

The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire



Name: _____

Homeroom: _____

Date Received: _____

1. What year was the Triangle Fire?
2. Where was the Triangle Fire?
3. What happened during the Triangle Fire?
4. Before the fire, how were working conditions at the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory?
5. In your own words, what was one lasting effect of the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire? Hint: What "line" did the Triangle Fire draw?

Name: _____

Date: _____

Station 4: Working Conditions and the Industrial Revolution

* Annotate by underlining important words and phrases.

Triangle Shirtwaist Fire

The following excerpt is from the March 26, 1911, issue of *The New York Times*:



141 Men and Girls Die in Shirtwaist Factory Fire; Trapped High up in Washington Place Building; Street Strewn with Bodies; Piles of Dead Inside



- 1 Three stories of a ten-floor building at the corner of Greene Street and Washington Place were burned yesterday, and while the fire was going on 141 young men and women, at least 125 of them mere girls, were burned to death or killed by jumping to the pavement below.
- 2 The building was fireproof. It shows now hardly any signs of the disaster that overtook it. The walls are as good as ever; so are the floors; nothing is the worse for the fire except the furniture and 141 of the 600 men and girls that were employed in the upper three stories.
- 3 Most of the victims were suffocated or burned to death within the building, but some who fought their way to the windows and leaped met death as surely, but perhaps more quickly, on the pavements below.
- 4 At 4:40 o'clock, nearly five hours after the employees in the rest of the building had gone home, the fire broke out. The one little fire escape in the interior was never resorted to by any of the doomed victims. Some of them escaped by running down the stairs, but in a moment or two this avenue was cut off by flame. The girls rushed to the windows and looked down at Greene Street, 100 feet below them. Then one poor little creature jumped. There was a plate glass protection over part of the sidewalk, but she crashed through it, wrecking it and breaking her body into a thousand pieces.
- 5 Then they all began to drop. The crowd yelled "Don't jump!" but it was jump or be burned—the proof of which is around in the fact that fifty burned bodies were taken from the ninth floor alone.
- 6 The victims, who are now lying at the morgue waiting for someone to identify them by a tooth or the remains of a burned shoe, were mostly girls of from 18 to 23 years of age.
- 7 There is just one fire escape in the building. That one is an interior fire escape. In Greene Street, where the terrified unfortunates crowded before they began to make their mad leaps to death, the whole big front of the building is guiltless of one. Nor is there a fire escape in the back.
- 8 The building itself was of the most modern construction and classed as fireproof. What burned so quickly and disastrously for the victims were shirtwaist, hanging on lines above tiers of workers, sewing machines placed so closely together that there was hardly aisle room for the girls between them, and shirtwaist trimmings and cuttings which littered the floors above the eighth and ninth stories.
- 9 According to two of the ablest fire experts in the city, the great loss of life at the Shirtwaist Factory fire can be accounted for by the lack of adequate instruction of the girls in the way to conduct themselves in time of fire.

Directions: Use the passage on the previous page to answer the questions below.

1. Why is this tragic event entitled the "Triangle Shirtwaist Fire"?
 - a. It occurred on Triangle Street in Manhattan.
 - b. It occurred in a clothing factory in the Garment District.
 - c. The factory in question was named the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory.
 - d. The man responsible for dangerous conditions was named Triangle Shirtwaist.

2. According to the New York Times excerpt, why did some factory workers jump out of windows?
 - a. They thought they could survive the fall.
 - b. They were at risk of burning and chose the only other option.
 - c. They were trying to reach ladders brought by the firefighters.
 - d. They were pushed out in the chaos.

3. According to the New York Times excerpt, how did the fire experts account for the number of deaths in the factory fire?
 - a. The workers received insufficient directions for escape.
 - b. The doors were locked.
 - c. The building was crowded.
 - d. The fire spread too quickly.

4. Draw a picture or cartoon which might accompany the New York Times article. Also create a title for your drawing.

Drawing Title: _____



* Annotate by underlining
important words and phrases

Kate Alterman's Description of the Triangle Fire

(Note: This extract from the trial testimony of Kate Alterman, a worker who survived the fire, comes from the transcript of one of the most famous cross-examinations in legal history. Max Steuer, the attorney for the defendant owners of the Triangle Company, sought to show that Kate Alterman had been coached to tell her story in the most dramatic and horrifying manner possible. Although Steuer succeeded in winning the case for his clients, Kate Alterman's story still effectively evokes the terror and despair experienced by the Triangle workers.)

1 I went out from the dressing room, went to the Waverly side windows to look
2 for fire escapes, I didn't find any. Margaret Schwartz was with me,
3 afterwards she disappeared. I turned away to get to Greene Street side, but
4 she disappeared, she disappeared from me. I went into the toilet room, I
5 went out from the toilet rooms, bent my face over the sink, and then I went
6 to the Washington side to the elevators, but there was a big crowd, and I
7 saw a crowd around the door, trying to open the door; there I saw Bernstein,
8 the manager's brother, trying to open the door but he couldn't; he left; and
9 Margaret was there, too, and she tried to open the door and she could not.
10 I pushed her on a side. I tried to open the door, and I could not, and then
11 she pushed me on the side, and she said, "I will open the door," and she
12 tried to open the door, and then the big smoke came and Margaret
13 Schwartz I saw bending down on her knees, her hair was loose and her
14 dress was on the floor a little far from her, and then she screamed at the top
15 of her voice, "Open the door! Fire! I am lost! My God, I am lost, there is
16 fire!" And I went away from Margaret. I left, stood in the middle of the
17 room. That is, I went in the dressing room, first, there was a big crowd, I
18 went out of the dressing room, went into the middle of the room between
19 the machines and examining tables, and then I went in; I saw Bernstein, the
20 manager's brother, throwing around the windows, putting his head from the
21 window—he wanted to jump, I suppose, but he was afraid—he drew
22 himself back, and then I saw the flames cover him, and some other man on
23 Greene Street, the flames covered him, too, and then I turned my coat on
24 the wrong side and put it on my head with the fur to my face, the lining on
25 the outside, and I got hold of a bunch of dresses and covered up the top of
26 my head. I just got ready to go and somebody came and began to chase
27 me back, pulled my dress back, and I kicked her with the foot and she
28 disappeared. I tried to make my escape. I had a pocketbook with me, and
29 that pocketbook began to burn, I pressed it to my heart to extinguish the
30 fire, and I made my escape right through the flames—the whole door was a
31 flame, right to the roof.

32 Source: Leonard E. Davies. *Anatomy of Cross-Examination*. (New York:
33 Prentice Hall Law & Business, 1993), 389–390.

Directions: Use the passage on the previous page to answer the questions below.

5. The factory in which the fire took place manufactured what type of products?
 - a. Men's hats.
 - b. Sewing machines
 - c. Fur coats
 - d. Women's clothing

6. What was Kate Alterman's description of the Triangle Fire used for?
 - a. To gain support for an expose on factory conditions.
 - b. To publicize a novel on the Industrial Revolution.
 - c. To rally factory workers to fight for better working conditions.
 - d. To demonstrate the horror of the fire and factory conditions in civil court.

7. According to Kate Alterman's description, what helped to account for the large number of deaths in the factory fire?
 - a. The workers received insufficient directions for escape.
 - b. The doors were locked.
 - c. The building was crowded.
 - d. The fire spread too quickly.

8. Reflect on what you have read in both passages. Use the space below to consider the fire, the horror of the victims, the negligence of the factory owners etc. You may write a diary entry, a poem, or a monologue. First, choose what type of reflection you will write, then create a title for your reflection

Reflection Type (circle one): Diary Entry/Poem/Monologue

Title: _____

FIRST... outline your short answer using the graphic organizer below

Explain how the conditions of the factory contributed to the severity of the fire. Use evidence from both passages to support your answer. [Remember: Answer with Inference, Text Evidence, Text Evidence]

Answer w/ Inference: [Example: The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire was especially severe due to unsafe conditions inside the factory itself.]

Supporting Evidence #1 [from first text]

Where did you find this evidence?

Supporting Evidence #2 [from 2nd text]

Where did you find this evidence?

NOW...rewrite your answer in paragraph form.

Explain how the conditions of the factory contributed to the severity of the fire. Use evidence from both passages to support your answer. **[Remember: Answer with Inference, Text Evidence, Text Evidence]**
