Building a Viewpoint

How historians turn sources into supported claims

SS24.HS.2b "Explain how a historian constructs a viewpoint on a historical subject."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline the historian's question and final claim. Number two places where she checks or weighs evidence, then circle one limit she places on her claim.

What Can the Sources Show?

1. On March 25, 1911, a fire swept through the Triangle Shirtwaist factory in New York City. One hundred forty-six workers died. Imagine a historian asking why the death toll was so high. She could read survivors' accounts of crowded escape routes, examine building plans, and study reports from fire investigators. Each source answers a different part of her question. A survivor describes what happened from one position in the building. A plan shows how exits were designed, not whether a door was open during the fire. The historian's viewpoint begins with a question, but it cannot rest on a single account.

2. Suppose the historian notices that several survivors describe trouble reaching exits. She compares their accounts with investigators' reports about escape routes. Agreement between independent sources strengthens her conclusion, although the sources may not describe every floor equally well. She also reads newspaper stories that emphasize dramatic rescues. Those stories reveal what editors chose to highlight, but they may give less attention to conditions inside the factory. Rather than treating every source as a complete picture, she asks who created it, what its author could know, and what details it leaves out. This comparison helps her decide which evidence supports an argument.

3. After weighing the evidence, the historian argues that unsafe escape conditions help explain why so many workers died. This is a reasoned viewpoint, not simply a feeling about the tragedy. She cites survivor accounts and investigators' findings, then explains why rescue stories alone cannot explain the death toll. She also states a limit: evidence about some escape routes does not prove that every exit was blocked. Another historian might ask how newspapers shaped public memory and choose different evidence. Neither historian can ignore inconvenient sources. Their viewpoints differ because they ask different questions and justify their claims with evidence.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How does the historian's question guide her choice of sources?

2. Why does comparing survivors' accounts with investigators' reports strengthen her viewpoint?

3. How does she use the newspaper stories without treating them as a complete account?

4. What claim does she make, and why does she limit it instead of saying every exit was blocked?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write five sentences presenting a viewpoint that accounts of the fire should focus on something other than escape conditions. Use at least two kinds of sources named in the passage, explain what each can and cannot show, and describe how you would check one claim.

ANSWER KEY

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HIGH SCHOOL · SS24.HS.2b

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline the historian's question and final claim. Number two places where she checks or weighs evidence, then circle one limit she places on her claim. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How does the historian's question guide her choice of sources?	**Because she asks why so many workers died, she examines accounts, plans, and reports that could reveal what happened at the exits.**
2	Why does comparing survivors' accounts with investigators' reports strengthen her viewpoint?	**Agreement between independent sources gives her more support than one account alone, though those sources may not cover every floor.**
3	How does she use the newspaper stories without treating them as a complete account?	**She uses them to see what editors highlighted, while recognizing that rescue stories may leave out conditions inside the factory.**
4	What claim does she make, and why does she limit it instead of saying every exit was blocked?	**She argues that unsafe escape conditions help explain the death toll. Evidence about some routes does not establish the condition of every exit.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

My viewpoint is that accounts of the fire should center workers' experiences instead of only dramatic rescues. Survivors' accounts can describe the difficulty of escaping, but one person's location cannot represent every floor. Newspaper stories can show what editors emphasized, yet they cannot establish what every worker experienced. I would check a survivor's account of a crowded route against other survivor accounts and investigators' reports. If those sources agree, I would present the account as part of a broader pattern while noting that their evidence does not cover everyone.

Accept other supported explanations of how the historian selects, compares, and limits evidence. For Your Turn, accept any distinct viewpoint that uses at least two named source types, states a limit for each, and explains a way to check a claim.