When Rules Become Real

Track how a key term gains meaning across a historical account.

11-12.RH.4 "Interpret the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including analyzing how an author uses and refines key terms over the course of a text."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Circle each use of *protection*, underline nearby words that explain or complicate it, and number the circles in reading order. Use your marks to track how the term's meaning changes.

What Counts as Protection?

(1) At the Triangle Waist Company in New York City, a worker might have understood *protection* as knowing how to leave a burning room. On March 25, 1911, a fire spread through the upper floors of the factory. Some exit doors were locked, and a fire escape collapsed. Many workers could not reach the street. The fire killed 146 people, most of them young immigrant women. In this setting, *protection* meant more than a warning about flames: it required usable exits when seconds mattered. A rule that existed only on paper could not open a locked door.

(2) After the fire, New York created the Factory Investigating Commission to examine working conditions. Its members visited workplaces and heard testimony before recommending new rules. Here, *protection* widened from a worker's route out of one building to a public duty across many workplaces. Laws passed in the following years strengthened requirements for exits, fire prevention, and factory inspections. An inspection did not put out a fire; it could reveal hazards before one started. Calling these measures *protection* shifted attention from what a trapped worker could do to what employers and government had to do in advance.

(3) Yet *protection* did not become automatic when lawmakers wrote a rule. Inspectors had to find violations, and employers had to correct them; workers also needed a way to report danger without losing their jobs. In this final sense, *protection* is not simply a door or a statute. It is a continuing practice of noticing risks and making changes before people are hurt. The Triangle fire became a turning point in debates over workplace safety, but the word *protection* still asks a hard question: who has the power to make a rule real?

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. In paragraph 1, how does the meaning of *protection* grow beyond knowing an escape route?

2. What does "public duty" add to the meaning of *protection* in paragraph 2?

3. In paragraph 3, what does it mean to "make a rule real," and how does that phrase refine *protection*?

4. How do "only on paper" in paragraph 1 and "not simply a door or a statute" in paragraph 3 develop the same idea?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a three-sentence mini-history of an invented town library. Use *access* in each sentence, sharpening its meaning from an open door to a genuine chance to use books.

ANSWER KEY

When Rules Become Real

HIGH SCHOOL · 11-12.RH.4

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Circle each use of *protection*, underline nearby words that explain or complicate it, and number the circles in reading order. Use your marks to track how the term's meaning changes. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	In paragraph 1, how does the meaning of *protection* grow beyond knowing an escape route?	**It comes to require exits that workers can actually use during a fire, not just knowledge of where to go.**
2	What does "public duty" add to the meaning of *protection* in paragraph 2?	**Protection becomes a responsibility shared by employers and government across workplaces, including preventing hazards before a fire.**
3	In paragraph 3, what does it mean to "make a rule real," and how does that phrase refine *protection*?	**It means finding and correcting hazards rather than merely writing rules. Protection requires ongoing action.**
4	How do "only on paper" in paragraph 1 and "not simply a door or a statute" in paragraph 3 develop the same idea?	**Both reject protection in name only: a written rule or physical exit is insufficient unless it works for workers in practice.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

When the town library opened, access meant that anyone could walk through its front door. Later, residents argued that access also required evening hours for people who worked during the day. By adding those hours and books in several languages, the library made access a practical chance to read, not just permission to enter.

Accept answers that explain each phrase in context and show how the passage shifts from an individual escape route to prevention and enforcement. For Part 3, look for three original sentences that use "access" each time and give the term a more specific meaning as the mini-history unfolds.