Tracing Safer Workplaces

Evaluate evidence about the Triangle Shirtwaist fire.

USG.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 Underline two details about the historical context, circle three source formats, and number three cautions about what a source might leave out or distort. Use your marks to weigh the evidence.

What Can the Sources Tell Us?

1. On March 25, 1911, a fire swept through the Triangle Shirtwaist factory in New York City, killing 146 workers. Many employees were young immigrant women who sewed clothing on upper floors. At the time, factories often crowded workers into tall buildings, and labor groups were pushing for safer conditions. Suppose you are investigating why this disaster led to new safety rules. A newspaper report from the next morning could show what the public learned first. Yet reporters faced tight deadlines, and a dramatic account might highlight shocking scenes while leaving out less visible problems, such as routine inspections.

2. An investigator's notes on exits and fire escapes would provide another format. Notes made before a fire could reveal earlier warnings, but an inspection log might miss conditions on other days or reflect an inspector's limited access. A survivor's testimony could describe the rush toward an exit and the fear inside the building. That account offers firsthand detail, yet stress can affect what a person remembers. Comparing testimony with inspection notes and other witnesses helps distinguish a detail supported by several sources from one that remains uncertain.

3. New York created the Factory Investigating Commission after the fire; its reports helped support new workplace laws. A commission report could connect dangerous practices to proposed reforms, but its mission might lead it to emphasize problems that lawmakers could fix. A labor union leaflet could reveal what workers demanded, though its authors also wanted to persuade readers. A later law shows which rules officials adopted, not whether every factory followed them. To understand the fire's impact, a researcher must place these sources amid rising labor activism and compare claims across formats, dates, and authors.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How could a next-day newspaper report help your inquiry, and what might it leave out?

2. Why should a researcher compare a survivor's testimony with inspection notes and other witnesses?

3. How could the Factory Investigating Commission's mission shape its reports? Include one detail about the historical context.

4. Why would the text of a new workplace law be insufficient evidence that factories became safer?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Investigate this new question: Did factory exits become safer by 1915? In one paragraph, choose two source formats from the passage, explain what you would look for in each, identify a limitation or possible bias, and connect your plan to the historical context.

ANSWER KEY

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HIGH SCHOOL · USG.P.2.2.A

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two details about the historical context, circle three source formats, and number three cautions about what a source might leave out or distort. Use your marks to weigh the evidence. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How could a next-day newspaper report help your inquiry, and what might it leave out?	**It could show what the public learned first, but a rushed, dramatic report might leave out routine safety problems such as inspections.**
2	Why should a researcher compare a survivor's testimony with inspection notes and other witnesses?	**Testimony offers firsthand detail, but stress can affect memory. Comparison helps identify which details other evidence supports.**
3	How could the Factory Investigating Commission's mission shape its reports? Include one detail about the historical context.	**Its mission might lead it to emphasize problems lawmakers could fix. Labor groups were already pushing for safer conditions.**
4	Why would the text of a new workplace law be insufficient evidence that factories became safer?	**A law shows which rules officials adopted, but not whether factories followed them.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

I would compare inspection logs from before and after the fire to look for changes in factory exits, but an inspector might miss problems that occurred between visits. I would also read workers' testimony from 1915 to learn whether exits stayed usable during a normal workday. Workers might not have seen every exit, so I would compare accounts from several factories. Because labor groups were pushing for safer conditions and New York adopted new laws, I would check whether the evidence shows changes in practice, not just changes in rules.

Accept other relevant context details and source formats named in the passage. Strong Part 3 responses distinguish evidence of safer exits from evidence that a rule was passed.