After the Fire

Trace how an argument about workplace safety changes

11-12.RH.2.a "Evaluate how ideas develop over the course of a text."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Number one sentence in each paragraph that shows a new stage in the idea of who is responsible for worker safety, then underline the words that reveal the change.

Who Was Responsible for Factory Safety?

1 In the early 1900s, New York garment workers faced crowded rooms, long hours, and exits that could be hard to reach. Some safety rules existed, but inspections and enforcement did not reliably protect workers. Employers controlled factory layouts, while workers and labor organizers demanded safer conditions. To many reformers, a dangerous workplace was not simply a worker's private problem. Yet that claim competed with a powerful assumption: decisions inside a factory belonged mainly to its owners. The debate could sound abstract until a fire at the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory made the costs of those decisions impossible to ignore.

2 On March 25, 1911, a fire swept through the upper floors of the Triangle factory in Manhattan. Some workers found a stairway door locked; the building's fire escape collapsed during the blaze. The fire killed 146 workers, most of them young immigrant women. Newspaper reports and public mourning brought factory conditions into a wider conversation. The locked door mattered not just as a detail of one building but as evidence that an owner's choices could put many lives at risk. Calls for protection now rested on a visible disaster, not only on workers' warnings about hazards.

3 In 1911, New York lawmakers created the Factory Investigating Commission, which examined workplaces and recommended changes. Over the next few years, the state passed laws addressing fire safety and other working conditions. Those steps treated worker safety as a public concern that government could investigate and regulate, rather than a matter left only to factory owners. Still, a law on paper could not keep an exit clear or a door unlocked; inspectors and employers had to act. The argument that began with competing claims about control of factories thus grew into a question of how to make public responsibility effective.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How does the first paragraph set up a disagreement about who should have a say in factory safety?

2. How does the locked door in the second paragraph strengthen the earlier argument for safer workplaces?

3. How do the commission and new laws develop the idea of public responsibility, rather than simply restate it?

4. What limit does the final paragraph place on the idea that government regulation can protect workers? How does that limit change the argument?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a four-sentence museum label responding to this claim: “The fire alone made workplaces safe.” Use one detail from before the fire and one from after the state passed new laws to explain your response.

After the Fire

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Number one sentence in each paragraph that shows a new stage in the idea of who is responsible for worker safety, then underline the words that reveal the change. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How does the first paragraph set up a disagreement about who should have a say in factory safety?	**Owners controlled factory decisions, while workers and reformers argued that unsafe conditions were not merely a private matter.**
2	How does the locked door in the second paragraph strengthen the earlier argument for safer workplaces?	**It provides a concrete example of an owner's decision putting workers at risk, giving force to warnings that had previously been easier to dismiss.**
3	How do the commission and new laws develop the idea of public responsibility, rather than simply restate it?	**They turn a call for public protection into government investigation and regulation of workplaces.**
4	What limit does the final paragraph place on the idea that government regulation can protect workers? How does that limit change the argument?	**Laws alone cannot keep exits safe. The argument shifts from whether government should act to how inspectors and employers can make protections effective.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Before the fire, workers and labor organizers were already demanding safer conditions, so the push for change did not begin with the disaster. The Triangle fire made the danger visible to a wider public. New York later passed safety laws, but inspectors and employers still had to make those rules work. The fire helped change public expectations, yet it could not make workplaces safe by itself.

Accept different sentence choices for the marking job if students can explain how each advances the idea. For the museum label, look for a supported response that distinguishes the fire's influence from the work needed before and after it.