Evidence in the Ashes

Use different sources to interpret a factory fire.

6-9.WH.6.1 "Synthesize evidence from information sources including, but not limited to artifacts, primary and secondary sources, charts, graphs, and/ or images to interpret historical events."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline one detail from each kind of source: a survivor's account, an official investigation, a newspaper report, and a later historian's work. Number two details that help you explain the same part of the fire.

The Triangle Factory Fire

1. On March 25, 1911, a fire swept through the Triangle Waist Company factory in New York City. Many employees were young immigrant women who sewed shirtwaists, a popular kind of blouse. Workers on the eighth, ninth, and tenth floors faced smoke and flames. In testimony given after the fire, survivor Kate Alterman described people rushing toward an exit on the ninth floor and finding its door locked. Her account records what she saw during a terrifying escape, but it cannot show what happened at every exit in the building.

2. An official investigation documented that the building's fire escape collapsed under the weight of people fleeing. Fire department ladders could not reach the upper factory floors. Newspaper accounts from the next day described crowds on the street watching workers jump from windows. A reporter could see the street but not the conditions behind each factory door. Later records put the death toll at 146 people. These sources were created at different times and from different viewpoints, so each preserves a different part of what happened.

3. After the fire, the New York State Legislature created the Factory Investigating Commission. Its members gathered testimony and examined working conditions across the state, not just at Triangle. Historians studying the commission's records note that New York later adopted stronger rules for exits, fire drills, and sprinklers in some factories. Yet a new rule on paper did not prove every workplace became safe at once. A law shows what officials decided to require; it does not, by itself, show that each factory followed it.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How do Alterman's testimony and the official investigation together explain why escaping was difficult?

2. What do the newspaper accounts reveal that Alterman's testimony could not? Use a detail from each source.

3. How do the newspaper accounts and the later death records together show the fire's impact?

4. How do the commission's work and the passage's warning about new rules affect what you can conclude about factory safety after the fire?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a 60 to 85 word museum caption making a claim about what the Triangle fire reveals about factory safety in 1911. Support your claim with three different kinds of sources from the passage, and explain one limit of a source.

ANSWER KEY

Evidence in the Ashes

GRADES 6-9 · 6-9.WH.6.1

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline one detail from each kind of source: a survivor's account, an official investigation, a newspaper report, and a later historian's work. Number two details that help you explain the same part of the fire. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How do Alterman's testimony and the official investigation together explain why escaping was difficult?	**Alterman described a locked exit door, and the investigation documented a fire escape that collapsed.**
2	What do the newspaper accounts reveal that Alterman's testimony could not? Use a detail from each source.	**The newspapers described people on the street watching workers jump from windows. Alterman's testimony describes the locked door she encountered inside.**
3	How do the newspaper accounts and the later death records together show the fire's impact?	**The newspapers describe workers jumping from windows as crowds watched, while later records show that 146 people died.**
4	How do the commission's work and the passage's warning about new rules affect what you can conclude about factory safety after the fire?	**The commission examined workplaces across New York, and the state adopted stronger safety rules. Those rules do not prove that every factory followed them.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The Triangle fire shows how a factory's escape routes could fail during an emergency. Kate Alterman's testimony describes a locked door, while an official investigation documented a fire escape that collapsed. Newspaper accounts add that people on the street saw workers jump from windows. Together, these sources show dangers inside and outside the building. Alterman could report the door she reached, but her account alone cannot tell us about every exit.

Accept interpretations grounded in the cited sources, including answers that explain a source's limited viewpoint. The sample museum caption is 71 words.