

Name _____

Date _____

Grace Fryer

Learn more about this topic! Each section gives more detail on one of the lyrics from the song. Read each section, and then respond by answering the question or taking notes on key ideas.

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In 1898, Marie and Pierre Curie discovered radium. This chemical element garnered a lot of attention from the public due to its ability to emit a glow.

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By the early 20th century, radium became a popular additive in many products, like toothpaste, cosmetics, and some food items, because of its supposed health benefits. Some doctors even recommended radium treatments. But what many people didn't realize was the harmful long-term impact radium has on human beings when ingested.

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Notes

One particular company that wanted to benefit from radium's glow-in-the-dark properties was the US Radium Corporation. They recognized the commercial potential and wanted to use radium to paint watch dials, clock faces, and compasses. Not only were these tools important during WWI for soldiers, but they were also popular among everyday consumers who wanted a novel timepiece.

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As a result, the US Radium Corp opened a radium factory by 1917 in Orange, New Jersey. They hired Grace Fryer, 18 years old at the time, along with other young women, as dial painters. Dial painting paid well at the time, and many people viewed it as a desirable job. But what the company did not disclose to the workers was the harmful effects of ingesting radium.

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A solution of glue, water, and radium powder was used to paint the dial's numbers. But after a few strokes, the paint brush tips would lose their shape. So the women were instructed by the factory supervisors to lick the brushes and point them with their lips. Every time this was done, a small amount of radium was ingested.

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Grace Fryer quit the factory in 1920 to work as a bank teller. But as the years passed, the sickness from the radium ingested started to show, mainly affecting her jaw and teeth. A doctor suggested that Fryer's problems may have been caused by her previous job, linking it to radium poisoning.

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But Fryer wasn't the only worker who was experiencing pain. Many of the other Radium Girls started experiencing major health issues as well. As a result, Fryer decided to sue the US Radium Corporation.

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This was not an easy feat. US Radium Corporation was a powerful and well-funded company, so finding a lawyer that would take their case was difficult. It took Fryer two years to find a lawyer willing to represent her and four fellow dial painters: Edna Hussman, Katherine Schaub, Quinta McDonald, and Albina Larice. Their case also faced numerous delays, as US Radium Corporation's lawyers kept stalling.

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Despite their declining health, the five women continued to show up to court hearings to fight for justice.

\nMedia coverage also helped gain a lot of public sympathy, pressuring the US Radium Corporation to finally settle in 1928. Fryer died five years after her victory. But her and the Radium Girls' efforts in bringing attention to workplace safety changed history, leading to reforms in labor laws.

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