deadlines. I see women hurrying home to crowded apartments, carrying wages for parents and children. When I ask for inspections, I am asking the city to treat workers' lives as important as the goods they make.

(3) This is not only a plea from one anxious sister. After the fire, crowds marched and demanded change, but grief alone will not keep the next exit open. Newspapers can print the names of victims, yet they can also ask who checks a stairway before smoke fills it. I want readers who never enter a sewing room to press city officials for enforceable safety rules. Perhaps I would still want safer buildings if my family owned a shop instead. Living beside workers, however, makes their daily risks impossible for me to set aside.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How does the recent fire shape the writer's stated purpose? Name the action she wants and explain why she calls for it now.

2. How does the writer's family background affect what she emphasizes about factory workers? Use one detail from the letter.

3. Why might a manager described in the letter write to city officials for a different purpose? Compare that possible purpose with the writer's.

4. To what extent does the writer say her closeness to workers shapes her purpose? Explain how her final two sentences limit or strengthen that claim.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a four- or five-sentence letter from a 1911 factory owner responding to the passage. State what you want city officials to do, explain how your position shapes that purpose, and judge how much your purpose differs from the writer's using one detail from her letter.

ANSWER KEY

Whose Safety Counts?

HIGH SCHOOL · TOT.P.3.2.A

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two details that show the writer's perspective, and circle the action she wants readers to take. Number one sentence that shows how her perspective shapes that purpose. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How does the recent fire shape the writer's stated purpose? Name the action she wants and explain why she calls for it now.	**The fire killed 146 workers and exposed unsafe exits. She wants readers to press officials for enforceable safety rules to prevent another disaster.**
2	How does the writer's family background affect what she emphasizes about factory workers? Use one detail from the letter.	**Her parents immigrated from Italy, and her sister's factory pay feeds the family. She emphasizes that workers' lives matter while acknowledging their need for wages.**
3	Why might a manager described in the letter write to city officials for a different purpose? Compare that possible purpose with the writer's.	**A manager focused on orders and deadlines might ask officials to avoid rules that disrupt work. The writer asks them to enforce safety rules to protect workers.**
4	To what extent does the writer say her closeness to workers shapes her purpose? Explain how her final two sentences limit or strengthen that claim.	**It shapes her purpose strongly because living beside workers makes their risks impossible to ignore. She does not claim it is the only reason: she says she might still want safer buildings if her family owned a shop.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

As a factory owner in 1911, I ask city officials to set clear exit rules and give shops time to meet them. I employ workers whose families need wages, and a sudden closure would hurt them as well as my business. The writer says her sister's pay keeps food on the table, so we both care about workers who rely on these jobs. Our purposes differ somewhat: she urges inspections to protect workers, while I also ask officials to consider the cost of making changes. My position shapes that difference, but it does not make safety unimportant to me.

Accept different judgments about the extent of perspective's influence when students support them with passage evidence. For Part 3, the owner may favor or oppose specific rules, but the response must explain how that position shapes the owner's purpose.