Words After the Fire

Use context to interpret the language of work, law, and reform.

9-10.RH.4 "Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including domain-specific and content-specific vocabulary describing political, social, or economic aspects of history/social studies."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline *piecework*, *liability*, *regulation*, *collective bargaining*, and *leverage*. Circle nearby words that help you infer what each term means.

The Triangle Fire and the Language of Change

1 In 1911, the Triangle Shirtwaist Company made women's blouses in a crowded New York City factory. Many employees were young immigrant women who spent long hours cutting and sewing fabric. Some earned money through piecework: a faster worker who finished more garments could take home more pay, even if both workers stayed for the same number of hours. That system rewarded speed but did not reward taking time to report a jammed machine or a blocked aisle. With cloth scraps underfoot and rows of machines close together, a small fire could spread before workers found a clear way out.

2 On March 25, a fire broke out on the factory's upper floors. Workers rushed toward exits, but one door was locked, and a narrow fire escape collapsed. Firefighters' ladders could not reach everyone. The fire killed 146 people. Afterward, relatives sought to hold the owners responsible, while the owners faced criminal charges. A jury acquitted them of manslaughter, but families later received money through civil settlements. The question of liability did not disappear with the verdict: who should bear the cost when unsafe conditions lead to deaths? For survivors, that legal word named a painfully practical dispute.

3 The disaster helped fuel a campaign for workplace regulation. New York lawmakers passed rules on exits, fire drills, and factory conditions, and inspectors gained stronger authority to check whether workplaces followed those rules. Workers also sought collective bargaining rather than asking owners for safer conditions one person at a time. When employees acted together, they had more leverage in talks: a group could press demands that an individual might struggle to raise. Neither new rules nor group action could undo the fire. Both changed how people argued about safety, power, and the responsibility of employers and government.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. What does *piecework* mean in this passage? Identify the pay comparison that helps you tell.

2. What does *liability* mean here? Use two details from the legal dispute to support your answer.

3. What does *regulation* mean in the third paragraph? How do the lawmakers' and inspectors' actions clarify it?

4. What does *collective bargaining* mean in this passage? Explain how the contrast with asking owners one person at a time helps you tell.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine a different workplace where employees want a safety change. In three sentences, use *leverage* to describe what might help them negotiate, then explain how two details in the passage support your use of the word.

Words After the Fire

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline *piecework*, *liability*, *regulation*, *collective bargaining*, and *leverage*. Circle nearby words that help you infer what each term means. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What does *piecework* mean in this passage? Identify the pay comparison that helps you tell.	**Piecework means pay based on the amount produced. A worker who finished more garments could earn more than someone who worked the same number of hours.**
2	What does *liability* mean here? Use two details from the legal dispute to support your answer.	**Liability means legal responsibility for harm or its costs. Relatives sought to hold the owners responsible, and families later received money through civil settlements.**
3	What does *regulation* mean in the third paragraph? How do the lawmakers' and inspectors' actions clarify it?	**Regulation means rules governing workplaces. Lawmakers passed safety rules, and inspectors checked whether factories followed them.**
4	What does *collective bargaining* mean in this passage? Explain how the contrast with asking owners one person at a time helps you tell.	**It means workers negotiating as a group. The passage contrasts acting together with making individual requests to owners.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

At a busy bakery, workers gain leverage when they agree to request working smoke alarms together. In the passage, workers seek collective bargaining instead of speaking to owners one by one. It also says a group can press demands that one person might struggle to raise, so leverage means greater power to influence a decision.

Accept accurate paraphrases supported by the surrounding text. For Part 3, look for a new workplace example and two distinct passage details that support the meaning of leverage.