Grades: 9-12th grades
Subjects: Social Studies, English/Language Arts
Time Required: 3 50-60 minute class periods
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OVERVIEW
In this lesson plan students are introduced to the tragic fire at the Triangle Shirtwaist factory on March 25, 1911, in New York City. Students read a short background piece, then analyze not only primary sources covering the fire itself, but also sources on factory conditions for workers before the fire, and the social and political aftermath of the disaster. Groups of students prepare presentations on their assigned topic for the class, contributing to a class-wide understanding and allowing students to develop questions to direct further research.

GOAL
Understand that the Triangle factory fire was not an isolated incident, that various factors contributed to the public’s reaction to the disaster, and that the fire and its aftermath had a profound influence on labor reform.

OBJECTIVES
Learners will:
- Analyze a number of primary sources related to the Triangle fire
- Help create a presentation for the class based on their group’s assigned sources

INVESTIGATIVE QUESTIONS:
What is important about the Triangle Shirtwaist factory fire and how does that event fit within the larger context of immigrant and labor history?

CURRICULUM STANDARDS
U.S. History & Geography
The Rise of Industrial America 1877-1900
US.7 Describe the differences between “old” and “new” immigrants, analyze the assimilation process for “new” immigrants, and determine the impacts of increased migration on American society including: Angel Island, Ellis Island, Push and pull factors, Ethnic clusters, Jane Addams, Competition for jobs, Rise of nativism, Jacob Riis, Chinese Exclusion Act and Gentleman’s Agreement (C, E, G, H, P).
The Progressive Era 1890-1920
US.13 Describe working conditions in industries during this era, including the use of labor by women and children. (C, E, H).
US.11 Explain the rise of the labor movement, union tactics (e.g., strikes), the role of leaders (e.g., Eugene Debs and Samuel Gompers), the unjust use of prison labor (e.g., Coal Creek labor saga), and the responses of management...
CURRICULUM STANDARDS (CONT.)

English/Language Arts

Reading: Informational Text

9-10.RI.KID.1 Analyze what a text says explicitly and draw inferences; cite the strongest, most compelling textual evidence to support conclusions.

9-10.RI.CS.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone.

9-10.RI.IKI.9 Analyze a variety of thematically related texts of historical and literary significance for the way they address related topics, facts, and concepts.

11-12.RI.KID.1 Analyze what a text says explicitly and draw inferences; support an interpretation of a text by citing and synthesizing relevant textual evidence from multiple sources.

11-12.RI.KID.3 Analyze how an author’s choices regarding the ordering of ideas and events, the introduction and development of ideas, and connections among ideas impact meaning.

11-12.RI.IKI.7 Evaluate the topic or subject in multiple diverse formats and media.
**PRIMARY SOURCES**

**Before the Fire**

- A yard of Priscilla shirt waist designs / Ethelyn J. Morris [c1906]
- Suffrage postcard [1908]
- Mrs. Philip Lydig on Woman Suffrage [1908-1909?]
- Geneva Political Equality Club Told of our Working Women [January 25, 1909]
- Group of striking women - shirtwaist workers, NYC. [1909]
- Shall women vote? / Ehrhart. [March 31, 1909]
- Group of mainly female shirtwaist workers on strike, in a room, New York [1910 January]
- Geneva Political Equality Club Industrial Meeting on Shirt Waist Strike [January 31, 1910]
- Strike pickets [1910 Feb.]
- Strike pickets [1910 Feb.]
- Women strikers selling newspapers for a living, New York waist workers strike [1910?]
- Newspaper article on shirtwaists *Los Angeles Herald* [microform], (Los Angeles [Calif.]), 24 April 1910.
- Miss Anna McCue... [1910]

**The Fire**

- Scene of Washington Place fire [1911 March]
- Horse-drawn fire engines in street, on their way to the Triangle Shirtwaist Company fire, New York City [1911 March 25]
- Damaged fire escape at the Triangle Shirtwaist Company building after the 1911 fire [1911 March]
- Le tragedie del lavoro [1911 March 28.]
- Firemen searching for bodies. [1911 March 26.]
- Bodies from Washington Place fire, Mar 1911 [1911 March 25.]
- Triangle Waist Co. fire, N.Y.C.--Crowds outside pier morgue [1911 March 26.]
- Triangle Waist Co. fire, N.Y.C.--Crowds outside pier morgue [1911 March 26]
- Triangle Waist Co. fire, N.Y.C.--Crowds at sence [i.e., scene] of Washington St. fire, N.Y. [1911 March 26]

**After the Fire**

- Trade parade in memory of fire victims [1911 [April or May]]
- Labor union parade, NY., May 1, 1911 [1911 May 1]
- Mameniu Including an elegy to the Triangle fire victims [1911]
- Die fire korbunes [1911]
- Fire rescue work [1912, Oct. 9]
- The Triangle Shirtwaist Fire Trial: Building and Safety Laws
- Girls wanted / Glintenkamp. [1916]
- S.Res.106 - A resolution recognizing the 100th anniversary of the Triangle Shirtwaist Company fire in New York City on March 25, 1911...".112th Congress (2011-2012)

**PRIMARY SOURCES (CONT.)**

- New-York tribune. (New York [N.Y.]), 26 March 1911. (multiple articles)
- The Logan Republican. (Logan, Utah), 20 April 1911.

**Shall women vote? / Ehrhart.** [1909]
## CONTEXTUAL RESOURCES

- Chronicling America - [Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire](https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/)
- The History Channel: [Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire](https://www.history.com/topics/united-states/triangle-shirtwaist-factory-fire)
- Library of Congress Blogs:
  - [A Factory, a Fire, and Worker Safety](https://blogs.loc.gov/)
  - [The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory](https://blogs.loc.gov/)
  - [A Fashion Faux Pas of Epic Proportions](https://blogs.loc.gov/)
  - [The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire: Exploring Tragedy and Reform with Primary Sources](https://blogs.loc.gov/)
  - [The Triangle Shirtwaist Company Fire](https://blogs.loc.gov/)
  - [The Fire Victims](https://blogs.loc.gov/)
  - [The Triangle Waist Company](https://blogs.loc.gov/)

## MATERIALS

- Computer access for students
- [Before the Fire source list](https://frederickaramaki.org/twiss/)
- [The Fire source list](https://frederickaramaki.org/twiss/)
- [After the Fire source list](https://frederickaramaki.org/twiss/)
- [Interactive Primary Source Analysis Tool](https://frederickaramaki.org/twiss/)

## PROCEDURE

### DAY 1:

#### Step 1:
Prepare by reading some or all of the Contextual Resources, looking over the primary sources for each section, and familiarizing yourself with the Interactive Primary Source Analysis worksheet. Arrange for students to have computer access throughout the lesson and the ability to display images for a presentation during the final period. Prepare to divide the class into three main research topic groups. You may create sets of partners or groups of three within each topic group as it suits your class size. Make enough copies of the three source lists for each student to have a copy of the appropriate list for his or her group.

#### Step 2:
Begin the lesson by leading a class discussion. Encourage students to share what they know about the following topics: women’s suffrage from 1900 on; working conditions, particularly for women, during the early 20th century; labor reform during the same period. Have any of your students heard of the Triangle fire before? If so, what do they know and how? Do they have any opinions about the fire’s causes or consequences?
PROCEDURE
DAY 1: (CONT.)

Step 3: Explain the lesson process to students. They will be reading an introductory essay summarizing the events of the Triangle fire, then they will be divided into groups and given a list of primary sources pertaining to one of three periods: before, during, and after the fire. They will be given a teacher-determined period of time to examine their group’s sources and choose two to analyze in detail using the interactive analysis tool. Then, as a group, they will develop a short presentation to explain the main ideas from their sources to the rest of the class and to share some of their questions for further research. There will then be a whole class discussion to discuss how what the groups have learned fits together to tell a larger story.

Step 4: Provide students with either copies of or the link to The History Channel essay on the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire. Allow them time to read the essay in class or assign it as homework. If you feel your students would particularly benefit from any of the additional Contextual Resources, you may wish to assign one or more of them as well.

DAY 2:

Step 1: Divide students into the three topic groups and assign partners and computers. Remind them of their tasks for the day. Pass out the copies of the source lists. You may wish to have students navigate the Interactive Primary Source Analysis Tool and answer any questions they have about its use. Direct students how you wish them to save, print, or email their completed worksheets.

Allow students the rest of the period to work with sources and worksheets. Circulate often to assist students and answer questions.

Step 2: As homework, students may take home their two analysis worksheets for further time to formulate their research questions. (This will require students to print out their work and continue working offline.)

DAY 3:

Step 1: Have students re-form their topic groups and plan their presentations for the class. They should make a short list of the main ideas from their set of sources and choose several research questions from among the group’s work to share with the class. Depending on group size, you may wish to have each set of partners or three-person groups present one main idea and one or two questions.

Step 2: Allow each topic group to present. They should have the equipment to project their sources to share with the class. Encourage the rest of the class to ask questions of the presenters. The goal is for everyone to get a sense of the other groups’ work.

Step 3: After the presentations, lead a class discussion. Encourage students to draw connections between the work of all three groups and to discuss and build on one another’s research questions. Finish by asking students: Why was the Triangle factory fire so important?
**EXTENSION**

Have students select one or two of the research questions from class—or develop their own—as the first step in writing research papers on some aspect of the Triangle fire or a related topic. They should use the source lists and contextual resources from this lesson as a foundation. The papers should use a number of primary sources as evidence for the student’s argument.

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**EVALUATION**

50 points: Thoroughly fills out 2 analysis tools and formulates at least 3 research questions

25 points: Participates in group work and contributes to group discussion.

25 points: Contributes to group presentation, listens attentively to other groups, and participates in class discussion.

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RESEARCH TOPIC #1: BEFORE THE FIRE

Sources:

- A yard of Priscilla shirt waist designs / Ethelyn J. Morris [c1906]

- Suffrage postcard [1908]

- Mrs. Philip Lydig on Woman Suffrage [1908-1909?]

- Geneva Political Equality Club Told of our Working Women [January 25, 1909]

- [Group of striking women - shirtwaist workers. NYC, 1909]

- Shall women vote? / Ehrhart. [March 31, 1909]

- [Group of mainly female shirtwaist workers on strike, in a room, New York] [1910 January]

- Waist Strike Injunction: Manufacturer Objects to Picketing and Scores Mrs. Belmont’s Activity, The sun. (New York [N.Y.]), 11 Jan. 1910. (Bottom of 4th column)

- Geneva Political Equality Club Industrial Meeting on Shirt Waist Strike [January 31, 1910]

- Strike pickets [1910 Feb.]

- Strike pickets [1910 Feb.]

- Women strikers selling newspapers for a living. New York shirt waist workers strike [1910?]

- Newspaper article on shirtwaists Los Angeles herald [microform]. (Los Angeles [Calif.]), 24 April 1910.

Interactive Primary Source Analysis Tool: http://www.loc.gov/teachers/primary-source-analysis-tool/
RESEARCH TOPIC #2: THE FIRE

Sources:

- **Scene of Washington Place fire**  [1911 March]
- **Horse-drawn fire engines in street, on their way to the Triangle Shirtwaist Company fire, New York City**  [1911 March [25]]
- **Damaged fire escape at the Triangle Shirtwaist Company building after the 1911 fire**  [1911 March]
- **Le tragedie del lavoro**  [1911 March 28.]
- **Firemen searching for bodies**  [1911 March 26.]
- **Bodies from Washington Place fire, Mar 1911**  [1911 March 25.]
- **Triangle Waist Co. fire, N.Y.C.--Crowds outside pier morgue**  [1911 March 26.]
- **Triangle Waist Co. fire, N.Y.C.--Crowds outside pier morgue**  [1911 March 26]
- **Triangle Waist Co. fire, N.Y.C.--Crowds at sence [i.e. scene] of Washington St. fire, N.Y.**  [1911 March 26]
- **The Washington herald. (Washington, D.C.), 26 March 1911.**
- **New-York tribune. (New York [N.Y.]), 26 March 1911.** (multiple articles)
- **New-York tribune. (New York [N.Y.]), 27 March 1911.**
- **The Logan Republican. (Logan, Utah), 20 April 1911.**

**Interactive Primary Source Analysis Tool:**  [http://www.loc.gov/teachers/primary-source-analysis-tool/]
RESEARCH TOPIC #3: AFTER THE FIRE

Sources:

- Trade parade in memory of fire victims [1911 [April or May]]
- Labor union parade, NY., May 1, 1911 [1911 May 1]
- Mameniu Including an elegy to the Triangle fire victims [1911]
- Die fire korbunes [1911]
- Fire rescue work [1912, Oct. 9]
- The Triangle Shirtwaist Fire Trial: Building and Safety Laws
- Girls wanted / Glintenkamp. [1916]
- S.Res.106 - A resolution recognizing the 100th anniversary of the Triangle Shirtwaist Company fire in New York City on March 25, 1911...”. 112th Congress (2011-2012)

Interactive Primary Source Analysis Tool: http://www.loc.gov/teachers/primary-source-analysis-tool/