

HUNGER 101: ACTIVITY 5



Picturing Hunger

Subjects

Social Studies, Reading Comprehension

Grade Level

6-12

Performance Task

If time is limited, focus on step 2.

1. Draw an outline of a person on the board or a piece of butcher paper. Have students share examples of individual choices and external situations that might lead to hunger. Write the individual choices inside the outline and the external situations outside the outline.
 2. Have students read the included blog post "Food Stamp Etiquette: Human Kindness" and discuss it as a class.
 3. Ask students for various ideas on how they can address some of the causes of hunger. Help students to choose a project. Offer suggestions if they cannot think of any, such as having a fund raiser for a local food bank, donating clothing to a family shelter, working at a soup kitchen, helping out at a community garden or making a care package for a senior citizen. (See also suggested class projects located on the Regional Food Bank's website.)
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Discussion Points

- What are some examples of individual choices that might lead to hunger (e.g. high school dropout, drug addictions, relocating to a new area, fleeing domestic violence, etc.)? What are some examples of external situations/circumstances/factors that can lead to hunger (e.g. severe illness, lost job, on the job injury, no affordable housing, low wages, etc.)?
 - What do you think the person represented by this outline probably looks like? Why?
 - What do you think are some of the stereotypes that surround hunger? Why do you think they exist?
 - Did the author of "Food Stamp Etiquette" make any points that you'd never thought of before? Do you agree with everything she wrote? Why, or why not? What do you think she means by 'entitlement mentality'? Why do you think she repeats the phrase 'No big deal'?
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Pass Skills

- Sociology Content Standard 7: The student will analyze social problems that affect large numbers of people or result from imbalances within a social system.
 - Reading/Literature Standard 3: Comprehension/Critical Literacy - The student will interact with the words and concepts in the text to construct an appropriate meaning.
 - Reading/Literature Standard 4: Literature - The student will read, construct meaning and respond to a wide variety of literary forms.
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Common Core Standards

- Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.
- Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning, as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.

Food Stamp Etiquette: Human Kindness

by [Dresden](#) on November 9, 2011

This is now officially the first month in two years that my family has not been depending on food stamps to feed ourselves. The moment that I realized that I no longer qualified for these benefits was incredibly triumphant for me. Within the same moment of celebrating I also felt so incredibly thankful. I have no idea how my family would have existed without this kind of supplemental assistance to purchase food. Currently over 45 million families use food stamps – that is roughly 15% of the population of the United States. *(As of September 2012 nearly 47 million families are using food stamps.)*

Chances are you know someone beyond me that was on (or is currently on) food stamps.

With that in mind I wanted to put together a small list of lessons learned while I was on food stamps:

- 1. Not all grocery stores accept food stamps (also called EBT cards).** I always found it embarrassing/stressful to find a cashier or customer service person before shopping to ask them. Many times I have had to pull my son out of the buggy and leave a store because I could not get groceries there. 97% of the time the response was given in kindness, 3% of the time my answer was given gift wrapped in judgment.
- 2. Judgment. It's everywhere.** This was always a shock to me. There is a moment after you ring up your groceries when the cashier sees that you have a plastic card. They ask, "Debit or credit?" You have to reply, "EBT" (electronic benefit transaction) – it's a change in the atmosphere – it's subtle – but I felt it often enough to recognize it. Judgment. Not every cashier, not every store. But often enough that I knew which stores and which checkout lines to avoid.
- 3. Parallel to judgment, there are people that will attempt to shame you for being on food stamps.** Heard the phrase "entitlement mentality"? Yup, that's shaming.
- 4. Making food stamps "chic" is offensive.** I can't tell you how awful it is to see someone writing about their creative menu planning for the month and saying it is an homage to the sort of budgeting that one has to/ should do while on food stamps. There are tons of sites that dedicate posts to "food stamp challenges" or "snap challenges" and while I get the desire to create a challenge for yourself or your own family, at the end of the day if you need to buy one more carton of milk beyond your budget, chances are that you can.
- 5. Blanket assumptions about why a family is on food stamps don't help anyone.** The truth is if you qualify for the benefits then you need them. It is an incredibly tedious process to apply for state benefits – I know because I have lived in three states while my family recovered from our own personal economic/situational knock-out.

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Many months ago a friend on twitter tweeted that she was behind a woman at a checkout line and the woman was paying with food stamps and she had a DESIGNER PURSE!!!! OMG!! Because, you know, the nerve of that lady! This is such a common knee jerk reaction that so many people have. Having been on food stamps I see the world differently.

If I saw a woman with a designer purse paying for her groceries with food stamps my thought would probably be, "nice bag!"

Because, guess what, we don't know what is up in this woman's life. We don't know her beginning, middle, where she is now. We don't know if the purse is real, we don't know if the purse was one of the last things she purchased for herself before her life took a turn, we don't know if the purse was a gift, we don't know if the purse was something that she set aside \$10 every week for a year in order to buy.

So because we know none of these things – why is the first thought something akin to, "shame on her for daring to have a nice purse when she is on food stamps." Because the thought that isn't far from that one is, "she doesn't deserve it, she isn't worthy."

There is a spotlight on you when you shop with food stamps – it is undeniable. You are very much aware that at some point the person behind you is probably judging the name brand of milk on the conveyor belt, making note that you didn't buy any meat...

One of the most powerful moments I ever had in a grocery store happened recently. The checkout clerk had finished ringing up my groceries and when he saw my plastic card he mistook it for a credit card. When I corrected him to let him know that I needed to use EBT to purchase my groceries I flushed – it was always embarrassing to talk about it, always- he simply shrugged and said quietly, "my family and I are on them too. No Big deal."

No big deal.

That is the key to food stamp etiquette. Of course there are probably some very serious issues going on in a person's life – in my own life I had death, loss of employment, loss of home, new baby...serious stuff. Being able to feel like just any other person at the grocery store was one of the things I had to look forward to in my week.

And sure, there will always be some person that will know a person that read an article about a family or individual that "scammed" the government. Well shame on that person. I never encountered such an individual. The people I met also on food stamps were poor, lived in poverty, carried such fear and anxiety in their soul about the big "what next??"

I just want to put the focus back on **human kindness**. *Warmth*. As we get near a season where it is especially hard to be without (food, shelter, family) think about what you can do to help. You don't have to give money, heck you don't even have to give groceries, just give a smile. To the family in line in front of you or behind you – smile. It's huge.

Trust me.