

The Textile Industry and the Triangle Factory Fire

Massachusetts Frameworks:

USII.1 Explain the various causes of the Industrial Revolution. (H,E) p. 73.

USII.2 Explain the important consequences of the Industrial Revolution. (H,E) p. 73.

Overview:

Dramatic change characterized the rapid industrialization of nineteenth-century America. The economy, politics, society and specifically women were all affected. In the early stages of this economic revolution, manufacturing was moved to factories in newly developing urban areas. Young women began working in the textile industry as early as 1820. Later on as machines run by unskilled labor increasingly produced goods, the number of women in the industrial workforce grew. Women entered the ranks of industrial workforce as seamstresses who produced ready-made clothing in the city sweatshops. One event, the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire, helps us to understand the experience of these women.

Using the classroom as a historical laboratory, students can use primary and secondary sources to research the history of women and the industrialization of America in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Time Period: 5-6 50-minute periods.

Objectives:

1. Students will create a model to evaluate the validity of historical evidence.
2. Students will examine primary documents and factual references to analyze the effects of technology on America in the 19th and early 20th centuries.
3. Students will examine how the industrial revolution changed the lives of women.
4. Students will analyze the causes and effects of the Triangle Factory fire and consider the historical context of the event.

Activity One:

Analysis of the documents:

1. Have the class read various accounts of the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire.
2. Then, as a class, begin a discussion about a strategy for identifying information in the documents.

3. As a class, formulate a list of questions in order to identify relevant information from the accounts. Questions regarding the author's relationship to the fire—witness, survivor, newspaper reported, official--will help the students to visualize and imagine the event and its significance to our understanding of factory work in New York City.

Critiquing the documents to identify bias:

Ask the students about the author's purpose in order to clarify the contextual conditions that influence perceptions.

The following websites provide information about the fire from a variety of sources.

There are primary documents that include images, accounts from survivors, witnesses and diverse interested parties.

- <http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/trianglefire/> Kheel collection
- http://newdeal.feri.org/library/d_4m.htm photographs
- <http://teaching.arts.usyd.edu.au/history/hsty3080/3rdYr3080/trianglewebsite/> photographs and history
- <http://teaching.arts.usyd.edu.au/history/hsty3080/3rdYr3080/trianglewebsite/historyandeffects/> history and effects
- <http://www2.lhric.org/wh/wh1.html> "Bread and Roses"
- <http://www.historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5481/> Account of the event
- <http://www.laborarts.org/exhibits/union/triangle.cfm> images
- <http://www.marxists.org/history/usa/workers/triangle-fire/index.htm> Accounts in the Communist Organization newspaper in NYC
- <http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/triangle/trianglefire.html> Trial
- <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ILGWU>

Have the students write a model for analysis that will help them read the documents with a critical eye. Students should understand that they would be using the documents to create their own account of the event.

Activity Two:

Have the students work in groups to research the events of March 25, 1911, the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire in New York City and the investigation, the indictments, and trial that resulted from the event.

In order to determine the kind of information they need to understand why the tragedy occurred, students should identify the important historical questions they want to ask. Questions might include:

1. What were the working conditions for women in the textile industry?
2. Were there laws regulating factory work? If so, what were they?
3. How did the fire start?
4. Who was responsible for the safety of the workers?
5. What did the investigation reveal?

6. How do the indictments and trial help us to understand the attitude of the government and the public to both industrialists and the working class?

Divide the class into several groups. Have students create an account of the event. Each group might choose to create one of the following:

1. A newspaper edition devoted to the event, the trial and the reforms adopted as a result of the fire. This should include personal accounts of survivors, witnesses, owners of the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory.
2. A pamphlet for the ILGWU that uses the Triangle Fire to convince women of the importance of standing together in the union.
3. Film a newscast about the event.
4. A comparison of photos using the book *New York in the Thirties*, by Berenice Abbott with photos of the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire in New York City on March 25, 1911, and photos in *Cheap Amusements Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-Century New York*, by Kathy Peiss.

Activity Three:

Using the following website which examines the original trial, retry the defendants.

<http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/triangle/trianglefire.html>

Activity Four:

Using the following sites and the instructions for analyzing primary documents and secondary information, research early industrialization of the textile industry in the United States. This may be done in groups and the information shared.

http://faculty.uml.edu/sgallagher/Mill_girls.htm
http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/database/article_display.cfm?HHID=609
<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/robinson-lowell.html>
http://invention.smithsonian.org/centerpieces/whole_cloth/u2ei/u2materials/dublin.html
<http://www.historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5714/>
<http://www.pinn.net/~sunshine/whm2002/bagley.html>
<http://www.cr.nps.gov/nr/travel/pwwmh/ma48.htm>
<http://chnm.gmu.edu/courses/jackson/mill/people.html>
<http://bss.sfsu.edu/cherny/gapesites.htm>
<http://oswego.org/staff/tcaswell/wq/gildedage/student.htm>
<http://www.lavoltapress.com/Gilded-page2.htm>
<http://www.americaslibrary.gov/cgi-bin/page.cgi/jb/progress>
<http://www.snowcrest.net/jmike/progressive.html>
<http://home.earthlink.net/~gfeldmeth/lec.prog.html>
<http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/modules/progressivism/index.cfm>
<http://www.u-s-history.com/pages/h1061.html>
<http://www.westirondequoit.org/ihs/library/prog2.htm>
<http://www.swarthmore.edu/SocSci/rbannis1/Progs/>
<http://www.kentlaw.edu/ilhs/curricul.htm>
<http://www.chicagohs.org/fire/conflag/pic0369.html>
<http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/trianglefire/>

<http://tenant.net/Community/LES/contents.htm/>
<http://www.boondocksnet.com/gallery/cl020816.html>
<http://www.carnegielibrary.org/subject/history/gilded.html>
<http://www.tntech.edu/history/gilprog.html>
http://www.raken.com/American_Wealth/Gilded_age_index.asp
<http://www.h-net.org/~shgape/>
<http://www.jgape.org/>
<http://www.gildedage.net/index.html>
http://www.pbs.org/marktwain/scrapbook/05_gilded_age/index.html
<http://www.oah.org/pubs/magazine/gilded/cantuarticle.htm>
<http://www.secondnaturecd.com/gilagethumim.html>
<http://www.pinzler.com/ushistory/timeline7.html>

In conclusion show students power point presentation by Ms. Susan Pojer, of Horace Greeley H.S., Chappaqua, New York, *Life in a Big Urban City in the Gilded Age.*
<http://www.historyteacher.net/AHAP/PowerPoints/LifeInGildedAgeNYC.ppt>

Have students use the information to write a history of the industrialization of the textile industry in the first half of the nineteenth century. Students may work as a class or in small groups, and the project might take the form of one of the following:

- A children's book
- A comic book
- A chapter for a textbook

Extension Activities:

Essay:

To what extent did changes in the textile industry in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries affect the lives of women in the United States. Be sure to identify the women that you are including in your discussion.

Photo Analysis Sheet

Name _____

Date _____

Title of photo: _____

Step 1 Observation

Study the photograph.

Describe the people in the photo:

Describe the objects in the photo.

Describe the activities in the photo:

Step 2 Inferences

List 3 things you might infer (guess) from this photo at this time?

Step 3 Questions

What questions does this photo raise in your mind?

Photo Analysis Sheet

Look at the photos. For each one, complete the three—column analysis grid and questions that follow on your own paper.

<i>Objective Observation</i>	<i>Knowledge</i>	<i>Subjective Observation</i>
<p>Describe what you see in the photograph, e.g.;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The forms and structures • The setting or season • The arrangement of the various elements <p>Avoid personal feelings or interpretations. Your description should help someone who has not seen the image to visualize it</p>	<p>What do you know about this time period, event, scene, or activity?</p>	<p>Describe our personal feelings, associations, and judgments about the image. Always anchor your subjective response to something that is seen. For example, “I see _____, and it makes me think of _____.”</p>

What questions does this item raise? / What else do you need to know?