Tracing the Evidence

Compare what two sources can tell us about the Triangle fire.

E.P.3.1.A "Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, evaluating features such as author, date, and origin of information."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline one detail about escape in each source, circle each source's publication date, and number two statements that show limits of the sources.

Two Accounts of the Triangle Fire

1. On March 25, 1911, a fire swept through the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory in New York City. The factory occupied the upper floors of the Asch Building, and 146 workers died. On March 26, 1911, The New York Times published a report describing people trapped above the street and a fire escape that collapsed under the weight of fleeing workers. The report was produced in the city while rescue crews and witnesses were still sharing accounts. Its date makes it useful for studying what readers learned immediately, but a reporter working under a deadline could not yet verify every detail.

2. In The Triangle Fire, published in 1962, writer Leon Stein reconstructed the disaster using interviews with survivors and records from the years after the fire. Stein describes locked exit doors as one factor that prevented workers from escaping. Unlike a next-day news report, his book could compare accounts gathered across decades and consider later investigations. That distance also matters: survivors interviewed many years afterward might remember events differently from people speaking in 1911. Stein was not reporting from the burning building. His book is a secondary source that interprets earlier evidence, even when it includes firsthand voices.

3. The two sources do not answer precisely the same question. The newspaper's account of a collapsing fire escape offers evidence about one route out of the building. Stein's discussion of locked doors points to another barrier. Neither detail proves that every worker faced the same path or the same danger. A photograph of an exit might show its location, but it could not show whether the door was locked during the fire. Investigators' records or workers' testimony could address that question more directly. Different sources reveal different pieces of the event, and each has limits.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. What detail in the newspaper report supports the claim that some workers had trouble escaping? Why is this report a primary source for studying what readers learned at the time?

2. What kinds of evidence did Stein use, and why is his book a secondary source?

3. Which source more directly supports a claim that a fire escape failed? Cite the detail that supports your choice.

4. How might each source's publication date affect what a historian can trust about it? Cite a detail about each source.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a three- or four-sentence note to a museum curator explaining whether a label saying "Locked doors were the only escape problem" is justified. Cite one detail from each source and explain how a source's date or origin affects your judgment.

ANSWER KEY

Tracing the Evidence

HIGH SCHOOL · E.P.3.1.A

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline one detail about escape in each source, circle each source's publication date, and number two statements that show limits of the sources. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What detail in the newspaper report supports the claim that some workers had trouble escaping? Why is this report a primary source for studying what readers learned at the time?	**It reported that a fire escape collapsed under fleeing workers. Published in New York the day after the fire, it is a contemporary record of what readers were told.**
2	What kinds of evidence did Stein use, and why is his book a secondary source?	**Stein used survivor interviews and records from after the fire. His 1962 book interprets earlier evidence rather than recording the event as it happened.**
3	Which source more directly supports a claim that a fire escape failed? Cite the detail that supports your choice.	**The March 26, 1911, New York Times report more directly supports it because it describes a fire escape collapsing under fleeing workers.**
4	How might each source's publication date affect what a historian can trust about it? Cite a detail about each source.	**The next-day reporter worked under a deadline and might not have verified every detail. Stein could compare later records, but survivors interviewed years afterward might remember events differently.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The label is not justified because Stein's 1962 book identifies locked doors as one barrier, not the only one. The New York Times reported on March 26, 1911, that a fire escape collapsed under fleeing workers. That next-day report provides evidence of another escape problem, although its deadline may have limited verification. Stein's later book draws on interviews and records, so it can help a curator compare accounts of different barriers.

Accept responses that distinguish a contemporary newspaper report from a later historical account and connect specific passage details to claims. Students should treat both sources as useful but limited, not assume that a contemporary reporter witnessed every event.