Whose Fire Story?

Compare how two writers select details and frame a historical event.

9-10.RH.6 "Compare the point of view of two or more authors for how they treat the same or similar topics, including which details they include and emphasize in their respective accounts. Evaluate the texts for bias."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two details each writer emphasizes, circle each writer's main conclusion, and write 1 beside a detail one writer includes that the other leaves out.

Two Accounts of the Triangle Fire

1 On March 25, 1911, a fire broke out at the Triangle Shirtwaist Company in New York City. The factory made women's blouses and employed many young immigrant women. One hundred forty-six workers died. Some exits were locked, and the building's fire escape collapsed during the disaster. The fire drew public attention to dangerous factory conditions and helped build support for stronger workplace safety rules in New York. The two fictional present-day writers below describe the same event for different audiences. Their accounts use historical facts, but each writer decides which facts deserve the most space and what readers should conclude.

2 In an essay for a workers' rights newsletter, historian Lena Ortiz writes: "The doors matter most. Workers facing flames could not use an exit that had been locked, while an overloaded fire escape gave way. Many who died were young immigrant women whose work kept the factory running. When a company controls the exits, safety is not simply a matter of individual choices." Ortiz calls the fire a warning about the power employers hold over workers. She ends by asking readers to notice the people who were trapped, rather than treating the fire only as the start of new laws.

3 In an article for a state government history site, policy researcher Daniel Reed writes: "The disaster forced officials to confront gaps in factory oversight. Investigators examined working conditions, and New York passed many factory safety laws in the years that followed. These rules showed that government could set standards instead of waiting for owners to act." Reed describes the work of a state commission that studied factory conditions after the fire. He also notes that laws require inspections to have practical force. To him, the lasting lesson is that public agencies can respond to a crisis by changing the rules for future workplaces.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Which details does Ortiz emphasize, and which does Reed emphasize? Give one example from each account.

2. Name a detail Ortiz includes that Reed leaves out. How might leaving it out affect a reader's understanding of the fire?

3. How might each writer's audience shape the point of view in the account? Use a detail from each account.

4. Do the two accounts point to the same group as responsible for preventing future harm? Explain using a detail from each.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a four-sentence museum caption about the fire for visitors who have read neither account. Include one detail emphasized by Ortiz and one emphasized by Reed, then use the last sentence to explain how your choices avoid a one-sided account.

ANSWER KEY

Whose Fire Story?

HIGH SCHOOL · 9-10.RH.6

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two details each writer emphasizes, circle each writer's main conclusion, and write 1 beside a detail one writer includes that the other leaves out. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Which details does Ortiz emphasize, and which does Reed emphasize? Give one example from each account.	**Ortiz emphasizes the locked exit and the workers trapped by the fire. Reed emphasizes the investigation and the factory safety laws passed afterward.**
2	Name a detail Ortiz includes that Reed leaves out. How might leaving it out affect a reader's understanding of the fire?	**Reed leaves out the locked exit. Without that detail, a reader may pay less attention to the danger workers faced inside the factory.**
3	How might each writer's audience shape the point of view in the account? Use a detail from each account.	**Writing for a workers' rights newsletter, Ortiz stresses employer control of the exits. Writing for a government history site, Reed stresses investigations, laws, and inspections.**
4	Do the two accounts point to the same group as responsible for preventing future harm? Explain using a detail from each.	**No. Ortiz points to employers who control exits, while Reed focuses on government agencies that set standards and enforce laws.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The 1911 Triangle Shirtwaist fire killed 146 workers in New York City. A locked exit made it harder for workers to escape. After the fire, New York passed new factory safety laws. Including both the workers' immediate danger and the later reforms shows more than the policy changes alone.

Accept supported inferences about how audience may influence emphasis, but do not require students to claim either fictional writer intentionally misleads readers. For the caption, check for four sentences, an accurate detail from each account, and a final sentence explaining the value of including both.