**Key Content/Modeling**

Introduction: The industrial revolution was a time when the manufacturing of goods moved from small shops and homes to large factories. This shift brought about changes in culture as people moved from rural farming areas to big cities in order to work. Watch this 8-minute video for an overview of the industrial revolution.

https://youtu.be/nl__6WPQ4Sg

What inventions made farming faster and more efficient? Name 3 problems people encountered when they moved to the cities looking for work. What are some of the developments we enjoy today as a result of the industrial revolution?

Prepare to read: Familiarize yourself with the Words to Know. Have you heard any of the words? Read the definitions and example sentences. Try and think of another example sentence for some of the tougher words—advocates, riveting, searing, tedious and toiled.

**You Try** Read the article: Use the Close Reading Checklist to guide you in reading informational text.

Read “Some Horses Live Better Than We Do” skills sheet. Answer the five questions about the primary source. What part of 14-year-old John’s testimony did you find most powerful? Why? How do you think John Boldelar’s experience as a child laborer compared to Camella’s?

Delve deeper into the labor conditions of factory workers in the 1900s by reading the play The Triangle Factory Fire.

**Show me what you know (Proof of learning)**

**Exit Ticket**

Write a 5 to 8 sentence summary of what you learned including at least Three main ideas.

**Self-Assessment**

Check your understanding: Take the Know the News 10 question multiple choice quiz.

**Extra Learning Opportunities**

Research and write a report/power point about factory workers today in Bangladesh or another country.

https://youtu.be/8QSC_9c6qCQ

**Priority Standard(s):**

- RH 7.1 Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.
- RI7.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze the impact of a specific word choice on meaning.

**What am I learning?**

How did participation in the work force affect children in a rapidly growing industrial society? Why did so many children need to work instead of going to school?

**How do I know I learned?**

*Learning Evidence in 1-3 Descriptors*

Students will be able to describe job conditions of U.S. textile factory workers in the early 1900s.
**Girl Who Spoke Out for Workers’ Rights Lesson Outline**

**ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:** How did participation in the work force affect children in a rapidly growing industrial society? Why did so many children need to work instead of going to school?

**LEARNING TARGET:** Students will be able to describe job conditions of U.S. textile factory workers in the early 1900s.

**FEATURED SKILL:** Analyzing a Primary Source (A primary source is an original source or evidence of an historical event such as an artifact, diary, drawing, photograph, recording, interview, etc.)

**SUCCESS CRITERIA**

- **Introduction:** The industrial revolution was a time when the manufacturing of goods moved from small shops and homes to large factories. This shift brought about changes in culture as people moved from rural farming areas to big cities in order to work. Watch this 8-minute video for an overview of the industrial revolution. [https://youtu.be/nl_-6WPQ45g](https://youtu.be/nl_-6WPQ45g) What inventions made farming faster and more efficient? Name 3 problems people encountered when they moved to the cities looking for work. What are some of the developments we enjoy today as a result of the industrial revolution?

- **Prepare to read:** Familiarize yourself with the [Words to Know](#). Have you heard any of the words? Read the definitions and example sentences. Try and think of another example sentence for some of the tougher words—advocates, riveting, searing, tedious and toiled.

- **Read the article:** Use the [Close Reading Checklist](#) to guide you in reading informational text.

- **Check your understanding:** Take the [Know the News 10 question multiple choice quiz](#).

- **Show your understanding:** Answer each question about the article in 2-3 sentences.
  
  a. **CLOSE READING:** In what ways was Camella Teoli’s job dangerous?
  
  b. **MAIN IDEA:** Why did factory workers in Lawrence, Massachusetts go on strike in 1912?
  
  c. **EXPLICIT INFORMATION:** Why did some families send their children to work in factories?
  
  d. **SUMMARIZING:** Why were many factory jobs at the time filled by immigrants?
  
  e. **CAUSE AND EFFECT:** What caused the Lawrence strike that went on to include about 25,000 workers?
  
  f. **CLOSE READING:** What factors helped the Lawrence workers win better pay and conditions?
  
  g. **MAKING INFERENCES:** Why might it have taken nearly 30 years after the Lawrence strike and Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire for Congress to pass the Fair Labor Standards Act?

- **Read “Some Horses Live Better Than We Do” skills sheet.** Answer the five questions about the primary source. What part of 14-year-old John’s testimony did you find most powerful? Why? How do you think John Boldelar’s experience as a child laborer compared to Camella’s?

- **Delve deeper into the labor conditions of factory workers in the 1900s by reading the play The Triangle Factory Fire.**

**EXTENDED LEARNING:** Research and write a report/power point about factory workers today in Bangladesh or another country. [https://youtu.be/8QSC_9c6qCQ](https://youtu.be/8QSC_9c6qCQ)

**Exit Ticket:** Write a 5 to 8 sentence summary of what you learned including at least Three main ideas.
Building Vocabulary

Words to Know: The Girl Who Spoke Out for Workers’ Rights

1. assault (v): to attack someone or something (p. 18)
   • example: The roar of traffic outside the window constantly assaults my nerves.

2. Congress (n): the law-making body of the U.S. government, composed of the Senate and the House of Representatives (p. 20)
   • example: Congress passed a bill to fund the government and avoid another government shutdown.

3. dignity (n): the state of being worthy of respect (p. 21)
   • example: The doctor treated the homeless man with dignity even though he couldn’t pay.

4. equivalent (n): the equal in amount or value (p. 19)
   • example: A nickel is the equivalent of five pennies.

5. hearing (n): an official investigation of a matter in which testimony is taken from witnesses or experts (p. 22)
   • example: The mayor’s office agreed to put a traffic light on Elm Street after citizens in a public hearing said that it was needed to keep the crosswalk safe.

6. immigrant (n): a person who comes to a foreign country or region to live there permanently (p. 19)
   • example: Samantha’s grandmother is an immigrant who moved from South Korea to the U.S. as a teen.

7. Industrial Revolution (n): a period of rapid manufacturing growth beginning in Europe in the late 18th century (p. 18)
   • example: During the Industrial Revolution, millions of people moved from rural areas to cities to work in factories.

8. landmark (n): an event that marks an important stage or turning point in something (p. 21)
   • example: The U.S. Supreme Court’s 1955 ruling that Montgomery, Alabama, must integrate its buses was a landmark in U.S. civil rights history.

9. labor union (n): an organization of workers that advocates for better pay and working conditions (p. 20)
   • example: The International Workers of the World was the one labor union that helped the immigrant laborers of Lawrence, Massachusetts, in 1912.

10. militia (n): a military force made of civilians (p. 20)
    • example: The first American soldiers who fought against the British during the Revolutionary War were part of a militia in the Boston area.
Building Vocabulary

**Words to Know: The Girl Who Spoke Out for Workers’ Rights, cont’d.**

11. **mill (n):** a factory fitted with machinery for a specific manufacturing process (p. 18)
   - **example:** For generations, people in my family have worked at one of the steel mills in Pittsburgh.

12. **minimum wage (n):** the lowest hourly rate an employer can legally pay its workers (p. 20)
   - **example:** Betsy works as a cook in Florida and earns the minimum wage of $8.46.

   - **example:** Tyrone moved back to New Hampshire because he missed the crisp weather in New England and seeing the leaves change color.

14. **picket line (n):** a boundary set in front of a place of work by employees on a strike (p. 20)
   - **example:** As a supervisor at the auto plant, Noah hated having to cross the picket line of angry workers every morning.

15. **riveting (adj):** very exciting or interesting (p. 20)
   - **example:** Shanice found the movie so riveting, she nearly dropped her popcorn.

16. **starvation wages (n):** pay that’s too low for a person to survive (p. 21)
   - **example:** Emma could hardly afford to buy groceries on the starvation wages she made at the factory.

17. **strike (n):** an organized effort by employees who refuse to work until certain conditions are met by their employer (p. 18)
   - **example:** The workers went on strike after their boss refused to increase their pay.

18. **sweatshop (n):** a workplace in which employees labor long hours for little pay and under unhealthy conditions (p. 19)
   - **example:** Garment workers in poor countries like Bangladesh still suffer in sweatshops where they make less than $2 a day.

19. **tedious (adj):** extremely slow or boring (p. 20)
   - **example:** Jackson found practicing his multiplication tables to be extremely tedious.

20. **textile (n):** cloth or woven fabric (p. 19)
   - **example:** Textiles are used to make many products, including clothing, bedsheets, and towels.

21. **toil (v):** to work for a long time and with difficulty (p. 18)
   - **example:** Frank toiled all day picking fruit in the hot sun.
Building Vocabulary

Words to Know: The Girl Who Spoke Out for Workers’ Rights, cont’d.

22. **U.S. House of Representatives (n):** one of two chambers of the U.S. Congress (p. 20)
   • *example:* Each state elects a number of people to the **U.S. House of Representatives** in proportion to its population.

23. **wage (n):** an amount of money a worker is paid (p. 19)
   • *example:* After she received her college degree, Hannah’s employer gave her a well-deserved **wage increase.**

Directions: Use the space below to list any other words from this article whose definitions you're unsure about. For each word, use context clues to try to figure out the meaning. Then look up the word in a few different dictionaries. Write a definition for each word below and one example sentence.
The Girl Who Spoke Out for Workers’ Rights

In 1912, a courageous teen overcame a personal disaster to join a groundbreaking movement that helped change the lives of American workers.

March 11, 2019  By Bryan Brown

In a split second, Camella Teoli’s life changed forever. It was late in the afternoon. The 12-year-old factory worker had been on her feet for hours changing spools of thread on machines that spun wool into fabric. All day, she’d had to keep her long hair pinned up around the machinery’s whirring belts, gears, and rollers. Finally, tired and uncomfortable, Camella let her hair down. She turned—and suddenly, a spinning roller yanked the end of her brown locks. Before she could even cry out, her hair was sucked into the enormous machine.

That day in July 1909 had already seemed endless. Like many of the other mill workers at the Washington Mill in Lawrence, Massachusetts, Camella had risen before dawn to get to work by 6 a.m. Hour after hour, the noise of the factory machinery had assaulted her ears. The air in the building was thick with fibers from the fabric being spun there—and she would draw them in with each breath, irritating her lungs.
CHILD LABOR: These young factory workers, photographed in 1909, were so small they had to climb up on their spinning machine.
The work was exhausting and tedious. Sometimes Camella’s thoughts would drift longingly to her time in school. Earlier that year, she’d had to drop out of sixth grade so she could work. Her family was poor and depended on her small wages to survive. But she couldn’t daydream for more than a moment or two; she had to keep up with the machines, which never stopped. If she didn’t, she would be fired. Worse, the machines had no protective guardrails. Making a mistake around them could be dangerous.

Camella found that out the hard way. When the roller caught her hair, the searing pain was almost unbearable. In an instant, nearly 6 inches of her scalp was torn off. The girl was rushed to the hospital, where she remained for months. The hair would never grow back on that part of her head.

Although it was tragic, the incident would help bring about great change. In 1912, fed up with their low pay and the terrible conditions in the factories, workers in Lawrence, including Camella, went on strike. They refused to work until they won better pay. Their bravery helped put an end to most child labor in the U.S.—and win important rights for American workers.
Immigrants Without Choices

A century ago, Camella’s story was not unique. In those days, American industry was booming thanks to the technology that spurred the Industrial Revolution. But much of that growth was built on the backs of people who toiled for long hours in factories under horrendous conditions. The worst of those places—known as sweatshops—were like jails. Employers often locked workers in during the day to keep them from stealing goods or taking breaks. In the cramped, dirty factories, diseases such as measles spread like wildfire. Workers often didn’t live past age 40.

But they had few other options. Many of them were part of a wave of immigrants who began coming to the U.S. in the 1880s, fleeing poverty or violence in Eastern and Southern Europe. With little education, most of these immigrants had no choice but to take low-paying, dangerous jobs in their new country.

Families in Lawrence were so poor that half of the kids in the city had to work.
Many of those jobs were in **New England**, where Camella lived. The Northeastern region had become the center of U.S. textile manufacturing. Like the Teoli family, which had come from Italy, the workers in the mills there were mostly immigrants. In Lawrence alone, dozens of different languages could be heard on the streets.

Work in the mills was incredibly hard and paid poorly. For men in Lawrence, the average **wage** for a 56-hour workweek was $8.50—the **equivalent** of about $200 today. Women earned less, and children might make as little as 11 cents per hour. Yet families were so poor that half of the kids in the city had to work. Desperate for extra income, Camella’s parents purchased false papers stating that she was 14, the legal working age in Massachusetts.

**Workers Revolt!**

Then came the accident, which hit the Teoli family hard. Camella spent nearly four months in the hospital, all that time without pay. Soon after she was released, in late October 1909, she had to get another job.

At the time, Massachusetts officials were growing concerned about conditions in the mills. In late 1911, the legislature passed a law reducing the hours that women and children could work in a week from 56 to 54. In response, mill owners sped up the machines, putting the workers under even more pressure.

Then, on January 11, 1912, a group of women in one of the Lawrence mills opened their paychecks to find the bosses had cut their pay for those two hours. That money would have bought four loaves of bread. Enraged, the women left their machines and walked off the floor. “Short pay! Short pay!” they chanted.

Their action sent a shock wave through the town. Enough was enough. Within two days, about 25,000 people from the Lawrence mills were on strike.
ON STRIKE! Lawrence mill workers march for better pay.
A Workers’ Battle

Lawrence quickly turned into a battleground. Workers set up **picket lines** in front of factories and marched through town. **Militia** sent by city authorities clashed with the protesters. Two strikers were killed during these confrontations.

A national **labor union** took up the strikers’ cause. The union translated strike leaflets and speeches at rallies into 25 different languages. This was crucial in uniting workers from many cultures, historians say.

Within weeks, news of the strike had won sympathy for the Lawrence workers around the country. It also caught the attention of officials in Washington, D.C. In late February, **Congress** announced that it would hold **hearings** to learn about conditions in the mills. The people of Lawrence were invited to speak.
Lawmakers Hear the Truth

On March 1, 1912, a thousand people showed up at the Lawrence train station to see 5 adults and 13 children—including Camella—off to Washington to testify before Congress. The next day, the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Rules opened its hearings. As one Lawrence worker after another told his or her story, the congressmen couldn’t believe what they were hearing. Were there really people in America who worked under such alarming conditions?

When Camella, by then 14, spoke, she was so shy that the people in the room had to strain to hear her. Yet her testimony was riveting. Why did she join the strike? she was asked. “Because I didn’t get enough to eat at home,” she replied. When Camella related the terrifying story of how her hair had been sucked into the machine, the congressmen were stunned.

A strikers’ pamphlet paints factory bosses as “thieves.”
The hearings won additional public support for the workers. U.S. President William Howard Taft even met with the young people in the White House. Finally, on March 12, the mill owners agreed to raise their workers’ pay. The strikers had won! Not only that, but across New England, other textile mills improved wages as well—hoping to avoid a strike like the one in Lawrence.

Real Change Comes

The Lawrence mill workers’ strike was a milestone in American labor history. Their victory showed the power of labor unions. It also made the U.S. government ask what it should do to protect workers.

But it didn’t change American factories overnight. Life there continued to be miserable—and dangerous—for many people. Eventually, the strike and other incidents before and after, including the deadly 1911 Triangle Shirtwaist factory fire in New York City (see "The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory," below), convinced Americans how desperate the situation was. Real progress finally arrived in 1938, when Congress passed the Fair Labor Standards Act. That landmark legislation capped the legal workweek at 40 hours—and limited how kids could be employed (see “What This Means for You,” below).
The strike made the government ask what it should do to protect workers.

Young Camella didn’t benefit from those advances. Even after the Lawrence mill owners raised wages and Camella’s father was bringing in higher pay, the family still couldn’t afford for her not to work. So she returned to the factory.

Still, say experts, it was the actions of countless people like her that helped win standards of safety, pay, and *dignity* in the workplace that many Americans take for granted today. In 1990, long after she had died, Lawrence named a street Camella Teoli Way. “Camella probably never understood her gift to the nation,” wrote a local newspaper columnist. Yet in its way, this small street pays tribute to the achievement of one teenage girl who made her quiet voice count.

Write About It! What rights and protections should be legally guaranteed to workers? Explain your answer using evidence from the text.
During the Industrial Revolution, centers of production, such as Lawrence, were often gritty and polluted.
**Industrial Revolution:** A historic period in which power-driven machinery created a boom in large-scale manufacturing. Beginning in the late 19th century, it transformed America into an industrial giant.

**Labor Union:** A workers’ organization that advocates for better pay and other benefits. Labor unions grew in importance with the need for more factory workers during the Industrial Revolution.

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**What This Means for You . . .**

Today, most kids in the U.S. don’t have to work to help their families survive. The 1938 Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) prohibits people under 14 from working most jobs. It also restricts teens under 16 to eight hours of work per day and requires that they receive the federal minimum wage of $7.25 an hour.

But the FLSA does make exceptions. Kids under 16 can work more than eight hours in a business owned by their parents, such as a family farm—if they also continue to go to school. Still, authorities can’t keep track of everyone, especially the children of undocumented immigrants.

Today, tens of thousands of such teens work unlimited hours in tobacco fields in North Carolina or pick tomatoes in California or oranges in Florida. These kids often work under dangerous conditions for less than the minimum wage.

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**The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory**
In 1911, a fire in a New York City sweatshop became one of the worst workplace disasters in U.S. history. The Triangle Waist Company, which manufactured women’s clothing, was located on the upper floors of a 10-story building. Its employees were mostly teenage girls—primarily Jewish and Italian immigrants. They labored in long, cramped rows of sewing machines for 12 hours a day, earning starvation wages of about $6 a week.

On March 25, a fire broke out in the factory and spread so quickly that some young women died at their machines. Others, trying in a panic to get out, were crushed against doors to a stairway that had been locked by their managers. The building’s only fire escape quickly collapsed. New Yorkers on the street below watched in horror as workers jumped to their deaths to avoid being burned alive.

In all, 146 people were killed. But the tragic incident helped raise national awareness about factory conditions. That led to state and federal laws protecting workers’ health and safety that had never existed before.
Know the News: The Girl Who Spoke Out for Workers’ Rights

Read the article on pp. 16-21, then answer the questions.

1. Which is a central idea of the article?
   A Camella Teoli was one of 13 kids who testified before Congress in 1912.
   B Many people died in a factory fire in New York.
   C Camella worked in a factory in Massachusetts.
   D After a terrifying accident, Camella took part in a protest that helped improve the lives of American workers.

2. Which of the following is not an example of the “horrendous conditions” in factories?
   A The machines had no protective guardrails to keep workers safe.
   B Workers were made to stand for hours at a time.
   C Many factory workers were immigrants.
   D Workers often weren’t allowed to take breaks.

3. Which statement is a fact?
   A The government should have done more to protect child laborers like Camella.
   B The Fair Labor Standards Act prohibits kids under age 14 from working most jobs.
   C The Lawrence mill workers’ strike was the most important milestone in the labor movement.
   D More kids today should read about Camella and the plight of other child laborers.

4. Which detail would be most important to include in a summary of the article?
   A The Lawrence mill workers’ strike led to important victories for American laborers.
   B Camella spent nearly four months in the hospital.
   C Dozens of languages could be heard on the streets of Lawrence, Massachusetts.
   D In total, 18 people testified before Congress.

5. Which of these events happened most recently?
   A The Industrial Revolution began.
   B A devastating fire took place at the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory.
   C Congress passed the Fair Labor Standards Act.
   D Lawrence mill workers went on strike.

6. On p. 18, the author writes that the noise of the factory machines “assaulted her ears.” What does he mean by that?
   A The machines caused Camella’s ears to bleed.
   B The machines were so dirty that Camella had to wear a mask to cover her ears.
   C The machines were constantly spewing thick fibers into the air.
   D The machines were extremely loud.

7. Why did the Lawrence mill workers go on strike?
   A They were upset that immigrants from Italy were taking their jobs.
   B They were angry that factory owners had cut their pay.
   C They wanted to work in a different factory.
   D They demanded that children be removed from factory jobs.

8. Which best describes the structure of the section “Workers Revolt!”?
   A cause and effect    C compare/contrast
   B problem/solution    D none of the above

9. Quotes from child laborers who testified before Congress would best fit into which section of the main article?
   A Workers Revolt!
   B A Workers’ Battle
   C Lawmakers Hear the Truth
   D Real Change Comes

10. How does the sidebar “The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory” contribute to the article?
    A It provides another example of a workplace disaster in the early 1900s.
    B It explains why Jewish and Italian immigrants held many factory jobs.
    C It describes why Lawrence mill workers went on strike.
    D It contrasts Camella’s experience with that of wealthier immigrants.
The strike by the mill workers of Lawrence, Massachusetts, in 1912 made waves far beyond their town (see “The Girl Who Spoke Out for Workers’ Rights,” pp. 16-21). Newspaper accounts of the immigrants’ working and living conditions shocked many Americans. That March, a committee of the U.S. House of Representatives held formal hearings on the situation. A group of adults and 13 children from Lawrence traveled to Washington, D.C., to testify. One of the workers was 14-year-old John Boldelar, whose family had moved to Lawrence from Lithuania, a country in Europe. His answers to committee members’ questions shone a light on the challenges the mill families faced. Below is an excerpt from John’s testimony. Read it, then answer the questions that follow.

“Some Horses Live Better Than We Do”

The strike by the mill workers of Lawrence, Massachusetts, in 1912 made waves far beyond their town (see “The Girl Who Spoke Out for Workers’ Rights,” pp. 16-21). Newspaper accounts of the immigrants’ working and living conditions shocked many Americans. That March, a committee of the U.S. House of Representatives held formal hearings on the situation. A group of adults and 13 children from Lawrence traveled to Washington, D.C., to testify. One of the workers was 14-year-old John Boldelar, whose family had moved to Lawrence from Lithuania, a country in Europe. His answers to committee members’ questions shone a light on the challenges the mill families faced. Below is an excerpt from John’s testimony. Read it, then answer the questions that follow.

**Questions**

1. **What details in John’s account show how his family struggled to have enough money?**

2. **What did John’s family generally eat in a week? What might that diet say about their level of nutrition and day-to-day struggles?**

3. **What was John’s job at Wood Mill? How might it have kept him very busy?**

4. **One congressman asked John what he remembered about Lithuania (“the old country”). What can you infer about John’s feelings about life there from his answer?**

5. **Describe what you see as John’s role in his family. What sacrifices did he have to make? In what way might John have had even more responsibility than his father?**

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*Wood Mill was the largest factory in Lawrence. Its six floors had 1,470 machines.  **Bobbins were spools wound with thread. Machines in the spinning room wove the thread into fabric.*
The Triangle Factory Fire

A century ago this month, a deadly fire in New York killed 146 people—many of them teens—and led to reform of the nation’s labor laws.

**PROLOGUE**

Narrator A: In the early 20th century, the height of women’s fashion was a tailored blouse called a shirtwaist. At the same time, new machinery, along with cheap and plentiful labor, made it possible for factories to manufacture huge numbers of shirtwaists and other “ready-made” clothing.

Narrator B: Between 1901 and 1910, almost 9 million immigrants arrived in the U.S. Most came from Europe, seeking a way out of poverty, an escape from religious persecution, or both. They often arrived penniless and ended up working long hours in unsafe conditions for low wages. Even kids as young as 7 worked—no laws yet existed to limit child labor. Though some people had called for workplace reform, it took a deadly blaze in a New York City sweatshop called the Triangle Waist Factory to spur the nation to act.

**SCENE 1**

Narrator C: It’s November 22, 1909. Triangle factory employees are on strike to protest working conditions. Out on the picket line, Ellie Weiss runs into a friend.

Ellie Weiss: What’s the big rush?

Clara Lemlich: Samuel Gompers, the big labor leader, heard about our strike! He’s speaking at a meeting a few blocks away.

Ellie: A man that important is supporting poor girls like us?

Clara: I told you that if we didn’t give up on our strike, people would take notice and help us. Come to the meeting with me.

Ellie: I have to get home. My pa is furious that I’m on strike. It takes all of us working to keep our family from starving.

Clara: Doesn’t he know how awful our jobs are?

Ellie: Yes, but at least I bring home $6 every week.

Clara: To earn that $6, we have to be at our machines 11 hours a day, 6 days a week.

Narrator D: The only break workers get is a half hour for lunch—which consists of an apple or a hunk of dry cornbread with some water.

Ellie: All day long, we’re bent over our sewing machines or cutting...
10TH FLOOR: Many workers escaped by going up to and across the roof.

9TH FLOOR: With one door locked, most workers on this floor perished.

8TH FLOOR: The fire broke out here, with most workers escaping.
boards. Stiff necks, aching backs, bloody fingers! Plus it’s dark, dusty, and noisy. Not that I dare cry about it—a tear stain on a piece of fabric would get me fired. **Clara:** We deserve better treatment. That’s why we’re on strike. **Ellie:** Striking is almost as hard as the job. On our feet all day, walking the picket line. Then there’s the thugs the company hires to scare us! **Clara:** They beat me and broke some of my ribs. But I won’t give up! Come to that meeting with me. **Narrator E:** Thousands of garment workers are jammed into the hall. **Samuel Gompers:** There comes a time when not to strike is but to rivet the chains of slavery upon our wrists. . . . Mr. Shirtwaist Manufacturer, there are things of more importance than your convenience and your profit. There are the lives of the boys and girls working in your businesses! **Narrator A:** The crowd cheers. **Clara:** (yelling out from the crowd): I want to say a few words! **Ellie:** Let her speak! **Clara:** (from the stage): No more talk! It’s time for garment workers throughout New York to join us. I call for a general strike—now! **Narrator B:** Cheering wildly, the crowd agrees. The next day, more than 20,000 garment-industry workers in New York City go on strike. Clara becomes a hero of the “Uprising of the 20,000,” as the strike becomes known. By the time it ends in February 1910, some 40,000 workers have taken part. **Narrator C:** Out of 353 garment-manufacturing companies, 339 agree to better conditions. Even so, life for workers at many factories, including the Triangle, remains difficult.

**SCENE 2**

**Narrator D:** About a year after the strike ends, three siblings join a crowd of workers climbing stairs to the building’s ninth floor. The date is Saturday, March 25, 1911. **Surka Brenman:** Six weeks ago I got to the U.S. from Russia, dreaming of streets paved with gold. Now, six days a week, I sit in a dark room bent over a sewing machine. **Joseph Brenman:** We came to America to be free. No one ever said it would be easy. **Rosie Brenman:** At least we’re earning a living—and it’s payday! **Narrator E:** On the eighth, ninth, and tenth floors, workers head to their machines before the start-to-work bell. A minute’s delay could cost them pay, or even their jobs.

**SCENE 3**

**Narrator A:** Hours later, on the building’s eighth floor . . .

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Dora Miller: Why did we come back to work after the strike? The company’s goons knocked my teeth out. Yet here I am, slaving away. **Ellie:** Because we need the money. **Narrator B:** In the back of the room, someone screams. Then . . . **Max Zorsky:** Fire! Lord help us! **Narrator C:** A fire has started in a waste bin. A man tosses a pail of water to douse the flames, but it’s too late. Panicked eighth-floor workers stampede toward the two stairwells and a freight elevator. **Narrator D:** The elevator door opens. The operator, unaware of the fire, is nearly knocked over by the crowd. As he closes the doors. . . . **Dora:** Wait, here comes my friend Ellie! Run, Ellie! **Joseph Zito:** There’s no more room, but I’ll come right back. I promise!

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**Chronology**

**Workers’ Rights, Before & After Triangle**

**1901-1910 Immigration**

Millions of immigrants flock to the U.S. Desperately poor, many work long hours in grime factories for meager pay. Few laws exist to protect workers.

**1909-1910 Strikes**

A strike against the Triangle Waist Company is organized; soon, about 20,000 other New York City garment workers join in. After 13 weeks and the arrest of 700 women, many factories agree to a 52-hour workweek and four paid vacation days a year.

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Narrator E: Someone on the eighth floor calls to warn the others. The call to the tenth floor goes through, but not the one to the ninth. By the time those ninth-floor workers realize what’s wrong, flames block one of the stairwells. At the other...

Rosaria Maltese: Someone please help us! This door won’t budge!

Narrator A: It’s jammed—or locked. The company often locked doors to keep workers from sneaking out with valuable materials.

**SCENE 4**

Narrator B: On the streets below, a crowd of onlookers has gathered.

Police officer: Get out of here, kid!

Morris Passoff: It’s my job to be here! I’m a newspaper runner—I take reporters’ stories back to the office. That’s my horse cart.

Police officer: Then stand back. Here comes the fire department!

William Shepherd: My God, look at all those people crowding the ninth-floor windows, with flames and smoke behind them!

Police officer: It started on the eighth floor. Looks like people on the eighth got down a stairwell, and the folks on the 10th floor went to the roof and across to other buildings. But lots of people on the ninth are trapped.

Dora (running): I made it! The operator couldn’t save any more of us because the elevator crashed!

Joe Brennan (stumbling out): Surka! Rosie! Where are you?

Police officer: You need a doctor?

Joseph: Oh, God, I lost my sisters! Frances Perkins: Officer! Too many people are on that fire escape!

Narrator C: It collapses under the girls’ weight, plunging them to their deaths.

Shepherd: Some girls are jumping rather than die in the flames!

Perkins: This is a disaster! I’ll remember it for the rest of my life.

Narrator D: In 45 terrible minutes, 146 factory workers died—most of them women and girls.

**EPILOGUE**

Narrator E: The Triangle fire led to state and national laws on workplace safety (see chronology).

Narrator A: Every March 25, people gather in New York City to commemorate the event. This year, a centennial procession will honor the victims—and the labor movement that sprang from the fire’s ashes.

—Kathy Wilmore

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1911-1915: Safety Laws

- After the Triangle fire, New York enacts 36 new safety laws over the next four years. Other states follow.

1935: Unions

- The National Labor Relations Act (Wagner Act) prohibits employers from discriminating against union workers and guarantees workers the right to negotiate the terms of their employment.

1936: Child Labor

- Under the Walsh-Healy Act, the U.S. government agrees not to purchase goods made by children under 16.

1938: Minimum Wage

- President Franklin D. Roosevelt signs the Fair Labor Standards Act, which bans child labor, sets minimum ages for various types of work, and mandates a minimum wage (25 cents an hour) and overtime pay beyond 40 hours a week.