When Safety Changed

Trace an idea from a factory fire to public action.

9-10.RH.2.a "Analyze how ideas develop over the course of the text."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline one detail in each paragraph that changes who is expected to protect workers, then number the details 1, 2, and 3 to track how that idea develops.

After the Triangle Fire

1 On March 25, 1911, a fire swept through the upper floors of New York City's Triangle Shirtwaist Factory. Many workers were young immigrant women sewing blouses for low wages. Flames spread rapidly among fabric scraps, while crowded workrooms and difficult exits made escape perilous. One exterior fire escape collapsed, and fire ladders could not reach the highest floors. In all, 146 people died. Before the fire, some factory owners had treated safety as a matter for each business to manage. The disaster forced a wider question into public view: if workers could not leave a burning workplace, who was responsible for protecting them?

2 The question was not new to the people who worked in garment shops. During a major New York shirtwaist strike in 1909, workers had protested long hours and unsafe conditions, but many demands went unmet. After the fire, unions and survivors spoke at public gatherings, turning private experiences of risk into evidence that others could hear. Reformers argued that a worker's chance of surviving a fire should not depend on an employer's choices alone. Their argument gained force because the Triangle deaths exposed hazards that workers had warned about before the flames began.

3 New York lawmakers created the Factory Investigating Commission in 1911. Its members visited workplaces and heard testimony about conditions beyond the Triangle factory. Their findings helped support new state laws on fire prevention, exits, and factory inspections. The idea of safety had moved from a warning raised by workers, to a public demand, to a duty backed by law. Yet new rules did not erase danger overnight: they had to be enforced, and other states made different choices. The fire became a turning point not because one tragedy solved the problem, but because it changed who was expected to act.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How does the first paragraph move from describing the fire to raising a broader question about safety? Use two details.

2. How does the mention of the 1909 strike change your understanding of the calls for reform after the fire?

3. How does the commission extend the idea of workplace safety beyond the Triangle factory?

4. Why does the final paragraph say the fire was a turning point without saying the problem was solved? How does this shape the passage's idea of reform?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a 75- to 95-word museum label titled “Who Had to Act?” Trace how responsibility for safety shifts among owners, workers, and government. Use one specific detail from each paragraph and explain how the details connect.

ANSWER KEY

When Safety Changed

HIGH SCHOOL · 9-10.RH.2.a

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline one detail in each paragraph that changes who is expected to protect workers, then number the details 1, 2, and 3 to track how that idea develops. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How does the first paragraph move from describing the fire to raising a broader question about safety? Use two details.	**The collapsed fire escape and ladders that could not reach the highest floors show why workers could not escape. These details lead to the question of who should be responsible for their safety.**
2	How does the mention of the 1909 strike change your understanding of the calls for reform after the fire?	**It shows that workers had warned about unsafe conditions before the fire. The disaster brought more public attention to concerns they had already raised.**
3	How does the commission extend the idea of workplace safety beyond the Triangle factory?	**The commission investigated other workplaces, so its findings supported safety laws that applied more broadly than one factory.**
4	Why does the final paragraph say the fire was a turning point without saying the problem was solved? How does this shape the passage's idea of reform?	**New laws required enforcement, and other states made different choices. Reform changed who was expected to act, but it did not end workplace danger.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Who Had to Act?

At the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory, a collapsed fire escape and ladders that could not reach the highest floors showed the cost of leaving safety decisions largely to employers. Garment workers had already warned of unsafe conditions during the 1909 strike, and survivors and unions brought those warnings into public debate after the fire. The Factory Investigating Commission then gathered evidence from other workplaces, helping lawmakers pass safety rules. Responsibility widened from individual businesses to public oversight, though laws still depended on enforcement.

Accept different supporting details if students explain how the idea develops, rather than merely listing events. The museum label should connect evidence from all three paragraphs and remain within 75 to 95 words.