Fire and Evidence

Compare accounts of the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire

USG.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 specific detail from each historical source. Circle each source's date and author or organization, then number the details you would use to support a claim about factory safety.

What Can These Sources Prove?

1. On March 25, 1911, a fire swept through the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory in New York City, killing 146 workers. A *New York Times* report published the next day described workers trapped on upper floors and a fire escape that collapsed. The report also said that a door had been locked. As a newspaper account written immediately after the fire, it offers details about what people reported seeing and learning at the scene. But its reporters had little time to investigate every claim. A reader should not treat its account of one factory as proof of conditions in every factory.

2. After the fire, New York State created the Factory Investigating Commission to examine workplace conditions. In a 1913 report, the commission called for stronger fire-safety rules, including better ways for workers to leave buildings during emergencies. Unlike the newspaper, the commission gathered information over time and focused on possible changes to state law. Its report helps show how officials responded to safety problems. Yet the commission had a reason to emphasize hazards: it was recommending new protections. That purpose does not make its findings false, but it matters when readers judge what the report can prove.

3. This 2026 classroom summary is a secondary source: it was written long after the fire using information from earlier records. It connects the newspaper's account of dangerous exits with the commission's later call for safer workplaces. The two sources together support a careful conclusion: the fire exposed serious exit hazards at the Triangle factory and helped prompt a state investigation. They do not show that every New York factory had locked doors. To make a broader claim about factories across the state, a historian would need evidence from additional inspections or reports.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Which detail in the newspaper account supports a claim about dangerous exits? Explain why the report's publication date matters when judging it.

2. How did the commission's purpose shape its 1913 report? Cite one detail from the passage.

3. Why is the 2026 classroom summary a secondary source? Give one advantage and one limit of using it.

4. A student claims, "Every New York factory had locked doors in 1911." Do the sources support that claim? Use evidence from the passage to explain.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a four-sentence caption for a museum display about why the Triangle fire became a turning point in factory safety. Use one specific detail from each historical source, explain a limit of one source, and make a careful claim about what the sources together show.

ANSWER KEY

Fire and Evidence

HIGH SCHOOL · USG.P.3.1

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline one specific detail from each historical source. Circle each source's date and author or organization, then number the details you would use to support a claim about factory safety. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Which detail in the newspaper account supports a claim about dangerous exits? Explain why the report's publication date matters when judging it.	**The report described a collapsed fire escape or said a door had been locked. Published the day after the fire, it captured early accounts but left little time to verify every claim.**
2	How did the commission's purpose shape its 1913 report? Cite one detail from the passage.	**The commission was examining workplace conditions and recommending protections, so it focused on hazards and changes to state law, including better emergency exits.**
3	Why is the 2026 classroom summary a secondary source? Give one advantage and one limit of using it.	**It was written long after the fire using earlier records. It connects the newspaper and commission accounts, but it provides no independent evidence about other factories.**
4	A student claims, "Every New York factory had locked doors in 1911." Do the sources support that claim? Use evidence from the passage to explain.	**No. The newspaper reported a locked door at the Triangle factory, while the passage says broader claims would require evidence from additional inspections or reports.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

A newspaper report published the day after the Triangle fire described a fire escape that collapsed as workers tried to flee. A 1913 state commission report called for better ways to leave buildings during emergencies. The newspaper described one factory soon after the disaster, so it cannot prove that exits were unsafe in every factory. Together, the sources show that the fire exposed deadly exit hazards and helped spur officials to seek stronger safety rules.

Accept either newspaper detail about exits. Look for distinctions between evidence about the Triangle factory, evidence of the state's response, and unsupported claims about all factories.