Evidence After the Fire

Build a historical argument from sources made at different times.

6-12.HT1.4 "Construct and/or communicate a historical argument using primary and secondary sources."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline one detail from the newspaper and one from the later history that could support a claim about why workers died. Circle one detail that could challenge or limit that claim.

Why Was Escape So Difficult?

1 On March 25, 1911, a fire swept through the Triangle Waist Company factory in New York City. Most employees worked on the eighth, ninth, and tenth floors. Many were young immigrant women who sewed shirtwaists, a popular kind of blouse. The fire killed 146 workers. To understand why so many people died, historians compare sources made at different times. A newspaper printed the next day offers reports gathered close to the event. A later account can connect the fire to changes that followed. Neither source alone tells the whole story.

2 On March 26, The New York Times described workers trapped above the reach of firefighters' ladders. Its reporters described people jumping from upper floors to escape the flames. The paper also reported claims that a factory exit had been locked. This newspaper is a primary source because it was produced at the time of the fire. Its descriptions show what witnesses and reporters could see or hear then, but early reports could contain mistakes. For example, the paper's first count of the dead was lower than the final toll of 146.

3 The Cornell University Kheel Center published a later history of the fire. This secondary source draws on records from the event and explains that some workers could not get through a locked door. It also connects the disaster to new workplace safety rules in New York, including requirements for safer exits and fire drills. The two sources support an argument that blocked escape routes helped make the fire deadly. Still, the newspaper's account of short ladders suggests another hazard. A careful argument should use both sources, weigh their limits, and avoid claiming that one change would have saved everyone.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Make a claim about blocked exits. Which detail from each source supports your claim?

2. How does the newspaper's report about ladders challenge the claim that unlocking doors alone would have prevented every death?

3. Why should you be cautious about using the newspaper's first death count as the final count in an argument?

4. What claim about the fire's effects can the Cornell account support? Give a detail from that account.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write 5 to 7 sentences arguing which safety change would have done more to protect Triangle workers: keeping exits unlocked or providing taller ladders. Use evidence from both sources, explain how it supports your claim, and address a counterargument.

ANSWER KEY

Evidence After the Fire

GRADES 6-12 · 6-12.HT1.4

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline one detail from the newspaper and one from the later history that could support a claim about why workers died. Circle one detail that could challenge or limit that claim. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Make a claim about blocked exits. Which detail from each source supports your claim?	**A blocked exit made escape harder. The newspaper reported claims that an exit was locked, and the later Cornell account says some workers could not get through a locked door.**
2	How does the newspaper's report about ladders challenge the claim that unlocking doors alone would have prevented every death?	**Firefighters' ladders could not reach trapped workers on the upper floors. An unlocked door would not necessarily have removed every danger.**
3	Why should you be cautious about using the newspaper's first death count as the final count in an argument?	**The passage says the newspaper's first count was lower than the final toll of 146. The early report was made before the full toll was known.**
4	What claim about the fire's effects can the Cornell account support? Give a detail from that account.	**The fire was followed by workplace safety changes in New York. The Cornell account describes new rules for safer exits and fire drills.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Keeping exits unlocked would likely have protected more Triangle workers than providing taller ladders. The 1911 newspaper reported claims that an exit was locked, suggesting that workers may have lost a way out. The later Cornell account says some workers could not get through a locked door, which strengthens that claim. Cornell also describes later rules requiring safer exits. Taller ladders might have helped workers trapped on upper floors, as the newspaper's report suggests. Still, an open exit could have let some workers leave the building before they needed rescue.

Accept either safety change in Part 3 if the argument uses a relevant detail from each source and addresses the other hazard. Students should treat the newspaper's early reports as evidence, not as proof that every reported detail was settled.