WELCOME TO THE MUSEUM AT ELDRIDGE STREET!

600 GLASS JEWELS?
A HOLE IN THE WALL?
CENTURY OLD FOOTPRINTS YOU CAN SEE IN THE FLOOR?

WELCOME TO THE MUSEUM AT ELDRIDGE STREET!
You’re about to find mysterious and colorful clues all over the Eldridge Street Synagogue. What do they reveal about this historic building? Follow your Family Guide and let’s begin our investigation!

**ARE YOU READY TO ...**

1. **Climb** stairs?  
   - A. Yes  
   - B. I might take the elevator.
2. **Spot** stars?  
   - A. Yes  
   - B. I love stars.
3. **Peek** behind walls?  
   - A. Yes  
   - B. Behind the walls? Sure!
4. **Think like a detective?**  
   - A. Yes  
   - B. I am quite clever.
5. Did you answer A or B to every question?  
   - A. What a silly question!  
   - B. 😞

Then start here on the synagogue’s lower level.

Next, go up one flight of stairs to the sanctuary.

After that, head to the balcony and track down your final clues.

Curious to crack the case?  
- A. I’m ready!  
- B. Let’s get started!

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**FACT #1**

The Museum at Eldridge Street is inside the historic Eldridge Street Synagogue. A synagogue is where Jewish people pray. This synagogue opened in 1887. How long ago was that? Do the math!

| Year 1887 | 20 - 1887 years old |

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**FACT #2**

A small group of people still pray in the synagogue on the Jewish Sabbath and holidays. The rest of the time, visitors to the museum explore the building and discover its stories!

You are standing on the lower level of the synagogue. This room is called the Bet Midrash or the House of Study. Your first mission: find the Torah Scroll exhibit in this room. Look closely at everything in the case. Can you answer this bonus question? What is a "yad" used for?

**FACT #3**

The Eldridge Street Synagogue was built by Jewish immigrants. Where did their journeys begin? Next, find this big map in the Lower Level Exhibit.
Many people come to America hoping for a better life. If you live in the United States today, when did your family come to this country? Where did they come from?

Between 1881-1924, 2,500,000 (two and a half million) Jewish immigrants came to the United States from small towns and big cities in Eastern Europe.

**Talk about this:**
What would make you leave home? What would you bring with you?

Some people said about America: ‘All you have do is get a big shovel and a sack and you go out in the street and shovel the gold into the sack.’

—Abraham Gamberg, Ukrainian immigrant

Gold in the streets? Would life in America really be so easy? Well, no. New immigrants, including children, worked long hours for little pay. Most lived in tiny, dark apartments called tenements. Inside, families were so crowded that four children sometimes shared one little bed.

**Watch the black and white film and imagine walking through the neighborhood streets. What would you hear? See? Smell? Write a postcard to a friend about your new home in America. What will you say about the gold?**

So many Jewish immigrants settled on New York’s Lower East Side that one clever writer called this neighborhood, the “Jewish Plymouth Rock.”

Today the Eldridge Street Synagogue is a great big clue to that time. The synagogue is in Chinatown now. But at the turn of the last century, this was the most crowded Jewish neighborhood in the world.

Jewish immigrants were happy to see a new synagogue on the crowded city streets. But many newcomers hoped to find something IN the streets as well. Did they find it? Next stop: the Lower East Side Interactive Display.
Welcome to the main sanctuary. Walk around and look! What do you notice? How would you describe this space?

Imagine entering the sanctuary long ago. Picture the room packed with people. What do you suppose they thought about their new synagogue in America? How do you think they felt when they came inside?

JEWELS

Many tenement apartments had only one or two windows. But the Eldridge Street Synagogue has 67!

STAR SEARCH

The synagogue sparkles with stars as well. Some have five points and some have six. Where do you see these stars in the sanctuary? Write your answer under the photograph.

STARS OF DAVID

A symbol of the Jewish people, the six pointed star is called the Star of David.

RACE TO (COUNT) THE STARS

Have an adult in your group time you. How many Stars of David can you count in just 30 seconds? Ready, set, go!

I counted __________

Talk about this:

Why are there so many Stars of David here? Is there a message in these special stars?

Many immigrants had never seen such a grand synagogue before. But what did Eldridge Street have in common with their synagogues at home?
Every synagogue in the world has an Ark, an Eternal Light, and a Reader’s Platform.

Walk around and find each one here. Then circle them on the black and white drawing.

The Reader’s Platform (Bimah in Hebrew) is where people read from the Torah Scroll. Look at the men in the black and white drawing. Climb onto the bimah and stand exactly where they stood. Imagine everyone in the synagogue listening to you!

The Eternal Light (Ner Tamid in Hebrew) hangs in front of the Ark. Look up! It’s never supposed to go out. But guess what? This Eternal Light did go out for many years. Why? You’ll find out later in your investigation.

The Ark (Aron HaKodesh in Hebrew) holds the Torah Scrolls and is the most important place in every synagogue. This one is especially grand. Slide open the doors and touch the red velvet inside. Can you guess how many Torah Scrolls fit inside? The answer is on the bottom of this page.

Every seat has a number and everyone had an assigned seat. Can you find Seat 153? Sit down and open the little door in front of your feet. What do you think people stored inside?

Imagine friends and neighbors sitting all around you. It might be hard not to talk! That’s one reason why synagogue members wrote a book of rules about how to behave here. One rule: don’t talk during services! What if you did? You might have to pay a 25 cent fine. Picture sitting in Seat 153 in 1887. Uh-oh, the person next to you won’t stop talking. What will you say to each other? Fill in the speech bubbles.

How many people used to come to the synagogue every week? Look closely at the floor and the seats.

Are you standing in front of Seat 98? Now rub your feet sideways across the floor. Do you feel how it goes up and down? Slide your feet into the grooves. Do they fit? What do you think happened to the floor?

I think:

More than 700 seats

MMm, fascinating clue!

There’s a real bunch of interesting signs in this old building they may not have been there in 1887 when it was first opened. Perhaps they were left behind. Perhaps they were added later. Perhaps they are signs that show how the building was used. Perhaps they are signs that show how the building was used. Perhaps they are signs of the past.
For years the synagogue was filled with families. But as time went on, many Jewish people moved away from the Lower East Side. By the early 1950s, only a small group of people continued to pray here. They moved downstairs to the Bet Midrash, locked the doors to the sanctuary ... and didn’t return for about 20 years.

In 1971, a man named Gerard Wolfe knocked on the door of the Bet Midrash. He was writing a book about synagogues on the Lower East Side and wanted to see the sanctuary. Taking a flashlight, he came up the stairs. "I found the doors to the sanctuary warped shut," he later said. "I pulled them open and stepped inside and my hair stood on end. It was like the Twilight Zone."

Dust covered every seat. Pigeons lived in the balcony. Even the Eternal Light burned out. The Eldridge Street Synagogue was becoming a ruin. Then one day ... someone pried open the doors.

What a discovery! "It was as though the synagogue was held up by strings from heaven," said Roberta Brandes Gratz, the founder of this museum. She led the effort to rescue the building. Teams of workers repaired the windows and lights. They restored the wood and the walls. Thousands of people helped and finally, the synagogue was saved!

In 2007, 120 years after the Eldridge Street Synagogue opened, the work was done. This is how the sanctuary looked. But wait! Look at the window above the Ark. That’s not here anymore. Draw a picture of what you see in its place.
Detectives, your investigation is almost complete. Are you ready for a bonus clue? The glass blocks in the old window are still in this building. Go downstairs to the Bet Midrash. Where are they now?

They are in ________________________________

In 2010, the museum replaced the old window. The new window was designed by artist Kiki Smith and architect Deborah Gans. What do you notice about it? What kind of story do you think it tells?

At Home:

How do you put in a 6,000 pound window? Very carefully! Watch the video on our website about the Kiki Smith window.

Read more about the Lower East Side. Check out our recommended book list on our website.

www.eldridgestreet.org

Congratulations Detectives. You tracked down the clues and discovered a story! Stop by the front desk for a sticker, and tell us what you thought about your investigation.