



TEACHING THROUGH BOOKS

POVERTY

BY DEREK ACORN, ALANNA KING, AND MELANIE MULCASTER

LEARNING FOCUS

Poverty refers to a lack of money to acquire basic needs such as food, clothing, and shelter. It is something that affects many families in Canada. Poverty can create cyclical inequities in all aspects of life, including health care, education, where you live, and how you feel about yourself.

Identity: In what ways might poverty affect my community?

Skills: How might we define poverty? How might we describe the differences between communities who live in poverty around the world?

Intellectualism: What role might access to health supports, education, and skills play in reducing poverty rates?

Criticality: Can poverty happen to everyone? Are some populations more predisposed to poverty than others? Where do inequalities exist and why?

Joy: How might our actions help contribute to change and help reduce poverty?

THEME: Diversity

SUB-THEME:

Poverty

GRADE LEVELS:

Elementary (K-3)

Middle School (4-8)

High School (9-12)



POVERTY | ELEMENTARY LEVEL

BY DEREK ACORN

FEATURED BOOK



The One with the Scraggly Beard by Elizabeth Withey, illustrated by Lynn Scurfield (Orca Book Publishers, 2020)
 Also available in FR: *L'Homme à la barbe hirsute* par Elizabeth Withey, illustré par Lynn Scurfield (Orca Book Publishers, 2020)

LEARNING EXPERIENCE

MINDS ON PROVOCATION

The teacher will display pictures of different types of homes (houses from around the world, apartments, tents, cardboard boxes, etc.). After observing the different homes, have students describe what they have in common.

Next, the teacher guides a discussion on homes:

- What makes a good home?
- Why is having a home important?
- What basic need(s) does having a home fulfill?
- How might you feel when you are in a safe home?
- Does everyone have a home?

Students will draw their ideal home and add descriptive words and feelings to their pictures. Younger students may need a co-created word bank prior to adding the words to their drawings.

Students may recognize that having a home is important, but will need context to understand that not everyone has a home. Prior to reading the book, it is important they understand that homelessness is a problem that affects people in many communities in Canada and around the world.





READ, PLAN, AND PRACTICE

Before Reading:

Display the cover of the featured book using a book camera, or use a photo and project a large version of the cover.

Create a Venn diagram or another type of comparison chart to compare and contrast the man with the beard and the little boy.

During Reading:

If possible, use a document camera to project the text and images.

After each double-page spread, pause and ask students if there is anything new to add to their diagram.

Some questions that could be used to spark reflection and discussion include:

- What did the words tell us was the same or different about the man with the beard and the little boy?
- What do we see in the illustration that is the same or different about the man with the beard and the little boy?

After Reading:

Review the similarities and differences that students recorded.

Discuss the following questions:

- What things did the little boy have that the man with the beard did not?
- How did the little boy and his mother treat the man with the beard?

Read the Author's Note from the end of the book. From this note we learn that the author's brother is experiencing homelessness.

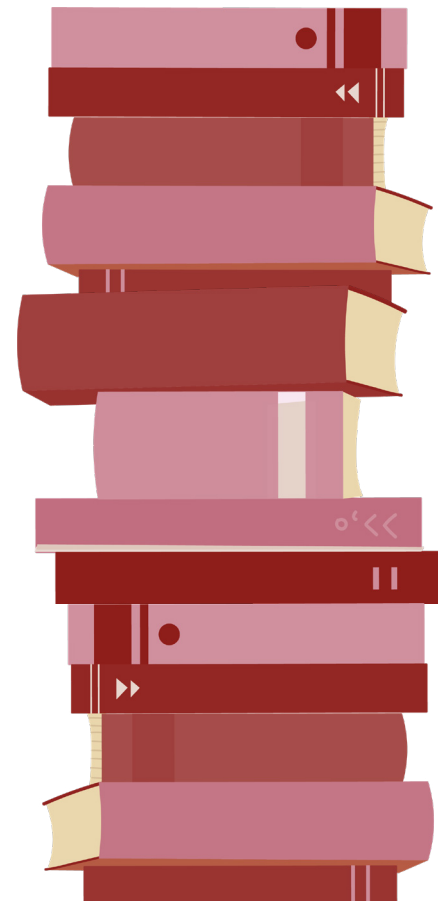
- How does the author feel about her brother experiencing homelessness?
- How do you think you would feel if someone you loved was experiencing homelessness?

MAKE, TINKER, AND MODIFY

Choose one or all of the following activities:

Acrostic Poem

Create a collaborative or individual acrostic poem using the word "HOMELESS" to help students communicate their thoughts and feelings about the issue. For younger students, co-create a word bank if they are going to do the activity individually. If doing it collaboratively, students should come up with a selection of words for each letter as a group, then decide together which one is the best choice.





Illustrating Wants and Needs

Humans need air, water, food, and shelter to survive. Humans also possess and desire many things that are not necessary to survival. Divide a sheet of paper into two sections: one section for needs and the other for wants. Have students illustrate air, water, food, and shelter on the needs side of the paper. On the wants side, have them draw things they like that are not necessary to survival. After they are done drawing, discuss the difference between wants and needs. Which basic needs might be difficult to meet for someone who is homeless?

Design a House

What does a good home need? Have students design a home using recycled materials, LEGO, or wooden planks such as KEVA planks. Have them explain their home to a classmate or have them record a tour using [Flip](#). Students can reflect and share on:

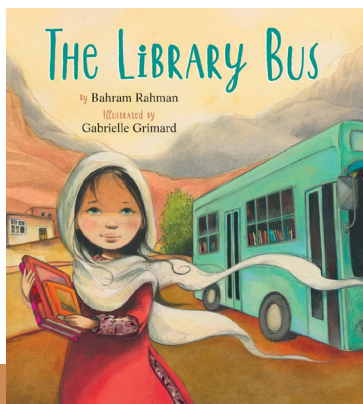
- What are the most important elements of a good home?
- What basic needs does this home help fulfill?
- What makes the home you designed special?

REFLECT AND CONNECT

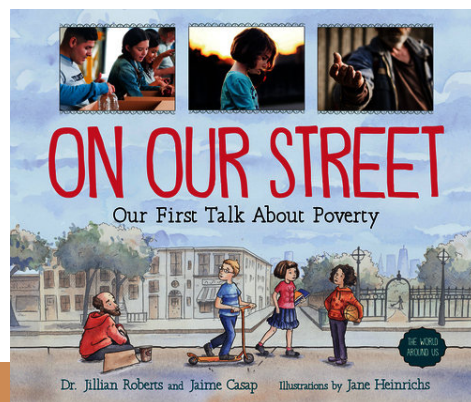
Reflect back on the idea of homelessness.

- What are some things being done in your community to help address homelessness?
- What could be done at the classroom level or the school level to help support organizations that address homelessness in your community?
- How could you help spread awareness in your community?

ADDITIONAL CANADIAN BOOKS TO SUPPORT THIS SUB-THEME



The Library Bus by Bahram Rahman, illustrated by Gabrielle Grimard (Pajama Press, 2020)
Also available in FR: *Le bibliobus* par Bahram Rahman, illustré par Gabrielle Grimard (Éditions Scholastic, 2021)



On Our Street: Our First Talk about Poverty by Dr. Jillian Roberts and Jaime Casap, illustrated by Jane Heinrichs (Orca Book Publishers, 2018)
Also available in FR: *Et si on parlait de la pauvreté ?* par Dre Jillian Roberts et Jaime Casap, illustré par Jane Heinrichs (Québec Amérique, 2021)



POVERTY | MIDDLE SCHOOL LEVEL

BY MELANIE MULCASTER

FEATURED BOOK



More than Money: How Economic Inequality Affects Everything by Hadley Dyer and Mitchell Bernard, illustrated by Paul Gill (Annick Press, 2022)

LEARNING EXPERIENCE

MINDS ON PROVOCATION

Part One:

Pose the following questions to the class: What is inequality? How does it relate to poverty?

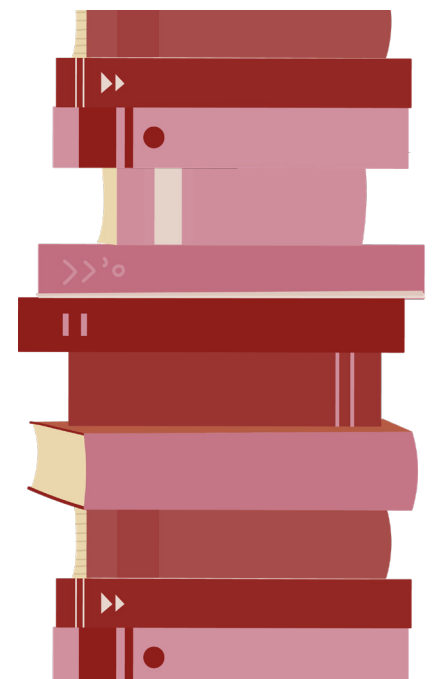
If available, provide students with an assortment of loose parts (e.g. LEGO, playdough, pipe cleaners, etc.). Students will create something that represents inequality as it relates to poverty. Have students label their creation with a title.

Students will then share what their creations represent with each other and the class. If time permits, have a gallery walk.

Part Two:

Pose a second question to the class: What impact does the COVID-19 pandemic have on inequality and poverty?

Provide students extra loose parts if necessary and ask them to modify their artifacts, or create something new that represents their thinking. Have students share their creations with each other in small groups and with the class. Time permitting, complete a gallery walk.





READ, PLAN, AND PRACTICE

Using a trauma-informed approach:

Before beginning the next part of the learning experience, it is important to know the learners in the environment and their lived experiences. Discussions around poverty may be personal to some students, and will require safe spaces for learning to honour, build trust, and empower all voices.

Before Reading:

The learning experiences to be explored focus on economic inequality, especially in relation to poverty. In other words, why are some people rich, while others are poor?

Have students fill out this [anticipation guide](#) individually or in groups. (Learn more about [anticipation guides](#).)

Assign students to numbered tables in small groups of 3-4. Each student will be responsible for a section of the [Jigsaw activity](#) that is going to be explored, and will also be given a statement from the anticipation guide, in which to engage in dialogue.

Tables will be numbered 1-6. Students will go to the table that has the number of their statement for further reading and discourse. At the tables, students will find [readings](#) from the featured book to provide additional perspectives on the assigned statement, as well as PDFs from the [Poverty page](#) of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals website and a [Jigsaw activity documentation sheet](#) to record their thinking and learning.

During Reading:

As a group, learners will review readings from the featured text that align with their statement. Students will record their observations and thinking through sketchnotes, illustrations, and/or words.

After Reading:

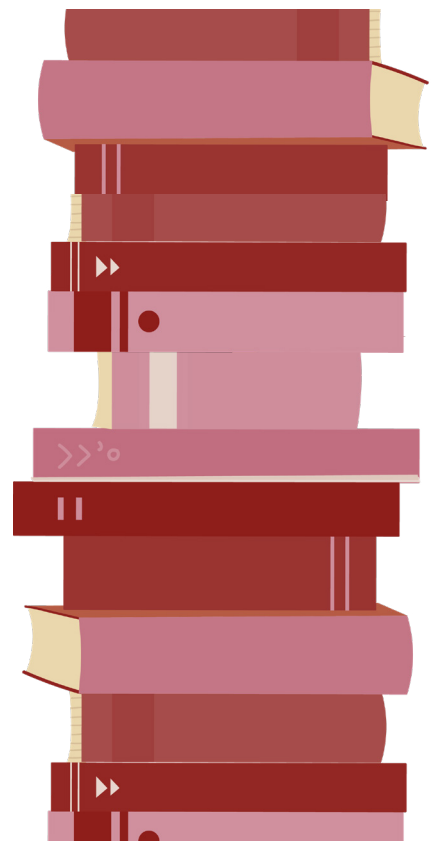
Once a set amount of time has been established, students will return to their original tables to share what they have learned. All students will update their individual Jigsaw activity documentation sheets with the learning from their classmates.

Have students share their creations with each other in small groups and with the class. Time permitting, complete a gallery walk.

MAKE, TINKER, AND MODIFY

Students revisit their anticipation guide, and re-evaluate their thinking and learning.

Students choose the anticipation guide statement that they connected with the most, or one they have more questions about. Redistribute the loose parts from the Minds On





Provocation activity and ask students to make something that reflects new learning, affirms current thinking, or represents questions that they still have. Ask learners to create a statement describing their artifact on a cue card using only six words.

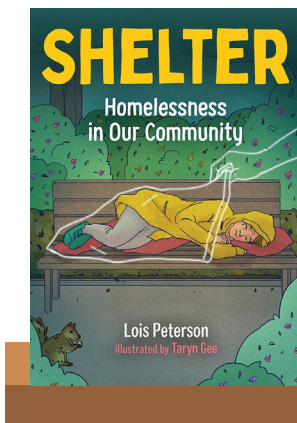
Have students share their creations with each other in small groups and with the class. Time permitting, complete a gallery walk.

REFLECT AND CONNECT

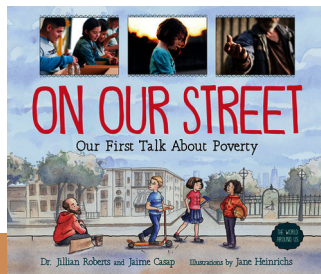
To review, reflect, and summarize learning, in small groups or individually, ask students to complete a variation of the [5-4-3-2-1 reading strategy](#).

If possible, share learning with the class and post for viewing.

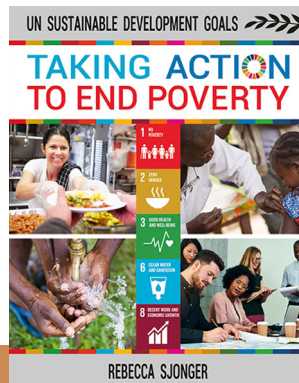
ADDITIONAL CANADIAN BOOKS TO SUPPORT THIS SUB-THEME



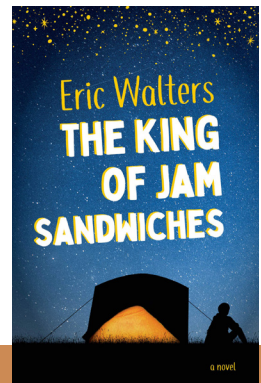
Shelter: Homelessness in Our Community by Lois Peterson, illustrated by Taryn Gee (Orca Book Publishers, 2021)



On Our Street: Our First Talk about Poverty by Dr. Jillian Roberts and Jaime Casap, illustrated by Jane Heinrichs (Orca Book Publishers, 2018)
Also available in FR: *Et si on parlait de la pauvreté ?* par Dre Jillian Roberts et Jaime Casap, illustré par Jane Heinrichs (Québec Amérique, 2021)



Taking Action to End Poverty by Rebecca Sjonger (Crabtree Classics, 2019)



The King of Jam Sandwiches by Eric Walters (Orca Book Publishers, 2020)



POVERTY | HIGH SCHOOL LEVEL

BY ALANNA KING

FEATURED BOOKS (LITERATURE CIRCLE TEXTS)



LEARNING EXPERIENCE

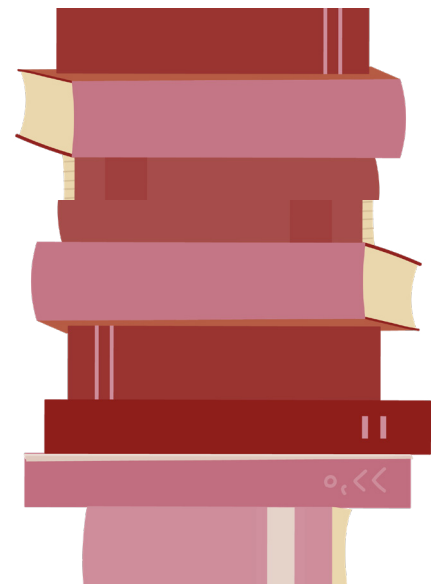
MINDS ON PROVOCATION

Share the TVO video [What Is Food Insecurity?](#) with the class. Food security is one indicator of poverty. The video describes three levels of food insecurity: marginal, moderate, and severe.

Brainstorm together the criteria used to categorize each of these levels. Make a list as a class of other criteria that could be used to categorize poverty, then, to test the hypothesis, work on the antonyms of these categories. (For example, food scarcity's antonym is food abundance.)

Using a [Frayer model](#) students can work alone or in small groups to further develop their definition.

Jigsaw exercise: Each group takes one of the following resources and analyzes the criteria used to define poverty. Then groups switch and compare ideas. Finally, the class should sort their lists to develop one common word wall for the learning environment.





- [A Decade of Deep Poverty: 2010-2021](#)
- [Dimensions of Poverty Hub](#)
- [Digital Youth Index Report](#): How poverty and the pandemic are contributing to problems for youth in the U.K.
- [Homeless and poverty in rich countries](#)

READ, PLAN, AND PRACTICE

Before Reading:

In literature circle groups (where more than one student is reading the same book from the selection), students will divide their chosen books into five relatively equal parts and agree on a weekly timeline for reading each part. Students will have one prompt per part.

Reading Prompts:

1. How might we define poverty? Is there evidence in your book so far that your main character is living in poverty? Are there others in the community who also live in poverty?
2. What type of support does your main character and their community require in terms of health, education, or other social structures?
3. Can poverty happen to everyone? Is your main character more likely to experience poverty than others in the community or in society?
4. How is your definition of poverty changing as you read? Where do inequalities exist and why?
5. How was this protagonist's journey comparable to your own so far? Were you satisfied with the ending of the book? Were there actions in the book that you agreed with or that you have questions about? Are there actions that you could take or that we could take collectively to help contribute to change and help reduce poverty?

During Reading:

Each literature circle will discuss the prompts and find evidence in their reading to justify their response.

After Reading:

Students will take note of differences in opinion and may use each other's points in their next activity, as well as their own ideas.

MAKE, TINKER, AND MODIFY

Share the TED-Ed video [What makes a hero?](#) with the class. In a realistic modern novel, aspects of the hero's journey shared in this video are more subtle but they are often still present.





Using the ideas in the video and the diagram of [Joseph Campbell's hero's journey](#), students will map the journey of their novel's main character in stages, using poverty as one of the challenges that the character must reckon with.

At each stage, students should provide an artifact from their reading. The artifact could be: an audio or video clip, a quote, an image, a piece of art, or anything that relates the protagonist's journey to the stage on the hero's journey diagram.

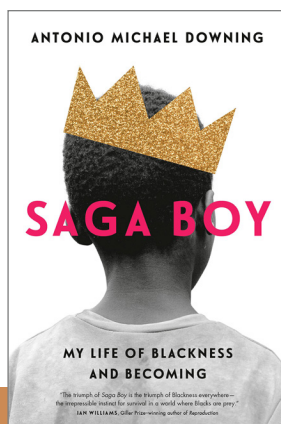
REFLECT AND CONNECT

Taking the ideas they have built individually and modified after their group discussions, students will write a 250-word response in paragraph form to the following questions:

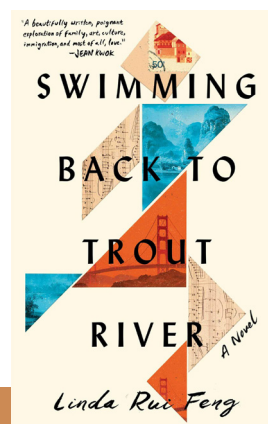
- How was the literature circle experience challenging?
- How was the literature circle experience beneficial to:
 - The process of reading?
 - Your understanding of poverty?

Students can write a final blog post that summarizes their key takeaways from this literature circle unit of study.

ADDITIONAL CANADIAN BOOKS TO SUPPORT THIS SUB-THEME



Saga Boy: My Life of Blackness and Becoming by Antonio Michael Downing (Viking, 2021)



Swimming Back to Trout River by Linda Rui Feng (Simon & Schuster, 2021)



MORE RESOURCES FOR ALL GRADE LEVELS

- [Canada's Homelessness Strategy](#): Learn about the government of Canada's homelessness strategy through this page.
- [Eradicate Extreme Poverty and Hunger](#): This learning experience, created by the Saskatchewan Council for International Cooperation, explores poverty around the globe through hands-on learning.
- [Poverty, what is it?](#): A discussion booklet for students in Grades 5-8, which includes a selection of statements, stories, and drawings from over 200 middle-grade students in Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, and New Brunswick. Create an account on [Imagineaction](#) for additional supporting materials.
- [The Town with No Poverty](#): This episode of TVO's *The Agenda* looks at the basic minimum income pilot project in Dauphin, MB.
- [United Way Canada](#) and [Just Socks](#): Here are several charitable organizations that are addressing homelessness in Canada.

