After the Fire

Compare evidence behind two historical interpretations

USG.P.1.2.B "Evaluate points of agreement and disagreement from reliable information and expert interpretations used to answer supporting questions related to content knowledge."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline what the historians agree on, circle what they disagree about, and label the evidence for each interpretation 1 or 2.

What Turned Outrage Into Law?

(1) On March 25, 1911, a fire at New York City's Triangle Shirtwaist Factory killed 146 workers. Some exit doors were locked, and escape routes failed many people. The disaster raised a question: What most helped turn public outrage into new workplace safety laws? Records held by Cornell University's Kheel Center include accounts of the fire and documents about workers' organizing. New York's Factory Investigating Commission collected testimony about factory conditions after the fire and recommended changes. These sources offer different kinds of evidence. Eyewitness accounts show what people experienced, while official reports show what investigators found and proposed.

(2) The records show that garment workers had demanded safer conditions before the fire. Afterward, unions and other groups continued pressing for change. Commission investigators also inspected workplaces and documented hazards beyond the Triangle factory. New York lawmakers passed many workplace safety laws during the next few years, including measures on fire safety. A union record can help trace workers' demands, but it may emphasize union actions. A commission report explains official findings, but it may not capture every worker's experience. Neither source alone can prove exactly how much each group influenced the lawmakers who voted.

(3) A labor historian interprets the earlier demands and later organizing as evidence that workers' sustained pressure was crucial. A historian of government interprets the commission's investigations and recommendations as the crucial bridge between outrage and laws. Both agree that the fire exposed dangerous conditions and that change involved more than one day's protest. They disagree about which force carried the most weight: organized workers or the state's investigation. The commission's reports directly connect documented hazards to proposed rules, while union records establish pressure before and after the fire. To judge either claim, a reader must compare these records rather than treat an expert's conclusion as a fact.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. What do both historians conclude about the fire and the changes that followed? What evidence in the passage supports their shared conclusion?

2. Which force does each historian consider most important? Name the evidence each uses.

3. Which source would better show how documented hazards became proposed rules? Explain what that source still cannot prove.

4. Which source would better test the claim that workers pressed for safety before the fire? Why would that evidence not settle the historians' disagreement?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Consider a new question: Did the safety laws improve conditions in factories beyond Triangle? In four or five sentences, name two types of reliable records you would compare, describe one conclusion experts might share and one they might dispute, and explain how the records could help you judge their interpretations.

ANSWER KEY

After the Fire

HIGH SCHOOL · USG.P.1.2.B

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline what the historians agree on, circle what they disagree about, and label the evidence for each interpretation 1 or 2. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What do both historians conclude about the fire and the changes that followed? What evidence in the passage supports their shared conclusion?	**Both agree that the fire exposed dangerous conditions and that change took more than one day's protest. Workers kept organizing, and the commission investigated hazards and recommended changes.**
2	Which force does each historian consider most important? Name the evidence each uses.	**The labor historian emphasizes workers' pressure, supported by demands before the fire and organizing afterward. The government historian emphasizes the commission, supported by its investigations and recommendations.**
3	Which source would better show how documented hazards became proposed rules? Explain what that source still cannot prove.	**Commission reports connect documented hazards to proposed rules. They cannot prove exactly how much the commission influenced lawmakers compared with workers or other groups.**
4	Which source would better test the claim that workers pressed for safety before the fire? Why would that evidence not settle the historians' disagreement?	**Union records could show workers' earlier demands. Those demands alone do not prove whether workers' pressure or the commission had more influence on later laws.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

I would compare factory inspection reports from before and after the laws with workers' accounts preserved in an archive. Experts might agree that fewer recorded hazards in inspected factories would show improvement there. They might disagree about whether that improvement reached most workers, since inspectors visited only some factories and workers might report hazards the inspections missed. I would check how many factories were inspected and whether workers' accounts matched the reports before judging how broadly conditions improved.

Accept answers that distinguish a source's evidence from an expert's interpretation and explain what the evidence cannot establish. For the open task, students should propose a plausible agreement and disagreement, not claim that records they have not seen prove a result.