Two Death Tolls

Read sources closely to explain a difference in reported facts

USG.P.3.1.A "Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, evaluating features such as author, date, and origin of information."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Circle each source's creator and publication date, underline the death toll each gives, and number the details that show where each source got its information.

Reporting the Triangle Fire

1. On March 25, 1911, a fire swept through the Triangle Waist Company's factory in New York City. Workers on the upper floors struggled to escape, and 146 people eventually died. Readers following the disaster the next morning did not yet know that final number. The March 26 edition of *The New York Times* carried the headline "141 Men and Girls Die in Waist Factory Fire." Newspaper staff produced the headline while reporting just hours after the fire, when the count was still changing. Its date and wording make it evidence of what readers were told immediately afterward, not a final list of victims.

2. Decades later, journalist David von Drehle wrote *Triangle: The Fire That Changed America*, published in 2003. His book is a secondary source because he was not reporting the fire as it happened. He assembled an account from earlier material, including newspaper coverage, witness statements, and official records. Von Drehle gives the accepted total as 146 dead. That figure does not show that the 1911 newspaper deliberately misled its readers. A reporter filing a story overnight had less time to check names than a writer working with records gathered over many years.

3. These sources answer different questions. The newspaper can show what information was available to readers on March 26, but its headline alone cannot establish the final death toll. Von Drehle's later book can help reconstruct the toll because it draws on records collected after the first reports. Still, readers should ask which records support any particular claim in a secondary account. If a student writes that the reported number changed, the strongest evidence is the two stated totals alongside the sources' dates, not a guess about what either writer intended.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How do the newspaper's date and headline make it useful evidence of what readers first learned about the fire? Cite both details.

2. Why is von Drehle's book a secondary source rather than a firsthand report? Cite its publication date and where its information came from.

3. Which source is more useful for finding the final death toll? Cite both reported numbers and explain why the sources' dates matter.

4. Does the passage support claiming that the newspaper staff deliberately reported a false total? Cite two details about how the headline was produced.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a museum label that explains why the two sources give different death tolls. Name each source's creator and date, give both numbers, and explain one strength and one limit of each source.

ANSWER KEY

Two Death Tolls

HIGH SCHOOL · USG.P.3.1.A

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Circle each source's creator and publication date, underline the death toll each gives, and number the details that show where each source got its information. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How do the newspaper's date and headline make it useful evidence of what readers first learned about the fire? Cite both details.	**The March 26, 1911, edition appeared the day after the fire, and its headline reported 141 deaths. Together, those details show what readers were told soon afterward.**
2	Why is von Drehle's book a secondary source rather than a firsthand report? Cite its publication date and where its information came from.	**Published in 2003, long after the 1911 fire, the book draws on earlier newspaper coverage, witness statements, and official records.**
3	Which source is more useful for finding the final death toll? Cite both reported numbers and explain why the sources' dates matter.	**Von Drehle's 2003 book is more useful for the final toll of 146 because it draws on records gathered after the fire. The newspaper's March 26, 1911, headline reported 141 while the count was still changing.**
4	Does the passage support claiming that the newspaper staff deliberately reported a false total? Cite two details about how the headline was produced.	**No. Staff reported just hours after the fire, and the death count was still changing. Neither detail shows an intent to mislead.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Newspaper staff at *The New York Times* reported 141 deaths on March 26, 1911. Their headline shows what readers learned soon after the fire, but the count was still changing, so it cannot establish the final toll. In his 2003 book, journalist David von Drehle gives the accepted total of 146. His account benefits from access to earlier reporting, witness statements, and official records. Because he assembled it decades later, readers should still check which records support a particular claim.

Accept responses that distinguish the newspaper's immediate reporting from von Drehle's later account and cite the dates, totals, or origins of information accurately. Do not accept claims about either writer's intent without evidence.