

Name: _____

Class: _____

Shoe Factory Horror

By The Taney County Republican
1905

The Industrial Revolution marked America's transition from producing products by hand to using machines. This transition occurred between 1760 and 1840; however, it wasn't until much later that safety precautions were taken to protect workers. While the Industrial Revolution increased production, it was often at the expense of workers' safety. The R. B. Grover & Cc. shoe factory explosion was one of many disasters in which workers suffered due to exposure to unsafe working conditions. This article from The Taney County Republican reports on the tragic explosion at the Grover shoe factory. As you read, identify the language that the author uses to describe the reactions of workers at the R. B. Grover & Cc. shoe factory during the disaster.

Shoe Factory Horror.

Nearly One Hundred Killed by a Boiler¹ Explosion.

- [1] Brockton, Mass.—The list of dead in the explosion in the R. B. Grover & Cc. shoe factory Monday morning may reach 100. Sixty bodies have been recorded so far and seventy-five additional operatives² are unaccounted for. Few of the bodies have been identified, as most of those recovered cannot be recognized. Thirty-six persons were injured, many of them, it is believed, mortally.³ It is believed nearly all of those reported missing will be found to have perished⁴ in the building. The work of removing the bodies has been going on all night.



"Grover Shoe site after" by Abert F. Pierce, History of the Brockton Relief Fund is in the public domain.

When the boiler exploded it passed upward almost perpendicularly,⁵ tearing a passage as it went, killing many on the way. After rising high in the air it descended half the distance and then, swerving northerly, cut its way like a huge projectile⁶ through a dwelling house⁷ fifty feet away and pierced another dwelling further along.

Scenes of horror followed the wrenching apart of the factory building. In the rear the three upper floors weighted as they were with heavy machinery, collapsed with a crash that was heard for blocks. Men and women working in departments of this section who were busy at their machines had time only to turn in an

1. A "boiler" is a closed vessel in which water or another fluid is heated.

2. workers
3. **Mortal (adjective)** causing or likely to cause death
4. **Perish (verb)** to suffer death, typically in a violent, sudden, or untimely way
5. at an angle of 90 degrees to a given surface (for example, straight up from the surface of the floor)
6. A "projectile" is an object released into the air through an explosive force.
7. a house used as a residence and not for business purposes

attempt to flee after the first dull roar when the flooring sank beneath them and they were carried to the ground floor crushed and bruised amid the mass of debris. Many fell into a veritable⁸ fiery furnace.

In the sections of the factory which remained standing the operatives were panic stricken as they sought to escape. Many fled down the stairway and reached the street, others ran to the windows, the fire escapes in many cases having been torn away by the explosion. In desperation many jumped from the second and third story windows to the ground and were dangerously injured. The crush⁹ on the stairways resulted in numerous minor injuries.

- [5] Scarcely¹⁰ had the rear portion of the structure collapsed when the flames started up from the boiler pit and communicated with the splinters of the wreckage and immediately afterward with the standing walls. Soon the entire story was in flames.

Many acts of sacrifice and heroism were seen. One man whose legs were caught under an iron beam cried to the rescuers that they could not extricate¹¹ him and to help the girls behind him. Stretching out his arms he lifted several girls one by one and passed them to the rescuers. Then the fire reached him and he died. A woman who was entangled in a shoe machine cried out that she was dying and commanded the rescuers to attend to others who might live. She begged to be shot. Soon the flames enveloped her. Among the first to arrive on the scene was the Rev. James O'Rourke, curate¹² at St. Margaret's Roman Catholic church. At the risk of his life he removed seven persons from the ruin before the fire had reached them and was returning for the eighth when he fainted. Father O'Rourke administered the last rites¹³ of the church to many Catholics, both to those who were saved and some who later perished.

Mayor Edward H. Keith personally superintended¹⁴ the search. Treasurer G. C. Weston of the Grover company estimated the loss on the factory at \$200,000 and the loss on the other burned structures was placed at about \$50,000. The Grover factory, machinery and stock were insured for \$200,000.

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8. "Veritable" is used as an intensifier, meaning "truly" or "very much so."
 9. a crowd of people pressed closely together, especially in an enclosed space
 10. only a very short time before
 11. **Extricate (verb)** to free someone or something from a constraint or difficulty
 12. a religious leader
 13. The "last rites" are meant to prepare a dying person's soul for death.
 14. To "superintend" means to direct or manage something.

Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: Which statement identifies the central idea of the text?
 - A. The boiler malfunction and the deaths that occurred because of it were unavoidable.
 - B. While the explosion caused numerous deaths, the widespread panic of workers caused even more.
 - C. The boiler malfunction caused widespread death and destruction at the shoe factory, as well as neighboring buildings.
 - D. The explosion at the shoe factory caused severe structural damage and required hard work and a lot of money to repair.

2. PART B: Which detail from the text best supports the answer to Part A?
 - A. "When the boiler exploded it passed upward almost perpendicularly, tearing a passage as it went, killing many on the way." (Paragraph 2)
 - B. "Men and women working in departments of this section who were busy at their machines had time only to turn in an attempt to flee" (Paragraph 3)
 - C. "In the sections of the factory which remained standing the operatives were panic stricken as they sought to escape." (Paragraph 4)
 - D. "One man whose legs were caught under an iron beam cried to the rescuers that they could not extricate him and to help the girls behind him." (Paragraph 6)

3. PART A: How does the article characterize those effected by the tragic explosion?
 - A. brave
 - B. fearless
 - C. irrational
 - D. calm

4. PART B: Which quote from the text best supports the answer to Part A?
 - A. "In desperation many jumped from the second and third story windows" (Paragraph 4)
 - B. "The crush on the stairways resulted in numerous minor injuries." (Paragraph 4)
 - C. "Stretching out his arms he lifted several girls one by one and passed them to the rescuers." (Paragraph 6)
 - D. "She begged to be shot. Soon the flames enveloped her." (Paragraph 6)

5. How does paragraph 4 contribute to the development of ideas in the text?

Discussion Questions

Directions: Brainstorm your answers to the following questions in the space provided. Be prepared to share your original ideas in a class discussion.

1. In your opinion, how could the shoe factory have avoided the excessive loss of life that resulted because of the explosion? What safety measure should have been in place?
2. In the context of the article, what can we learn from tragedy? How did this tragedy alert the United States about factory working conditions? Cite evidence from this text, your own experience, and other literature, art, or history in your answer.
3. In the context of the article, what are the costs and benefits of technology? How was the R. B. Grover & Co. shoe factory an example of new technology? Did the benefits of this new technology outweigh the costs? Cite evidence from this text, your own experience, and other literature, art, or history in your answer.
4. In the context of the article, how have working conditions changed in America? How would you like to see them change in the future?