When Counts Change

Compare an early report with a later historical account

MWH.P.3.1 "Comprehend, evaluate, and synthesize textual sources to acquire and refine knowledge in the social studies. Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, evaluating features such as author, date..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline one piece of evidence from each source, circle clues to when each account was made, and write 1 and 2 beside the accounts in order of creation.

Two Accounts of the Triangle Fire

1. On March 25, 1911, a fire raced through the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory in New York City. The factory occupied the upper floors of a ten-story building, where workers sewed women's blouses called shirtwaists. Many workers were young immigrant women. Smoke and flames trapped people on the eighth, ninth, and tenth floors. To investigate why the fire became so deadly, a historian can compare accounts created at different times. A newspaper printed the morning after the fire captures what reporters knew immediately. A later digital exhibition, assembled from many records, can show what investigators learned and what changed afterward.

2. The New York Times ran a story on March 26, 1911, with a headline reporting 141 deaths. Its reporters described people jumping from high windows when they could not escape the flames. As a report produced just one day after the fire, it offers evidence of what witnesses and journalists saw and believed then. Yet the headline was a preliminary count, not a final list of victims. The article could document desperate escape attempts, but its early date limited what reporters could verify about the total number killed or the causes of every blocked exit.

3. Cornell University's Kheel Center hosts an online exhibition, *Remembering the 1911 Triangle Factory Fire*, created long after the disaster. Drawing on historical records, the exhibition gives the final toll as 146 workers and describes a fire escape that collapsed and doors that were locked. It also explains that public outrage helped drive new workplace safety laws in New York. This secondary source can connect evidence gathered over time, but its account is not a firsthand view of the flames. Together, the sources show why a vivid early report and a researched later account answer different questions about the same event.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Why might the newspaper's death count differ from the exhibition's count? Use the dates and numbers in the passage.

2. How does evidence from each source help explain why workers had trouble escaping?

3. Which source is a primary source, and which is a secondary source? Explain using each source's origin.

4. A student claims that locked doors were the only obstacle to escape. Does the passage support that claim? Cite evidence.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Propose one new primary source a historian could use to test whether workplace safety improved after the fire. In 70 to 100 words, explain what it could show and what it could not show, and cite one detail from the newspaper account and one from Cornell's exhibition to justify your choice.

ANSWER KEY

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HIGH SCHOOL · MWH.P.3.1

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline one piece of evidence from each source, circle clues to when each account was made, and write 1 and 2 beside the accounts in order of creation. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Why might the newspaper's death count differ from the exhibition's count? Use the dates and numbers in the passage.	**The newspaper reported a preliminary count of 141 on March 26, 1911, one day after the fire. The later exhibition gives the final toll of 146.**
2	How does evidence from each source help explain why workers had trouble escaping?	**The newspaper described people jumping from high windows when they could not escape. The exhibition reports locked doors and a collapsed fire escape.**
3	Which source is a primary source, and which is a secondary source? Explain using each source's origin.	**The 1911 newspaper report is a primary source because reporters produced it just after the fire. Cornell's later exhibition is a secondary source because it draws on historical records to explain the event.**
4	A student claims that locked doors were the only obstacle to escape. Does the passage support that claim? Cite evidence.	**No. The exhibition also describes a collapsed fire escape. The newspaper reports that people jumped from windows, but it does not establish every cause of their escape difficulties.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

I would look for New York factory inspection reports from 1913. The newspaper described people jumping from high windows when they could not escape, so I would check whether inspectors recorded usable exits in similar factories. Cornell's exhibition says public outrage helped drive new safety laws, which makes inspections after 1911 especially useful. Reports might show whether inspectors found fewer locked doors or stronger fire escapes. They could not prove that every factory followed the rules every day, because an inspection captures only one visit.

Accept other plausible primary sources if students explain how the source could test a change in safety practices and identify a limitation. Responses should use one accurate detail from each account.