

Liana Finck's "A Bintel Brief: Love and Longing in Old New York"

A GREAT JEWISH BOOKS TEACHER WORKSHOP RESOURCE KIT

Teachers' Guide

This guide accompanies resources that can be found at: <http://www.teachgreatjewishbooks.org/resource-kits/liana-fincks-bintel-brief-love-and-longing-old-new-york>.

Introduction

Cartoonist Liana Finck's *A Bintel Brief: Love and Longing in Old New York* (2014) is a graphic novel about a young woman who finds an old notebook filled with clippings from the Yiddish-language advice column, *A Bintel Brief*. Translated as "bundle of letters," this popular feature of the *Forverts* (also known as *The Jewish Daily Forward* in English) appeared in the socialist Yiddish newspaper for the first time in 1906, nine years after Abraham Cahan founded the paper. Readers would send letters to the editor asking for advice on everything from love to the challenges of immigration and assimilation. Finck's graphic novel intersperses a fantastical story about this narrator, who lives in current-day Manhattan and converses with the ghost of Cahan, with eleven letters from the original *Bintel Brief*, translated from Yiddish to English and from prose to comics.

This resource kit provides original letters to the editor and newspaper clippings, video clips, photographs, and an excerpt from another graphic novel to help students think about the history, context, and structure that frames Finck's powerful work of visual and verbal translation.

Subjects

Immigration, New York, Women Writers, Yiddish, Graphic Novels and Comics

Reading and Background

- Liana Finck's *A Bintel Brief: Love and Longing in Old New York* was published in 2014 by Ecco Press.
- For background on Liana Finck, see "Liana Finck: Yiddish Graphic Novelist" by John Marchese on the Yiddish Book Center's website, "Interview with Liana Finck" by Rachel Morgenstern-Clarren on *Words Without Borders*, and "A Bintel Brief: An Interview with Liana Finck" by Mikki Pugh on the Jewish Women's Archive website. For engaging audio interviews with Liana Finck about the graphic novel and her process more generally, listen to "Illustrating Letters to a Yiddish Advice Column," an episode of the Yiddish Book Center's podcast, and "Cartoonist Liana Finck Rides the Train to Nowhere," published by the *New Yorker Radio Hour* and posted on the WNYC website. See also Finck's *New Yorker* contributions, which include an illustrated modern-day advice column, Dear Pepper, or her popular Instagram account, @lianafinck, which includes a number of political cartoons. She was also recently interviewed for *The Believer* about her new memoir, *Passing for Human*.
- For a brief summary of the original *Bintel Brief*'s history as well as a selection of six letters and responses (from 1908 - 1945), see Jennifer Siegel's "A Community of Readers" (2007) published online in the *Forward*. A book-length selection of translated letters and responses from sixty years of *Bintel Brief* is collected in Isaac Metzker's edited volume, *A Bintel Brief: Sixty Years of Letters from the Lower East Side to the Jewish Daily Forward* (1990); the editor's introduction in the book also provides a helpful background.
- A short biography of the founder and editor of the *Forverts* newspaper Abraham Cahan, reprinted with permission from *Jewish American Literature: A Norton Anthology*, can be found in [this article](#) on *MyJewishLearning.com*; for a longer recent biography, see Seth Lipsky's *The Rise of Abraham Cahan* (2013).
- For a scholarly discussion of Finck's graphic novel, see the concluding chapter in "How Come Boys Get to Keep Their Noses?": *Women and Jewish American Identity in Contemporary Graphic Memoirs* (2016) by Tahneer Oksman.
- For background on another *Forverts* feature included in Finck's book, "The Gallery of Missing Husbands," see "Di Farshvundene Mener and Agunes: The National Desertion Bureau in New York City" on Mapping Yiddish New York: A Columbia University Project (Oct. 4, 2017).
- For useful resources on how to read comics and graphic novels, consider Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics* (1994)



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and Will Eisner's *Comics and Sequential Art* (2008).

Resources