DEAR EDITOR

Letters from a Bintel Brief
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OVERVIEW

IMMIGRATION
Between 1880 and 1924, over 2.5 million Eastern European Jews made the journey to the United States. Two million of these immigrants settled on New York’s Lower East Side. Fleeing the poverty, restrictions and violence of Eastern Europe, this community arrived to New York with the hopes and aspirations that they would find peace, opportunity and prosperity in the land dubbed the “Golden Medina” (the Golden Land). As immigrant writer and Lower East Sider Anzia Yezierska states in her short story The Miracle, “Like all people who have nothing, I lived on dreams.”

ADAPTATION
Upon arrival to the Lower East Side, life was anything but the stuff of dreams. By 1900, the Lower East Side was the most densely populated place on the planet. Families were forced to live in dark, crowded and unsanitary blocks of tenement housing. To make ends meet, people toiled in sweatshops and garment factories, oftentimes working in their already overcrowded homes. Although immigrants were tackling the struggles and tensions of a new country, they were also experiencing a new kind of culture that was a distinct mix of Jewish and American. Throughout the neighborhood they built dozens of theaters, teahouses and cafes where people could socialize, exchange ideas and discuss politics. Hundreds of synagogues and benevolent societies and settlement houses were established as institutions where immigrants could find spiritual and communal support. And then there was the Yiddish newspaper.

CONNECTION
Founded in 1897, The Jewish Daily Forward was a Socialist Yiddish newspaper that went beyond providing the news of the day. It took a political stance as being pro-labor and pro-union. It also served as a guide for immigrants who were trying to navigate the nuances and challenges of everyday life in a strange country. When a dynamic young Yiddish novelist named Abraham Cahan took on the role as the Forward’s editor-in-chief in 1903, he saw the paper’s potential to tell human stories about the immigrant experience. In 1906, the Forward launched its advice column A Bintel Brief. Meaning a “Bundle of Letters”, the column served as a forum where immigrants could ask questions and share their experiences on American life. The column published questions on topics ranging from homesickness, love, family, language, work and baseball. Today, these letters shine a light on the lives of immigrant families and the conflicts and tensions that arise when people adapt to new countries.

At the Museum at Eldridge Street, we tell the story of the Jewish immigrants who settled on the Lower East Side more than 100 years ago. Although these questions were written long ago, they illuminate timeless elements of the immigrant experience.
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](http://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.
EDUCATION

Letters from a Bintel Brief

Saluting the flag, 1902. Jacob Riis.
Worthy Editor,

Allow me a little space in your newspaper and, I beg you, give me some advice as to what to do.

There are seven people in our family – parents and five children. I am the oldest child, a fourteen-year-old girl. We have been in the country two years and my father, who is a frail man, is the only one working to support the whole family.

I go to school, where I do very well. But since times are hard now and my father earned only five dollars this week, I began to talk about giving up my studies and going to work in order to help my father as much as possible. But my mother didn’t even want to hear of it. She wants me to continue my education. She even went out and spent ten dollars on winter clothes for me. But I didn’t enjoy the clothes, because I think I am doing the wrong thing. Instead of bringing something into the house, my parents have to spend money on me.

I have a lot of compassion for my parents. My mother is now pregnant, but she still has to take care of the three borders we have in the house. Mother and Father work very hard and they want to keep me in school.

I am writing to you without their knowledge, and I beg you to tell me how to act. Hoping you can advise me, I remain,

Your reader,

S.
Dear Editor,

Since I do not want my conscience to bother me, I ask you to decide whether a married woman has the right to go to school two evenings a week. My husband thinks I have no right to do this.

I admit that I cannot be satisfied to be just a wife and mother. I am still young and I want to learn and enjoy life. My children and my house are not neglected, but I go to evening high school twice a week. My husband is not pleased and when I come home at night and ring the bell, he lets me stand outside a long time intentionally, and doesn’t hurry to open the door.

Now he has announced a new decision. Because I send out the laundry to be done, it seems to him that I have too much time for myself, even enough to go to school. So from now on he will count out every penny for anything I have to buy for the house, so I will not be able to send out the laundry any more. And when I have to do the work myself there won’t be any time left for such “foolishness” as going to school. I told him that I’m willing to do my own washing but that I would still be able to find time for study.

When I am alone with my thoughts, I feel I may not be right. Perhaps I should not go to school. I want to say that my husband is an intelligent man and he wanted to marry a woman who was educated. The fact that he is intelligent makes me more annoyed with him. He is in favor of the emancipation of women, yet in real life he acts contrary to his beliefs.

Awaiting your opinion on this, I remain,

Your reader,

The Discontented Wife
Dear Editor,

I am a newsboy, fourteen years old, and I sell the Forverts in the streets till late into the night. I come to you to ask your advice.

I was born in Russia and was twelve years old when I came to America with my dear mother. My sister, who was in the country before us, brought us over.

My sister worked to support us. She didn’t allow me to go to work but sent me to school. I went to school for two years and didn’t miss a day, but then came the terrible fire at the Triangle shop, where she worked, and I lost my dear sister. My mother and I suffer terribly from the misfortune. I had to help my mother and after school hours I go out and sell newspapers.

I have to go to school for three more years, and after that I want to go to college. But my mother doesn’t want me to go to school because she thinks I should go to work. I tell her I will work days and study at night but she won’t hear of it.

Since I read the Forverts to my mother every night and read your answers in the “Bintel Brief,” I beg you to answer me and say a few words to her.

Your Reader,
Postcard bearing a Yiddish love poem, 1906.
Dear Editor,

I am a young man of twenty-one; I have a seventeen-year-old cousin, and she and her parents would like me to marry her. I like the girl. She’s educated, American-born, not bad-looking. But she’s quite small.

That is the drawback: for her age, she is very short. And I happen to be tall. So when we walk down the street together, people look at us as a poorly matched couple. Another thing: she is very religious, and I am a freethinker. I ask you, esteemed Editor, could this lead to an unpleasant life if we were to marry? I wait impatiently for your answer.

Sympathetic
Worthy Editor,

I was born in America and my parents gave me a good education. I studied Yiddish and Hebrew, finished high school, completed a course in bookkeeping and got a good job. I have many friends, and several boys have already proposed to me.

Recently I went to visit my parents’ home town in Russian Poland. My mother’s family in Europe had invited my parents to a wedding, but instead of going themselves, they sent me. I stayed at my grandmothers with an aunt and uncle and had a good time.

It was lively in the town. There were many organizations and clubs and they all accepted me warmly, looked up to me—after all, I was a citizen of the free land, America. Among the social leaders of the community was an intelligent young man, a friend of my uncle’s, who took me to various gatherings and affairs.

He was very attentive, and after a short while he declared his love for me in a long letter. I had noticed that he was not indifferent to me, and I liked him as well. I looked up to him and respected him, as did all the townsfolk. My family became aware of it, and when they spoke to me about him, I could see they thought it was a good match.

He was handsome, clever, educated, a good talker and charmed me, but I didn’t give him a definite answer. As my love for him grew, however, I wrote to my parents about him, and then we came officially engaged.

A few months later we both went to my parents in the states and they received him like their own son. My bridegroom immediately began to learn English and tried to adjust to the new life. Yet when I introduced him to my friends they looked at him with disappointment. “This ‘greenhorn’ is your fiance?” they asked. I told them what a big role he played in his town, how everyone respected him, but they looked at me as if I were crazy and scoffed at my words.

At first I thought, Let them laugh, when they get better acquainted with him they’ll talk differently. In time, though, I was affected by their talk and began to think, like them, that he really was a “greenhorn” and acted like one.
In short, my love for him is cooling off gradually. I'm suffering terribly because my feelings for him are changing. In Europe, where everyone admired him and all the girls envied me, he looked different. But, here, I see before me another person.

I haven't the courage to tell him, and I can't even talk about it to my parents. He still loves me with all his heart and I don't know what to do. I choke it all up inside myself, and I beg you to help me with advice in my desperate situation.

Respectfully,

A Worried Reader

**GLOSSARY**

**Greenhorn:**
A person who is naive or easily tricked. It is often used as a derogatory term for a personal who is in a new place and is unfamiliar with the language and customs.
Young laborers strike for better working conditions, 1909. Library of Congress.
Dear Editor,

I am one of those unfortunate girls thrown by fate into a dark and dismal shop and I need your counsel.

Along with my parents, sisters and brothers, I came from Russian Poland where I has been well educated. But because of the terrible things going on in Russia we were forced to emigrate to American...I went to work in a shop. In this shop there is a foreman who is an exploiter, and he sets the prices on the work. He figures it out so that the wages so that the wages are very low, he insults and reviles the workers, he fires them and then takes them back. And worse than all of this, in spite of the fact that he has a wife and several children, he often allows himself to “have fun” with some of the working girls. It was my bad luck to be one of the girls that he tried to make advances to....

Though my hard-earned dollars mean a lot to my family of eight souls, I didn’t want to accept the foreman’s vulgar advances. He started to pick on me, said my work was no good, and when I proved he was wrong, he started to shout at me in the vilest language. He insulted me in Yiddish and then in English, so the American workers could understand too. Then, as if the Devil were in me, I ran home.

I am left without a job. Can you imagine my circumstances and that of my parents who depend on my earnings? The girls in the shop were very upset over the foreman’s vulgarity but they don’t want him to throw them out, so they are afraid to be witnesses against him. What can be done about this? I beg you to answer me.

Respectfully,

A Shopgirl
Dear Editor,

I am an operator on ladies’ waists for the past four years and I earn good wages. I work steady but haven’t saved money, because I have a sick wife. I had to put her in the hospital where she lay for four weeks, and then I had to bring her home.

Just after I brought her home, the General Strike began and I could see that I was in trouble. I had to go to the union to beg them not to let me down in my situation. I just asked for some money to have a little soup for my sick wife, but they answered that there wasn’t any money. I struggled along with my wife for four weeks, and when I saw that I might lose her I had to go back to work at the shop where we were striking. Now my conscience bothers me because I am a scab.

I am working now, I bring home fifteen, sometimes sixteen dollars a week. But I am not happy, because I was a scab and left the union. I want to state here that I was always a good union man.

Dear Editor, how can I go back to the union and salve my conscience? I am ready to swear that I will remain a loyal union man forever.

GLOSSARY

**Operator on Ladies’ Waists:**
This refers to a person who operates a sewing machine. “Ladies’ waists”, or shirtwaists, were a popular style of women’s blouses in the early 1900’s.

**General Strike:**
In 1910, trolley workers in Philadelphia went on strike. They refused to work until they received better pay and regulated work hours. In an act of solidarity over 60,000 workers in other industries joined the trolley workers in the strike.

**Union:**
When a group of workers in a particular trade or industry join together for the purpose of securing improvements in worker’s pay, safety conditions and benefits.

**Scab:**
A derogatory term for a person who works despite an
This question did not appear in A Bintel Brief, but rather in an editorial written by Abraham Cahan in 1903. The original piece also included a diagram of the baseball field with the fundamentals of baseball explained in Yiddish. Although it was in a different section of the newspaper, its tone and theme very much align with the issues chronicled in A Bintel Brief’s letters.

Should Children Play Baseball? A father writes to ask advice about baseball. He thinks that baseball is a foolish and wild game. But his boy, who is already in the upper grades, is very eager to play. He’s not the only one.

The majority of our immigrants have the same idea about it. They express it in an interesting fashion, in such a way that it’s possible to see in him clearly how the parents in the Yiddish neighborhood feel about baseball. “It is said the one should teach their child how to play chess or checkers or goat & wolf [tsig un volf] or at least a game that sharpens the mind. That would be appreciated” writes the father in his letter. “But what value does a game like baseball have? Nothing more than becoming crippled comes out of it.

When I was a young boy we used to play ‘rabbits’ chasing and catching one another [tag?]. But when we got older we stopped playing. Imagine a big boy in Russia playing tag, we would have treated him like he was crazy. And here in this highly educated America adults play baseball! They run after the stupid ball made of hide and are as excited about it as little boys. I want my boy to grow up to be a mensch not a wild American runner. He’s making me miserable, I can’t take it anymore.

GLOSSARY

Tsig un volf:
Yiddish for ‘Goat and wolf.’ A type of game.

Mentsch:
The Yiddish word for a person of integrity and honor.
Worthy Editor,

We are a small family who recently came to the “Golden Land.” My husband, my boy and I are together, and our daughter lives in another city.

I had opened a grocery store here, but soon lost all my money. In Europe we were in business; we had people working for us paid them well. In short, there we made a good living but here we are badly off.

My husband became a peddler. The “pleasure” of knocking on doors and ringing bells cannot be known by anyone but a peddler. If anybody does buy anything “on time,” a lot of the money is lost, because there are some people who never intend to pay. In addition, my husband had trouble because he has a beard, and because of the beard he gets beaten up by the hoodlums.

I don’t know what to do. My husband argues that he doesn’t want to continue peddling. He doesn’t want to shave off his beard, and it’s not fitting for such a man to do so. What can I do? I beg you for a suggestion.

Your constant reader,

GLOSSARY

Golden Land: The name many immigrants called the United States. It is tied to the misconception that the streets in America were paved with gold.

Peddler: Peddlers sold food, clothes or household items. Some traveled across the country selling their wares. In New York City immigrants often sold items from carts in the street.

Beards: For religious Jewish men it is a tradition to grow a beard. This practice comes from the Torah (The Jewish Bible) and many Jewish men consider the beard to be sacred. As religious men immigrated to America, pressure was placed on them to shave their
Worthy Editor,

I am sure that the problem I’m writing about affects many Jewish homes. It deals with immigrant parents and their American born children.

My parents, who have been readers of your paper for years, came from Europe. They have been here in this country over thirty years and were married twenty-eight years ago. They have five sons, and I am one of them. The oldest of us is twenty-seven and the youngest twenty-one.

We are all making a decent living. One of us works for the State Department. A second is a manager in a large store, two are in business, and the youngest is studying law. Our parents do not need our help because my father has a good job. We, the five brothers, always speak English to each other. Our parents know English too, but they speak only Yiddish, not just among themselves but to us too, and even to our American friends who come to visit us. We beg them not to speak Yiddish in the presence of our friends, since they can speak English, but they don’t want to. It’s a sort of stubbornness on their part, and a great deal of quarreling goes on between our parents and ourselves because of it.

Their answer is: “Children, we ask you not to try to teach us how to talk to people. We are older than you.”

Imagine, even when we go with our father to buy something in a store on Fifth Avenue, New York, he insists on speaking Yiddish. We are not ashamed of our parents, G-d forbid, but they ought to know where it’s proper and where it’s not. If they talk Yiddish among themselves at home, or to us, it’s bad enough, but among strangers and Christians? Is that nice? It looks as if they’re doing it to spite us. Petty spats grow out of it. They want to keep only to their old ways and don’t want to take up our new ways.

We beg you, friend Editor, to express your opinion on this question, and if possible send us our answer in English, because we can’t read Yiddish.

Accept our thanks for your answer, which we expect soon,

Respectfully,

I. and the Four Brothers
HISTORIC RESPONSES

Listed below are the corresponding editorial responses originally printed in the Jewish Daily Forward for each letter.

Education

Letter 1
The advice to the girl is that she should obey her parents and further her education, because in that way she will be able to give them greater satisfaction than if she went out to work.

Letter 2
Since this man is intelligent and an adherent of the women’s emancipation movement, he is scolded severely in the answer for wanting to keep his wife so enslaved. Also, the opinion is expressed that the wife absolutely has the right to go to school two evenings a week.

Letter 3
The answer to this letter is directed to the boy’s mother, whose daughter was one of the shopworkers who perished in the Triangle fire. The unfortunate woman is comforted in the answer, and she is told that she must not hinder her son’s nighttime studies but must help him reach his goal. And an appeal is made to good people who are in a position to do something for the boy to come forward and help him further his education.

Love

Letter 1
The writer would make a grave mistake if she were to separate from her bridegroom now. She must not lose her common sense and be influenced by the foolish opinions of her friends who divided the world into “greenhorns” and real Americans. We can assure the writer that her bridegroom will learn English quickly. He will know American history and literature as well as her friends do, and be a better American than they. She should be proud of his laugh and laugh at those who call him “greenhorn.”
Letter 2
Love conquers all. Many such couples live happily, and it is better for the man to be taller and the woman shorter, not the opposite. People are accustomed to seeing the man more developed than the woman. People stare? Let them stare! Also the fact that the girl is religious and the man is not can be overcome if he has enough influence on her.

Labor

Letter 1
Such a scoundrel should be taught a lesson that could be an example to others. The girl is advised to bring it pit into the open, the whole story about the foreman because there in the small shop town it shouldn’t be difficult to have him thrown out of the shop and for her to get her job back.

Letter 2
Neither the operator nor the union is guilty. During the strike thousands upon thousands of workers complained that they were in need, but at the beginning of the strike there really was no money. It is now the duty of the union to investigate the case, and if it is shown that circumstances were as the operator describes, they will certainly forgive and he can become a good union man.

Identity

Letter 1
Let your boys play baseball and even become outstanding players as long as it doesn’t interfere with their studies and doesn’t make them keep in the company of bad influences. This issue arises for nearly half the families of the Jewish quarter. And this is the writer’s advice to all of them. Think this issue over carefully...Baseball is a good way to develop the body. It’s better than gymnastics. First of all it’s out in the fresh air. Secondly it develops the hand and feet and the reflex responses of the limbs and eyes. Why shouldn’t the children play this these days? Football, the “aristocratic” sport of the colleges ... now there is a wild game. You fight with each other like Indians and often one is left with a broken foot or hand or gets wounded. But there is no danger in baseball.

Letter 2
We see absolutely no crime in the parents’ speaking Yiddish to their sons. The Yiddish language is dear to them and they want to speak a language to their children and all who understand it. It may also be that they are ashamed to speak their imperfect English among strangers so they prefer to use the mother tongue. From the letter we get the impression that the parents are not fanatics, and with their speaking Yiddish they are not out to spite the children. But it would certainly not be wrong if the parents were to speak English too, to the children. People should and must learn the language of our country.
Liana Finck’s graphic novel *Bintel Brief: Love and Longing in Old New York* is inspired by letters from the original newspaper column and her own personal memoirs. The following pages represent a small selection of Finck’s adaptations of original *Bintel Brief* letters.

Graphic novels and comics are wonderful mediums to bridge multiple literacies and scaffold student learning. Ask your students to bring these letters to life through their own illustration and graphic memoir writing. The template below may help students begin to visualize laying out their stories.

Teachers are encouraged to view the New York City Blueprint for Teaching and Learning in Visual Arts, available in the Education section of our website, for more information on incorporating art in your lesson plans.
This story began for me on a visit to my grandparents’ apartment when I was a kid.

My grandparents kept their home very neat. The only worn-out thing they owned was an old, yellow notebook I found on a shelf that day.

I had time to notice that it was pasted full of newspaper clippings in a foreign language—before something very unusual happened.
And that was the last I saw of the Bintel Brief for a long time.

Many years later, I was living in New York. One day, I received a mysterious package in the mail. It was from my grandmother. When I opened it, there was the notebook!

I hid it under a pile of stuff.

("Stuff")

Even so, it was hard to concentrate knowing that the strange, portentous object was nearby.

Finally, I couldn't take the tension anymore.
I tiptoed over to the notebook, and opened it. Then I stood back and waited.

Soon enough, a man climbed out!
He was old-fashioned.
He was otherworldly.

I watched as he brushed himself off and looked around.

My name is Abraham Cahan. Um... What were you doing in that notebook?

It was a long story...
"I was," he said, "the editor of a small socialist Yiddish newspaper called Der Forverts.*

*The Forward

The year was 1906.

Within the next few years, the paper was to become very big, but at that time we still ran it from a dingy office on Duane Street, and I had to use all my wits to keep it out of the hands of pedants.

We still needed something for the back page...

Well...

How about a palindrome in High German?

Or a diary expose of how the factory workers are mistreated?

Or a rambling Marxist rant?

Our readers do not speak High German. And they already know how hard life is in the factory - because they are factory workers. As for Marxism: this is a newspaper, not a Snoopy paper!

Excuse me, if I might interrupt.

JEEZ!

A letter from one of your readers. I don't know what we can use it for. Maybe I should throw it out?

When I opened the letter...
I knew we were onto something.

We ran it in the paper followed by a short word of advice from yours truly. It was the first installment of a new feature we called "A Bintel Brief," a bundle of letters.

That notebook of yours is full of clippings from the early years of "A Bintel Brief."

But who put them in the notebook?

That, I don't know.

After a short silence, he licked his (translucent) finger in a way that reminded me...
of my grandpa.

flipped through the notebook,

and started to read.
THE BRIDEGROOM
WORTHY EDITOR,

I WAS BORN IN AMERICA AND MY PARENTS GAVE ME A GOOD EDUCATION.

I STUDIED YIDDISH AND HEBREW AND GRADUATED FROM HIGH SCHOOL WITH HONORS. AFTER THAT I TOOK A COURSE IN BOOKKEEPING AND GOT A GOOD JOB.

I HAD MANY FRIENDS, AND SEVERAL BOYS PROPOSED TO ME, BUT I WASN'T READY.

INSTEAD, I WENT TO VISIT MY PARENTS' HOMETOWN IN RUSSIAN POLAND.

MY MOTHER'S YOUNGER SISTER WAS GETTING MARRIED. MY PARENTS Couldn't go to the wedding, so they sent me instead.

I SAILED ON A FIRST-CLASS TICKET.

MY AUNT, MY UNCLE AND MY GRANDMOTHER WELCOMED ME WITH TEARS OF JOY. I STAYED WITH THEM SIX MONTHS AND LACKED FOR NOTHING.

IT WAS LIVELY IN THE TOWN.

AMONG THE SOCIAL LEADERS OF THE COMMUNITY WAS AN INTELLIGENT YOUNG MAN, A FRIEND OF MY UNCLE WHO TOOK ME TO VARIOUS GATHERINGS.

ONE DAY, HE DECLARED HIS LOVE FOR ME IN A BEAUTIFUL LETTER.

I WAS ACCEPTED WARMLY INTO ALL THE ORGANIZATIONS AND CLUBS. AFTER ALL, I WAS A CITIZEN OF THE "GOLDEN LAND."

HIS PROPOSAL DID NOT TAKE ME ENTIRELY BY SURPRISE. STILL, IT WORRIED ME. HE WAS NOT THE MAN I HAD IMAGINED FOR MYSELF.
My parents heard about it, and I could tell they were delighted.

He was handsome, clever, refined and a brilliant talker, but I hesitated to give him an answer.

Gradually, though, our differences began to seem trivial. I wrote to my parents and we became engaged.

A few months later, I brought him back to America with me. My parents embraced him as their own son.

He set about learning English.

Then, I introduced him to my friends...
"This greenhorn is your fiancé?" they asked.

I told them what a big role he played in his town, how everyone respected him, but they looked at me like I was crazy.

In time, I was affected by their talk. I began to think, like them, that I was betrothed to some "primitive."

At first I thought, let them laugh. Eventually they'll change their tune, but they didn't.

In short, my love for him is cooling off gradually. I'm suffering terribly because my feelings for him are changing.

In Europe, he looked like Prince Charming.

But here, he's a bumpkin from the old country.

I don't have the courage to break off my engagement.

I can't even talk to my parents about it.

He still loves me with all his heart and I just don't know what to do.

Respectfully, a worried reader.
The writer would make a grave mistake if she were to separate from her bridegroom now. She must not lose her common sense and be influenced by the foolish opinions of her friends who divide the world into "greenhorns" and real Americans.

We can assure the writer that her bridegroom will master English quickly. He will know American history and literature as well as her friends do, and be a better American than them. She should be proud of his love and laugh at those who call him a "greenhorn."
Listed below are the New York State Next Generation Learning Standards in Social Studies and ELA for Grades 4, 8, 11 & 12. We focus on these grades because they adhere to the curriculum guidelines for New York State and U.S. History. Educators in other grades and subject areas are welcome to use these materials.

**Grade 4**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Framework Practices</th>
<th>4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.6</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New York State Social Studies Framework Practices</td>
<td>4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York State Next Generation ELA Learning Standards</td>
<td>4R1, 4R2, 4R3, 4R9, 4W4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Common Core Learning Standards for English Language Arts &amp; Literacy</td>
<td>RI.4.1, RI.4.3, RI.4.10, W.4.1, W.4.3</td>
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**Grade 8**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Framework Practices</th>
<th>8.2 (2a,2b,2c,2d)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New York State Social Studies Framework Practices</td>
<td>8.2 (2a,2b,2c,2d)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York State Next Generation ELA Learning Standards</td>
<td>8R2, 8R9, 8W4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Common Core Learning Standards for English Language Arts &amp; Literacy</td>
<td>RI.6.4, RI.6.6, W.6.3</td>
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**Grade 11 & 12**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Framework Practices</th>
<th>11.5</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New York State Social Studies Framework Practices</td>
<td>11.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York State Next Generation ELA Learning Standards</td>
<td>11-12R2, 11-12R6, 11-12R9, 11-12W4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Common Core Learning Standards for English Language Arts &amp; Literacy</td>
<td>RI.11-12.6, W.11-12.3,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term</td>
<td>Definition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-Semitism</td>
<td>Hostility to, prejudice, or discrimination against Jews.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conscription</td>
<td>Conscription, sometimes called the “draft,” is the compulsory enlistment of people in a national service, most often a military service.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrant</td>
<td>A person who moves from one country to another to live permanently.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greenhorn</td>
<td>A person who is naïve or easily tricked. A derogatory term for a person who is in a new place and is unfamiliar with the language and customs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May Laws</td>
<td>Regulations enacted by the Russian government in the 1880s that prohibited Jews from moving towns, conducting business, owning and selling property and participating in local elections. Schools enacted quotas, limiting the number of Jewish students who could attend.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peddler</td>
<td>Peddlers sold food, clothes or household items. Some traveled across the country selling their wares. In New York City immigrants often sold items from carts in the street.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pogrom</td>
<td>A violent riot aimed at the massacre or persecution of an ethnic or religious group, particularly one aimed at Jews.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refugee</td>
<td>A person who is forced to leave their home country due to war, persecution or natural disaster.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union</td>
<td>An organized group of workers who unite to make decisions about conditions affecting their work. This includes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scab</td>
<td>A derogatory term for a strikebreaker. A person who works despite an ongoing strike.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shirtwaist</td>
<td>A style of tailored women’s blouse from the turn-of-the-19th century.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shtetl</td>
<td>The Yiddish word for a small Jewish town or village.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strike</td>
<td>A refusal to work, organized by workers, as a form of protest, typically in an attempt to gain a concession or concessions from their employer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenement</td>
<td>A building containing many family apartments. Tenements have a reputation for being overcrowded, dirty, and undesirable.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Elementary School

Letters from Rivkah by Karen Hesse
Twelve-year-old Rifka’s journey from a Jewish community in the Ukraine to Ellis Island is anything but smooth sailing. Modeled on the author’s great-aunt, Rifka surmounts one obstacle after another including soldiers, disease and family separation. Told in the form of "letters" written by Rifka in the margins of a volume of Pushkin’s verse and addressed to a Russian relative, Hesse’s vivacious tale colorfully and convincingly refreshes the immigrant experience.

When Jessie Came Across the Sea by Amy Hest
Jessie lives with her grandmother in a poor village in the valleys of Eastern Europe. When, to everyone’s surprise, young Jessie is chosen by the village rabbi to travel to America, and to leave her grandmother behind, they both feel their hearts will break. The book follows Jessie across the sea and discovers a new life—and a new love—in America.

Brave Girl: Clara and the Shirtwaist Maker’s Strike of 1909 by Michelle Markel
This illustrated biographical account tells the story of immigrant labor activist Clara Lelmlich. When Clara arrived in America, she couldn’t speak English. She didn’t know that young women had to go to work, that they traded an education for long hours of labor, that she was expected to grow up fast. But that didn’t stop Clara. Fed up with the mistreatment of her fellow laborers, Clara led the largest walkout of women workers the country had seen.

All-of-a-Kind Family by Sydney Taylor
Meet sisters Ella, Henny, Sarah, Charlotte and Gertie who live with their parents on the Lower East Side at the turn-of-the-century. Together they help their parents, celebrate
Middle and High School

City of Dreams: The 400 Year Epic History of Immigrant New York by Tyler Anbiner
With more than three million foreign-born residents today, New York has been America’s defining port of entry for nearly four centuries. City of Dreams provides a vivid sense of what New York looked like, sounded like, smelled like, and felt like over the centuries of its development and maturation into the city we know today.

The Rise of David Levinsky by Abraham Cahan
Cahan’s realistic novel tells the story of a young talmudic scholar who emigrates from a small town in Russia to the melting pot of turn-of-the-century New York City. As the Jewish “greenhorn” rises from the depths of poverty to become a millionaire garment merchant, he discovers the unbearably high price of assimilation.

A Bintel Brief: Love and Longing in Old New York by Liana Finck
In an illustrative style that is a thrilling mash-up of Art Spiegelman’s deft emotionality, Roz Chast’s hilarious neuroses, and the magical spirit of Marc Chagall, A Bintel Brief is Liana Finck’s evocative, elegiac love letter to the turn-of-the-century Jewish immigrants who transformed New York City and America itself.

World of Our Fathers by Irving Howe
Irving Howe traces the story of Eastern Europe’s Jews to America over four decades. Beginning in the 1880s, it offers a rich portrayal of the East European Jewish experience in New York, and shows how the immigrant generation tried to maintain their Yiddish culture while becoming American.

A Bintel Brief: Sixty Years of Letters from the Lower East Side to the Jewish Daily Forward by Isaac Metzker
For more than eighty years the Jewish Daily Forward’s legendary advice column, “A Bintel Brief” (“a bundle of letters”) dispensed shrewd, practical, and fair-minded advice to its readers. Created in 1906 to help bewildered Eastern European immigrants learn about their new country, the column also gave them a forum for seeking advice and support in the face of problems ranging from wrenching spiritual dilemmas to petty family squabbles to the sometimes-hilarious predicaments that result when Old World meets New.

How the Other Half Lives by Jacob Riis
Nonfiction. Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1890.
A pioneering work of photojournalism by Jacob Riis, this book documents the squalid
One Foot in America by Yuri Suhl  
_Fiction. Yuri Suhl, 1950._
A coming-of-age tale about Sol Kenner’s first three years in America, living with his orthodox father in a tenement flat in Brooklyn. Sol works as a butcher boy, takes evening courses, battles anti-Semitic bullies and falls in love as he tries to become a “regular sport” and an American.

Triangle, The Fire That Changed America by David Von Drehle  
A poignantly detailed account of the 1911 Triangle Shirtwaist Factory disaster that horrified the country and changed the course of twentieth-century politics and labor relations.

Breadgivers by Anzia Yezerskia  
_Fiction. Persea Books, 1925._
Set in the 1920s on the Lower East Side of Manhattan this novel tells the story of Sara Smolinsky, the youngest daughter of an Orthodox rabbi, who rebels against her father’s rigid conception of Jewish womanhood.
ABOUT THE MUSEUM AT ELDRIDGE STREET
The Museum at Eldridge Street is housed in the Eldridge Street Synagogue, a magnificent National Historic Landmark that has been meticulously restored. Opened in 1887, the synagogue is the first great house of worship built in America by Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe. Today, it is the only remaining marker of the great wave of Jewish migration to the Lower East Side that is open to a broad public who wish to visit Jewish New York. Exhibits, tours, cultural events and educational programs tell the story of Jewish immigrant life, explore architecture and historic preservation, inspire reflection on cultural continuity, and foster collaboration and exchange between people of all faiths, heritages and interests.

While the Eldridge Street Synagogue’s neighborhood was once the heart of the Jewish Lower East Side, today it is a part of a vibrant Chinatown. The Museum honors its place in this continuing immigrant context welcoming visitors of all faiths and cultural backgrounds. Further, every June the Museum presents our signature Egg Rolls, Egg Creams and Empanadas Festival. This event celebrates the diverse Jewish, Chinese and Puerto Rican communities of the neighborhood and features music, folk arts, food and crafts enjoyed by thousands of people. Today, the Museum at Eldridge Street stands as a dazzling addition to our nation’s cultural, historic and architectural landscape.

FIND OUT MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE MUSEUM AT ELDRIDGESTREET.ORG.

VISIT OUR EDUCATION PAGE ONLINE TO ACCESS THIS CURRICULUM, AS WELL AS INFORMATION ABOUT BOOKING A VISIT FOR YOUR CLASSROOM, AT ELDRIDGESTREET.ORG/K-12-UNIVERSITY.