After the Fire

Use evidence to examine a disaster and the laws that followed.

WG.P.2 "Use interdisciplinary tools to acquire, apply, and evaluate content understanding of the four strands of social studies. Demonstrate an understanding of the principles of government, the benefits of democratic systems..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline three kinds of evidence an investigator could use. Circle a limit of each kind so you can judge what the evidence can and cannot show.

Investigating the Triangle Fire

1. On March 25, 1911, fire spread through the upper floors of New York City's Triangle Shirtwaist Factory. The factory made clothing, and many employees were young immigrant women. In the fire, 146 workers died. Some exit doors were locked, and the building's fire escape collapsed. Firefighters' ladders could not reach the upper floors. The disaster raised a civic question: Who was responsible for making workplaces safer, factory owners or government officials? To answer it, investigators needed more than a dramatic account of one afternoon. They needed evidence about conditions before the fire and about what changed afterward.

2. A newspaper report printed the next day could show what witnesses saw outside, but early reports can repeat claims that have not been checked. Sworn testimony from a worker could reveal whether one exit was usable, but that worker might not know conditions on every floor. A factory inspection record could show what an inspector observed during a visit. Still, an earlier inspection could not prove that conditions stayed the same until the fire. Comparing these sources would help distinguish a firsthand observation from a broader claim, while also revealing gaps that no single account could fill.

3. After the fire, New York State created the Factory Investigating Commission in 1911. Its work helped lead to state laws strengthening factory safety rules, including requirements concerning fire hazards and exits. The state legislature could make rules for workplaces within New York, while inspectors could check whether factories followed them. Owners faced costs when they changed buildings or equipment; workers stood to gain safer conditions. A law's passage, however, is not proof that every workplace became safe. To judge its effect, an investigator would compare evidence from before and after the reforms and ask whose experiences each source leaves out.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Which source could best reveal whether one exit was usable? Why would you still need another source?

2. Why can't an inspection record from before the fire settle whether exits were usable on March 25?

3. How did New York's legislature and factory inspectors have different roles after the fire?

4. How might the new rules affect owners and workers differently? Why would passing the rules not prove that every worker was safer?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Suppose you are investigating whether New York's new factory rules improved safety by 1914. In four sentences, name two kinds of evidence from the passage, explain what you would compare, and identify a limit of each kind.

After the Fire

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline three kinds of evidence an investigator could use. Circle a limit of each kind so you can judge what the evidence can and cannot show. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Which source could best reveal whether one exit was usable? Why would you still need another source?	**A worker's sworn testimony could describe an exit the worker knew. Another source is needed because that worker might not know conditions on every floor.**
2	Why can't an inspection record from before the fire settle whether exits were usable on March 25?	**It shows conditions during the inspector's visit, not whether those conditions stayed the same until March 25.**
3	How did New York's legislature and factory inspectors have different roles after the fire?	**The legislature could make workplace safety rules, while inspectors could check whether factories followed them.**
4	How might the new rules affect owners and workers differently? Why would passing the rules not prove that every worker was safer?	**Owners could face costs to change buildings or equipment, while workers could gain safer conditions. Passing rules alone does not show that every factory followed them.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

I would compare factory inspection records from before and after the new rules to look for changes in exit conditions. I would also compare workers' sworn testimony from those periods to learn whether exits could actually be used. Inspection records show only what inspectors found during their visits. Workers can report daily conditions, but each person knows only the areas they saw.

Accept other evidence comparisons grounded in the passage if students explain what each source can show and identify a specific limit. Distinguish evidence of a rule's passage from evidence that factories followed it.