# Evidence After the Fire

Investigate the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire through primary sources.

**SS24.HS.4** "Locate and utilize a variety of primary sources related to the selected historical subject. 4a Describe methods for collecting primary source evidence. 4b Compare and contrast the types of evidence provided by various primary sources..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

## 1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

**YOUR JOB** Underline three ways to locate or document sources. Circle each source type, then number one strength and one limitation stated for each type.

### What Can the Records Tell Us?

1. On March 25, 1911, a fire at the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory in New York City killed 146 workers. To investigate what people knew about the danger, begin with a question: What did workers and witnesses know about the ways out? A primary source is a record made by someone who witnessed an event or lived during its time. Search a library's digitized newspaper collection for issues published just after the fire. Search an archive catalog for dated witness statements and photographs taken at the time. Save each item's number, creator, date, and repository so another researcher can find it.

2. An eyewitness statement can describe smoke, stairs, and an attempt to reach a door. It offers a view from one person's position, but fear and limited sight may affect what the witness remembered. A photograph taken at the scene can show the building's exterior and where people gathered. It cannot show whether an interior door was locked. A newspaper printed soon after the fire can place several accounts side by side, yet its reporter chose which voices to include. Compare the creation date and viewpoint of each source before treating a detail as established.

3. A death certificate can record a victim's identity and cause of death, but not the choices that person faced on a stairway. Catalog descriptions help locate such documents. They do not replace reading the documents themselves. If two accounts disagree about an exit, note the disagreement rather than forcing a single story. Compare each creator's access to the scene, the time the record was made, and the record's purpose. A careful investigation ties each claim to a source another person can locate and states what the evidence still cannot establish.

## 2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How could you find a newspaper and a witness statement about the fire, and what information would you save so someone else could locate them?

2. To investigate whether an interior door was locked, why might a witness statement be more useful than a photograph of the scene? What is one limitation of the statement?

3. How could a newspaper and a photograph provide different evidence about the fire? Give one limitation of each.

4. What could a death certificate establish about a victim, and what could it not show about that person's experience? If two accounts disagree about an exit, what should you do?

## 3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

A museum label claims, "Everyone in the factory knew which exits were usable." Plan an investigation using three primary source types from the passage. Explain what each might reveal and one limitation of each, how you would find and document the sources, and whether they could prove the label's claim.

ANSWER KEY

# Evidence After the Fire

HIGH SCHOOL · SS24.HS.4

## PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline three ways to locate or document sources. Circle each source type, then number one strength and one limitation stated for each type. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

## PART 2 · ANSWERS

| # | QUESTION | ANSWER |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | How could you find a newspaper and a witness statement about the fire, and what information would you save so someone else could locate them? | **Search a digitized newspaper collection and an archive catalog. Save each item's number, creator, date, and repository.** |
| 2 | To investigate whether an interior door was locked, why might a witness statement be more useful than a photograph of the scene? What is one limitation of the statement? | **A witness might describe trying a door, while a photograph of the exterior cannot show its lock. Fear or limited sight could affect the witness's account.** |
| 3 | How could a newspaper and a photograph provide different evidence about the fire? Give one limitation of each. | **A newspaper could present several accounts, but the reporter selected the voices. A photograph could show the exterior or gathered people, but not what happened at an interior door.** |
| 4 | What could a death certificate establish about a victim, and what could it not show about that person's experience? If two accounts disagree about an exit, what should you do? | **It could record identity and cause of death, but not the choices the person faced on a stairway. Note the disagreement and compare each account's viewpoint, date, and purpose.** |

## PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

I would search an archive catalog for witness statements and photographs, then a digitized newspaper collection for issues published soon after the fire. A statement might describe one worker's knowledge of an exit, but it gives only one viewpoint. A newspaper might include several accounts, but its reporter selected the speakers. A photograph might show the building's exterior, but not what workers knew inside. I would save each item's number, creator, date, and repository. I would compare the accounts and note disagreements. These sources could challenge the label, but they could not prove what everyone knew.

Accept other accurate distinctions between what these sources can show and what they cannot. The investigation should explain how to locate and document sources, and recognize that evidence from a few people cannot establish what everyone knew.