



FAMILY ARTICLE

TEACHER GUIDE

THE ROGARSHEVSKYS

WHO THEY ARE

The Rogarshevskys immigrated to New York from the Russian Empire in 1901. With six children, the Rogarshevskys balanced family, work, and tradition in their small home. One of the children, 16-year-old Bessie, worked in the garment industry during the years of the 1909 Shirtwaist Strike and the 1911 Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire. Conversations about workplace safety were probably plentiful in the factory where Bessie worked, and perhaps she thought about joining in the effort to better the working conditions for herself and others. However, this may have been a difficult decision because she also had to help provide an income for her family.

PRIMARY SOURCES

1 1910 Census

This document lists a selection of residents, in alphabetical order, that lived at 97 Orchard Street in the year 1910. Highlighted in yellow is the Rogarshevsky family. A lot of information is recorded for each family member, including family role, race, age, child mortality, nativity, citizenship, work, and education.

Questions for Student Exploration

- How many people in the family have jobs?
- How old is the youngest worker in the family?
- Why do you think so many of them have to work?

2 International Ladies Garment Workers Union, 1910 Photograph



This photograph was taken around the year 1910, recording a day in the life of a garment factory. Most of the workers are women, and they seem to all be posed for the picture. Sewing machines, thread, and fabric scraps can be seen in the image.

Questions for Student Exploration

- What type of work are the people in this picture doing?
- What might be good about working in a factory with so many people?
- What might be hard about working in this factory?



READING ACTIVITIES

Comprehension Questions

- When did the Rogarshevsky family move to New York?
- How many people were in the Rogarshevsky family by the time they lived in 97 Orchard Street?
- What religion was the Rogarshevsky family?
- What was Bessie Rogarshevsky's job?
- What was the work environment like at Bessie's job?
- What did 20,000 women do to show they unhappy with their working conditions in 1909?

Your Turn / Thinking Questions

ABOUT THEIR EXPERIENCE

- Why do you think so many people in the Rogarshevsky family had to work?
- What was the result of the strike in 1909?

ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCE

- If you were a Bessie, would you go on strike? Why or why not?
- Are there traditions that have been passed down to you? Do you know the stories behind them?

WRITING ACTIVITIES

- 1 Imagine you are Bessie. You are lying awake at night because you can't decide what to do about the strike. Should you participate or not? Write a journal entry where you decide what to do. You can use your imagination, but make sure to include information from the story, photographs and primary sources. Make sure to answer the following questions in your journal entry.

→ *What is your experience like working in the factory? What is good about it and what is difficult about it?*

→ *What is a strike?*

→ *Why did the workers decide to go on a strike?*

→ *If you join the strike, what will your parents think?*

→ *If you join the strike, what will your friends think?*

→ *What do you think is the best thing for you to do? Why?*

- 2 How does work in factories impact the Rogarshevsky family? In your answer, choose two different examples and use evidence from the text and primary sources.



GLOSSARY

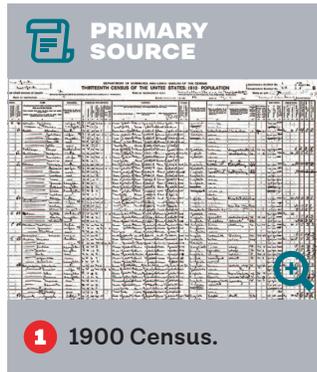
TENEMENT	(n.) a building where three or more families live, each family having their own kitchen. This is an old-fashioned word for apartment building.
JEWISH	(adj.) a word that describes a person or a practice that relates to the religion of Judaism.
CENSUS	(n.) a list of the people who live in a city, state, or country; this list includes names, ages, languages spoken, race, jobs, and more.
GARMENT FACTORY	(n.) a space with many people who work together to make clothes.
WHIR AND CLATTER	(v.) to make a lot of noise.
STRIKE	(n.) an organized protest where people do not go to work and demand better working conditions.
SABBATH	(n.) the Jewish day of rest, starting Friday night and lasting until Saturday night every week.
CHALLAH BREAD	(n.) braided loaves of bread traditionally eaten on the Jewish Sabbath.
ANCESTORS	(n.) family members that lived a long time ago.



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THE STORY

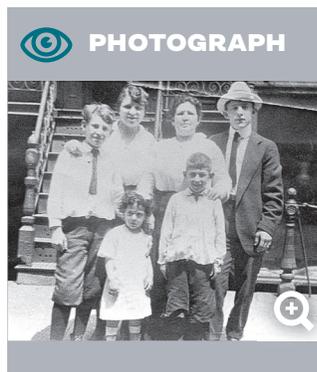
THE ROGARSHEVSKYS



The Rogarshevsky Household

The Rogarshevsky family lived in a small city called Telsh in the country of Russia. They were **Jewish** and their city had many other Jewish families. Life was hard for Jews in Russia at that time. For this reason, many people in their town were moving to the United States.

In 1901 the Rogarshevsky family immigrated to New York City, joining the many Jewish Russian people who moved to the U.S. seeking a better life for themselves. When they came, they moved into neighborhoods where other people from their towns were already living. These recent immigrants often crowded their large families into small apartments called **tenements**, where the rent was affordable and the family could work hard to get a new start in the U.S.



The Rogarshevsky family lived in exactly this type of apartment. In 1910, the family consisted of the parents, Fannie and Abraham, and their 6 children, and they lived in a 3-room apartment at 97 Orchard Street. Fannie and Abraham slept in a small bedroom, their teenage daughters Ida (17) and Bessie (16) slept together on a small bed tucked into the kitchen. The four sons, Morris (15), Sam (12), Henry (7), and Philip (3) slept with their heads on the sofa using chairs to support the rest of their bodies.

Night time when it was time to sleep was probably was one of the few times that everyone in the family would be home together. In fact, we have one photo of members of the Rogarshevsky family outside of 97 Orchard and not even everyone is in it. If we look at the 1910 **census**, we can learn about why that might be. Abraham, Bessie, Ida, and Morris are all have something listed under “occupation,” which means they were working.

YOUR TURN *Why do you think so many people in the Rogarshevsky family had to work?*


 PRIMARY SOURCE


2 The International Ladies Garment Workers Union, 1910 photograph.

Bessie's Job

Bessie Rogarshevsky, who was 16, operated a sewing machine in a garment factory that made women's clothing called a shirtwaist. Six days a week, Bessie would wake up, put on her favorite hat, and leave for work in the shirtwaist factory. As she walked down Orchard street, she heard the yells of the push cart sellers, the rumble of the train, and possibly even some street musicians.

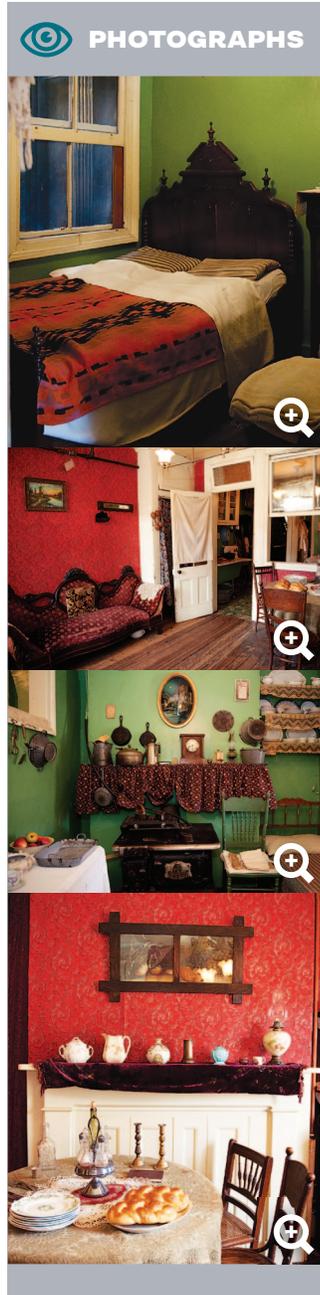
There were hundreds of factories in New York City, and each one had many workers. Many of them were young immigrant women like Bessie. They worked long hours for low pay, and the factory owners were often strict. The women did not get many breaks, and they often had to ask permission to use the bathroom. Some workers had to pay for their own sewing needles or even pay rent to the boss for the chairs they sat in. Shirtwaist work could be dangerous, as the sewing machines had sharp needles and many moving parts. It was a noisy place to work as the whir and clatter of hundreds of machines filled the air. Some factories had high ceilings and big windows to let in more air and light, but many did not.

There were ways that Bessie and the workers could bring joy into their days. The women often hummed and sang, even though it was prohibited in some factories and they would have to make sure the boss did not know who started the singing. They may have found ways to make friends, chatting while they ate their lunches.

 PHOTOGRAPH


In 1909, working conditions had become so unfair and dangerous that about 20,000 women, all shirtwaist workers, decided to strike. Instead of going inside to their sewing machines, the women marched outside the factories, carrying picket, or protest signs. They made a list of demands to the factory owners and said they would not come to work until their demands were met. Without these workers, there were no shirtwaists being made, and the factory owners could not make any money. The strike was on the front page of the newspapers and everyone started to learn about the difficult working conditions. After a few months, the factory owners agreed to give the women higher pay and fewer hours of work. The conditions did not improve right away, and in 1911, a devastating fire broke out in the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory which killed 146 garment workers, mostly young immigrant women. That tragedy called even more attention to the conditions in the factories, and eventually new laws were created that protected the workers.

YOUR TURN *What was the result of the strike in 1909?*



PHOTOGRAPHS

For Bessie and women like her, deciding whether or not to join the strike was not easy. Her father, sister and brother all worked in factories, and the family depended upon her income to pay for their food and rent. If she joined the strike, she would not be paid. She may have wanted to join her friends who were standing up for a cause they believed in. We don't know whether Bessie joined the strikers or not, but we do know that the effect of the strike benefited all Americans. Workers today have safer conditions because of the courage of these women to stand up for their rights.

YOUR TURN *If you were a Bessie, would you go on strike? Why or why not?*

Work and Culture

With work putting so many demands on the family, their religious practices and cultural traditions will be affected. For example, since the Rogarshevsky family was Jewish, it was their tradition to observe the **sabbath**, meaning that Friday night to Saturday evening was time to rest, connect with family, and connect with their faith. However, working at factories, the children may not be able to have the day off on Saturday without losing their jobs and would not be able to keep this tradition.

As part of observing the sabbath, perhaps the family would all be able to get together on Friday night for the shabbat dinner. Fannie would light the candles and lead the singing of the Shabbat hymns. Perhaps she is thinking about how precious it is to have her family together and be able keep a part of the traditions. As the **challah bread** is served, perhaps her thoughts change and she is sad and worried that she cannot pass down traditions to her children.

YOUR TURN *Are there traditions that have been passed down to you? Do you know the stories behind them?*

Today, Fannie and Abraham's great great great grandchildren and their children remember their **ancestors** and continue to practice many of the traditions that their ancestors brought to the United States.



STATE New York COUNTY New York TOWNSHIP OR OTHER DIVISION OF COUNTY Westchester DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE AND LABOR BUREAU OF THE CENSUS THIRTEENTH CENSUS OF THE UNITED STATES: 1910 - POPULATION SUPERVISOR'S DISTRICT NO. 211 SHEET NO. B NAME OF INCORPORATED PLACE Yonkers WARD OF CITY 1 ENUMERATED BY ME OR THE 16 DAY OF April 1910. ENUMERATOR 9799

HOUSEHOLD NUMBER	FAMILY NUMBER	NAME	RELATIONSHIP	PERSONAL DESCRIPTION	SEX		RACE	MARRIAGE	SINGLE	MARRIED	OCCUPATION	EDUCATION	SCHOOL OF AGE	
					M	F							Attended	Not Attended
97	1	Isidor Rogarshevsky	Head	W 38 Y 11 S	1	0	Polish	1	0	0	None	None	0	0
		Rebecca	Wife	W 35 Y 11 S	0	1	Polish	1	0	0	None	None	0	0
		Leah	Daughter	W 12 Y 11 S	1	0	Polish	1	0	0	None	None	0	0
		Isidor	Son	W 10 Y 11 S	1	0	Polish	1	0	0	None	None	0	0
		Leah	Daughter	W 8 Y 11 S	1	0	Polish	1	0	0	None	None	0	0
		Isidor	Son	W 6 Y 11 S	1	0	Polish	1	0	0	None	None	0	0
		Leah	Daughter	W 4 Y 11 S	1	0	Polish	1	0	0	None	None	0	0
		Isidor	Son	W 2 Y 11 S	1	0	Polish	1	0	0	None	None	0	0
		Leah	Daughter	W 1 Y 11 S	1	0	Polish	1	0	0	None	None	0	0

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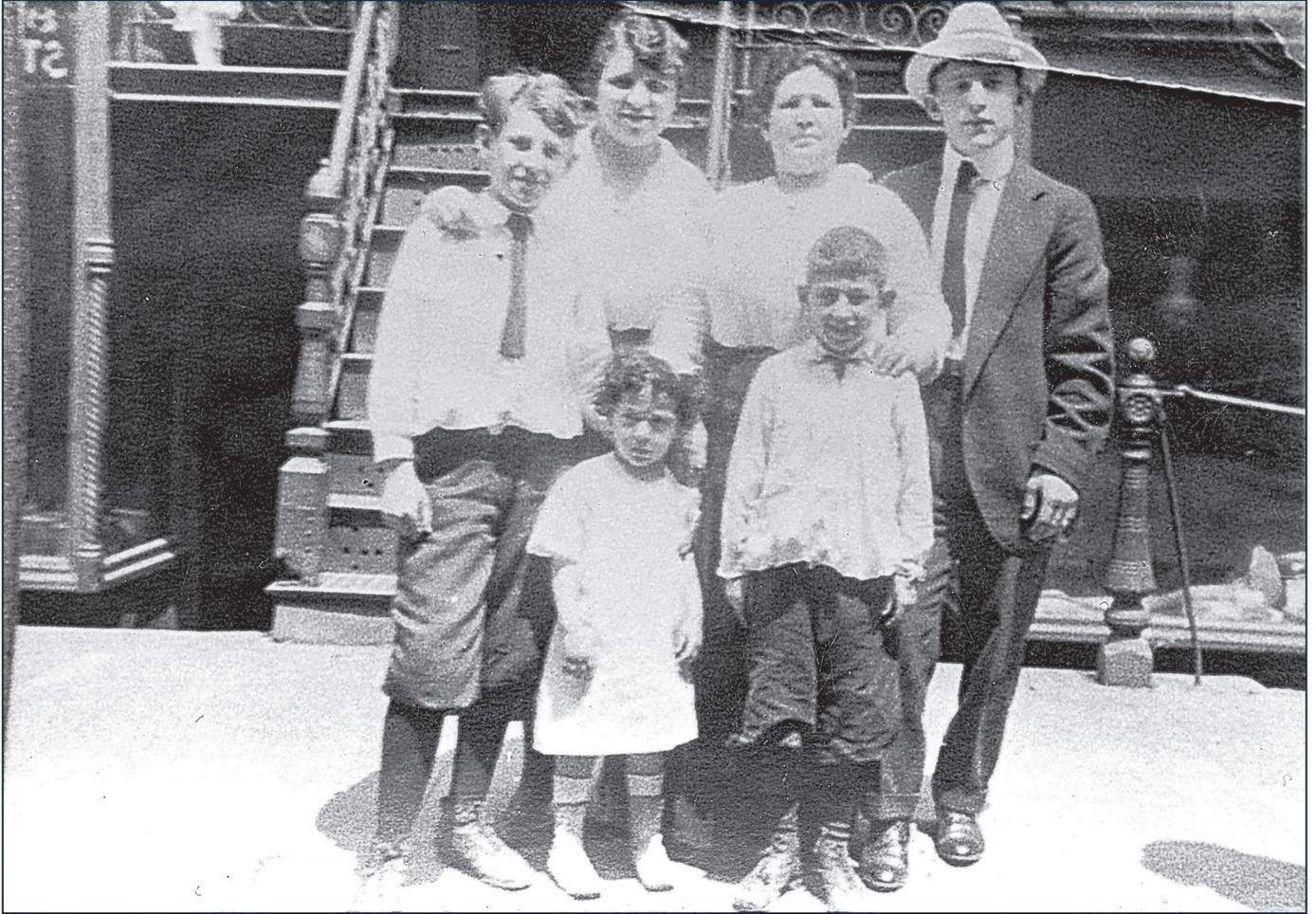
Portion of the 1910 U.S. Census Record

For the Address of 97 Orchard Street

Street, avenue, road, etc.	House number (in cities or towns)	The name of each person whose place of abode on April 15, 1910, was in this family.	Relation	Sex	Color	Age	Marital Status	Children born	Children living	Nativity	
										Place of Birth	Father
Orchard Street	97	Dubin, Simon	Head	M	W	46	M			Russ. Yiddish	Russ. Yiddish
		Ida	Wife	F	W	45	M	12	6	Russ. Yiddish	Russ. Yiddish
		Pauline	Daughter	F	W	21	S			Russ. Yiddish	Russ. Yiddish
		Marie	Daughter	F	W	21	S			Russ. Yiddish	Russ. Yiddish
		Paul	Son	M	W	19	S			Russ. Yiddish	Russ. Yiddish
		Hyman	Son	M	W	16	S			Russ. Yiddish	Russ. Yiddish
		Annie	Daughter	F	W	12	S			Russ. Yiddish	Russ. Yiddish
		Rogshefsky, Abraham	Head	M	W	39	M			Russ. Yiddish	Russ. Yiddish
		Fannie	Wife	F	W	37	M	8	6	Russ. Yiddish	Russ. Yiddish
		Ida	Daughter	F	W	17	S			Russ. Yiddish	Russ. Yiddish
		Bessie	Daughter	F	W	16	S			Russ. Yiddish	Russ. Yiddish
		Morris	Son	M	W	15	S			Russ. Yiddish	Russ. Yiddish
		Samuel	Son	M	W	12	S			Russ. Yiddish	Russ. Yiddish
		Henry	Son	M	W	7	S			New York	Russ. Yiddish
		Philp	Son	M	W	3	S			New York	Russ. Yiddish
		Baerd, Joseph	Head	M	W	64	M			Russ. Yiddish	Russ. Yiddish
		Annie	Daughter	F	W	64	M	9	5	Russ. Yiddish	Russ. Yiddish
		Ida	Grandchild	F	W	9	S			Russ. Yiddish	Russ. Yiddish
	Bornstein, Hyme	Lodger	M	W	19	S			Russ. Yiddish	Russ. Yiddish	



This photograph of a garment factory taken around the year 1910. Most of the workers are women. We can see sewing machines, thread, and fabric scraps in the image.



The Rogarshevsky family portrait in front of 97 Orchard Street in 1915. In the back Henry, Ida, Fannie, and Morris. The two children in the front might have been neighbors.



These two women were amongst many garment workers who protested their unfair and dangerous working conditions.



The Rogarshevsky bedroom. There were 8 people in the Rogarshevsky family. The parents, Fannie and Abraham, slept in this bed.



The Rogarshevsky parlor, or living room. The four boys in the family, Morris, Sam, Henry, and Phillip slept on this couch.



The Rogarshevsky Kitchen. Teenagers, Ida and Bessie, slept on the bed in this kitchen.



The Rogarshevsky parlor, or living room. We can see the table set for shabbat dinner on Friday night. It was a chance for the family to be together.