Questions Behind History

Investigate evidence for a school history exhibit

7.P.1.2.D "Demonstrate understanding of social studies content through the development of self-driven inquiries and the completion of authentic tasks and assessments."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline the focused question the student asks, circle three kinds of records the student could use, and number two limits of those records. These marks will help you plan an inquiry that makes careful claims.

Investigating the Triangle Fire

1. In 1911, a fire broke out at the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory in New York City. The factory made women's blouses called shirtwaists. Most workers were young immigrant women. The fire began on the eighth floor of a ten-story building, and 146 workers died. Some people could not reach safe exits. A fire escape collapsed, and firefighters' ladders could not reach the highest floors. These details raise more than one question. A student preparing a school exhibit might ask, "What kept workers from escaping?" rather than simply, "What happened?"

2. To investigate that escape question, the student could compare different records. Newspaper reports published just after the fire describe what witnesses said they saw, but reporters did not see every part of the building. Testimony given during official investigations includes workers' and firefighters' accounts of exits. Witnesses may remember the same event differently, so their accounts need comparison. A building plan could show where doors and stairs were located, but it cannot prove which doors were open during the fire. Each source helps answer part of the question, not all of it.

3. An exhibit must do more than collect facts. The student could write a short display label that makes a claim about escape routes and cites two records that support it. The label should distinguish a confirmed detail from a question the records leave open. After the fire, New York State created the Factory Investigating Commission, which examined working conditions and helped drive new safety laws. That later change matters, but it does not by itself reveal what every worker experienced on the day of the fire. Careful inquiries make that boundary clear.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Why is "What kept workers from escaping?" a more useful exhibit question than "What happened?"

2. Which two kinds of records could you compare to investigate whether an exit was usable? Explain what each could tell you.

3. A classmate says a building plan proves a particular door was locked during the fire. How would you evaluate that claim?

4. A display label says later safety laws show what every worker experienced during the fire. How should the student revise that claim?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Choose a new focused question about the fire that is not about what kept workers from escaping or how laws changed. In 60 to 85 words, propose a hallway exhibit: state your question, explain how two different kinds of records from the passage would help, and identify one detail you would check before making a claim.

ANSWER KEY

Questions Behind History

GRADE 7 · 7.P.1.2.D

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline the focused question the student asks, circle three kinds of records the student could use, and number two limits of those records. These marks will help you plan an inquiry that makes careful claims. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Why is "What kept workers from escaping?" a more useful exhibit question than "What happened?"	**It focuses the inquiry on escape routes, which the student can investigate using records about exits and the building.**
2	Which two kinds of records could you compare to investigate whether an exit was usable? Explain what each could tell you.	**A building plan could show where a door or stair was located. Workers' or firefighters' testimony could describe what happened at an exit during the fire.**
3	A classmate says a building plan proves a particular door was locked during the fire. How would you evaluate that claim?	**A plan shows where doors were, not whether they were open or locked. Compare accounts from people who were there before making that claim.**
4	A display label says later safety laws show what every worker experienced during the fire. How should the student revise that claim?	**The label should say the laws show a later response to the fire, not what every worker experienced that day.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

My exhibit would ask, "How did reports of firefighters' efforts change between the first news stories and official testimony?" I would compare newspaper reports published just after the fire with firefighters' testimony from official investigations. The news stories could show what readers first learned, while testimony could add firsthand details. Before claiming the accounts disagree, I would check whether both sources describe the same floor and the same moment.

Accept other focused questions that differ from the escape question and the question of how laws changed. The proposal should explain the distinct value of two source types and name a specific detail to verify.