Evidence Under Fire

Investigate how different sources help answer a historical question.

MWH.P.2.2.A "Gather and evaluate the usefulness of various formats of evidence for specific inquiry, analyzing the broader historical context, and assessing potential bias and credibility of sources."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Circle the historian's inquiry question and underline the three source formats. Write matching numbers beside each format and the limitation the passage gives for it.

Investigating the Triangle Fire

1 In March 1911, a fire swept through New York City's Triangle Shirtwaist Factory, killing 146 workers. Many were young immigrant women making clothing in crowded rooms. At the time, garment workers had protested unsafe conditions, while factory owners faced pressure to keep production fast and costs low. A historian asks: Did a locked exit make it harder for workers to escape? The answer matters because it connects one disaster to larger debates about workplace safety. To investigate, the historian compares sources made for different purposes, rather than treating any single account as a complete record.

2 A worker's sworn court testimony can describe what she saw at a particular exit. Her position in the room matters: she could report an attempt to open a door, but might not know what happened at every exit. Under oath, she faced a legal duty to tell the truth, yet trauma can affect memory. A newspaper report published soon after the fire can show what witnesses and officials said publicly. Its early date helps capture immediate reactions, but a reporter seeking a dramatic story might repeat claims before checking them.

3 A building plan can show where stairs and doors were designed to be, helping the historian check whether a witness's route was possible. It cannot show whether a door was locked during the fire, and later changes to the building could make a plan misleading unless its date is known. Court testimony, newspaper reporting, and plans answer different parts of the inquiry. The historian should compare their dates and details, look for agreement or conflict, and explain how labor disputes and demands for cheaper clothing may have shaped both working conditions and public accounts.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Which source format could most directly describe an attempt to open an exit? What limits what it can tell the historian?

2. How could a building plan help check a worker's account? What could it not confirm?

3. Why might a newspaper report be useful but less reliable for a specific claim about an exit?

4. How should the historian use the period's labor disputes and pressure to keep clothing costs low when judging these sources?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a new inquiry question about garment workers' pay before 1911. Name two source formats not discussed in the passage, explain what each could reveal and one bias or credibility check for each, and connect your judgment to a condition of the period.

ANSWER KEY

Evidence Under Fire

HIGH SCHOOL · MWH.P.2.2.A

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Circle the historian's inquiry question and underline the three source formats. Write matching numbers beside each format and the limitation the passage gives for it. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Which source format could most directly describe an attempt to open an exit? What limits what it can tell the historian?	**A worker's sworn court testimony could describe an attempt she witnessed. Her position limited what she could know about other exits, and trauma could affect her memory.**
2	How could a building plan help check a worker's account? What could it not confirm?	**It could show whether the route the worker described was possible. It could not confirm whether a door was locked during the fire.**
3	Why might a newspaper report be useful but less reliable for a specific claim about an exit?	**It records what people said soon after the fire, but a reporter seeking a dramatic story might repeat a claim before checking it.**
4	How should the historian use the period's labor disputes and pressure to keep clothing costs low when judging these sources?	**Those conditions help explain the working conditions and may have shaped what people said publicly. The historian should consider that context while comparing the sources' details.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

How much were garment workers paid in New York in 1910? A payroll ledger could show recorded wages, but I would check whether it includes every worker and any deductions. A union pamphlet could show workers' complaints about pay, but its goal of organizing might shape which examples it highlights. I would compare both with the cost of living and the pressure to keep clothing prices low before judging what the recorded wages meant.

Accept other supported evaluations of usefulness or credibility that distinguish what a source can show from what it cannot. For Part 3, look for a new inquiry, two suitable source formats, a check for each, and relevant historical context.