The Press Fights Back

Trace how evidence and structure build an argument in a historical account.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.9-10.10 "By the end of grade 9, read and comprehend literary nonfiction in the grades 9-10 text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range.

 By the end of grade 10..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline one sentence in each paragraph that you think is essential to understanding Wells's work. In the margin, write a 3- to 6-word note explaining what each paragraph adds to the account.

Ida B. Wells Documents the Truth

1. In 1892, Ida B. Wells was a teacher and newspaper editor in Memphis, Tennessee, when three of her friends, Black grocers Thomas Moss, Calvin McDowell, and Will Stewart, were lynched after a conflict near their store. White newspapers described the men as dangerous criminals. Wells investigated the event and questioned that account. In her newspaper, the Memphis Free Speech, she argued that lynching was not simply punishment for crime. It was also a tool used to frighten Black communities and protect white economic and political power.

2. Her reporting carried a personal cost. After Wells criticized the lynching in editorials, a white mob destroyed the Free Speech office while she was away in New York. Friends warned her not to return to Memphis, where threats against her life were likely. Rather than stop writing, Wells settled in the North and expanded her investigation. She examined newspaper reports, court records, and local accounts, looking for patterns that public stories concealed. Her work required readers to notice a gap between an official accusation and the evidence available to support it.

3. In 1895, Wells published A Red Record, a pamphlet that assembled statistics and case histories about lynching in the United States. Statistics gave her argument scale, showing that the violence was widespread, while individual cases challenged the explanations offered for particular killings. She also traveled to Britain, speaking to audiences and helping build international pressure against lynching. Wells did not claim that a report alone could end violence. Instead, she treated careful documentation as a form of public action, one that could expose a system many Americans preferred not to examine.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. What central idea about Ida B. Wells's work does the passage develop across all three paragraphs?

2. How does paragraph 2 develop the account introduced in paragraph 1? Use two details from paragraph 2 in your answer.

3. What does the passage suggest by describing a gap between an official accusation and the evidence available to support it?

4. Why did Wells use both statistics and individual case histories in A Red Record?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a four-sentence annotation summary of the passage. Include the historical situation, the danger Wells faced, how she gathered or used evidence, and one detail that most shapes your understanding of her purpose.

ANSWER KEY

The Press Fights Back

HIGH SCHOOL · RI.9-10.10

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline one sentence in each paragraph that you think is essential to understanding Wells's work. In the margin, write a 3- to 6-word note explaining what each paragraph adds to the account. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What central idea about Ida B. Wells's work does the passage develop across all three paragraphs?	**Wells used investigation and published evidence to challenge false accounts of lynching and expose systemic racial violence, even at personal risk.**
2	How does paragraph 2 develop the account introduced in paragraph 1? Use two details from paragraph 2 in your answer.	**It shows both the danger Wells faced and the way she strengthened her work. A mob destroyed her newspaper office, and she expanded her research to include reports, court records, and local accounts.**
3	What does the passage suggest by describing a gap between an official accusation and the evidence available to support it?	**It suggests that public accusations about lynching were often unreliable and needed to be examined against evidence.**
4	Why did Wells use both statistics and individual case histories in A Red Record?	**Statistics showed that lynching was widespread, while individual cases challenged the explanations used to justify specific killings.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Ida B. Wells investigated the 1892 lynching of three Black grocers after newspapers described them as criminals. After threats and the destruction of her newspaper office, she settled in the North and widened her research to include reports, records, and local accounts. In A Red Record, she combined statistics with case histories to reveal both the scale of lynching and the weaknesses in common justifications. The destroyed office most shapes my understanding because it shows that her documentation challenged powerful people who wanted the violence hidden.

Accept concise responses that accurately synthesize ideas across the passage and support claims with relevant details. For the open task, accept varied interpretations of the most meaningful detail when the explanation is grounded in the text.