Whose Story Survives?

Reading sources from the Triangle factory fire

6-12.HT2.5 "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 one detail about what each of two sources records. Circle two clues about missing perspectives, and put a star beside the sentence about comparing sources.

The Records of a Fire

1. On March 25, 1911, a fire swept through the Triangle Shirtwaist factory in New York City. The fire killed 146 people, most of them young immigrant women and girls. Imagine a historian trying to learn how people understood the disaster at the time. Newspapers printed stories almost immediately. Reporters described crowds watching from the street and quoted officials who discussed the building's exits. Editors decided which details and voices appeared in print. A reader today can see what those papers told the public, but the people quoted in a story were only a small part of the city.

2. Other records offer different windows. Survivors later described the fire in testimony given to investigators. A worker who testified could explain what she saw inside the factory, while an investigator's questions might direct attention toward doors, stairs, and fire escapes. Some workers died before they could tell their stories. Others lived but never testified, or spoke in languages that might not be fully captured in English records. An inspection report could list conditions in the building, yet it would not record every conversation on a crowded work floor. Each document grew from a particular purpose and a particular moment.

3. A payroll list is another possible source. It might show workers' names and wages, if such a list survived, while its columns were meant for bookkeeping. A historian could place a payroll list beside a newspaper story and testimony, then compare the different kinds of details they preserve. Even several sources may repeat the voices of officials while leaving out workers' private thoughts and relatives' memories. If a source is missing, silence is not proof that an event or feeling never existed. The strongest interpretation says what the evidence supports and makes clear whose perspectives are hard to find.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How could an editor's choices limit a historian's claim about what New Yorkers believed after the fire?

2. Why would survivor testimony alone give an incomplete account of workers' experiences?

3. How might an inspection report and worker testimony lead to different accounts of conditions inside the factory?

4. A historian has a payroll list and a newspaper story. Why would a claim about what workers wanted for their futures remain uncertain?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

In three sentences, assess this claim: “The fire changed every survivor's view of factory work.” Use two kinds of sources from the passage, identify a missing perspective, and state a narrower claim the evidence could support.

ANSWER KEY

Whose Story Survives?

GRADES 6-12 · 6-12.HT2.5

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline one detail about what each of two sources records. Circle two clues about missing perspectives, and put a star beside the sentence about comparing sources. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How could an editor's choices limit a historian's claim about what New Yorkers believed after the fire?	**Editors selected the details and people quoted, so a newspaper story cannot show what all New Yorkers believed.**
2	Why would survivor testimony alone give an incomplete account of workers' experiences?	**Workers who died could not testify, and some survivors never testified or may not have been fully represented in English records.**
3	How might an inspection report and worker testimony lead to different accounts of conditions inside the factory?	**A report could list building conditions, while testimony could describe what a worker saw and experienced. Neither captures every conversation or perspective.**
4	A historian has a payroll list and a newspaper story. Why would a claim about what workers wanted for their futures remain uncertain?	**A payroll list records information such as names and wages, and a newspaper includes selected voices. Neither necessarily records workers' private hopes.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Survivor testimony might show what some workers said after the fire, but it may not show what they thought before it. Newspapers might include worker quotes, yet editors chose which ones to print, and many survivors' views are missing from these sources. A narrower claim is that some survivors described their experiences after the fire, not that every survivor changed their view of factory work.

Accept other evidence-based limits if students distinguish what a source preserves from whose perspective it leaves out. For Part 3, the narrower claim must not assume a change in views without evidence of earlier views.