Evidence After Fire

Compare firsthand records and historical analysis to build a fuller account.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.9 "Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline one detail from each named source, number the sources in the order they appear, and circle the two different death totals to track each source's contribution and disagreement.

The Triangle Fire Sources

(1) On March 25, 1911, a fire raced through the eighth, ninth, and tenth floors of the Triangle Waist Company in New York City. Many garment workers, most of them young immigrant women, could not escape quickly. A March 26 New York Times article, written while officials were still identifying victims, reported 141 deaths. Later official records established 146 deaths. This difference does not mean the newspaper invented information. Its reporters worked with an early, incomplete count, while later investigators had time to identify bodies and compare records. Both sources document the disaster, but they capture different stages of knowledge.

(2) Other sources reveal what the numbers cannot. Rose Freedman, a survivor who gave an oral-history interview decades later, described workers pressing toward the elevators and recalled an operator making several rescue trips before heat stopped the elevators. In 1911 hearings, the New York State Factory Investigating Commission collected testimony about blocked routes and unsafe conditions. Its later report described the factory's inadequate exits and a fire escape that failed under the weight of people trying to flee. Freedman's memory offers a worker's view of panic, while the commission records identify conditions investigators examined after the fire.

(3) Historian David Von Drehle, in Triangle: The Fire That Changed America, draws on newspapers, testimony, and government records. His secondary account argues that public anger after the fire helped build support for stronger workplace-safety laws in New York. This claim adds a longer view that neither an early newspaper count nor one survivor's memory can supply. Taken together, the sources show an event whose immediate facts were still uncertain, whose human experience was terrifying, and whose consequences reached beyond one factory. A careful reader keeps the early and final death counts distinct while using each source for the evidence it is best suited to provide.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Compare the death totals in the New York Times article and the later official records. Why does the passage say the totals differ?

2. What does Rose Freedman's account contribute that the commission report does not, and what does the commission report contribute that her account does not?

3. Use both primary sources in paragraph two to explain one reason escape was difficult during the fire.

4. What broader conclusion does Von Drehle's secondary account add, and why could the earlier sources alone not establish that conclusion?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a four-sentence source synthesis about the Triangle fire. Use evidence from at least three sources, explain the difference in the death totals, and show how one source adds information that another source cannot provide.

ANSWER KEY

Evidence After Fire

HIGH SCHOOL · RH.11-12.9

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline one detail from each named source, number the sources in the order they appear, and circle the two different death totals to track each source's contribution and disagreement. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Compare the death totals in the New York Times article and the later official records. Why does the passage say the totals differ?	**The Times reported 141 deaths, while later official records established 146. The newspaper used an early count before all victims had been identified.**
2	What does Rose Freedman's account contribute that the commission report does not, and what does the commission report contribute that her account does not?	**Freedman provides a survivor's view of workers crowding toward elevators and rescue attempts. The commission report identifies unsafe building conditions, including inadequate exits and the failed fire escape.**
3	Use both primary sources in paragraph two to explain one reason escape was difficult during the fire.	**Freedman shows that workers crowded toward the elevators, while the commission report shows that exits were inadequate and the fire escape failed. Together, these sources show that both panic and unsafe escape routes made escape difficult.**
4	What broader conclusion does Von Drehle's secondary account add, and why could the earlier sources alone not establish that conclusion?	**Von Drehle concludes that public anger after the fire helped build support for stronger workplace-safety laws. The earlier sources record immediate facts and experiences, but they do not provide the same long-term historical analysis.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The March 26 Times report and later official records both establish that the Triangle fire killed many workers, but their totals differ, 141 and 146, because the first count was incomplete. Freedman's later testimony adds the immediate experience of workers crowding toward elevators and an operator attempting rescue trips. The commission's findings about inadequate exits and a failed fire escape support the view that dangerous conditions worsened the disaster. Von Drehle's secondary account connects these details to the later push for workplace-safety laws, showing why the fire mattered beyond that day.

Accept equivalent evidence-based explanations that distinguish an early report from later official findings. In the open response, look for accurate use of at least three sources, a clear treatment of the death-count discrepancy, and a coherent explanation of how the sources complement one another.