Evidence After the Fire

Compare sources about the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire

WG.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 two details that identify a source's date or origin, circle two details about what a source can or cannot show, and number the three sources from earliest to latest. Use your marks to weigh the evidence in each source.

What Can the Sources Tell Us?

1. On March 25, 1911, a fire swept through the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory in New York City. The factory occupied the upper floors of the Asch Building, where workers made women's blouses. The fire killed 146 people, most of them young immigrant women. A report in The New York Times dated March 26 described people at the windows and the struggle to escape. The reporter wrote for readers who wanted news the next morning, not for a later safety investigation. A newspaper account from that day can reveal what observers saw and heard, but early reports might contain details that were not yet checked.

2. In 1912, New York State's Factory Investigating Commission published findings from its inquiry into factory conditions. Investigators gathered testimony and examined safety rules after the fire. Its report discussed problems that extended beyond one building, including inadequate fire precautions in many workplaces. The commission was a government body formed in response to the disaster, so it could consult witnesses and inspect records over months. Its purpose was to recommend changes in state law. Yet a statewide report does not necessarily tell a reader what each worker in the Triangle factory experienced during the first minutes of the fire.

3. Today, Cornell University's Kheel Center maintains an online collection about the fire. The collection places newspaper coverage beside photographs and testimony from survivors. The people who created those records lived through the event or its immediate aftermath; the center's editors selected and organized them much later. A photograph might show workers at a window, but it cannot show whether a stairway door was locked on another floor. A survivor's account can give firsthand details of one route of escape, though that person may not know what happened in every room. These differences matter when a historian builds an argument.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How does the March 26 date make The New York Times report useful, and what reason does the passage give for checking its details?

2. Why might the commission's 1912 report help explain the response to the fire better than one worker's first minutes of escape?

3. How is the Kheel Center's online collection different from the survivor testimony it contains? Use details about who created each.

4. Which kind of record in the Kheel Center's collection would you use to check the newspaper's account of escape, and what limit would that record have?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

A museum label claims, "The March 26 newspaper report alone tells the full story of how factory safety changed after the fire." Write a 75 to 105 word correction using specific evidence from two named sources in the passage, including their dates or origins. Name one additional primary record you would seek and explain what it could show.

ANSWER KEY

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HIGH SCHOOL · WG.P.3.1

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two details that identify a source's date or origin, circle two details about what a source can or cannot show, and number the three sources from earliest to latest. Use your marks to weigh the evidence in each source. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How does the March 26 date make The New York Times report useful, and what reason does the passage give for checking its details?	**It was published the day after the fire, so it can convey what observers saw and heard. Some details might not have been checked yet.**
2	Why might the commission's 1912 report help explain the response to the fire better than one worker's first minutes of escape?	**The commission examined testimony, records, and safety rules over months to recommend changes in state law. Its statewide findings do not necessarily describe one worker's experience.**
3	How is the Kheel Center's online collection different from the survivor testimony it contains? Use details about who created each.	**The center's editors selected and organized the collection much later. Survivors created firsthand accounts based on their experiences.**
4	Which kind of record in the Kheel Center's collection would you use to check the newspaper's account of escape, and what limit would that record have?	**A survivor's testimony could provide firsthand details about an escape route. One survivor might not know what happened in every room.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The claim overstates what one source can show. The March 26, 1911, New York Times report describes people at windows and the struggle to escape, but it was written before all details could be checked. The New York State Factory Investigating Commission's 1912 report examined safety conditions and sought changes in state law. It offers evidence about the response after the fire that the next-day report could not provide. I would also seek the text of laws passed after 1911. That primary record would show which safety rules lawmakers actually adopted.

Accept other well-supported source comparisons and suitable primary records, such as legislative records. The response should distinguish what a source documents from what it cannot establish.