

The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory:
Fiery Conflict Sparks Compromise

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Individual Exhibit
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When I started my search for this year's topic in August, I knew I wanted to find a subject that impacted not only my life, but also the lives of my family and friends. After an extensive search, I discovered the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire. As a result of public outcry concerning this tragedy, factory workers have benefited from improved safety regulations and worker rights. Also, because my father works in a factory, this topic has personal significance to me. Thus, I knew that the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire was the perfect topic for my project.

I started my research by checking out books at the local library, which provided a good overview of the fire and its fallout. In November, I traveled to the University of Northern Iowa library to extend my research. There, I found many helpful sources, such as *New York Times* articles about the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire itself, along with editorials that captured public reaction to the tragedy. I also found a useful online archive at Cornell University, which contained a multitude of fire and victim photographs, trial testimony accounts, and political cartoons. Additionally, the United States Department of Labor website had good information about safety provisions both past and present. Each of these provided quality documents, pictures, interviews, articles, and diagrams of the building's layout. Surprisingly, I enjoyed the research process and found myself wanting to learn more as I sifted through the documents and pictures related to the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire. After the district competition, I interviewed Ken Sagar, president of the Iowa Federation of Labor, a branch of the AFL-CIO. He provided excellent information regarding the history of organized labor and its impact on workplace safety yet today. Prior to

nationals, I interviewed Dr. Joshua Freeman, who is considered the top expert concerning New York labor history.

Personally, I chose the individual exhibit category because every year it presents a challenge. It is like putting together a puzzle, each one is different and requires using every skill set I possess to create an exhibit that properly portrays my topic. I started by selecting historic paint colors from the time period to create visual appeal. Next, to further enhance the visual effect of my exhibit, I used a computer design program to print a high quality adhesive photograph of the factory building to place prominently at the center of my project. Additionally, I created a timeline out of cornerstones to provide a chronological map of the events concerning my topic.

My topic is a good fit with this year's National History Day theme, *Conflict and Compromise In History*. The rise of industrialization during the late 19th century spurred waves of immigrants seeking the American Dream. Sadly, on March 25, 1911 a fiery conflict between industrialists and female immigrant laborers ignited, as frantic factory workers leapt to their death to escape the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire. As the deadliest industrial disaster of the time period, this tragedy led to compromise concerning worker safety.