After the Fire

Trace how a disaster changed ideas about workplace safety.

9-10.RI.3 "Analyze a text to explain how specific individuals, ideas, or events interact and develop over the course of the text, including explicit and implicit connections."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline three places where one person or group's actions affect another, then write E beside a connection the text states directly and I beside one you infer.

The Triangle Fire and the Question of Safety

1 In 1911, the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory occupied the upper floors of a New York City building. Its owners, Max Blanck and Isaac Harris, employed hundreds of workers, many of them young immigrant women. Shirtwaists, popular women's blouses, were cut and sewn quickly. The work created piles of flammable fabric scraps, while crowded workrooms made escape difficult. Workers had protested dangerous conditions during a garment strike in 1909, but Triangle's owners had not agreed to a union contract. For workers, safety was a daily concern. For the owners, keeping the factory running meant maintaining control over its operations.

2 On March 25, 1911, a fire started on the eighth floor and spread through the factory. Some workers reached the roof; others found exits blocked or could not get through them in time. Firefighters' ladders could not reach the upper floors. The fire killed 146 workers. Frances Perkins, a social worker who witnessed the disaster from nearby Washington Square, later described seeing people jump from the windows. The fire exposed a gap between the owners' control of the workplace and the workers' ability to leave it safely. What had seemed to some outsiders like an ordinary factory became evidence of a public danger.

3 Perkins helped turn that evidence into a demand for change. She joined safety advocates who pushed officials to investigate factories instead of treating the fire as a single accident. New York lawmakers formed the Factory Investigating Commission, which examined workplaces and recommended protections. The state then passed laws that strengthened fire-safety rules and factory inspections. Those laws did not undo the deaths, and they did not make every workplace safe. Yet the sequence changed who was expected to act: employers still controlled daily conditions, but state officials now had a stronger duty to check them.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. What does the owners' decision not to agree to a union contract suggest about workers' influence over safety decisions before the fire?

2. How did the fire turn the workroom conditions described in paragraph 1 into a danger for workers in paragraph 2?

3. How did Perkins's role change from the fire to the response that followed?

4. What does the commission's work suggest lawmakers concluded about workplace danger beyond the Triangle factory? Support your inference with two details from paragraph 3.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

In five or six sentences, explain how the passage develops the idea of who is responsible for factory safety from before the fire to after it. Use details from at least two paragraphs, identifying one connection the text states directly and one you infer.

After the Fire

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline three places where one person or group's actions affect another, then write E beside a connection the text states directly and I beside one you infer. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What does the owners' decision not to agree to a union contract suggest about workers' influence over safety decisions before the fire?	**Although workers had protested dangerous conditions, they lacked a union contract that could give them a collective way to press the owners about workplace decisions.**
2	How did the fire turn the workroom conditions described in paragraph 1 into a danger for workers in paragraph 2?	**Flammable scraps could help a fire spread, while crowded rooms made escape difficult when workers needed to leave quickly.**
3	How did Perkins's role change from the fire to the response that followed?	**She witnessed the disaster, then joined advocates who pushed officials to investigate factory safety.**
4	What does the commission's work suggest lawmakers concluded about workplace danger beyond the Triangle factory? Support your inference with two details from paragraph 3.	**Lawmakers treated danger as a problem in other workplaces too: the commission examined factories, and the state strengthened general fire-safety rules and inspections.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Before the fire, Triangle's owners controlled daily operations, while workers had protested dangerous conditions without securing a union contract. I infer that this imbalance limited workers' influence over safety decisions. The crowded rooms and flammable scraps became especially dangerous when fire spread through the factory. The passage directly states that Perkins joined advocates who pushed officials to investigate factories. By the end, employers still controlled daily conditions, but state officials had a stronger duty to check them.

Accept supported inferences that distinguish workers' concerns, owners' control, and the state's later role. Do not require students to claim that a union contract would have prevented the fire.