Rose Schneiderman was a Jewish immigrant from Russia-controlled Poland; she played a central role in the leadership of the National Women's Trade Union League. Schneiderman had started working at a factory when she was thirteen years old. She had knowledge of and sympathy for the hardships immigrant workers endured, particularly in the garment industry.

It is hard to be a "New immigrant" from Southern or Eastern Europe. It is hard to survive. So, we work in the factories. We work long hours for low wages on dangerous machinery in unsafe conditions.

Rose Schneiderman made the following speech after the disastrous Triangle garment factory fire. In this catastrophic fire, 146 workers, mostly young women, lost their lives inside the burning factory.

146 workers, mostly young women, died because they could not escape the fire—the doors were locked!

The workers could not escape the fire because the doors had been locked to keep the employees from leaving during working hours and to allow company officers to search employees for stolen materials.

We had no choice. We locked the doors to prevent theft to prevent laziness!
"I would be traitor to these poor burned bodies if I came here to talk good fellowship. We have tried you good people of the public, and we have found you wanting. The old Inquisition had its rack and its thumbscrews and its instruments of torture with iron teeth. We know what these things are today; the iron teeth that are our necessities, the thumbscrews the high-powered and swift machinery close to which we must work, and the rack is here in the "fireproof structures that will destroy us the minute they catch on fire."

"I am not here to talk good fellowship. I am here to talk about what conditions exist in society that led to this tragedy to prevent future tragedies!"

"This is not the first time girls have been burned alive in the city. Each week I must learn of the untimely death of one of my sister workers. Every year thousands of us are maimed. The life of men and women is so cheap and property is so sacred. There are so many of us for one job it matters little if 143 of us are burned."

Every week, one of my sister workers dies.
To the factory owners, life is cheap for there are many workers for every job.
"We tried you, citizens; we are trying you now, and you have a couple of dollars for the sorrowing mothers and daughters and sisters by way of a charity gift. But every time the workers come out in the only way they know to protest against conditions which are unbearable, the strong hand of the law is allowed to press down heavily upon us. Public officials have only words of warning to us—warning that me must be intensely orderly and must be intensely peaceable, and they have the workhouse just back of all their warnings. The strong hand of the law beats us back when we rise into the conditions that make life bearable."

“I can't talk fellowship to you who are gathered here. Too much blood has been spilled. I know from my experience it is up to the working people to save themselves. The only way they can save themselves is by a strong working-class movement.”

Workers unite! Join the Strike—Support the Union!

Join the Union

I can't talk fellowship. Too much blood has been spilled!
1- Who was Rose Schneiderman and why was she important?

2- What happened at the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory?

3- Why had so many workers died at the factory? Why could the workers not escape?

4- Describe the lives of workers in the late 1800s and early 1900s.

5- Why does Ms. Schneiderman say that she did not come here to talk good fellowship?

6- What was the Inquisition and how does Ms. Schneiderman compare the Inquisition to the industrial factory system?

7- What does Ms. Schneiderman learn of each week?
8- What, according to Ms. Schneiderman, is cheap?

9- Why, according to Ms. Schneiderman, does it matter little if 143 workers are burned?

10- According to Ms. Schneiderman, what happens every time the workers come out to protest?

11- According to Ms. Schneiderman, what do public officials warn?

12- According to Ms. Schneiderman, what does the strong hand of the law do and why does it do this?

13- As she ends her speech, what has experience taught her?

14- If you had been in the audience, what would you have thought when Ms. Schneiderman finished her speech?
15. In the space below, create a poster either supporting Ms. Schneiderman and the union or a poster opposing union activities. Be expressive! Be creative!