

**Triumph from the Ashes of the Triangle Tragedy:
Women's Wear, Women's Work, Women's Will**

Junior Division
Individual Documentary

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Theme and Historical Context

I became interested in the Triangle Fire because it was a story of triumph coming out of tragedy. It was only through the tragic loss of 146 lives that the public pushed for labor and safety reform. At first, I was concerned about telling such a frightening story, but I felt it important that people understand how so much suffering occurred in the process of bringing about the labor and safety laws we live by today.

I chose to focus my attention not only on the Triangle Fire, but the historical atmosphere of the time, how it fed the conditions leading up to the fire, and how women were ultimately involved. I also learned about the wider story to this tragedy. I read of how the high demand for ready-to-wear fashion ultimately caused the abuse of immigrant labor. I discovered that the incredible growth of New York City was quickly outgrowing fire-fighting technology. The events surrounding the Triangle Fire affected mainly women, and it was women who lead the charge. Immigrant women were most likely to hold the types of jobs where the conditions and pay were so poor, as men held the more skilled and better-paying jobs. The fight for change was taken up by many, but women figured prominently in the progress.

Research

I began researching with a small book by Suzanne Lieuerance, which gave basic facts about the fire and had excellent photographs. It helped me understand how the fire brought the issue of sweatshops to the front of the public mind. Ms. Lieuerance's bibliography helped me begin my research. I started my in-depth research with *The New York Times* on microfiche at Western Washington University. I borrowed books and videos about sweatshops, labor, fashion,

and immigrants. I searched online databases, particularly for images, many of which I found at the National Archives, the Library of Congress, and the Kheel Center for Labor Research at Cornell University. After Regional History Day, comments from the judges led me to further research the accomplishments of Frances Perkins, as well as modern-day sweatshops.

This is my first major research project. I developed the skill of quickly identifying important details within documents. I learned to compare resources before using a fact because many resources gave different information. I was surprised to find that newspapers are not the most accurate primary resource. New York's papers were so anxious to be first to cover the news that they often printed inaccurate stories, which have been further magnified through the publication of resulting books.

The story of the Triangle Fire is visual, and the documentary category was ideal. To create my documentary, I used iMovie HD, iPhoto, and GarageBand software. The technical skills I have learned in making this movie have already gotten me working on other projects.