After the Fire

Use historical evidence to evaluate a safety policy

USG.P.2 "Use interdisciplinary tools to acquire, apply, and evaluate content understanding of the four strands of social studies. Demonstrate an understanding of the principles of government, the benefits of democratic systems..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two details about the fire, circle two kinds of evidence historians could use, and number one possible benefit and one possible cost of the new laws. Use your marks to connect evidence to a government decision.

The Triangle Fire and Workplace Rules

1. On March 25, 1911, a fire swept through the Triangle Shirtwaist factory in New York City. The factory occupied the upper floors of a building, and 146 workers died. Many employees were young immigrant women who sewed clothing for low wages. Flames spread quickly among fabric scraps, and the building's fire escape collapsed. Some workers could not get through a locked exit door. The disaster raised a public question: Who should set workplace safety rules, owners alone or elected governments? Protesters demanded action, while factory owners worried about the cost of new requirements.

2. To investigate that question, historians compare sources rather than treating one account as the whole story. A survivor's recollection can describe what happened at one exit but may not reveal conditions at other exits. A photograph of the collapsed fire escape can document damage, but it cannot establish why the escape failed. New York's Factory Investigating Commission gathered testimony and examined working conditions after the fire. Its reports offer broader evidence, yet the commission was created to investigate workplace dangers, so its questions centered on safety. Checking where sources agree helps separate a well-supported claim from a single perspective.

3. New York lawmakers responded with factory safety laws that required stronger fire protections, including improved exits and fire drills. These rules shifted some decisions about workplace safety from business owners to state government. Workers could gain safer routes out of buildings, while employers faced costs for changes and inspections. The laws did not erase every hazard, and an account of a new rule alone cannot prove that every factory followed it. To judge the policy's impact, a researcher would compare inspection records from before and after the reforms, while asking whether those records covered all workplaces equally.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How do the locked door and collapsed fire escape together strengthen an argument for safety rules?

2. Why should a historian check a survivor's recollection and a photograph against other evidence before making a claim about every exit?

3. How did the new laws change who made workplace safety decisions? Identify one benefit and one cost of that change.

4. Suppose inspection records show fewer hazards after the reforms. Why would that finding not prove that every factory became safe?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Your school board proposes alarms that sound whenever an emergency exit opens. Write a recommendation that names two kinds of evidence you would gather, explains one limit of that evidence, and weighs a safety benefit against a possible drawback.

After the Fire

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two details about the fire, circle two kinds of evidence historians could use, and number one possible benefit and one possible cost of the new laws. Use your marks to connect evidence to a government decision. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How do the locked door and collapsed fire escape together strengthen an argument for safety rules?	**They show that more than one escape route failed, supporting rules that require usable exits and fire escapes.**
2	Why should a historian check a survivor's recollection and a photograph against other evidence before making a claim about every exit?	**The survivor may know only one exit, and the photograph documents damage without showing conditions at every exit.**
3	How did the new laws change who made workplace safety decisions? Identify one benefit and one cost of that change.	**State government set more safety requirements instead of leaving those decisions to owners alone. Workers could have safer exits, while employers faced costs for changes and inspections.**
4	Suppose inspection records show fewer hazards after the reforms. Why would that finding not prove that every factory became safe?	**The records might not cover every workplace, and fewer recorded hazards would not mean all hazards were gone.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

I would ask the board to test the alarms before installing them in every school. Records of doors opened without permission could show how often staff need an alert, while observations during fire drills could show whether the alarms affect evacuation. Drills may not predict how people act in a real emergency. Alarms could help staff notice an open exit, but frequent false alarms might interrupt classes and lead people to ignore them.

Accept other passage-supported explanations of the evidence and the shift in government power. For the open task, look for two relevant evidence sources, a specific limit, and a reasoned comparison of a benefit and a drawback.