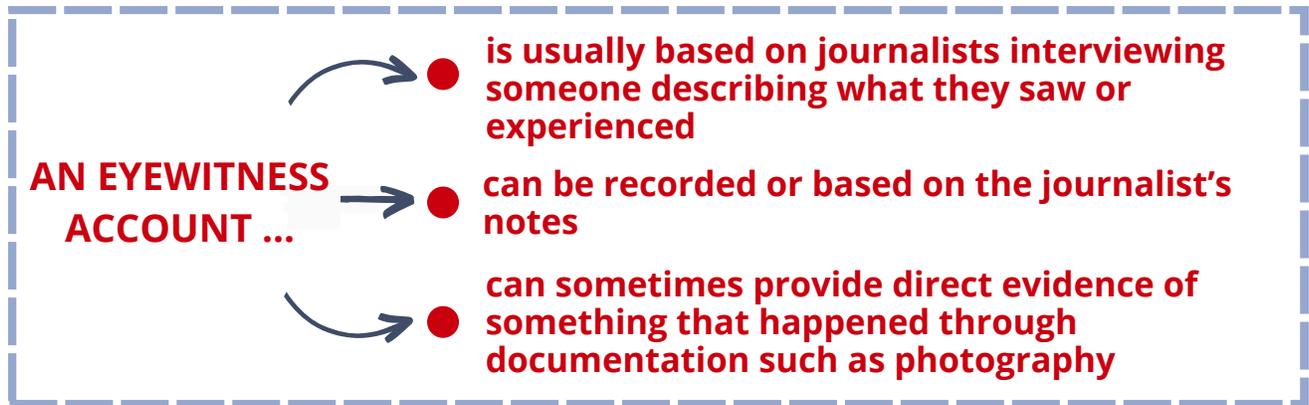


Media Literacy Mini-Lesson #4

EYEWITNESSES

How do journalists rely on eyewitnesses to describe important events to their readers? An eyewitness is a person who has experienced an important event or saw or heard what occurred at the scene of the event.



Eyewitnesses accounts aren't always accurate

Journalists might interview witnesses who may have heard or seen only part of the story. Sometimes their memories fail them. Some witnesses may have a particular **perspective or bias**.

These are the reasons why reliable journalists seek multiple sources to try and confirm exactly what happened. Still, eyewitnesses are one of the most important sources of evidence for journalists, who count on first-hand observers to help readers understand what happened.

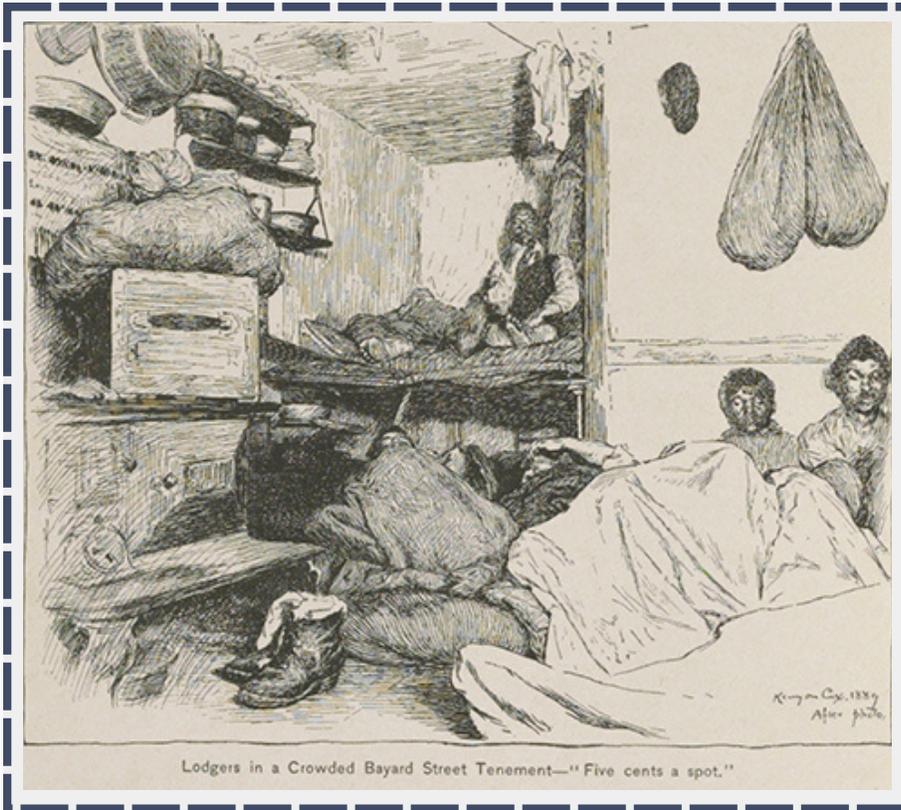
Some eyewitnesses choose to remain *anonymous*

They may fear that revealing information with their name might get them into trouble. For instance, a city official telling a reporter that he witnessed the mayor accept a bribe might worry that he might lose his job if the reporter includes his name in a story. Still, readers should be skeptical of stories that rely only on anonymous sources, especially without other *evidence* to help verify the story.



On the next page, look at the illustration from Jacob Riis's book *How the Other Half Lives*. (Note that Riis's photo has been turned into a wood engraving, which was easier and cheaper to print in the paper at the time.) Then, answer the following questions about what makes the illustration an important eyewitness account. Share your responses with a peer in-person or online.

The following source was created by Jacob Riis. Working as a journalist in the late 1800s, Riis learned photography as a hobby. He then discovered the camera would be an effective tool for his investigations of the living conditions of the poor in tenement housing in New York. This image was featured in his book *How the Other Half Lives*.



Source: "How the Other Half Lives: Studies among the Tenements" by Jacob Riis. *Scribner's Magazine*, Dec. 1889. One of twenty wood engravings based on Riis's photographs. Library of Congress

Describe what is happening in the excerpt. What did you notice or wonder about?

What makes this image an eyewitness account?

How does this eyewitness account help provide evidence for a story Riis is trying to tell about conditions for workers in New York City?