Evidence Under Fire

Compare sources to investigate a workplace disaster.

TOT.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 As you read, underline what each type of source could reveal, circle a limit or possible bias for each, and number the sources you would check first and second. Use your marks to judge which evidence best helps answer the passage's inquiry question.

Investigating the Triangle Fire

1 On March 25, 1911, a fire swept through the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory in New York City. One hundred forty-six workers died, many of them young immigrant women. Investigate this question: Why did so many people die? A newspaper report published the next morning could show what witnesses said and what reporters saw outside. Its early death count, however, might change as officials identified victims. The report also offers little direct evidence about conditions inside before the fire. To judge its usefulness, separate what its reporter observed from claims repeated from others.

2 Workers' testimony to investigators offers a different kind of evidence. Survivors described crowded workspaces and the difficulty of escaping; some described doors they could not use. Such accounts can reveal experiences that an official count cannot. Yet each witness saw only part of the fire, and fear or the passage of time could affect a memory. A factory floor plan, if one survived, might help test claims about routes, but it could not show whether a door was locked that day. Compare the date, purpose, and limits of each source before drawing a conclusion.

3 The broader setting matters. At the time, garment workers had protested dangerous conditions, and New York's workplace safety rules and inspections had serious gaps. After the fire, investigations helped spur new state safety laws. An investigator's report may be credible about measurements and exits that officials checked, but an investigator might emphasize failures to support reform. A factory owner's statement may explain company practices, but its author also had reason to defend the business. Neither a dramatic headline nor a reassuring statement settles the question alone. Use accounts, records, and context to test where sources agree or conflict.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. For the inquiry about why so many workers died, what could a next-day newspaper report help establish? Name one limit you would check.

2. Why might survivor testimony be more useful than an official death count for studying escape routes? Why would you still check it against other evidence?

3. If a floor plan shows an exit, can it settle a survivor's claim that the door could not be used during the fire? Explain.

4. How could the history of labor protests and later safety laws shape your reading of an investigator's report?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

A classmate asks whether the factory owners knew about escape problems before the fire. In one paragraph, propose two different kinds of evidence to seek, explain what each might show and how you would check its credibility, and connect your plan to the earlier labor protests.

ANSWER KEY

Evidence Under Fire

HIGH SCHOOL · TOT.P.2.2.A

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

As you read, underline what each type of source could reveal, circle a limit or possible bias for each, and number the sources you would check first and second. Use your marks to judge which evidence best helps answer the passage's inquiry question. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	For the inquiry about why so many workers died, what could a next-day newspaper report help establish? Name one limit you would check.	**It could report witness statements and what the reporter saw outside. Its early death count might change, and its claims about events inside could be secondhand.**
2	Why might survivor testimony be more useful than an official death count for studying escape routes? Why would you still check it against other evidence?	**Survivors could describe trouble escaping or doors they could not use. Each saw only part of the fire, and memory could be affected by fear or time.**
3	If a floor plan shows an exit, can it settle a survivor's claim that the door could not be used during the fire? Explain.	**No. A plan could show where an exit was located, but not whether its door was locked or otherwise unusable that day.**
4	How could the history of labor protests and later safety laws shape your reading of an investigator's report?	**The report may provide credible measurements and checked exits, but an investigator might stress failures to support reform. Compare its claims with other evidence.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

I would look for dated worker complaints addressed to the owners and evidence that the complaints were delivered. The letters might show that workers warned the owners about escape problems, but I would check when they were written and whether the owners received them. I would also seek inspection reports from before the fire. They might record problems with exits, though an inspection could miss conditions on other days. Garment workers' earlier protests make warnings worth investigating, but they do not prove these owners received any.

Accept other source limitations grounded in the passage. For the open task, look for two distinct evidence formats, a credibility check for each, and a connection to the earlier protests that does not treat them as proof.