

# Ellis Island

## Self-Guided Activity (Grades 6-8)

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

Education Department  
Ellis Island Immigration Museum  
Statue of Liberty National Monument



Name : \_\_\_\_\_

### Ellis Island: *Dear Editor*

Based on what you have learned in class, list three factors that would encourage you leave your home country (push factors). Also, name three reasons why you would be drawn to America (pull factors).



Push Factors

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

Pull Factors

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

When Ellis Island opened in 1892, the federal government introduced a new set of immigration regulations for the country. Looking at the Baggage Room sign, what concerns do you think Americans have about newly-arrive immigrants in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century?

According to the chart, what types of jobs did male immigrants have in 1900?

Why do you think immigrants chose work in these industries? What advantages might these jobs have?



NOTE: "Manufacturing" was a catch-all term for many trades, including factory work, mining, and construction.

Source: Adapted from Abstracts of Reports of the Immigration Commission with Conclusions and Recommendations and Views of the Minority, Vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1911).

*Immigrant aid societies at Ellis Island helped immigrants in a number of ways. These organizations supplied translation services, assistance in finding a new place to live, family reunification, and may have even offered help with finding jobs. Here are some primary sources that help illustrate the challenges immigrants faced. Use the **Dear Editor** handouts to help you find some of the resources immigrants turned to for help.*

Middle-class reformers at the time wanted to document immigrant life in cities. Jacob Riis, a social activist, photographed immigrants in his book *How the Other Half Lives* (1890), around the time that Ellis Island was to be opened for immigrants. His views have often been seen as controversial.

Look for the “Dear Editor” folder (on the gray table on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor). Analyze the handout “Jacob Riis and the Progressive Era” and the photos below to help answer the questions.



Jacob Riis, *Children Sleeping on the New York Streets*, 1888



Jacob Riis, *Untitled*, *How the Other Half Lives*, 1890

What do you think Riis wanted to communicate to his audience?

What do these photographs and excerpts tell you about immigrant life in cities? Do you think these photos helped or hurt the immigrant communities?

Many immigrants often turned to advice columns in newspapers for guidance in the United States. Below are two letters written to editors of the *Bintel Brief* (or advice column) in the *Daily Forward*, an immigrant newspaper that helped many transition to the new country. Look for additional resources found in the “*Dear Editor* Newspapers” handouts to best answer these questions.

**Document 1:**

1908

*Esteemed Editor,*

*We were sitting in the shop and working when the boss came over to one of us and said, “You ruined the work: you’ll have to pay for it.” The worker answered that it wasn’t his fault that he had given out the work in perfect condition. “You’re trying to tell me!” The boss got mad and began to shout. “I pay your wages and you answer back, you dog! I should have thrown you out of my shop long ago.”*

*The worker trembled, his face got whiter. When the boss noticed how his face paled, he gestured, spat and walked away. The worker said no more. Tired, and overcome with shame, he turned back to his work and later he exclaimed, “For six years I’ve been working here like a slave, and he tells me, ‘You dog, I’ll throw you out!’ I wanted to pick up an iron and smash his head in, but I saw before me my wife and five children who want to eat!”*

*Obviously, the offended man felt he had done wrong in not standing up for his honor as a worker and human being. In the shop, the machines, hummed, the irons thumped, and we could see the tears running down his cheeks.*

*Did this unfortunate man act correctly in remaining silent under the insults of the boss? Is the fact that he has a wife and children the reason for his slavery and refusal to defend himself? I hope you will answer my questions in the “Bintel Brief.”*

*Respectfully,*

*A.P.*

What is the person describing in this letter? Where do you think he/she can turn to for help?

Keeping the previous activities in mind, what advice would you give to the author of this letter?

Could finding an organization at Ellis Island help you settle or would you suspect these organizations would take advantage of you?

## LOCATING JEWS IN EUROPE.

**Immigrant Aid Society Opens New York Bureau to Restore Communication Between Separated Kin.**

NEW YORK, Aug 31—The European war has cut off so many Jews in Russian and Austrian Provinces from their kin in this country that the Hebrew Sheltering and Immigrant Aid Society has organized a bureau to cooperate with organizations abroad in locating the lost ones. Since the war began about 800 persons have been put in touch with friends here and letters and money have been forwarded to them.

Among the appeals sent to the bureau the following from Boston is typical: "We are four children who supported our aged parents in Austria by regular monthly remittances, but since the war broke out we do not hear from them."

Judge Leon Sanders is president of the society and the headquarters are at 229 East Broadway.

Newspaper clipping, circa 1914

Based on what you learned in the "Dear Editor" activity, what types of questions would you ask as a newly-arrived immigrant?



Mulberry Street in New York City, circa 1900