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**Background on Sweatshops**

**The Origins of Sweatshops**

The terms “sweating,” “sweating system,” and “sweatshop” were first used in the 1840’s. The earliest definition of the “sweating system” did not refer to the conditions of the workshops. Instead, it referred to the relationship between designers, producers, and workers.

In the “sweating system,” designers of garments would contract with many different small shops. Each shop would work on part of the garment–one shop for sleeves, one shop for buttons, etc. This work was carried out in small home workshops, often by the family of the subcontractor. These small home workshops paid their workers by the piece they completed.

As much of the garment industry moved from homes into factories over the course of the nineteenth century, the home “sweatshops” that still existed moved from rural to urban areas. Most of these urban sweatshops were run by immigrants.

**Sweatshops in New York’s Lower East Side**

New York’s Lower East Side was notorious for its high number of sweatshops. Most sweatshops in the Lower East Side employed between four and thirty workers that performed a variety of tasks: sewing a piece of a garment, assembling pieces into a full garment, finishing touches, and pressing garments.

Sweatshop contractors in the Lower East Side would use kin networks (reaching out to family members), improvement associations, and a shared language to recruit workers from within their own ethnic immigrant community. Sometimes they would even have come from the same village in Europe.

Although wages and working conditions in these sweatshops were often sub-standard, contractors argued that immigrants would be unable to find work elsewhere and that they should take whatever work they could. This was especially true during times of economic downturn. One of the most famous cases involving factory work in New York occurred in 1911 during the famous Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire

**The Triangle Shirtwaist Fire**

***What actually happened?*** Whenever tragic events take place, they tend to be surrounded by confusion and many tales of the same event. One of the best sources of information to determine what happened is to look at Newspapers and Witness Testimonials and compare them.

1. Use the headlines to answer the questions below:

**What happened?**

**When?**

**Who? (was involved)**

**How many were killed?**

1. Newspapers are supposed to report factual information, what discrepancies and irregularities did you find in the headlines and article?
2. Can these sources be trusted?

Instructions: So what actually happened? Let’s examine a few more sources to find out

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Notes from Article | Additional Notes from Video |
| **What Happened?**  **When?**  **Where?**  **Who? (Who was involved?)**  **How many were killed?**  **What safe guards did the building have?** |  |  |

***Write Up: What happened the day of the fire? Take on the perspective of an employee, fire fighter or factory owner (alive or dead) to describe what happened the day of the fire. Include at least 3 facts from the events. Include what you think needs to happen next- Should laws be passed? How should justice be served? Who is at fault?***

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***My Assigned Side: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_***

**Your will come up with an opening statement where you prove the guilt or innocence of the factory owners. The most persuasive opening statement will win so make sure to back up your claims with evidence and make them as persuasive as possible.**

***Building & Safety Laws***

***Step 1 Instructions: To aide your side in the case, take notes in the boxes below to either prove the guilt of innocence of the factory owners based on the NYC laws and building regulation codes at the time.***

***You can use the witness testimonials and the NY Times article as resources***

Several laws existed at the time for buildings. Examine the laws to decide if they were broken or upheld by the factory owners

1. **Factory Exit Doors New York State Labor Laws (Article 6, Section 80):**

"All doors leading in or to any such factory shall be constructed as to open outwardly, where practicable, and shall not be locked, bolted, or fastened during working hours."

1. **New York Law on Staircases:**

Buildings with more than 2,500 square feet per floor--but less than 5,000 square feet per floor-- require two staircases. Each additional 5,000 square feet per floor requires an additional staircase.

1. **New York Law Fire Escapes:**

New York law left the matter of fire escapes to the discretion of building inspectors. The building inspector for the Asch building insisted that the fire escape proposed for the building "must lead down to something more substantial than a skylight." (The architect's plans showed a rear fire escape leading to a skylight.)

1. **New York Law on Fire Drills:**

Fire drills were not required to be conducted.

|  |
| --- |
| Evidence that building laws were either broken or met from witness testimonies: |

|  |
| --- |
| Other evidence that supports my side: |

**Step 2 Put Your Argument Together.**

**What are the 3 Strongest Arguments for your side (At least two should be based on the laws, one can be more of an emotion appeal)**

**1.**

**2.**

**3.**

**Last Step. Decide which part of your argument each group member will present. Write out your part of the opening statement using as much evidence and facts as possible:**

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**Rubric for Presentations of Opening Statements**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **10** | **8** | **7** | **5** |
| **Understanding of Topic** | Clearly understood topic in depth and presented information forcefully and convincingly | Understood topic in depth | Understood main points of argument | Showed little understanding of topic |
| **Evidence** | Used a variety of support and brought in quotes, statistics or graphics to back up claims | Adequately supported with relevant evidence | Some relevant evidence given, some evidence may be questionable | Few or unclear evidence given |
| **Delivery/ Organization** | Appropriate and convincing style of delivery, remained extremely professional throughout | Appropriate delivery and professionalism | Remained somewhat professional but may have stumbled on delivery | Delivery showed little professionalism and preparation |

**Total Score: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_/ 40 points**