



Guide to Hands-on Learning



Section 3: Our Hungry Neighbors

Lesson Description

Students will learn demographic information about our hungry neighbors.



Materials Needed

Computer and Internet connection

Copies of the personal stories included in this section

Preflection

- What does hunger look like to you? Have students describe what someone is like who is hungry. Consider describing their actions, thoughts and behaviors. Then, watch [this video](#) where people who have used a food bank reflect on their challenges.

Facts

Families:

- One in 10 people in Minnesota and western Wisconsin experience the stress of hunger on any given day.
- Hungry Minnesota families miss 100 million meals each year.



Children:

- One in 6 Minnesota children lives at risk of hunger.
- 40 percent of the members of households served by Second Harvest Heartland are children under 18 years old.
- Children who suffer from poor nutrition during the brain's most formative years score much lower on tests of vocabulary, reading comprehension, arithmetic and general knowledge.



Seniors

- Since 2008, visits by seniors to Second Harvest Heartland's food shelf partners have more than quadrupled.
- Reducing senior citizens' risk of food insecurity or hunger benefits their health, nutrition and general well-being.



Activity 1:

Teachers divide the class into three groups, assign a story to each group and have each create a role play, skit or PSA to explain the scenario to the rest of the class.

Some ideas include:

- The effects on a child living with hunger—going to school, playing with friends, trying to study.
- A day in the life of someone who is working two or three jobs but can't afford enough food.
- Dispel the myths of working poor, how to support your local food bank, or food shelf.
- Demonstrate how someone might feel if they are using a food shelf.
- How to use a food shelf - how to find one, what to expect.

Story Number 1: Hunger in Our Midst - Meet Cynthia

"I am a proud person. But pride gets in the way, and I'm finally learning to let go of that pride," says Cynthia Milford. It's a lesson the 50-year-old will never look back on. Putting aside her pride is what has allowed Cynthia to use her food shelf in Golden Valley off and on for the past two years.

She says she only goes when she really needs it, but lately she's been in need of help more often, going to the food shelf approximately once a month since the beginning of the year. Cynthia moved back to Minnesota in 2007 after losing her job in Canada, and she has yet to land a full-time job here. Various part-time and seasonal jobs have gotten her by for the most part, but sometimes they aren't enough to pay all the bills and still purchase groceries.

Cynthia was wary about going to a food shelf for help. She had used the food shelves in Canada while she lived there, and the experience left a bad taste in her mouth.

Hoping for something different, she checked out her local food shelf two years ago. Thanks to the help of its dedicated volunteers, the food shelf offers a variety of nutritious food options to choose from, and loads of fresh fruits and vegetables come in all the time.

Today Cynthia volunteers twice a week at her food shelf, and encourages fellow clients to volunteer as well. She also goes on "food dates" with her neighbor, a handicapped man who needs help getting to the food shelf. Both are just little ways Cynthia tries to reciprocate the generosity shown her.



Story Number 2: What does it mean to be hungry in Minnesota?



Marilyn Jackson is among those trying to make the most out of virtually nothing. At 59, she is raising her five grandchildren. When she runs low on food or milk, she visits the Catholic Charities' Branch I Food Shelf in Minneapolis. Jackson works full time, but doesn't make enough to pay all her bills and buy food. She falls in the middle of the spectrum of people that the U.S. government considers food insecure. She doesn't go entire days without eating, but frequently skips meals. Often, she'll cook a pot of beans, only to realize there's only enough for the children.

"I can tolerate not eating," she said. "You make sure the kids eat. And then I always tell them, I'm on a diet."

Jackson is not hungry all the time, which makes her plight typical. She's among those who depend on food shelves only four or five times a year. Still, she knows what hunger feels like. "It's a hurting feeling," she said. "My stomach is in cramps, it's whining, growling.... You get up, you drink a glass of water, and lay back down hoping everything will be okay."

Like many Minnesotans who worry about food, Jackson buys cheaper items that are often less nutritious. She doesn't think her grandchildren go to bed feeling like she does, but she sees that they want more. Sometimes they sit around after dinner, pretending everything's okay. Or they ask for seconds. "What do you say? 'Stop being so greedy,'" Jackson said. "It's not being greedy. It's me adjusting myself to what I can allow them to have on a daily ritual. I say, 'Well, if I give them too much, they're going to be expecting this every day.' So I try to keep them on a routine. 'This is all we can eat right now, let's wait and watch TV, and have something later.' And then I'll be hoping that by later they'll have gone to sleep."

Jackson considers herself a good budgeter, and said she hasn't shopped anywhere but second-hand stores in years. But after recently undergoing hip surgery, she couldn't afford a cell phone to keep track of her grandchildren. She bought a prepaid phone, but exceeded her minutes. Her life is like dominos -- one thing easily sets everything else tumbling.

Story Number 3: Fresh produce goes a long way - Mary, Johnny and family

have great kids. Not one of my three—ages 8, 11 and 14—has missed a day of school since kindergarten. My oldest received such high test scores he's currently on track to receive a full scholarship to Duke. On top of all that, they never complain; which says a lot considering things haven't been easy lately.

We haven't always struggled. A few years back, my husband was the top salesman at a car dealership. We always had enough. Everything changed when he was diagnosed with cancer—not once, but twice. He's in remission now, but still too weak to work. I run a small catering business between taking care of him and our three kids, but it doesn't bring in enough to get by.

The mobile pantry at my kid's school is a huge help. It gives us fresh fruits and vegetables—today I received tomatoes and asparagus. You can make fresh produce go a long way, and it's critical to my husband's recovery and my children's growth.

My kids have bright futures. Thanks to the mobile pantry and food bank, they get the healthy food they need to do well in school and be successful. I never want them to struggle like we have.



Activity 2

Budget Simulation

Many food insecure households have to make difficult decisions about how to use their limited resources. Although they may be working full time, individuals who earn lower incomes may fall under the poverty level and struggle to support themselves and their families. Complete the budget simulation activity found in the Appendix.

Some discussion questions/topics for after the activity include

- Were there any choices that were easy (no hesitation at putting 1 or 3 Smarties on?)
- What categories were the most challenging to decide?
- Categories will affect each other, none of them stand alone:
 - If you chose a laundromat for your laundry facility, take a look at what your transportation choice was. If it was choice A or B, how are you going to get your laundry to and from the laundromat? With a family of four you do several loads of laundry each week. How time-consuming will the laundry process be?
 - Same with shopping choices and transportation. How will you get to the grocery store, how much food will you buy each visit?
 - Your choice of the amount of food you are eating could very well affect your need for health care.
 - Are there any other connections between categories that you can make?