Beyond the Price Tag

Read a fictional 1912 column to examine how perspective shapes purpose.

WG.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 place the writer in her historical or cultural setting, circle her stated purpose, and number two clues to an implied purpose.

An Immigrant Seamstress Speaks, an Imagined 1912 Column

(1) In March 1911, the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory burned in New York City, killing 146 people. Many were young immigrant women like the women who sew beside me. I came from Italy expecting long hours, not a workplace where a locked door could trap people during a fire. I did not work at Triangle, but the disaster made every stairway in my own factory look different. I write this column to urge city leaders to require regular safety inspections. A factory may make fashionable blouses, but no blouse is worth a worker's life.

(2) Some readers tell me that garment shops provide wages to families who badly need them. That is true. My pay helps buy food, and a closed shop would hurt my household. Yet an employer who can afford machines and bolts of cloth can also keep exits usable and remove piles of cloth scraps that catch fire easily. Inspections should check those conditions before smoke fills a room. I know owners fear the cost of changes, but workers bear a greater cost when safety is treated as an extra expense.

(3) A customer may see only the price tag on a blouse; I see the hands that stitched it. When a newspaper describes immigrant workers as if we are easily replaced, it becomes easier to ignore our warnings. Many of us speak with accents, but we know when a doorway is blocked. I ask shoppers as well as lawmakers to press for inspections, even if safer production raises prices. If the city listens only after another fire, it will have chosen cheap clothing over the people who make it.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. What is the writer's stated purpose, and how did the Triangle fire help shape it?

2. How does the writer's position as a wage-earning immigrant shape the way she answers the argument that inspections could hurt shops?

3. What does the writer seem to want shoppers to believe about immigrant workers, beyond supporting inspections? Use two clues from the column.

4. To what extent does the writer's immigrant-worker perspective shape her argument: is it central or a minor detail? Support your judgment with details from two different paragraphs.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a four-sentence reply from a fictional garment-factory owner in 1912. State the owner's position on safety inspections, use two details from the column, and show how the owner's economic position shapes the reply's purpose.

ANSWER KEY

Beyond the Price Tag

HIGH SCHOOL · WG.P.3.2.A

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two details that place the writer in her historical or cultural setting, circle her stated purpose, and number two clues to an implied purpose. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What is the writer's stated purpose, and how did the Triangle fire help shape it?	**She wants city leaders to require regular safety inspections. The fire killed 146 people and made her see danger in the stairways at her own factory.**
2	How does the writer's position as a wage-earning immigrant shape the way she answers the argument that inspections could hurt shops?	**She acknowledges that her pay buys food and that a closed shop would hurt her household. She still argues that workers face a greater cost when employers treat safety as an extra expense.**
3	What does the writer seem to want shoppers to believe about immigrant workers, beyond supporting inspections? Use two clues from the column.	**She wants shoppers to see immigrant workers as people whose lives and warnings matter. She contrasts a blouse's price tag with the hands that stitched it and challenges descriptions of workers as easily replaced.**
4	To what extent does the writer's immigrant-worker perspective shape her argument: is it central or a minor detail? Support your judgment with details from two different paragraphs.	**It is central. In the first paragraph, she connects the fire to danger in her own factory. In the second, she weighs inspection costs against her need for wages and the risks workers bear.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

As a garment-factory owner in 1912, I support regular inspections, but I ask city leaders to give shops time to fix unsafe exits. The Triangle fire killed 146 people, and I do not want workers trapped by a locked door in my building. Still, paying for changes may force me to raise blouse prices and could reduce the wages my employees depend on. I want lawmakers to prevent another fire without closing the shops that keep both my business and these families afloat.

Accept different judgments about the extent of the writer's influence if students support them with details from two paragraphs. For the reply, look for a historically plausible owner perspective rather than a claim that all owners held the same view.