Find the Gap

Build a research question from what historians cover and sources might reveal.

SS24.HS.7 "Construct and refine a research question to address an aspect of the subject that is not well-known or has not been widely reported, basing the question on their examination of literature and historiography of the subject."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline what the existing accounts cover, circle the gap they leave, and write 1 beside the broad question and 2 beside the narrowed question to track how the inquiry changes.

A Question Beyond the Parade

1. In September 1918, Philadelphia held a Liberty Loan parade while influenza spread through the city. Hospitals soon faced overwhelming numbers of patients. A student planning a project first asks, "Why was the 1918 flu important?" That question invites a summary of an event already covered in many histories. The student reads two accounts of the epidemic. A city health department report emphasizes case numbers and official orders. A modern history chapter emphasizes the parade and the speed of the outbreak. Together, these accounts show what researchers have already explained, but they leave open how residents handled care outside hospitals.

2. The student notices that neither account describes how volunteer nurses decided which homes to visit. A library catalog lists city health reports, local newspapers, and records from nursing organizations. The catalog does not prove what those records say. It only shows where the student might look. Nurses' notes may be missing, and a newspaper might describe only a few neighborhoods. The student also checks another history article to see whether historians have already studied this topic. Comparing historians' work with what surviving sources might reveal turns an interesting gap into a question the student can investigate.

3. Instead of asking, "How did everyone in Philadelphia help sick neighbors?" the student drafts, "How did volunteer nursing groups organize home visits in Philadelphia during the October 1918 influenza outbreak, according to surviving organizational records and local newspapers?" The new question limits the place, period, people, and evidence. Still, it assumes that records describe home visits. If a search finds only newspaper notices requesting donations for volunteer nurses, the student could ask how newspapers sought support for those nurses instead. A research question should change when the available evidence proves narrower than expected.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. What does each of the first two accounts emphasize, and what possible gap does the student find?

2. Why is the library catalog not enough to show that the nursing question is both underexplored and researchable? Name two checks the student needs to make.

3. Name two limits in the student's narrowed question. How does one of them connect to a source the student might use?

4. If the search finds only newspaper notices requesting donations for volunteer nurses, how should the student change the question? Explain why.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

A 1911 factory fire in New York City is often studied through its causes and the safety laws that followed. A catalog lists union newsletters and testimony from a state factory investigation. In three or four sentences, identify a possible gap, write a focused research question tied to those sources, and explain how you would check or revise it after reading them.

ANSWER KEY

Find the Gap

HIGH SCHOOL · SS24.HS.7

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline what the existing accounts cover, circle the gap they leave, and write 1 beside the broad question and 2 beside the narrowed question to track how the inquiry changes. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What does each of the first two accounts emphasize, and what possible gap does the student find?	**The city report emphasizes case numbers and official orders; the history chapter emphasizes the parade and the outbreak's speed. Neither explains how residents handled care outside hospitals.**
2	Why is the library catalog not enough to show that the nursing question is both underexplored and researchable? Name two checks the student needs to make.	**The student needs to check more historical writing to see whether the topic has already been studied and inspect surviving sources to see whether they contain useful evidence about home visits.**
3	Name two limits in the student's narrowed question. How does one of them connect to a source the student might use?	**The question limits the inquiry to volunteer nursing groups and October 1918. Organizational records might provide evidence about those groups' home visits.**
4	If the search finds only newspaper notices requesting donations for volunteer nurses, how should the student change the question? Explain why.	**The student could ask how newspapers sought support for volunteer nurses. Donation notices can show those requests, but they cannot establish how nurses organized home visits.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The accounts leave open how garment workers argued for safer workplaces after the fire. How did garment workers describe needed safety changes in union newsletters and state investigation testimony from 1911 to 1913? I would check whether those sources include workers' statements and narrow the question to union leaders' views if only their statements survive.

Accept different focused questions if they address a plausible gap, identify evidence from the listed sources, and include a check that could lead to revision. Students should not treat a catalog listing as proof of what a source says.