



Beyond the Sources • Danger

Using the information you gather on the web site, answer the following questions about the unit.

1. How can a photograph make an event or an issue such as danger in mining seem more realistic for the researcher or reader?

When we can actually see how close the miners were to the explosives and how little protection they had from the blast, it can make the reality of the danger more obvious.

How can we as historians use photographs to better understand an event or issue?

Photographs can give us a “snapshot” of a moment in time that can be studied and interpreted to enhance our research and understanding. Photographs of miners like these can tell us about their work clothing, their environment, and the dangers they faced on a daily basis more clearly and quickly than a paragraph in book.

What details do photographs give us that we might not find in other sources?

We can notice details such as a person’s clothes, age, gender, environment, hairstyle, facial expressions, equipment and technology shown in the photograph, information about the weather and the location of the photograph, and numerous other details about the event or subject pictured.

2. Both of the newspaper articles about mining accidents appeared near the top of the newspaper’s front page. Why would a newspaper print articles like these on the front page?

Most people would see these articles when they first looked at the paper. It might encourage readers to buy a paper from the newsstand if they see a story that interests them on the front page.

What does this tell us about the incidents?

That suggests to us that these were important events in the community.

What might it tell us if the articles were found farther back in the newspaper?

Articles near the back of the paper are often considered less newsworthy or less “important” than articles in the front. If these articles had been in the back of the paper, we might have assumed that events like these happened all the time and were not newsworthy, or that they had little interest for the community.

3. The Department of Labor sent inspectors to the mines to evaluate their safety. How might records of their inspections help us understand what life was like for miners?

Descriptions of what inspectors found in the mines would give us a better indication of what their environment was like and how they worked at their jobs.

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What might these inspections tell us about mining companies?

If a mining company received good ratings from the inspector, we could assume that they were concerned about the safety of their workers and could afford to use safety equipment to help their workers in the mines. If the company received negative reports, we might assume that they were not concerned about their workers, or that the company was not doing well enough in the mines to afford safety equipment.

How might the records of these inspections have been used if a safety lawsuit were filed against a mining company?

These inspections could show a jury or judge whether or not a mining company had a history of injuries or dangerous work practices. This might affect a jury's decision for or against a mining company.

4. The statistics in Data 1 show us the number of fatalities in the mines during the years mentioned and the causes of those deaths. Statistics are often used today in studies of American citizens and their jobs, health, and home life. What are some advantages that statistics might have for the historian?

Statistics can give us a quick summary of information about a topic. We can use these statistics over time to interpret changes in a group or issue.

What challenges might statistics like these present for the historian?

It is possible that statistics are not always accurate. The historian needs to know who or what organization compiled the statistics and how the information was gathered in order to evaluate the accuracy of the material.