

Big Hearts Book Club ~ Poverty

Resource List for Parents/Caregivers (scan code for digital version)

Books read at book club:

Beatrice's Goat by Page McBrier

Harlem Grown by Tony Hillery



Online resources about poverty:

1. United Way of Connecticut (runs programs and helps people connect to various state services for food, housing, and other financial needs); <https://www.ctunitedway.org/gethelp/>
2. United Way of Greater New Haven (specifically serving New Haven county, including Guilford; connect to food, financial, educational, & other resources) - 370 James St. Suite 403, New Haven; (203) 772-2010; <https://www.uwgnh.org/community-resources>
3. Connecticut Food Share (a Feeding America partner) - <https://ctfoodshare.org/get-help/>
4. UNICEF (provides food, clothing, shelter, medical aid, and education to children around the world) - <https://www.unicefusa.org/>
5. Red Cross (provides blood, medical assistance, food, water, and other aid at home and abroad, especially following natural disasters) - <https://www.redcross.org/about-us/our-work/international-services.html>
6. World Health Organization or WHO (provides medical aid and funds disease research to save lives) - <https://www.who.int/our-work>
7. United Nations (representatives from most of the world's countries working together to achieve peace and prosperity for all, has several sub-organizations which carry out humanitarian aid in places stricken by war, poverty, and natural disasters) - <https://www.un.org/en/our-work/deliver-humanitarian-aid>
8. Heifer International (provides aid in the form of animals, plants, seeds, and training directly to impoverished people to help them grow their own food sustainably) - <https://www.heifer.org/our-work/index.html>
9. Habitat for Humanity (works in America and abroad to build houses for people who need them but can't afford them even with a regular job) - <https://www.habitat.org/>
10. Oxfam (provides humanitarian aid around the world while also pursuing legal action and government policies to help prevent poverty in the first place) - <https://www.oxfamamerica.org/about-us/>

Further Reading for Kids (with notes for grown-ups)

Non-fiction

How I Learned Geography by Uri Shulevitz - A memoir-style picture book from a time in the author's life as a child when he absorbed himself in the fascinating colors and names of far-off places of an oversized world map to distract himself from constant hunger. Talk about some of the things you might do when you'd like to think of

something else other than whatever's troubling you (be it hunger, anxiety, sadness, or other unpleasant feelings). If you didn't have enough money for food, how might you be able to get something else to take your mind off of it?

How do they help? A series of books by Katie Marsico, Pearl Sherman, and Melissa Sherman - Each short non-fiction book in the series talks about a different charity. Some focus on one issue, such as giving coats to homeless people, while others are more broad in their mission to help fight poverty, hunger, health crises, climate change, and more. Some were started in recent years by kids, and others have long histories of helping. Many social issues are intertwined with overlapping causes and effects, and many charities exist to help any worthy cause you can imagine. Each of these books uncovers the history of the organization, what its mission is, and how it operates to achieve its goals. Titles include: Doctors Without Borders, Greenpeace Fund, Humane Society, Oxfam International, Rotary Clubs, The Nature Conservancy, Red Cross, Salvation Army, United Nations, World Health Organization, UNICEF, United Way, World Wildlife Fund, YMCA, Alex's Lemonade Stand, Cell Phones for Soldiers, Coat-A-Kid, Fund-A-Field, Jessie Rees Foundation, Katie's Krops, Kids Saving the Rainforest, Ladybug Foundation, Paper Beads from Africa, Project TGIF, Sheltering Books, & What's Mine Is Yours.

What's Food Insecurity? by Anna Collins - A short non-fiction book that gives facts about food insecurity with a focus on what it looks like in America, how it affects health and wellness of people who experience it (especially children), and what people can do to help solve this complex issue. Ask what are some of the causes of food insecurity, and if each cause needs the same or a different solution. This book is a little longer than some of the others and may require adult assistance for complex words and sentences with younger readers.

Poverty and Hunger by Louise Spilsbury - This short non-fiction book summarizes poverty and hunger in a simple way for children with a focus on what it looks like internationally and in developing countries. It talks about the myriad causes of poverty and stresses that they are generally out of the poor person's control, such as war, famine, drought, systemic issues, and more. The solutions presented in this book focus more on short-term alleviation (give them food) than long-term answers (fix the underlying systemic cause), but still present some actionable items families can do to help others in need. You may want to ask what differences and similarities your children can point out between hunger at home and abroad after reading this book and the previous one. This resource list and the program it goes with does have an at-home focus, but it is good for children to learn that bad luck can happen to anyone and poverty and hunger are a problem everywhere, even if they look a bit different.

Kids Can Help Fight Poverty by Emily Raij - This book for younger children touches on various causes of poverty and its effects, including people living without basic necessities like food, clothing, shelter, water, and education. Its focus is on how kids can volunteer or donate to help fight poverty, with a focus on the USA but also touching on global issues.

Do the Work! No Poverty by Julie Knutson - This book for older children talks about the many causes of global poverty, then highlights the various goals the UN is trying to achieve to end poverty. It touches on things that are systemic issues, then offers ways that the reader can help at home in their community, such as being aware of where some of their food and other goods come from and whether their purchase funds exploitative labor that keeps the workers poor or if it makes a difference in the workers' lives. It also brings up discussion questions that the reader can think about and engage in with their families, friends, or classmates, as well as more traditional efforts such as fundraising and donating goods.

Poverty and Our Future by Gene Brooks - This book talks about the definition of poverty, its history, and what it looks like here and around the world. The book discusses poverty's impacts on other issues, such as health, education, gender inequality, and the environment. It then talks about people and groups currently battling to end poverty, and what everyday folks can do to help.

Vision of Beauty: The story of Sarah Breedlove Walker by Kathryn Lasky - A picture book biography for older children about a black orphan girl born just after slavery ended who grew up in absolute poverty but slowly built an empire out of her home-made hair products for black women. She was the wealthiest black woman in America at one time, and she used a great deal of her wealth and her business practices to help give back to the black community

in the form of education, job training, and culture centers. She also became politically active to advocate for equal rights for people of color and for women. This book is for older children and may be best digested in small pieces with discussion with help from adults. It addresses race and gender and systemic issues as a cause for poverty and includes mentions of violence against black people at the time.

Fiction

These books focus on how farming, gardening, or raising livestock as a community can help people provide for themselves and reduce poverty:

Mama Miti by Donna Jo Napoli - It starts with one woman and one seed, but soon the whole Kenyan village is planting trees and being rewarded with a source of food, shade, and pride.

The Good Garden: How one family went from hunger to having enough by Katie Smith-Milway - Villagers in Honduras learn healthy and sustainable farming practices to get more produce from their land without hurting it.

Beatrice's Goat by Page McBrier - All it takes is one goat gifted to Beatrice's Ugandan family for her to have the means to slowly improve the lives of herself and her family and earn enough money to buy a uniform and attend school.

One Hen by Katie Smith-Milway - One small loan to Kojo in Ghana gives him enough money to buy a hen. That hen lays eggs which his family can eat and which he can sell for extra money. He soon has enough to buy more hens, have more eggs to sell, and eventually he has extra money he can lend to other people to help them become more self-sufficient. His hens and eggs business eventually grows big enough that he needs help to keep up with it and he can provide good jobs to other people in his hometown, and pay taxes which fund improvements for all.

Jayden's Impossible Garden by Melinda Mangal - Young Jayden and his apartment neighbor Mr. Curtis set out to create nature in a tiny patch of forgotten land outside their building. They plant flowers and vegetables, and soon everyone can see how they brought nature to their little patch of city.

Farmer Will Allen and the Growing Table by Jacqueline Briggs-Martin - Based on a true story, a former basketball star transforms abandoned and polluted lots in the big city into productive gardens that help feed the neighborhood, with help from the families who live there.

Harlem Grown by Tony Hillery - Based on a true story, a teacher and his elementary school students transform a vacant lot full of trash into a thriving vegetable garden that helps feed the neighborhood.

Green Green by Marie & Baldev Lamba - A community gardening story told in sparse rhyming verse with a focus on colors.

Thank you, Garden by Liz Garton Scanlon - Another community garden story told in simple rhymes.

The Children's Garden by Carole Schaefer - Based on a true story, children in a big city build and care for a communal garden in their neighborhood.

Community Soup by Alma Fullerton - What do you get when you combine young gardeners, their tasty vegetables and a herd of mischievous goats--a recipe for disaster or a bowl of delicious soup? Includes recipe.

The Bear's Garden by Marcie Colleen - A little girl's creativity, dedication, and imagination turn a vacant city lot into a beautiful community garden.

These books are folktales that explore themes of poverty:

Tops & Bottoms by Janet Stevens - There is a rich, lazy bear and a hare down on his luck who can't feed his family. The bear doesn't want to share his land or wealth that he was given but didn't work for, and the hare makes a deal to farm it for the bear in exchange for half the harvest. Half wouldn't be enough to feed his whole family, so hare tricks bear into choosing tops or bottoms (the part of the plant that grows above or below ground) to keep, and

then planting crops that benefit himself. After being tricked multiple times, bear decides to do his own farming, and the rabbit family have farmed enough food to be able to buy their own land back from the bear and work it themselves. While an old tale that involves animal characters, this story touches on wealth inequality and some of its causes that pervade the world today.

Hansel & Gretel by the Brothers Grimm - The tale of the children lost in the woods who find a witch with a house made of gingerbread is so familiar, that the premise of the story is often glossed over in favor of focusing on how the children escape the witch. The children aren't just out for a walk in the woods when they get lost; they are cast out by their parents (sometimes just the wicked stepmother) because their father cannot afford to feed them. There were several famines in medieval times in Europe where this story takes place, where people did abandon their children in the woods (or worse) because they couldn't feed them and social safety nets didn't exist like they do today. Imagine with your child how the entire story could have been avoided if it happened here, today, and what Hansel & Gretel and their parents could do instead if they were hungry and had no money for food.

Jack & the Beanstalk an old English tale - Depending on the version of the tale you read, the reason for Jack going to the market to sell the family cow varies, but in most of them (especially older ones), it is because the cow stopped giving them enough milk to live on, and now she must be sold so that the family can eat. In the story, Jack comes back with magic beans and is able to trick a giant and gain a fortune. However, there are many people who wind up having to sell their possessions, give up their pets, or move their homes because they need the money to buy food. There are no magic beans and giants and gold waiting for them. Discuss as a family what things would be easiest and hardest to part with if you needed to trade them for food. Talk about how your family might help others avoid having to be in this situation if they fell on hard times, or places you could turn to for help if the need arose.

These books deal with not having enough food or other necessities as a result of being poor, and how working together can help everyone; includes modern and historical stories:

Empty Fridge by Gaetan Doremus - In this book, neighbors in an apartment building each have very few ingredients in their refrigerators, but when they put them all together they make a quiche that is enough for everyone to share. The book lists benign reasons why the fridges are all empty (mainly variations on "they were busy all day" or "they forgot"), but looking closely at some of the illustrations and talking about what you see can lead to inferring that some of the residents may be busy or working all day but probably don't have enough money to buy a lot of food on their own. Andrew is a busker, or, street musician, earning small tips from passersby for his music and sleeps on a roll-up mat in the basement of the apartment building, Rose is an elderly lady living alone who likely doesn't work, and Claire has been described as having an exhausting day and is shown walking home from a bus stop. There are a few other clues in the illustrations which would suggest to an adult reader the overall economic status of the locale: all the buildings shown are apartment buildings crowded near each other and the apartments themselves are small with humble furnishings. While many books on hunger revolve around getting help from organizations like food pantries or friends who are better off, this one shows multiple people who by themselves do not have much, but when they pool resources and work together they have enough. This ties in with the concept of mutual aid, where everybody pitches in regardless of what they have and everybody benefits. This book is reminiscent of the tale *Stone Soup*, in that each neighbor contributes one ingredient. It differs in that there is no trickery involved. Depending on which version of the tale you read, the villagers contributing to the soup are either selfish and don't want to share with a poor traveler even though they have plenty, or the villagers are poor themselves and don't have enough on their own to feed a poor traveler coming into town. The version of *Stone Soup* by Jon Muth is more in line with the concept of sharing, building community, and mutual aid, and reading these two stories back-to-back and comparing them will be an interesting way to explore themes of community sharing. In both stories, the people are happier when they are eating together, and you can talk about what it means to be part of a community and ways you can get to know your neighbors.

Our Little Kitchen by Jillian Tamaki - This one is very similar in story and theme to the previous two, where a community comes together to make food to have enough for everyone and get to know each other. This one differs in that the community dinner is overtly a volunteer-organized affair and the food largely comes from the

community garden and donations/food pantries. The idea of gardening together in a neighborhood to help provide for yourself and others is a powerful one and can be a great tool for building resilient communities and addressing food insecurity. Ask about helping out at a community garden near you, and what the benefits are for you and for others.

Banana-Leaf Ball by Katie Smith-Milway & Shane W. Evans - A composite of real-life experiences of refugees bring out the story of how playing soccer with a homemade ball in a refugee camp brings children together instead of fighting over the too-few resources available in the camp can create opportunities for improving one's life.

My Rows and Piles of Coins by Tololwa M. Mollel - Saruni, a boy in Tanzania, wants to buy a bicycle to help his mother carry plants to the market. He secretly saves up his coins but doesn't have enough for a bike. His friendly neighbor decides to help him learn to ride on his own bike, then sells his bike to Saruni for much less than it is worth at market when he upgrades his own ride to a motor bike. You can discuss how bicycles in many parts of the world (and also here, mostly in big cities) are essential transportation instead of just something extra for fun.

Papa's Pastries by Charles Toscano - Miguel's family needs many things to get through the coming winter (a new roof, firewood, clothing), and his father, a baker, must sell many pastries to afford these things. When he goes into town, all of the people there also have little money so they cannot afford to buy his pastries. His father decides to give them away to hungry folks instead. Miguel doesn't think this is wise, but his father says that kindness is more important than money and that the more you give, the more you will receive. The next day, all the folks who received his papa's pastries come over to help the family cut and gather wood, fix their roof, and mend their clothes. One thing to discuss is how trading skills and materials with people in your community can benefit all when money is lacking.

What is Given from the Heart by Patricia C. McKissack - A church congregation is putting together love boxes to give to folks in need, and they especially mention a family that has lost everything in a fire. James and his mama don't have very much themselves, and he can't think of anything of his own that isn't mostly used-up or broken to give to the little girl of the family whose house caught fire. Then he has the idea to write and draw her a book just for her, and to give it to her directly. They make friends, and later James and his mama come home and they have a love box waiting for them too.

The Orphan Singer by Emily Arnold McCully - In Venice in the 1700s, orphaned children could be given to a hospital that trained them to become Europe's best singers. The Dolci family were poor basket weavers, but they were all very musically talented, mother, father, and little boy. When a new baby girl was born and began singing beautifully before she was even a year old, they decided that they couldn't keep another child from realizing their full potential in music because they couldn't afford schools for them. They gave the girl up to the hospital as an orphan, but they kept visiting and singing outside the windows for her to hear. When she was old enough for performances, they would stand outside the concerts (too poor to afford tickets) and listen to her sing, and she would visit them after. One day, the little boy was sick and the family couldn't come to the concert. The girl snuck out of the hospital that night and visited him to sing to him, hoping her song would help him get better. Later, she guessed the truth of these strangers she had always felt a connection with, and as her career blossomed, she was able to take care of them so they weren't poor anymore. One topic to discuss in this book is talent and opportunity, and how everyone should have the opportunity to make the most of their talents and dreams, regardless of how much money they have.

Discussion questions for books read at book club:

Before reading:

Today we are going to read some stories about different people who are poor, and how with a little bit of help, they are able to make their situations better. If you've been to our previous clubs where we talked about empty fridges, not having a home, or old clothing, you may notice that some things about these stories are the same as the ones we read in the past, but there will also be a lot that is different. You may have heard the old saying, "Give a man a fish, and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime." What do you think this phrase means? (if prompted, ask if it is better to always have to ask your mom to tie your shoes for you, or if you should learn to do it yourself; discuss how both options solve the problem, but in different ways and with different long-term and short-term results)

So, is it better to just donate necessities to people who need them? Or should we instead focus on helping them be able to earn money and buy the things they need on their own? Discuss.

Let's get back to that saying, "Give a man a fish, and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime." I would like to add to that saying, the phrase, "But it's easier to learn on a full stomach." Our previous book clubs that involved helping those in need focused on immediate solutions to getting needs met temporarily. In this book club, we will talk about how, once someone has been given the basics, we can help them become self-sufficient so they won't need donations anymore to stay alive. You can't fix a problem, whether it's world poverty or just tying your shoes, if you don't address what causes it in the first place.

Beatrice's Goat by Page McBrier

The book can be divided into *before Mugisa* and *after Mugisa*. When you learn about Beatrice's life before Mugisa, what do you notice is different about how she spends her days, compared to how you spend yours? (if necessary, ask about whether Beatrice goes to school and why that is)

The goat is a gift, but they must work to be ready for her. Do you have any animals at home? What would you need to do at your place to make it ready for a goat?

After Mugisa arrives, what changes? How does this help them? (if necessary, ask if the family had access to milk of any kind before Mugisa came and had her kids; ask what they do with the extra milk)

Beatrice and her family save up the money they make from selling Mugisa's extra milk. What are they saving up for? (if necessary, prompt about new clothing and blankets, uniforms, and paying for school)

When you need something such as milk or a new blanket, is it as hard for you to get as it is for Beatrice's family? Why do you think this is?

Mugisa the goat isn't just a gift and isn't just a pet. How is Beatrice's family getting this goat different from a normal gift? (answer: the family works hard to keep the goat healthy, and in return, they are able to earn enough money for safer living conditions, healthier food, and access to education.)

Harlem Grown by Tony Hillery

This book takes place in a big city, where there isn't a shortage of fast food, but there is a shortage of fresh and healthier food. People aren't that familiar with vegetables, and they don't know where they come from. Fresh food has to be bought far away and it costs a lot more than packaged food. Think about where you live. Is it hard to find vegetables and fruit? Not having access to fresh and healthy food, even if you aren't starving or homeless, is another way that people can be poor.

The neighborhood, Harlem it's called, in the city, New York, where this book takes place, is all buildings crowded together, concrete, and no open green spaces around. The kids have nowhere outside that they can play

that's safe. Think about where you live, about where we are right now. Do we have safe outside spaces for people to run around? Not having greenery and open spaces that are free to use and nearby is another way that people can be poor.

What does Mr. Tony do when he sees the "haunted garden" filled with trash across the street?

Who helps Mr. Tony with building the garden and taking care of the plants? When the vegetables are ripe, who gets to eat them?

What other good things does having the garden in the neighborhood do?

Activity:

Make biodegradable seed-starters from newspaper and masking tape.

Put vegetable seeds in starters. Have everyone plant directly into the ground at home, and see what grows.

If they have extra vegetables, they can donate the fresh produce to the Guilford Food Bank.