

PATIENCE LEARNING · FREE 1-DAY CASE

The Confident Source

A free single-session case from the world of **The Cold Case**, the 13-day investigative-podcast simulation.

GRADES 9–12 · ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS (SOURCE EVALUATION & EVIDENCE) · ~45 MIN · 1 CLASS PERIOD

Your students run the production room of a true-crime podcast. Two sources describe the same missing woman's last night — one is confident, quotable, and wrong; the other is hesitant, boring, and load-bearing. The episode is only as trustworthy as the evidence they choose to air.

TEACHER QUICK-START

Objective: Students evaluate competing sources for reliability — distinguishing confidence and vividness from actual evidentiary weight — and decide what a responsible narrator can claim.

Standards tie-in: CCSS RI.9-10.1 & .8 (cite strong textual evidence; evaluate the reasoning and relevance of claims) and W.9-10.1 (argument from valid evidence); SL.9-10.3 (evaluate a speaker's evidence).

What you need: Just this packet. Print the student pages (works individually or in teams of 3–4). No prep.

- 1. Set the scene (5 min).** “You're building episode one. Two people say two different things about the same night. You can only air what you can defend.”
- 2. Read the sources (8 min).** Teams read the two interview excerpts and the reliability checklist.
- 3. Weigh & decide (20 min).** Rate each source, then write the one sentence the episode can honestly say.
- 4. The reveal (8 min).** Walk the answer key. The point: the most quotable source is often the least reliable — and a good narrator says only what the evidence earns.
- 5. Reflection (4 min).** Each student answers the reflection question.

The Case File

You are the production team at Carthage Public Radio, building episode one of *Where Did She Go?* — about Mireya Salinas, a 22-year-old who left her restaurant shift on the night of June 14 and was never seen again. Two people agreed to be interviewed. They don't agree.

SOURCE A — “the confident one”

Dell, a regular at the restaurant (interviewed this year, 2026): “Oh, I remember it clear as day. She left with a tall guy in a red jacket, around 10 o'clock, and she looked scared. I'll never forget it. You don't forget something like that.”

(Confident, vivid, quotable. Dell was not working that night and is describing a memory from 18 years ago.)

SOURCE B — “the boring one”

Restaurant time-clock record + Mireya's coworker Adriana (interviewed 2026): The punch-out log shows Mireya clocked out at 9:04 PM. Adriana: “I don't really remember the guy. I think she left alone? Honestly it was a normal night, I didn't know it would matter. You could check the closing log — I'm not sure.”

(Hesitant, admits uncertainty, points to a document. The log is a business record made that night.)

RELIABILITY CHECKLIST

For each source ask: (1) Were they in a position to know? (2) When was the account created — that night, or years later? (3) Does it depend on memory, or on a record? (4) Does the source admit what they don't know? Confidence is not on this list — because confidence is not evidence.

Your Call (Decision Sheet)

Team name: _____ Period: _____

Step 1 — Rate each source against the checklist (Strong / Weak, with a reason).

	In a position to know?	Made that night or later?	Memory or record?	Overall
Source A (Dell)	_____	_____	_____	_____
Source B (log + Adriana)	_____	_____	_____	_____

Step 2 — The pull. Which source is more *tempting* to put in the episode, and why? (Be honest about what makes it attractive.)

Step 3 — The one sentence. Write the single sentence your episode can honestly say about when and how Mireya left, using only what the evidence supports:

Step 4 — The limit. What is something the episode *cannot* claim yet, no matter how good it would sound?

ANSWER KEY (for the reveal)

Step 1 — Ratings:

Source A (Dell): Weak. Wasn't working that night (not positioned to know), account is an 18-year-old memory, pure recall, and admits no uncertainty — the confidence is a red flag, not a green one. **Source B (log + Adriana): Strong where it counts.** The punch-out log is a record made that night (9:04 PM is reliable); Adriana is hazy but honestly flags her limits and points to the document.

Step 2 — The pull:

Dell is far more tempting — vivid, quotable, a “scared woman leaving with a mysterious man in red” is a perfect podcast hook. That's exactly why it's dangerous: the story's appeal has nothing to do with its truth.

Step 3 — What the episode can say:

Something like: “Restaurant records show Mireya clocked out at 9:04 that night; a coworker believes she may have left alone, though she isn't certain.” That's it. It's less thrilling than Dell's version — and it's defensible.

Step 4 — The limit:

The episode cannot claim she left at 10, looked scared, or left with anyone — all of that rests only on Dell. A responsible narrator can mention that a regular *remembers* it differently, but cannot present it as what happened.

The big idea:

The most airable quote and the most reliable evidence are often not the same source. Strong nonfiction — and strong thinking — means saying only what the evidence earns, even when a better story is sitting right there.

REFLECTION (graded on thinking, not the “right” answer)

“One source was exciting; one was reliable. Which pulled at you harder, and how did you keep the story honest anyway?”

SCORING THE THINKING

	3 — Strong	2 — Developing	1 — Beginning
Source evaluation	Applies the checklist to both	Partial	Picks by vividness
Confidence ≠ evidence	Names Dell's confidence as a flag	Hints at it	Trusts the confident source
Claims within limits	One sentence stays defensible	Slightly overreaches	Airs the unprovable
Explains clearly	A reader can follow it	Partly clear	Unclear

READY FOR THE FULL SIMULATION?

This was two sources. The Cold Case is thirteen days of them.

In the full 13-day simulation, four-person teams build a true-crime podcast pilot from a real, unsolved 2008 disappearance — receiving the case file in pieces while conducting fresh interviews. There is no answer waiting to be found; each role reads the same evidence differently, and the team must commit in writing while the file stays open. Graded on reasoning, never on solving it.

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