Beyond the Iceberg

Compare sources about the Titanic disaster

6-12.HT1.3 "Evaluate historical sources, considering authorship, strengths, limitations, and perspectives, while analyzing primary and secondary sources to understand their collective contribution to historical interpretation."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline who created each source, circle one strength of each source, and number one limitation of each source so you can compare what they help explain.

Three Views of the Titanic

1. On the night of April 14, 1912, the Titanic struck an iceberg in the North Atlantic. In testimony to a U.S. Senate inquiry, lookout Frederick Fleet said he spotted the iceberg, rang the lookout bell, and telephoned a warning to the bridge. His testimony is a primary source because he was aboard and witnessed the approach. It is strong evidence for what he saw and did, but he could not see every decision made on the bridge. He testified after the sinking, when people wanted answers, so his account alone cannot explain every cause of the disaster.

2. The U.S. Senate inquiry's 1912 report is another primary source, produced soon after the disaster. Investigators gathered testimony from people with different jobs. This gave the report a wider view than one lookout could offer. The report criticized the shortage of lifeboat space for everyone aboard and examined how the evacuation unfolded. Yet the senators were not on the Titanic. They had to judge other people's accounts, and many people who died could not testify. Because the inquiry sought ways to prevent future disasters, it focused closely on failures that rules and safety changes might address.

3. A present-day historian might write a secondary account using Fleet's testimony and the Senate report. Working later, the historian could compare those records with other surviving evidence and consider where they disagree. The historian might separate two questions: what happened before the collision, and why so many people died afterward. That distinction helps readers avoid treating one piece of evidence as an answer to everything. Still, the historian was not aboard and must decide which evidence deserves the most weight. Together, the sources offer a fuller interpretation, but they cannot reveal every thought or action of the people on the ship.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Why is Fleet's testimony useful for learning about the iceberg warning, and what can it not tell us?

2. How did the Senate inquiry gain a wider view than Fleet had? Identify one limit of its report.

3. How would a present-day historian's account differ from Fleet's testimony and the Senate report in when and how it was created?

4. A writer says Fleet's testimony alone explains why so many people died. What evidence in the passage challenges that claim?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a four-sentence exhibit label that makes a careful claim about what these sources reveal together. Include a detail from Fleet's testimony, a finding from the Senate report, one source limitation, and a question that remains unanswered.

ANSWER KEY

Beyond the Iceberg

GRADES 6-12 · 6-12.HT1.3

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline who created each source, circle one strength of each source, and number one limitation of each source so you can compare what they help explain. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Why is Fleet's testimony useful for learning about the iceberg warning, and what can it not tell us?	**Fleet witnessed the approach and described his warning, but he could not see every decision made on the bridge.**
2	How did the Senate inquiry gain a wider view than Fleet had? Identify one limit of its report.	**Investigators gathered testimony from people with different jobs. The senators were not aboard, and many people who died could not testify.**
3	How would a present-day historian's account differ from Fleet's testimony and the Senate report in when and how it was created?	**The historian would write later and interpret surviving evidence. Fleet testified as a witness, while senators produced a report soon after the disaster from testimony they gathered.**
4	A writer says Fleet's testimony alone explains why so many people died. What evidence in the passage challenges that claim?	**Fleet's account concerns the iceberg warning, while the Senate report identifies a shortage of lifeboat space. His testimony alone cannot explain what happened during the evacuation.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The sources show that the Titanic disaster involved both a collision and a shortage of lifeboat space. Fleet testified that he spotted the iceberg and warned the bridge. The Senate report found that there was not enough lifeboat space for everyone aboard, but its authors had to rely on other people's accounts. Exactly what did each person on the bridge decide after Fleet's warning?

Accept other supported limitations and unanswered questions. Strong responses distinguish a witness's account from the inquiry's broader findings without claiming that either explains the entire disaster.