Trace the Claim

Follow how online accounts of a factory fire were made and shared.

6-12.HT1.9 "Evaluate the credibility of sources about a historical event found on the internet by determining (if possible) how and why the sources were created, how they were circulated, their intended audience..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline clues about who made each source and why, circle clues about its audience or how it spread, and write 1 beside a checkable citation or 2 beside a vague citation.

Three Pages, One Fire

1. On March 25, 1911, a fire at New York City's Triangle Shirtwaist Factory killed 146 workers. Imagine searching for information about the fire and finding three very different web pages. Page A is a scan of a newspaper report dated April 2, 1911. The library that posted it names the newspaper, the issue date, and the page number, and links to the full issue. The report was written soon after the fire for city readers who bought the paper. Its fast publication makes it useful for studying early reactions, but reporters at the time did not know everything. The report gives a death toll of 146.

2. Page B is a modern history museum's online article, written by a named curator to explain the fire to students and visitors. The museum placed it on its website and shared a link in an email newsletter for teachers. It reports that 146 people died and discusses how the disaster drew attention to unsafe workplaces. A note beneath the death toll names the newspaper report in Page A, gives its issue date and page number, and links to the scanned page. Readers can follow the link and check whether the cited report supports the claim. That check matters even when the museum seems trustworthy.

3. Page C is an unsigned post on a video-sharing site. It claims that 300 workers died and says, "Experts confirm it," but gives no expert's name, document title, date, or link. Its creator is not named, so the reason for making it is uncertain; its caption says, "Share this unbelievable fact!" Users have reposted it thousands of times, so it may reach people who never search for a museum or an archive. Its claim conflicts with Pages A and B. Reposts can spread a claim widely, but they do not show where the number came from.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Who was Page A's report written for, and how did it reach readers online?

2. Why was Page B written, and how did the museum share it with teachers?

3. How could a reader check Page B's death toll? Why can't a reader check Page C's claim in the same way?

4. Page C has been reposted thousands of times. Why does that not make its death toll credible?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

A post claims the 1969 Moon landing was staged. It has no author or date, was reposted on social media for people interested in conspiracy theories, and cites only “NASA files” without a document title or link. In four or five sentences, assess how and why it may have been made, how it spread, its audience, and whether its citation can be checked; name one piece of evidence you would seek.

ANSWER KEY

Trace the Claim

GRADES 6-12 · 6-12.HT1.9

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline clues about who made each source and why, circle clues about its audience or how it spread, and write 1 beside a checkable citation or 2 beside a vague citation. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Who was Page A's report written for, and how did it reach readers online?	**It was written for city newspaper readers. A library scanned the report and posted it online.**
2	Why was Page B written, and how did the museum share it with teachers?	**A curator wrote it to explain the fire to students and visitors. The museum shared a link in an email newsletter for teachers.**
3	How could a reader check Page B's death toll? Why can't a reader check Page C's claim in the same way?	**Page B links to a scanned newspaper report and gives its issue date and page number. Page C names no expert or document and provides no link.**
4	Page C has been reposted thousands of times. Why does that not make its death toll credible?	**Reposts do not identify evidence for its claim. Its figure of 300 also conflicts with the 146 reported in Pages A and B.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The post has no named author or date, so I cannot tell who made it or why. It spread through social media reposts to people interested in conspiracy theories. “NASA files” is too vague to check without a document title or link. Reposts show that people shared the claim, not that it is true. I would look for a specific mission record from a space agency and check what it says.

Accept answers that distinguish a source's original creation from its later online circulation. Students should treat an unknown motive as uncertain and explain that a citation must identify evidence readers can locate and check.