Beyond the Headlines

Compare how secondary sources explain a historical event

SS24.HS.2a "Describe the strengths and limitations of different types of secondary sources for providing insight into the selected historical subject."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline one strength and circle one limitation for each of the three secondary source types so you can compare the insights each offers about the fire.

Three Ways to Tell the Triangle Story

1. In 1911, a fire at New York City's Triangle Shirtwaist factory killed 146 workers. To study why the disaster mattered, a reader might start with a historian's book written decades later. The book can connect the fire to factory conditions, public outrage, and later debates over workplace safety. Its footnotes show which records support the author's claims, so readers can check the trail of evidence. Yet a book's central argument also guides what the historian includes. A chapter focused on reform may spend little time on workers' lives before the fire. Its broad view cannot replace those workers' own accounts.

2. A museum exhibit offers a different secondary account of the fire. It might pair surviving records with captions written by curators. The records themselves are primary sources, but the exhibit's selection and explanations make it a secondary source. Placing a wage record beside a safety rule could help visitors notice a connection between work and risk. Short labels make complex history approachable, and objects can make distant events feel immediate. Still, display space limits how much disagreement or background a curator can include. Visitors may mistake a carefully chosen object for a typical experience, even when it tells only one person's story.

3. A documentary film may combine interviews with historians, narration, and older footage to tell the Triangle story. Hearing historians explain conflicting accounts can help viewers grasp why interpretations differ. Editing and sound can also convey urgency, which may draw attention to workers who are often reduced to a death toll. But music and quick cuts can make an interpretation feel more certain than the evidence allows. A brief interview may leave out a historian's qualifications or doubts. Viewers should ask what was selected, what was omitted, and whether the film distinguishes documented facts from a dramatic reconstruction.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How could a historian's book help you study the fire's consequences, and what might its argument leave out?

2. What insight might a museum exhibit give you about workers' experiences, and why should you be careful about treating one displayed object as typical?

3. How might a documentary help viewers understand different interpretations of the fire while also making one interpretation seem too certain?

4. If you wanted to check the evidence behind an interpretation of why the fire mattered, would the book or the documentary be a better starting point? Compare one strength or limitation of each.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine you can use a history book, a museum exhibit, and a documentary about the 1968 East Los Angeles student walkouts, when students protested unequal school conditions. Choose two types and write four sentences that give one possible insight and one limitation for each, then explain how using both would improve your account.

ANSWER KEY

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HIGH SCHOOL · SS24.HS.2a

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline one strength and circle one limitation for each of the three secondary source types so you can compare the insights each offers about the fire. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How could a historian's book help you study the fire's consequences, and what might its argument leave out?	**It can connect the fire to public outrage and debates over workplace safety, but an argument focused on reform might leave out workers' lives before the fire.**
2	What insight might a museum exhibit give you about workers' experiences, and why should you be careful about treating one displayed object as typical?	**Selected records and curator captions can help visitors notice connections between work and risk. One object may tell only one person's story, not represent all workers.**
3	How might a documentary help viewers understand different interpretations of the fire while also making one interpretation seem too certain?	**Historians' interviews can explain conflicting accounts, but music, quick cuts, and brief interview clips can hide uncertainty.**
4	If you wanted to check the evidence behind an interpretation of why the fire mattered, would the book or the documentary be a better starting point? Compare one strength or limitation of each.	**The book is a better starting point because its footnotes let readers trace evidence. The documentary can explain conflicting accounts, but short interviews may omit historians' doubts.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

A history book could connect the walkouts to school policies and other events in the city. Its argument might overlook differences among individual students. A documentary could share historians' interpretations through interviews, but short clips might hide their uncertainty. Together, the book's documented context and the film's spoken analysis would help me check whether a compelling story leaves out important perspectives.

Accept other supported comparisons that name a distinct strength and limitation for each source type. Part 3 should apply those comparisons to the walkouts rather than repeat claims about the Triangle fire.