When Exits Failed

Read, mark, and summarize a turning point in workplace safety.

9-10.RH.2.b "Provide an accurate summary."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline one sentence in each paragraph that helps explain what happened, why the fire was so deadly, or what changed afterward, then circle two details you would keep in a short summary.

The Triangle Shirtwaist Fire

1 On March 25, 1911, a fire broke out at the Triangle Shirtwaist Company in New York City. Hundreds of employees, many of them young immigrant women, made shirtwaists, a popular type of blouse. The factory occupied the top three floors of a ten-story building. Flames began on the eighth floor and spread quickly through scraps of fabric and paper patterns. Workers had little time to react. Although the building had a fire escape, it was not designed to carry so many people at once. What began as a workplace fire soon became a test of the building's escape routes.

2 Some workers reached the stairs, while others crowded onto the fire escape, which collapsed under the weight. One stairway door on the ninth floor was locked, blocking a possible route. Firefighters' ladders could not reach the highest floors, and their safety nets could not stop people falling from that height. Workers on the tenth floor escaped to the roof with help from people in a neighboring building. In all, 146 workers died. The loss was not caused by flames alone: blocked exits, limited equipment, and the building's height also shaped the disaster.

3 The fire shocked New Yorkers who saw bodies in the street and read accounts of the workers' deaths. Thousands attended a public funeral procession. Labor activists had already called for safer workplaces, but the disaster gave their demands wider attention. New York State created a commission to investigate factory conditions, and lawmakers passed measures addressing fire safety, exits, and other working conditions. These changes did not end workplace danger or come from a single event alone. Still, the Triangle fire became a lasting example of how unsafe buildings and weak protections could turn ordinary work into a deadly risk.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Summarize how the factory setting helped the fire become dangerous so quickly.

2. Summarize why escaping the fire was difficult, using at least two obstacles from the passage.

3. Summarize how people responded to the fire and what changed afterward.

4. Name one detail you would leave out of a brief summary of the whole passage. Explain why it is less important than the main events.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a 65 to 85 word summary of the whole passage for a student who has not read it. Include the event, why it was so deadly, and what followed, without adding information from outside the passage.

When Exits Failed

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline one sentence in each paragraph that helps explain what happened, why the fire was so deadly, or what changed afterward, then circle two details you would keep in a short summary. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Summarize how the factory setting helped the fire become dangerous so quickly.	**The factory was on the upper floors of a ten-story building, and flames spread quickly through fabric scraps and paper patterns, leaving workers little time to escape.**
2	Summarize why escaping the fire was difficult, using at least two obstacles from the passage.	**A ninth-floor stairway door was locked, the fire escape collapsed, and firefighters' ladders could not reach the highest floors.**
3	Summarize how people responded to the fire and what changed afterward.	**The deaths drew public attention to demands for safer workplaces. New York State investigated factory conditions and passed measures addressing safety and working conditions.**
4	Name one detail you would leave out of a brief summary of the whole passage. Explain why it is less important than the main events.	**Shirtwaists were a popular type of blouse. That detail explains what workers made but is less important than the fire, the barriers to escape, and the safety changes.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

On March 25, 1911, a fire spread through the Triangle Shirtwaist factory in New York City, where many young immigrant women worked. Fabric scraps fed the flames, while a locked stairway door, a collapsing fire escape, and ladders that could not reach the upper floors limited escape. The fire killed 146 workers. Public outrage strengthened calls for safer workplaces, and New York lawmakers passed new safety measures after a state investigation. The disaster showed how dangerous working conditions could turn a fire into a catastrophe.

Accept summaries that accurately connect the fire, barriers to escape, deaths, and subsequent safety measures. For question 4, accept any passage detail whose omission is reasonably justified without distorting the main account.