USING ‘DEAR EDITOR’ IN YOUR CLASSROOM

BUILDING CONTEXT
In order for students to analyze and respond to the questions in A Bintel Brief, it is important that they are introduced to the story of Jewish immigration within a broader context of 19th- and early 20th century history. Here are some key points that should be taught beforehand:

• Students should know the definition of immigrant and refugee. They should understand that immigration happens both by choice and force and is deeply tied to the history of the United States. It is helpful for students to know that Jewish people have been immigrating to North America since the 1600s and have come from places other than Eastern Europe including Spain, Portugal, Brazil and Germany.

• Students should be aware of the factors that cause people to immigrate. The Museum is primarily focusing on the period of 1880-1920, when push and pull factors included poverty (shtetl life), government restrictions (May Laws), conscription and Anti-Semitic violence (pogroms).

• Students should be familiar with turn-of-the-20th century life on New York’s Lower East Side, where many Jewish immigrants first made their homes.

• Students should know that Jewish immigrants experienced a conflict between maintaining their old identity and “becoming American.” Immigrants turned to synagogues, aid societies and settlement houses for support, as well as newspapers like the Forward. Be sure to give some history of the paper along with the purpose and format of A Bintel Brief.

Use our presentation slides at eldridgestreet.org/deareditor to help craft a contextual lesson for your students.
LEARNING OBJECTIVES
The letters from *A Bintel Brief* can be used as an entry point into numerous areas of study, including in units on Immigration, U.S. History or Jewish-American History. These letters provide a more personal understanding of the immigrant experience. As primary source documents, they can be used to help students build their reading and analytical skills.

- Students will explore and discuss the unique and universal challenges that immigrant communities face when adjusting to life in a new country. Long ago, they illuminate timeless elements of the immigrant experience.
- Students will use the letters from *A Bintel Brief* letter to gain a deeper understanding of the immigrant experience at the turn-of-the-century.
- Taking on the roles of *A Bintel Brief* editors, students will write reflective and ethical responses to the historical questions.

TEACHING ACTIVITIES
The ten letters attached to this curriculum were selected from the compilation *A Bintel Brief: Sixty Years of Letters from the Lower East Side to the Jewish Daily Forward*. The letters date from 1906-1933 and are grouped into themes of Education, Love, Labor and Identity. We invite you to choose the selections that are most appropriate to your students’ reading level and interest.

There are numerous way to introduce these texts to students. We realize that some students may require more scaffolding, so you may choose to lead a reading of a single letter with the whole class. Or for more independent work, you might divide the class into groups and have them each respond to separate letters.

The focus of your assignment will be just as important as your teaching strategy. Below are several questions to guide students when working with the texts:

- Ask students to identify new keywords/phrases from the text and to share them.
- What can the Bintel Brief letters teach us about the challenges and opportunities of integrating into a new country?
- Is it possible for one person to inhabit multiple identities or is it more important to fit in to one group?
- Do you think the questions posed in *A Bintel Brief* are relevant in 2019?
- If *A Bintel Brief* existed today, what kinds questions do you think people would be asking the editors?
EXTENDED ACTIVITIES

1. Teachers can use the letters as part of a writing assignment where students take on the roles of the Forward’s newspaper editors. Students will write thoughtful and ethical responses to the historical questions. Teachers will decide if they want their students to respond to these questions from a 21st or early 20th-century perspective.

**BONUS!** After the students write and share their responses, compare them with the original editorial responses. Did the students and the editors come to the same conclusion? The original responses are provided in the packet (see Table of Contents).

2. Discuss challenges today’s immigrants face when adapting to life in a new country. Do your students know someone who is a first- or second-generation immigrant? Create a modern day A Bintel Brief in your classroom by having your students develop questions and interview family or community members about their experiences and challenges.

3. Many of the letters in A Bintel Brief allude to bigger political, cultural and social events happening in the early 20th century. These events include the rise of the Labor Movement, the Progressive Era, and Women’s Suffrage. Have students choose a question from A Bintel Brief and write a research paper exploring the historical context behind the question. A recommended reading list has been provided with this curriculum (see Table of Contents).

VISIT THE MUSEUM AT ELDRIDGE STREET

At the Museum at Eldridge Street we tell the story of the Eastern European Jewish community who arrived to New York at the turn of the 20th century. Our historic synagogue is situated in the Lower East Side, the neighborhood where the Jewish Daily Forward was founded. A visit to the museum will provide your students with in-depth historical context about the Jewish Lower East Side. During your visit, educators will incorporate photos and other historic documents to highlight the challenges and aspirations experienced by our immigrant congregants. The museum also offers a historic neighborhood walking tour for students. During this tour students will uncover the places where Jewish immigrants lived, prayed, worked and played. The walk includes the historic 1912 headquarters of the Jewish Daily Forward. To learn more or to schedule a field trip visit our Education page at www.eldridgestreet.org/k-12-university.