

Grades 9-12

Future of America's Past, "The Fire of a Movement"

In THE FUTURE OF AMERICA'S PAST, notable scholar Ed Ayers takes viewers to the sites of complex and evocative chapters in American history. Throughout the series, Ayers meets with public historians working to preserve the past, from National Park Service rangers to curators and community activists. He visits the sites - both familiar and unknown - of monumental events, and brings on guests who offer a range of perspectives.

On March 25, 1911, New York City's Triangle Shirtwaist Factory burst into flames, and 146 workers - nearly all young women, many of them teenage immigrants - perished. We visit the building and learn how public outcry inspired workplace safety laws that revolutionized industrial work nationwide. Descendants and activists show us how that work reverberates today.

After watching this episode, choose from the following questions and/or tasks to extend your learning

Question Box 1

- What is this program "saying"? Cite several pieces of textual evidence to support your analysis.
- Oftentimes tragedy sparks a change in legislation. How did the fire at New York's Triangle Shirtwaist Factory impact workplace safety laws?
- Describe at least two of the attributes of the building that made it especially vulnerable to a tragic fire.
- What part did the elevator operators play in the response to the fire?
- What was the Factory Investigation Commission and what was its purpose?

Question Box 2

- If someone else were looking at this program, what might they learn?
- If a part 2 of this program was created, what would you like them to focus on?
- What would you like to research for extra credit? Why?
- Some consider the elevator operators heroic in this situation. Do you agree? Why or why not?
- How does sharing past incidents such as the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire help the memory "become stronger and not weaker" as described by the host and his guest?

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Box 3 (Tasks)

- Create a floor plan of the 9th floor of the building. What changes were put into place to prevent another tragic fire like the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire?
- Research the trial of the owners of the Triangle Factory Shirtwaist Fire. Why were the owners acquitted of manslaughter? Should they have been?

Box 4 (Enrichment)

- Take the role of a member of the Factory Investigation Commission. What questions would you have? How would you get them answered? Make a list of the questions you would have asked and the answers you think you would have gotten based on details from the episode.
- 36 different laws were passed as a result of the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire. Research those laws and talk about the laws that are most applicable to the buildings that we use now?

Box 5 (Extend/Real-Life)

- The Triangle Shirtwaist Fire was a tragic event that led to the development of many world safety regulations. The federal government has developed a website just for teens who are preparing to enter the workforce.
- Review this webpage: <https://www.osha.gov/youngworkers/workers.html>
 1. There are three main categories presented. Worker rights, employer responsibilities, and ways to stay safe on the job.
 2. Could the Ways to Stay Safe on the Job be called Worker Responsibilities instead? Explain your answer.
- Review the hazards at this link: <https://www.osha.gov/youngworkers/hazards.html>
 1. Which hazards surprised you the most?
 2. Do you have questions about any of the hazards? Write them down and ask a family member.
- Hazard Identification Activity:
 1. <http://youngworkers.org/injuries/hazards/hazards-activity-page/>
 2. Find all of the hazards in the pictures. Review your answers with a family member to see if you missed any.