

## Lesson Plan on Poverty

November 16-December 4

Powerpoint on Social Stratification

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### Established Goals:

This lesson presents an overview of where, why, how and in what conditions poverty and homelessness exist in the United States. This lesson examines the ethical and moral issues related to society's treatment of the poor and homeless. Students will gain a greater awareness of the causes and the devastating impact poverty has on people's lives.

#### National Council for Social Studies Standards:

II. Time, Continuity, and Change  
III. Peoples, Places and Environments  
IV. Individual Development and Identity  
V. Individuals, Groups, and Institutions  
VI. Power, Authority, and Governance  
IX. Global Connections  
X. Civic Ideals and Practices

#### Transferable Concepts/Links:

Human Rights, Habitats, Social Structures, Settlement and Urbanization, Healthy Environment, Poverty, Homelessness, Citizenship, Human Geography, Economics, Sociology, International Cooperation, Collaboration, Civil Society, Humanitarian Agencies, NGOs (non-governmental organizations).

#### Course Connections:

Global Studies  
Current Events  
Geography  
Economics  
History  
Social Studies

**Understandings:**

Poverty is a common reason for the failure of children to develop to their full potential. Impoverished children are more likely to be exposed to conditions that harm their health, safety and development. Every child has the right to live a good life and be free from any exploitative or harmful activity.

**Students will know:**

Human rights vocabulary

What is being done about this global problem

International documents and the issues they address

The names of international organizations and NGOs that are working to reduce poverty

How to get involved

**Essential Questions:**

Identify how children whose families are struggling financially can be helped.

Discuss what local and national governments and civil society can provide to assist families struggling financially.

Examine international documents like the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Demonstrate the extent of the problem of homelessness in different countries and communities.

Use interpersonal communication skills to raise awareness about poverty on local, national and international levels.

Review the success of international efforts to reduce poverty and homelessness.

Enable students to synthesize the knowledge they have gained.

**Students will be able to:**

Respect others through exposure to a way of life different from their own

Advocate for the rights of the poor and the homeless

Explore opportunities to bring about social change locally and nationally

List reasons why people become homeless

**Equipment and Materials:**

**Television** and **DVD** or **VHS player**

**Computer** with access to the internet

'What's Going On? Poverty in America, hosted by Tim Robbins. Meet Jessica, who cares for her siblings while her dad works long hours for low pay, and J.R., who thinks shelter life is like being in prison.

## Convention on the Rights of the Child

<http://www.unhcr.ch/html/menu3/b/k2crc.htm>

### **Activity 1:**

1. Write the term 'home' on the board. Ask students to think about words, ideas and emotions they associate with the term. Write responses on the board, forming a word web around the term 'home.' Some answers might include: building, space, security, protection, privacy, warmth.

2. Next to the word chart ask students to list activities people do at 'home.' Answers might include: sleep, eat, read, play, watch TV, do work, and bathe.

Think about getting ready for school in the morning at your home: brushing your teeth, bathing, getting dressed, eating breakfast, etc. What might it be like to do all of these things in front of strangers at a homeless shelter? What is it like to get ready for school in the car that your family lives in? What is it like to try and do homework while caring for siblings or in a parents' car?

In a class discussion or written response ask students: How does it feel to get ready for school in these situations? Do you think it would be hard to concentrate?

3. Write "Poverty" on the board. Ask students to list words, emotions and ideas associated with this term.  
Ask students: What are the characteristics of poverty? Can you tell if someone is poor, if so, how do you?

Explain that sometimes poverty can be easily concealed. It might not be obvious that your peers and their families are struggling financially. It is important to keep an open mind and be empathetic about people's financial and housing circumstances.

**Note:** It is important to keep in mind that there might be children in the class who might live in a homeless shelter or consider themselves poor. These children might be embarrassed by the discussion. It is important to ensure that the classroom discussion is respectful and non-discriminatory.

**Activity 2:**

1. Screen the documentary 'What's Going On? Poverty in America' hosted by Tim Robbins. Meet Jessica, who cares for her siblings while her dad works long hours for low pay, and J.R., who thinks shelter life is like being in prison.
2. Ask students to cite the challenges Jessica and J.R. face. Ask students to respond emotionally to the experience of the young people in the film.
3. Ask students to imagine what it might be like to live as one of the characters in the film. What would their challenges and fears be?

**Activity 3:**

1. Hand out copies of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. In 1989, world leaders decided that children under 18 years of age often need special care that adults do not. The Convention is the first legally binding international instrument to incorporate a full range of human rights such as civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights for children.

The Convention is an international document negotiated by Member States at the United Nations. Every Member State of the United Nations has ratified (or adopted) the treaty except the United States and Somalia, who have only signed it.

The Convention offers a vision of the child as an individual and as a member of a family and community, with rights and responsibilities appropriate to his or her age and stage of development. By recognizing children's rights in this way, the Convention firmly sets the focus on the whole child.

Madeline Albright, the United States ambassador to the United Nations, signed the Convention in 1995. However, the United States Constitution requires that such documents receive a two-thirds approval by the Senate to be adopted. There are some articles in the Convention that the US Senate has yet to come to an agreement on.

Ask Students:

What is the difference between ratifying and signing a treaty?  
Why do you think the United States has not adopted the Convention?

Answers can include:

**a.** Signing does not create a binding legal obligation but does demonstrate the State's intent to examine the treaty domestically and consider ratifying it. Ratification signifies an agreement by the state to be legally bound by the terms of the treaty.

**b.** Some US legislators feel that the provisions or certain articles of the Convention could interfere with the role of parents in their children's lives.

The Convention is the most widely supported international treaty because nations, organizations and individuals realize that the future of humanity is in the hands of our children.

## 2. Share these facts with your students:

- Every 43 seconds a child is born into poverty in the US.
- Every 53 minutes a child dies from causes related to poverty in the US.
- Today, one in ten families in America lives in poverty.
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- Since 2000, the number of poor Americans has grown by more than 6 million to a total of 37 million.
- The U.S. Census Bureau defines poor families as those with cash incomes of less than \$15,067 a year for a family of three - or \$19,307 for a family of four.
- The official poverty rate in 2004 (the most current year for which figures are available) was 12.7 %, up from 12.5 % in 2003.
- On average, more than one out of every three Americans - 37 % of all people in the United States - are officially classified as living in poverty at least 2 months out of the year.
- Atlanta has the highest poverty rate with 48.1% poor people living below the poverty line. The number of Americans living in severe poverty - with incomes below half of the poverty line are estimated at around 15.6 million.
- Texas has the highest percentage (19.9%) of low income and uninsured children.
- The District of Columbia has the highest percentage (33.9%) of children under 18 living in poverty.
- The American Midwest and South saw the greatest numbers of people falling into poverty in 2004.
- In the Midwest and Northeast, 11.6 % of all people live in poverty, compared to 12.6 % for the West, and 14.1 for the South - the highest of all.
- Being homeless makes it extremely difficult to attend school regularly.
- 41 % of homeless children attend two or more schools a year.
- Homeless children have higher rates of learning disabilities and emotional and behavioral problems.
- The average homeless family is a 27 year-old single mother with two children under the age of six.
- In 2002, 34.9 million people lived in households experiencing food insecurity - that is, not enough food for basic nourishment - compared to 33.6 million in 2001 and 31 million in 1999.
- Twelve million of the adult residents in the United States have been homeless at least once in their lives.
- Children in America have higher poverty rates than adults, and people 65 and over have

higher chronic poverty rates and lower exit rates.

<http://www.usccb.org/cchd/povertyusa/povfact11.shtml>

[http://www.nccbuscc.org/cchd/brakethecycle/pov\\_usa/index.html](http://www.nccbuscc.org/cchd/brakethecycle/pov_usa/index.html) <http://www.fhfund.org/>

<http://www.homesforthehomeless.com/>

3. The Convention says that all children under the age of 18 should be protected from harm.

Ask students to identify and highlight which Articles of the Convention are violated when children live in poverty.

Answers are: 3, 6, 9, 16, 19, 20, 21, 23, 24, 25, 27, 28, 31 and 33

Ask students to rephrase the Articles 3, 6, 9, 16, 19, 20, 21, 23, 24, 25, 27, 28, 31 and 33 for an in class discussion.

**Note to teacher:** Students should hold onto their copies of the Convention for further use during other "What's Going On?" lesson plans. It is recommended that you have students use the following initials next to each article that is violated for each topic they learn about from the "What's Going On?" series. [Child Soldiers (CS), HIV/AIDS (AIDS), Refugees (RF), Child Labor (CL), Landmines (LM), Girl's Education (GED), Indigenous People (IP), Northern Ireland (NI), Poverty in America (PA), Street Children (SC).

#### **Activity 4:**

1. Write a response to the lesson's focus question: Why is poverty and homelessness a problem for youth in America?

2. Ask students to describe the challenges Jessica and J.R. face after reading their personal stories.

[http://www.un.org/works/goingon/poverty/goingon\\_poverty.html](http://www.un.org/works/goingon/poverty/goingon_poverty.html)

Ask students to respond emotionally to the experience of young people in the film.

3. Students should form their own groups that help lift people out of poverty. Divide students into groups of 3-5 and have them come up with the following:

1. A group name and logo.
2. The group's mandate and mission statement.
3. Long and short term goals for the group
4. Other organizations to collaborate with
5. Come up with a PR campaign to inform the school and public about their organization.