After the Verdict

Weigh competing claims about the Triangle factory fire

11-12.RH.6 "Evaluate differing points of view on the same historical event or issue by assessing the authors' claims, reasoning, and evidence. Evaluate a text for bias, misinformation, or propaganda."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline each writer's claim about exit rules. Number the details each writer uses as evidence, and circle wording that may sway readers beyond what the evidence shows.

What Should Change After the Fire?

1 On March 25, 1911, a fire swept through the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory on the upper floors of a New York City building. One hundred forty-six workers died. Some people escaped by elevator or stairs; others were trapped as flames spread, and a fire escape collapsed. In the months that followed, the factory's owners were tried for manslaughter and acquitted. New York lawmakers later passed workplace safety reforms. The two statements below are invented for this worksheet, not historical quotations. They imagine opposing writers debating whether the fire calls for stricter rules on factory exits. Both writers use real details from the event.

2 Mara, a workers' advocate, argues that the state should require factory owners to keep exits usable whenever employees are inside. She points to testimony from the owners' trial: witnesses said a door to a stairway was locked on the day of the fire. She also notes that a fire escape collapsed under the weight of people trying to flee. In Mara's view, these details show that workers could not count on a safe way out. She ends her statement with a broader charge: "Factory owners always choose profit over human life." She does not discuss the jury's verdict.

3 Elias, a representative of factory owners, argues that the state should not impose new exit rules because of one disaster. He cites the jury's acquittal of the Triangle owners and says the trial did not establish their criminal guilt. He also says that fires can spread too quickly for any rule to prevent every death. Then he adds, "The verdict proves that the factory's exits were safe." His statement does not mention the testimony about the stairway door or the collapsed fire escape. He asks readers to consider the costs that new rules could impose on small businesses.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Which detail in Mara's statement most directly supports a rule about keeping stairway doors usable? Explain the connection.

2. Does Mara's evidence support her claim that factory owners always choose profit over human life? Explain the gap between the evidence and the claim.

3. How strong is Elias's claim that the acquittal proves the exits were safe? Use another detail from the passage to assess his reasoning.

4. Compare Mara's and Elias's choices of what to leave out. How could each omission affect a reader's judgment?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write an editorial note of 80 to 110 words advising a reader how to judge the two statements. Compare their claims and evidence, identify one misleading or biased move by each writer, and name one piece of additional evidence that would help you decide whether exit rules should change.

ANSWER KEY

After the Verdict

HIGH SCHOOL · 11-12.RH.6

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline each writer's claim about exit rules. Number the details each writer uses as evidence, and circle wording that may sway readers beyond what the evidence shows. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Which detail in Mara's statement most directly supports a rule about keeping stairway doors usable? Explain the connection.	**Witnesses testified that a stairway door was locked. If true, that detail directly supports a rule meant to keep stairway doors available during an emergency.**
2	Does Mara's evidence support her claim that factory owners always choose profit over human life? Explain the gap between the evidence and the claim.	**No. Her evidence concerns conditions at one factory; it cannot establish the motives of all factory owners.**
3	How strong is Elias's claim that the acquittal proves the exits were safe? Use another detail from the passage to assess his reasoning.	**The claim is weak. An acquittal did not establish that the exits were safe, and witnesses testified that a stairway door was locked.**
4	Compare Mara's and Elias's choices of what to leave out. How could each omission affect a reader's judgment?	**Mara leaves out the acquittal, which could make the owners' legal responsibility seem settled. Elias leaves out the door testimony and collapsed fire escape, which could make concerns about escape routes seem less serious.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Mara makes a stronger case for examining exit rules because testimony about a locked stairway door bears directly on whether workers could escape. The collapsed fire escape raises another concern. Yet her claim that owners always put profit first assigns motives to an entire group without enough evidence. Elias is right that an acquittal means the owners were not found criminally guilty, but he misleadingly treats that verdict as proof that the exits were safe. Neither writer gives enough information to judge which rules would help most. Records showing how many workers used each exit during the fire would help lawmakers assess the risks.

Accept answers that distinguish what the cited details establish from the broader conclusions each writer draws. For the editorial note, accept other relevant requests for evidence, such as inspection records or testimony about exit conditions.