# Whose Story Survives?

How missing voices shape accounts of the past

**6-12.HT1.8** "Analyze how current interpretations of the past are limited by the extent to which available historical sources represent the perspectives of people at the time."

NAME _____ DATE _____

## 1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

**YOUR JOB** Underline three kinds of historical sources and circle two places where a person's viewpoint might be missing or filtered. Use your marks to think about what historians can and cannot know.

### The Triangle Fire in the Records

1. On March 25, 1911, a fire swept through the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory in New York City. The factory made women's blouses, and many employees were young immigrant women. One hundred forty-six workers died. A historian trying to explain what working there felt like can read newspaper stories, accounts from survivors, and official investigation records. These sources reveal details, but they do not record every worker's experience. A reporter could describe crowds outside the building without knowing what workers had complained about weeks earlier. The question is not only what a source says, but whose view it carries.

2. Newspapers at the time reported on the fire. Reporters interviewed people who had escaped or stood outside. Such stories can help historians trace what witnesses saw, but a bystander could not describe a worker's daily routine inside the shop. Investigators also gathered testimony about exits and fire safety. Those records can reveal conditions that witnesses noticed, yet they center on questions investigators chose to ask. A worker might have talked about wages or fear of losing a job if asked, but an investigation focused on exits might leave those concerns out.

3. Survivors' accounts bring workers' voices closer to the story, but survivors were only some of the people in the factory. Workers who died could not give later interviews. Language could also affect which voices entered the record: a worker who spoke little English might need an interpreter, and a translated account might not preserve every shade of meaning. Today, historians can compare newspapers, investigation records, and survivors' accounts to check claims about the fire. Even after comparing them, they cannot safely claim to know how every worker felt. Missing voices limit what a present-day interpretation can explain.

## 2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Why would a newspaper interview with a bystander be weak evidence about workers' daily routines?

2. What concerns might an investigation focused on exits leave out? Why?

3. Why can't survivors' accounts represent every worker's experience of the fire?

4. How might translation limit what historians learn from a worker's account?

## 3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine a historian finds a diary written by a worker who left the factory one month before the fire. In four sentences, explain what the diary could add to an account of factory life and give two reasons it still could not speak for every worker.

ANSWER KEY

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GRADES 6-12 · 6-12.HT1.8

## PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline three kinds of historical sources and circle two places where a person's viewpoint might be missing or filtered. Use your marks to think about what historians can and cannot know. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

## PART 2 · ANSWERS

| # | QUESTION | ANSWER |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Why would a newspaper interview with a bystander be weak evidence about workers' daily routines? | **A bystander could report what they saw outside, but not what workers experienced each day inside the factory.** |
| 2 | What concerns might an investigation focused on exits leave out? Why? | **It might leave out wages or fear of losing a job because investigators focused their questions on exits and fire safety.** |
| 3 | Why can't survivors' accounts represent every worker's experience of the fire? | **Survivors were only some of the workers. Those who died could not give later interviews.** |
| 4 | How might translation limit what historians learn from a worker's account? | **A translated account might not preserve every shade of what the worker meant.** |

## PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The diary might describe daily routines and concerns that an investigation focused on exits missed. It could show what one worker noticed before the fire. Because the writer had already left, the diary could not describe what happened inside during the fire. It would also reflect one person's experience, not the views of every worker.

Accept other passage-supported examples of a source's limits. For Your Turn, look for a plausible contribution from the diary and two distinct limits tied to whose perspective it represents.