

TEACHER'S GUIDE

Primary Source Document Collection

MISSION 4: "City of Immigrants"

An Immigrant Girl Writes to the Bintel Brief for Advice

The Jewish Daily Forward was a Yiddish-language newspaper established in 1897 by a group of Jewish socialists. By 1912 the paper had a circulation of 120,000. The "Bintel Brief" ("Bintel" means "bundle" in Yiddish; "Brief" means "letter") was the paper's advice column. In the following document, a young girl writes to the paper's editors seeking advice on whether she should go to work or stay in school.

1907

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 boarders 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.

Answer:

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.

Source: Isaac Meltzer, ed., *A Bintel Brief: Sixty Years of Letters from the Lower East Side to the Jewish Daily Forward* (New York: Schocken Books, 1971).

