Evidence After the Fire

Trace connected events and weigh sources about workplace safety.

USH.P.2.2 "Develop skills which demonstrate an understanding of historical events and the people who shaped our history. Gather and evaluate the usefulness of various formats of evidence for specific inquiry, analyzing the broader historical context..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two worker actions and circle two government actions, then number two source types and write L beside a limit of each source so you can trace events and test evidence.

The Triangle Fire and the Push for Change

1 On March 25, 1911, fire swept through the Triangle Shirtwaist factory in New York City. The factory occupied the upper floors of a ten-story building, and 146 workers died. Many were young immigrant women who made blouses called shirtwaists. Some workers could not escape through a stairway door that was locked, and a fire escape collapsed. The city's fire ladders could not reach the highest floors. Workers had organized before the fire: in 1909, thousands of garment workers had gone on strike over pay and conditions. The fire turned existing demands for workplace safety into an urgent public issue.

2 Suppose a researcher asks why people disagreed about responsibility for the deaths. A survivor's testimony might describe a blocked route or a locked door firsthand, but one person's location limits what they could see. A newspaper report written the next day could show which details reached the public quickly, yet hurried reporting could repeat errors. Factory owners had reason to defend their practices, while workers had reason to demand safer conditions. Neither motive automatically makes a claim false. Comparing accounts with records of building exits helps test claims about conditions, but an exit plan alone cannot show what happened during the fire.

3 After the fire, public anger and organizing added pressure for change. New York created a Factory Investigating Commission in 1911 to study workplace conditions. Its investigators examined factories and gathered testimony, giving them a broader view than one eyewitness had. Yet the commission's goal of improving safety could shape which problems it emphasized. In the years that followed, New York passed many new workplace safety laws. Two histories ran alongside each other: workers pressed for protection, while officials investigated and changed rules. A careful history needs both tracks, plus sources that show where their explanations agree or conflict.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Name one worker action before the fire and one government action after it. How might these events be connected?

2. If you wanted to know what happened at one stairway during the fire, why would survivor testimony be useful, and what would limit it?

3. Why would a next-day newspaper report help you study what the public learned, but be less dependable for confirming exactly what happened?

4. How could the commission offer a broader account than one survivor, and what possible bias would you still check?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

A museum asks whether immigrant garment workers' views were represented fairly in public debates about factory safety. Choose two kinds of sources not named in the passage; for each, explain what it could reveal and one limit or possible bias.

ANSWER KEY

Evidence After the Fire

HIGH SCHOOL · USH.P.2.2

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two worker actions and circle two government actions, then number two source types and write L beside a limit of each source so you can trace events and test evidence. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Name one worker action before the fire and one government action after it. How might these events be connected?	**Garment workers struck in 1909 over pay and conditions. After the fire, New York created the Factory Investigating Commission in 1911. Earlier demands and later public pressure helped put workplace conditions before officials.**
2	If you wanted to know what happened at one stairway during the fire, why would survivor testimony be useful, and what would limit it?	**A survivor could describe what they saw firsthand at that stairway, but their location would limit what they could see.**
3	Why would a next-day newspaper report help you study what the public learned, but be less dependable for confirming exactly what happened?	**It shows which details reached readers quickly, but rushed reporting could repeat errors.**
4	How could the commission offer a broader account than one survivor, and what possible bias would you still check?	**Its investigators examined factories and gathered testimony from multiple sources. Their goal of improving safety could influence which problems they emphasized.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Minutes from an immigrant garment workers' union meeting could show concerns raised by members, but the person recording them might leave out dissent. A worker's private letter to a relative could reveal a concern missing from public debate, but one person's view cannot represent all immigrant workers.

For the marking job, accept the 1909 strike and later organizing as worker actions, and the commission and new laws as government actions. For the open task, accept other distinct source types if the student explains both their usefulness and a specific limit.