After the Fire

Compare evidence and perspectives on the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire.

WG.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 the events dated 1909, 1911, and 1913, circle three kinds of evidence, and mark one sentence that explains how a source's perspective could affect its account.

What Changed After Triangle?

1. On March 25, 1911, a fire swept through the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory in New York City. The factory occupied the upper floors of a building near Washington Square. Many employees were young immigrant women making blouses for low wages. Flames spread quickly among fabric scraps, and some workers could not reach a safe exit. The building's fire escape collapsed. In all, 146 people died. The disaster exposed the risks of crowded garment shops, where production demands often competed with workers' safety. To understand why people responded differently, historians look beyond the fire itself to the city's labor struggles and laws.

2. A worker who escaped could tell investigators what she saw near an exit. Her testimony would help trace one route, but fear and limited sight might narrow her account. A factory owner could describe rules for doors and shifts. His records might show official policies, yet a wish to avoid blame could shape his statements. A newspaper editorial demanding stricter rules would reveal public arguments after the fire, but not necessarily what happened on each floor. Historians can compare these sources with inspection reports and building plans, checking when each was made, who produced it, and whether its details agree with other evidence.

3. The fire did not occur in a vacuum. In 1909, thousands of New York garment workers struck for better pay and conditions, showing that workers challenged factory conditions before the disaster. After the fire, New York created a Factory Investigating Commission in 1911. Its investigations helped lead to new state workplace safety laws in 1913. Workers seeking safe exits, owners worried about costs and responsibility, and lawmakers facing public pressure did not view each step alike. Placing the 1909 strike, 1911 fire and inquiry, and 1913 laws in parallel timelines shows how earlier demands and later government action connected.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. If you wanted to learn what happened near one exit, why would a worker's testimony be useful, and what could limit it?

2. How might an owner's records and a newspaper editorial help answer different questions about the fire?

3. Why might workers, owners, and lawmakers have viewed safety changes differently?

4. How does the 1909 strike change an explanation that says concern about factory conditions began with the 1911 fire?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Create parallel timelines for workers and state officials at the 1909 strike, the 1911 fire and inquiry, and the 1913 laws. In each row, use a passage detail to show what changed for each group, and label any reasonable inference you add.

TIME	WORKERS' PERSPECTIVE	STATE OFFICIALS' PERSPECTIVE

ANSWER KEY

After the Fire

HIGH SCHOOL · WG.P.2.2

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline the events dated 1909, 1911, and 1913, circle three kinds of evidence, and mark one sentence that explains how a source's perspective could affect its account. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	If you wanted to learn what happened near one exit, why would a worker's testimony be useful, and what could limit it?	**An escaped worker could describe what she saw near that exit, but fear and limited sight might narrow her account.**
2	How might an owner's records and a newspaper editorial help answer different questions about the fire?	**The owner's records might show official door or shift policies. An editorial could show public arguments for stricter rules, but not what happened on each floor.**
3	Why might workers, owners, and lawmakers have viewed safety changes differently?	**Workers wanted safe exits, owners worried about costs and responsibility, and lawmakers faced public pressure.**
4	How does the 1909 strike change an explanation that says concern about factory conditions began with the 1911 fire?	**The strike shows that workers challenged factory conditions before the fire, so concern did not begin in 1911.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

TIME	WORKERS' PERSPECTIVE	STATE OFFICIALS' PERSPECTIVE
1909 strike	Thousands struck for better pay and conditions.	Inference: Workers' demands may have drawn officials' attention to factory conditions.
1911 fire and inquiry	Workers faced dangerous exits, and 146 people died.	New York created a commission to investigate factories.
1913 laws	Inference: Workers could expect stronger safety protections.	The state passed new workplace safety laws after the investigations.

Accept other perspectives grounded in the passage. Students should distinguish stated facts from reasonable inferences, especially when describing officials in 1909.