



Ways We Worship

Pre-Visit Activities

In 1887, the Eldridge Street Synagogue became the first great house of worship built by Eastern European Jews in America. Today it is an active synagogue, museum, and a National Historic Landmark.



Learning Objectives

- A synagogue is a place where Jewish people pray, study and celebrate together.
- While synagogues each have their own unique design and traditions, they all have several key elements in common.
- When the Eldridge Street Synagogue opened in 1887, it offered congregants a space unlike the places where they lived and worked.

Vocabulary

Here are some words you can discuss in class prior to your visit to Eldridge Street.

Synagogue: A Jewish house of worship, used for prayer and celebrating holidays.

Orthodox Judaism: A branch of Judaism that closely follows Jewish law and traditions.

Torah: A hand-written scroll containing the five books of Moses.

Shabbat (Pronounced Sha-baht): The Jewish day of rest also known as the Sabbath. Shabbat is the seventh day of the week and begins Friday at sundown and lasts until Saturday night.

Rabbi: A Jewish leader of the congregation and teacher of the Torah.

Cantor: A person who leads prayer services in a synagogue through singing.

Questions to Discuss

- Where are some places that you like to spend time with your family? Your community? Why are these places important to you?
- Have you ever been inside of a worship space, such as a church, mosque, temple or synagogue? What did it look like?
- What are some things about synagogues and Jewish traditions that you would like to know more about?

* Students can come with a list of pre-written questions, or you can email us their questions ahead of the tour. This handout also includes a list of suggested readings and websites

When you come to the museum, look for...

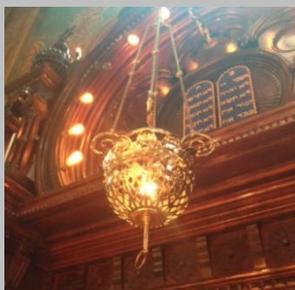
Ark

Also known as the Aron Ha'Kodesh, this holy cabinet along the eastern wall houses the Torah Scrolls.



Ner Tamid

Known in English as the Eternal Light, this hangs in the front of the sanctuary. Why do you think it is called the Eternal Light?



Bimah

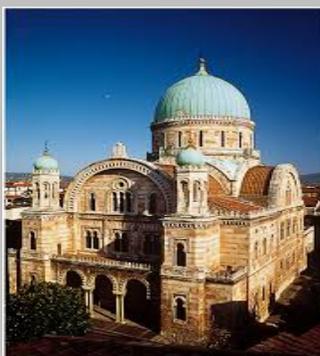
Called the Reader's Platform in English, this is where the Torah scrolls are unrolled and read during services.



FUN FACT: Look at the examples of synagogues below. While each building is different you will find the Ark, Ner Tamid and Bimah in every synagogue in the world.



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Activity Ideas

- With your students watch the True Tube Clip *Holy Cribbs: The Synagogue*: <https://www.truetube.co.uk/lesson-plan/synagogue>. This can provide an introduction to synagogue spaces as well as vocabulary related to synagogues and Jewish traditions.
- Discuss how visiting a synagogue might be the same or different as going to places like school, home, or the park. What are the expectations of dress, behavior, goals, etc.
- The Eldridge Street Synagogue was built with the intention of being completely different from everyday life in the Lower East Side. Using the Pre & Post visit handout students will compare the sights and sounds of the Lower East Side with the experience of worshipping at Eldridge Street.

Ex: When looking at the picture of the neighborhood you can see people shopping and carrying things in the street. It must have been very noisy.

If you were coming to Eldridge Street Synagogue it must have been very serious. There are lots of benches so people must be sitting and resting.



Ways We Worship

So You're Visiting a Synagogue?

For many immigrants, living on the Lower East Side was an everyday challenge. Worship at the Eldridge Street Synagogue was meant to provide a very different experience. Using the chart below prepare your students for their visit to the Museum at Eldridge Street by comparing and contrasting living in the Lower East Side with the experience of worship at Eldridge Street

Pre-Visit

The Neighborhood



Imagine you are a newly arrived immigrant to the Lower East Side. Look at the above image. Describe what you see:

How might you feel if you were walking through this scene of the neighborhood?

The Tenement



When many immigrant arrived to the Lower East Side, they often lived in tenement apartments like the one pictured above. How would you describe this apartment?

Looking at the image what do you think might be the challenges of living in a tenement?

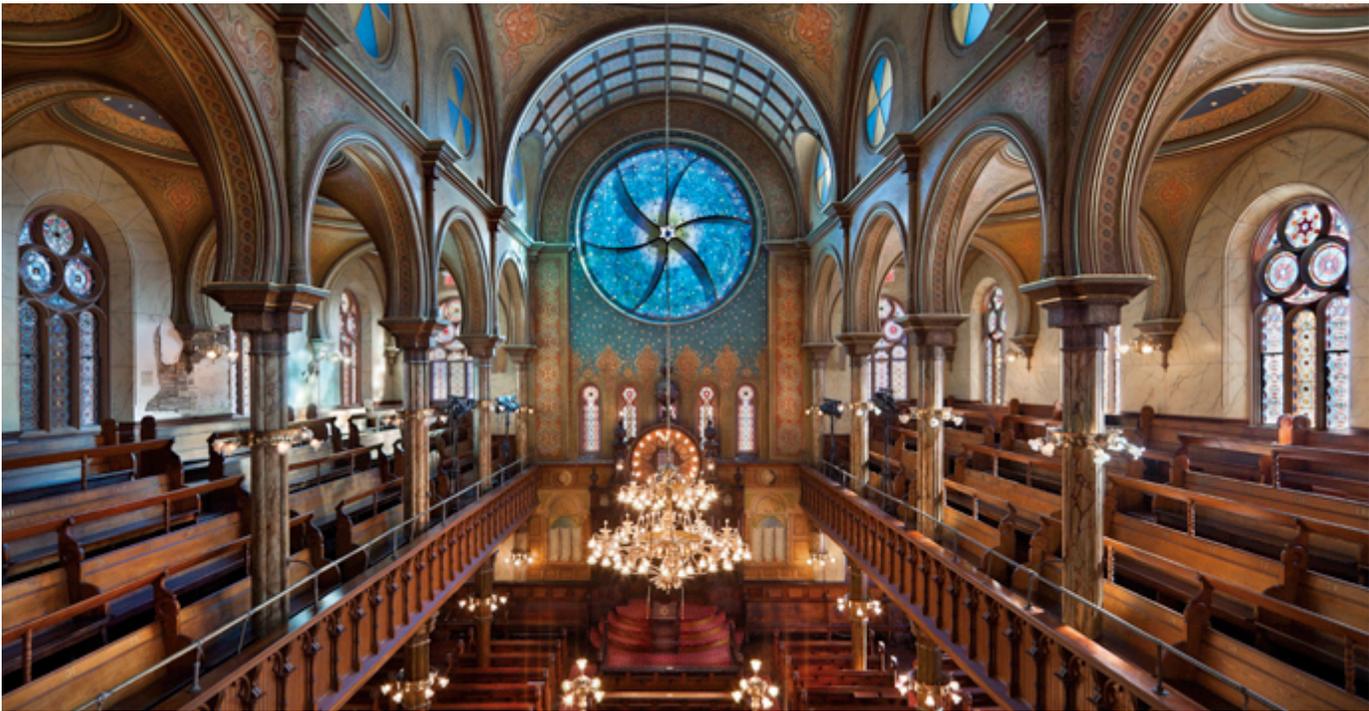


Ways We Worship

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Post Visit

Now that you have visited the Museum at Eldridge Street, think about how this building was designed to be different from life in the neighborhood and the tenements. Use your responses in the Pre-Visit section to guide your responses.



Imagine it is 1887 and you are attending a service at Eldridge Street for the first time. Write about your experience of going there. What did you wear? How did the sights, sounds and smells change as you went from your home to the synagogue?



Suggested Readings

What You Will See Inside a Synagogue

Author: Eric A. Kimmel

Grades: 3-6

About: This book emphasizes the synagogue's core purpose as a house of prayer, learning, and community and focuses on the weekly Shabbat service, holidays, and life cycle events. 31 pp; illustrated. Excerpted from School Library Journal.

The Tattooed Torah

Author: Marvell Ginsburg

Grades: 3-5

About: Based on the true story of the rescue and restoration of a small Torah from Brno, Czechoslovakia. 32 pp; illustrations; Excerpted from Publisher's description.

Menorahs, Mezuzas, and Other Jewish Symbols

Author: Miriam Chaikin

Grades: Grades 4-6

About: From the Star of David to the yarmulke; from numbers to angels to stars, this book explores the significance of familiar – and less familiar symbols – in Jewish life. 112 pages; illustrations.

Sofer: The Story of a Torah Scroll

Author: Eric Ray

Grades: Middle school

About: Children learn how a sofer (scribe) makes mezuzot, tefillin, and the sefer Torah. This book is somewhat text heavy, but can serve as a useful reference. 32 pp; photographs.

Landmark of the Spirit: The Eldridge Street Synagogue

Author: Annie Polland

Grades: High school and beyond

About: The complete and fascinating history of the rise, the near fall, and the rise again of Eldridge Street Synagogue on New York's Lower East Side. 192 pp; illustrations and photographs.

American Synagogues: A Century of Architecture and Jewish Community

Author: Samuel Gruber

Grades: High school and beyond

About: How was Jewish history expressed in 20th century synagogue design? This architectural tour includes synagogues designed by Frank Lloyd Wright, Philip Johnson, and Minoru Yamasaki. 240 pp; photographs by Paul Rocheleau. Excerpted from Amazon.

And I Shall Dwell Among Them: Historic Synagogues of the World

Author: Yom Tov Assis

Grades: High school and beyond

About: The architectural diversity of these historic synagogues not only reflect the countries they were built in, but they also reveal the Jewish story of migration and survival. 176 pp; photographs by Neil Folberg.

Websites

MyJewishLearning.com: <http://www.myjewishlearning.com/>

About: MyJewishLearning.com is a trans denominational website of Jewish information and education. Offering articles and resources on all aspects of Judaism and Jewish life, the site is geared toward adults of all ages and backgrounds.

TrueTube: <https://www.truetube.co.uk>

About: TrueTube is an award-winning website for schools that provides videos, lesson plans and assembly scripts. Geared towards young people, TrueTube was originally started to encourage young people to make films dealing with the issues they cared about. As the library of films grew, the purpose of the site evolved to include lesson plans and assembly plans to help teachers use films in the classroom.