

### **Teacher's Guide to Student Worksheet 3-** **"Counter Trials: The Shop-Girl Speaks"**

The article "Counter Trials: The Shop-Girl Speaks" was written from the perspective of a New York City "shop girl" working in a large department store in 1890. Wanamaker deeply resented the stereotypes surrounding his department store workers, claiming, "I will not have people called 'shop girls'; I will not have people called 'help'", for he saw his employees as "men and women living our lives, doing our share, doing it with dignity."<sup>1</sup> Despite actions taken by Wanamaker to improve the lives and working conditions of his employees, jobs in early department stores were far from easy.

**Directions:** Read the following account of "Counter Trials: The Shop-Girl Speaks" and answer the questions below.

**1. What are the biggest complaints of the shop girl?**

*Her feet are sore after working all day, getting scolded by her boss, and customers harassing her and asking to see products they will not buy.*

**2. What does the department store demand from its shop girls in regards to their dress and behavior?**

*The shop girls are expected to wear "black or in some grave color that don't make no show." The department store demands that shop girls show customers anything that they want to see and scolds them if they do not make any sales, although lying to sell goods is not encouraged.*

**3. How does this particular shop girl consider work in other stores (as opposed to where she is employed)?**

*The shop girl refers to other stores as "common stores" which employ "common girls," while her store, "has a reputation to keep up."*

**4. Do you think these are the exact words of the shop girl or do you think the journalist or reporter had a hand in shaping the voice of the column? Explain your response.**

*In all likelihood the reporter helped shape the article, as the shop girl is clearly responding to questions, such as "Why am I so naughty as to need scolding," "Are we expected to lie professionally," and "Employers Christian men?"*

**Article provided by:** "Counter Trials: The Shop-Girl Speaks" In *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets (A Story of New York)*. Boston: Bedford / St. Martin's, 1999.

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<sup>1</sup> Herbert Ershkowitz, *John Wanamaker: Philadelphia Merchant*. (Conshohocken: Combined Publishing, 1999), 122.