

might also make the signs or banners that express the complaints of the women.

- Do research to find out more about the Triangle Shirtwaist Company and the tragic fire. Write a description for a radio broadcast telling about it. Or you might tape record your description and play it for classmates. If you prefer, research the development of the International Ladies Garment Worker's Union and report your findings in a booklet.
- What country did your family come from? Did any family members or neighbors live on the Lower East Side during the early 1900's? What were their experiences? Interview a family member or neighbor. Prepare a set of questions and leave space for the answers. Or you might tape record the answers if the person gives you permission. Share your interview with classmates. What experiences did those who were interviewed have in common?
- What do you know about your ancestors and how your family came to America? If possible, track your family and create a family tree. You might also read *The Great Ancestor Hunt* by Lila Perl to find out more about tracking ancestors.

TEACHERS GUIDE

East Side Story

by Bonnie Bader



SILVER MOON PRESS
160 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10010
1-800-874-3320



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East Side Story, by Bonnie Bader, brings to life the immigrant experience on the Lower East Side of New York City in the early 1900's. Ten-year-old Rachel Boganovich, a Russian immigrant, befriends Antonio Russo, whose family has moved to the Lower East Side from Italy. Together they watch their older sisters battle for union rights at the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory. This historical fiction novel is part of the *Stories of the States* series—historical novels whose intent is to illuminate the past and to show the diversity and strength of our heritage and American culture. *East Side Story* concludes with a short “historical postscript” section that tells more about the real events depicted in the story.

BACKGROUND

The author points out that although the characters are made up, many girls like Rachel Boganovich really lived and worked on the Lower East Side of New York City in the early 1900's. Families like Rachel's had come to America from countries such as Russia, Germany, and Italy in the hope of making a better life for themselves.

Most immigrants, however, ended up living in crowded tenements and worked in oppressive sweatshops. The Triangle Shirtwaist Company did really exist and was, indeed, an oppressive place to work. The hours were long, the air was stale and hot, and parts of the building were dilapidated.

When the building caught fire on March 25, 1911, those trapped inside, as well as those fighting the fire on the outside, faced the horrifying reality of fire ladders that only reached part way up. Tragically, 146 workers (mostly women and young girls) on the eighth, ninth, and tenth floors of the building died because they had no way to escape.

As a result of the fire, many unsafe working conditions in factories across New York State were improved through the establishment of two new entities: the Bureau of Fire Prevention and the Factory Investigating Commission. The Former was set up by New York City government, the latter by the New York State legislature.

FACT, FICTION, AND CHARACTERIZATION

Share with students that *East Side Story* is a novel of historical fiction, and that this form of literature mixes real and made-up characters and events. Discuss with students aspects of historical fiction that make it so exciting and interesting to read. Help students realize that this type of novel brings readers closer to another time period through the experiences of the characters. Instead of just reading about an event, readers can “live” it with the characters.

Engage students in a discussion about how a reader can tell what is fact and what is fiction. Be sure students understand that facts can be checked in reference books such as encyclopedias; in newspapers of the time and in other official public records; and in personal accounts such as journals and diaries. Photographs, paintings, and drawings can also serve as historical records. To help students distinguish fact from fiction, be sure to have them read the postscript at the end of the book.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- What have you read in textbooks and other nonfiction materials that confirms the experiences explained in this story?
- Why do you suppose that boys were sent to school and girls were made to work in factories?
- Of all the things that Rachel faced in the story, what would you have found most difficult?

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

- How did Rachel describe herself at the beginning of the story? How was she different at the end? Create a character chart to show how Rachel changes. On one half of the chart, list adjectives that describe her at the beginning; on the other half, list adjectives that describe her at the end. You might also add drawings of her to accompany the adjectives you use. Or you might write a character sketch to describe to someone who has not read the book.
- Suppose you were a newspaper reporter covering the picketing of the Triangle Shirtwaist Company. Write a headline and news article reporting what happened. Remember to include information that answers the who, what, when, where, and why questions. Create a bulletin board display with classmates to show the articles. You