

Northwest University

Social Justice and Children's Literature:

How to Promote Awareness, Empathy, and Action in Children and Youth

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Introduction

Many children and youth have a very basic view of and connection to the larger world around them, including limited knowledge of the social injustices that many in our global community, including children, are currently suffering from. There are a myriad of factors that contribute to this limited knowledge, but nevertheless it is imperative that this lack of awareness is addressed due to the astronomical number of children experiencing social injustices like poverty, global conflict, and the refugee/migrant crises. Social justice issues facing children, like poverty, affect children differently than they do adults, in that children are “deprived in the immediate aspects of their lives, areas including nutrition, health, water, education, protection and shelter” (UNICEF 2). Families and schools can be a catalyst for change as they help children and youth begin to understand more about social injustice, develop empathy for those affected, and act on behalf of those in our global community who are suffering.

How can families and schools with limited time, resources, and expertise begin to guide the children in their care as they approach these overwhelming issues? It begins with the encouragement that even though many children and youth are just starting their journey as global citizens, they are more than capable of doing great things and having an impact. The key is to involve our children and youth, making sure to provide them with the right knowledge, tools, motivation, and opportunities. Roger Hart proposes, “Involvement fosters motivation, which fosters competence, which in turn fosters motivation . . .” (5). One way to start involving children and youth is to provide their families and teachers with a convenient, high-quality, and trustworthy resource kit to use in this endeavor.

Although there are many stand-alone resources available, a more comprehensive resource is needed. As a teacher and children’s librarian, I have found that children’s literature can be a

powerful, developmentally appropriate tool in helping children and youth understand more about the world around them by providing them with a glimpse into the lives and realities of others. Crawford et al. note “The stories presented in high-quality children’s literature can serve as invitations for readers of any age to gain information and insights, as well as to offer a critical perspective on important topics, such as those related to human crises” (46). Children’s literature when combined with other resources, could be even more effective as part of a comprehensive resource kit. The kit would help families and schools as they impart knowledge, encourage empathy, and challenge children and youth to act on behalf of other children and members of our global community who suffer from social injustices.

Background

As a result of my own experiences working in public and private schools for the last fifteen years, it has become evident to me that many children and youth in the United States do not know a lot about the global social justice issues facing our global community. Due to their age, developmental progression, the “*individualist*[ic]” culture we live in, etc., children and youth tend to be focused on and engaged in their own achievement, well-being, interests, and pursuits (Hofstede and Hofstede 75, 78). When asked to reflect on her experiences as an educator, Dana Bogel, an elementary school teacher, noted that “. . . I think students have a vague sense that there is injustice in the world and that there are people struggling . . . [but] their understanding is not deep . . .” (Bogel). She also explained that “their [student’s] awareness is often based on the exposure to complex issues in school by their teacher(s) and the school culture as well as their family” (Bogel). Regardless of the many different reasons behind children and youth’s place on the continuum of awareness, it is apparent that awareness of social justice can be attributed at least in part to the influence of the adults in their lives. When reflecting on the approach that he

and his wife have adopted in their home, Sean Kramar, parent of two young children and co-founder of educational technology firm Gweela, stated that he and his wife “try to be proactive . . .” in educating their children about social justice issues, believing that it is “immensely important to start that conversation early . . .” (Kramar). He also commented that in his experience, children have a “general sense of inequity” but that often their “awareness is underestimated” (Kramar). Children and youth are observant and inquisitive and the adults in their lives should partner with them as they seek to make meaning of the world around them. If children and youth are introduced to weighty issues like child poverty, global conflict, and the refugee/migrant crises and are encouraged to grow in their knowledge of and empathy toward others, they are capable of showing interest in and working toward making a difference in the lives of others. Children and youth should be seen as “active participants and subjects of their own development who make important contributions to society” (Miles and Wright 54). The next generation of our global community are changemakers and should be empowered as such.

At a time in history when more people are suffering from social injustices than ever, it is crucial that we take the necessary steps to educate ourselves and the children and youth in our care about issues like child poverty. Global crises like child poverty can create “powerful and enduring consequences for individuals’ health, well-being, education, and longevity, as well as for the societies in which children grow into adulthood” (World Bank 98). If our global community is to be a place in which the next generation thrives, then children and youth need to be equipped and encouraged to be a part of the solution for a better world.

One of the simple, yet effective ways to start this process is by using picture books, as part of a complete resource kit, to inspire our children to empathize and act. Children’s books are often vessels of the human story and can encourage children and youth to “develop a sense of

shared fate for the globe on which they live and to examine difficult and complex issues of poverty and social injustice through the use of a fictional character” (Bradbury 3). There is powerful inspiration in the form of pictures, words, and stories on our children’s shelves.

Personal Perspective

Over the course of the International Community Development (ICD) program, my knowledge, values, and perspective about social justice have changed a great deal. I thought that issues like extreme poverty, global conflict, and the refugee and migrant crises mainly affected those living in other parts of the globe and appeared to be insurmountable due to the sheer number of people they affected and the systemic issues that contributed to and upheld them. I was also ignorant of the complexity and depth of these crises. I failed to understand that an issue like poverty could be much farther reaching than occasionally not having money for food or shelter, as poverty “encompasses living conditions, an inability to meet basic needs because food, clean drinking water, proper sanitation, education, health care and other social services are inaccessible” (Compassion International).

After becoming a teacher and father and looking through the lens which the ICD program has provided me, I have realized that our focus as a global community, as development practitioners, and as global citizens should be one of helping others, especially children and youth and especially those children and youth considered most vulnerable. As Paul Tough notes, “personal actions can create powerful changes, and those individual changes can resonate on a national scale. [. . .] It is work we can all do, whether or not it is the profession we have chosen” (130-132). All children should be afforded, at minimum, their basic rights and within those, a proper developmental foundation. The staggering number of children who are suffering from abuse, neglect, hunger, homelessness, etc., merit more attention and support from all of us.

Social justice was, and is still in part, about how I can help and make a difference. As Parker J. Palmer notes, “Our complicity in world making is a source of awesome and sometimes painful responsibility—and a source of profound hope for change” (loc. 707). Along with countless others, I feel the personal responsibility to make our global community a better place. In addition to thinking through the contributions I can make as an individual, I would like to find ways to encourage the next generation to make a difference in the world they have inherited by focusing on working to bring about “a society of mutual enrichment, interconnection, and interdependence that enhances the lives of all members of the human family” (Groody 26). One of the ways this can happen is by helping children and youth understand more about the world around them, both positive and negative. If children can learn about the experiences of others in our global community and begin to develop a concern and empathy for those who suffer from injustice, our world can begin to heal and we can begin to counteract “the harmful consequences [resulting from child poverty] for societies, economies, and future generations [. . .]” (UNICEF 1).

Passing on the inspiration so it does not end with me or my generation is key. Allowing children and youth to think about and find ways to help their peers both locally and globally is an exciting endeavor. Children and youth have novel, innovative ideas that are not confined by the boundaries that many of us, their predecessors self-impose. They often see opportunities when we tend to see limitations. They have open, tender hearts when ours are tired and tough. The creation of the comprehensive resource kits will allow children and youth to understand more, ask questions, and move forward with a fresh perspective as they seek to right wrongs and lay a new foundation for justice in our global community.

As we raise the next generation of influencers and change makers, it is imperative that a focus on social justice informs our actions and interactions. Social justice means that the basic human rights of all people, including children and youth, are lived out and protected (World Vision). Social justice means that those with adequate resources help to provide and care for those who have little or nothing. Social justice means an ongoing commitment to living a life that has the needs and wellbeing of others in mind because “all of us have great and equal worth [. . .]” (Wolterstorff 393). Our global community needs all its citizens to empathize and act.

Contextualization

When it comes to providing families and educators with the best tools to teach their students about social justice issues affecting children, contextualization is an important consideration. Knowing what individual families and educators value, the challenges they face, and the hope they have for their children and students all play a part in how the resources in this kit were chosen and highlighted (Stringer 204). For instance, if a family struggles to find ways to talk about tough topics with their children, this kit provides an accessible way to do so using children’s books. Many families are pressed for time due to the busyness of their schedule, and this kit is convenient for and adaptable to that need. For families who want to be more engaged in their local or global communities and fight for social justice, this kit can be a helpful resource in that endeavor as well.

Educators, although in a different role, may have many of the same challenges and values families do. In addition, educators might also be under resourced and underfunded and/or not have enough time or autonomy when it comes to teaching curriculum. Despite these obstacles, educators still want their students to be knowledgeable change makers in their local

and global communities. Due to lack of funding, providing educators with the kit at no cost is an important piece of contextualizing this resource. Housing this resource in the library in a school will also make it accessible and convenient for educators to use. Within the kit, educators can select the books and resources that best fit their students' developmental level and the time constraints in their schedules. The depth of knowledge and inspiration the kits can provide students will help educators approach teaching these topics with confidence and reassurance. These kits are designed with parents and teachers in mind.

In order to harness the inspiration children's literature can provide, it is practical to find a way to make it accessible and meaningful for the teachers and parents of children and youth who will use it. As a parent and educator, it was important for me to consider the thoughts and views of my peers.

Beginning with the schools I've taught at and currently teach in, I first thought of the vast responsibility all teachers have in educating their students. As children attend school each day, they are taught the core subjects of math, reading, writing, science, and the social studies. In addition to these core competencies, today's students need more. Many schools and classrooms are working hard to include important social emotional learning, digital citizenship, and opportunities for students to engage in the arts. On top of all these disciplines, teachers are also finding it crucial to respond to the ever changing social and political climate of our country and global community by teaching students about issues of social justice. When communicating with Michelle Zapalski, a former elementary school teacher and parent of three young children, about the necessity of educating children about global social justice issues, she stated "I believe it's imperative" (Zapalski). Schools and educators need to find ways to help their students understand more about the world they live in. It is not a question of whether we should teach

children and youth about social justice issues, but of how we can do so. Yet how can educators, myself included, who are already taxed while teaching the basics, effectively equip students with a strong foundation in social justice, helping them to “become thoughtful, committed, and active citizens” (Banks 18)? With everything that is needed to be taught over the course of a day, month, or year, teachers need something they can trust and rely on.

When reflecting on the key features of resources that would prove useful, Michelle Zapalski commented that resources need to have “Fact-checked information from reliable sources. Digitally this would be platforms that are both informative but also engaging to kids of all ages” (Zapalski). In addition to containing trustworthy information, resources also need to be relevant, engaging, and age appropriate to their audience. With this in mind, many teachers already use children’s books in various facets of their teaching and do so because of the books’ accessibility, reliability, and engaging content.

While issues of social justice are often difficult for children and youth to comprehend, Dever et al. conclude that the medium of “Children’s books provide a safe forum for talking and writing about social justice issues because children address them in the context of the story and its characters” (19). Lysaker and Sedberry also support the use of children’s literature in teaching, stating that “In schools, picture book read-alouds are often used to provide a shared context for exploring the social, political and personal realities of a range of ‘others’ – all within the safe arms of classroom community” (105). As students encounter the familiar story elements such as character development, settings, problems, and solutions featured in children’s books, they are better able to access the message the story is trying to convey. As students listen to and read about social justice issues presented in books, they can begin to make various connections with what is taking place in the stories. As Martin et al. note, there are two types of responses

that readers come away with after reading, “An efferent response is one in which students react to the facts and ideas they learn in a text, and an aesthetic response is one in which their personal feelings and attitudes are touched by their transactions with the text and they make connections between the text and their own life” (159). In addition to making a personal connection with a children’s book, it is important for students to find a way to act upon these connections.

When asked about important features he would like to see in global social justice resources, Dan Mahoney, an elementary school teacher, commented that a resource which “offers manageable, useful steps that would facilitate or motivate students to take action” would be desired (Mahoney). Many children’s book authors and publishers who create books focused on topics of social justice recognize this need and suggest ideas for their readers to help others. While compiling resources for the kit, one of my goals was to take and expand upon these suggestions, offering students many options to choose from should they want to take further action. Providing students options for responding can provide them with important opportunities to show “an emerging sense of care for others . . .” (Montgomery et al. 4). When teachers support students’ desire to take meaningful action, they “Ensure that [their] children’s views are taken seriously and acted upon . . .” (Lundy 3). Students want to be heard and help make a difference in the lives of others.

In addition to meeting the needs of educators who want resources to teach their students about social justice issues, it was important to take the ideas and needs of parents into account. As a father, I ultimately desire to see my own children and the children and youth in my community, develop their awareness, act with empathy, and begin to help their local and global peers who suffer from injustice in any way they are able. With a knowledge of the widespread injustice experienced in our world today, I am worried about the future that the next generation

of our global community will inherit. Issues like child poverty, global conflict, and the refugee and migrant crises are pervasive, and as Groody comments, “The loss of human potential due to poverty is especially serious when the global village as a whole is wealthy enough to do something about it” (9). These issues are too prevalent and serious for us as global citizens, young or old, to ignore. Like educators, many parents I know are looking for resources to help provide their children with a view of the “multicultural nature of the world they live in [. . .] as well as their connections to all other humans” and become better equipped to make an impact in our world (O’Brien and Tabb 125). The question does not lie in whether the desire is there, but in how to help them fulfill their desire to equip their children to act. When asked what features he would look for in a resource to help educate children about global social justice issues, Jeremy Vallerand, CEO of Rescue:Freedom International, a global anti-trafficking nonprofit, commented that “I’d love something that was age specific and developed as kids got older” (Vallerand). After posing the same question to Sean Kramar, he noted that he would like to be able to use “Something written in kid’s language with authentic stories, and action-oriented materials” (Kramar). Resources focused on and tailored to the developmental stages of children is important. One additional factor that informed both parents’ and teachers’ desire for an age-appropriate resource, was that some adults may be concerned about exposing their children to topics that they are not yet ready for. As I considered this concern, I reflected on Michelle Zapalski’s comment that children could begin learning about social justice issues “as early as infancy; reading board books and begin[ning] with simple conversations [. . .] As children get older, these conversations can evolve to become more nuanced and complex” (Zapalski). Since parents and teachers have their children’s and students’ best interest in mind, they can use resources with wisdom, making sure that despite their reservations, “that [their] longing to

protect does not prevent conversations that could disrupt the status quo and teach valuable lessons about social justice” (Papola-Ellis 19). Like the teachers I spoke with, parents want a resource that is accessible and age-appropriate and that inspires their children to get involved.

Child Development and Empathy

While there are many theories and ideas about which ages children can develop and respond with empathy, it is agreed upon that one of the main components of child development involves children “learn[ing] how to understand both their own feelings and others' emotions” (Oswalt). Therefore, it is important for caretakers, teachers, role models, and other adults who play instrumental roles in the lives of children to introduce children to ideas and situations in which they have a chance to develop empathy. Children consistently need opportunities to exercise their emotional intelligence by responding to the feelings and emotions of themselves and others. What do children do when they see a friend experience pain or loss? Are they able to feel or understand what they are going through? Do they move from feeling and understanding into action? When a child’s social and emotional development is nurtured, scaffolded, and supported, they are more likely to act with empathy when the situation calls for it.

Based on the development and existence of empathy, is there a ‘right’ time to begin teaching children about social justice issues? Should we begin early as soon as the child is able to develop empathy, so the child can build a foundational awareness that can be translated into action later in life? Or should we begin further down the road in a child’s developmental path, when the child already has some experience with formulating empathy and is able to understand and connect with the concepts being taught? Maria Nikolajeva asserts that even if a child has not had much experience with identifying emotions and practice acting with empathy, “picturebooks offer vicarious emotional experience that children can partake of. [. . .] picturebooks offer images

of characters that help us understand people's emotions in real life" (250–251). When a child reads picture books for enjoyment or understanding, their emotional awareness can be supported by that act of reading. Reading picture books can also provide the reader with new learning about situations or emotions. Nikolajeva adds that "picturebooks are an excellent first step toward emotional intelligence" (254). So, in addition to teaching children about their emotions and empathy in traditional ways, adding picture books to the game plan can be meaningful too.

Helping children develop an awareness of and empathy toward social justice issues at an early age is possible. However, due to the child having minimal knowledge of or connection to an issue, some people think that it may be best to wait until the child is older or has enough understanding about an issue for it to be meaningful. Dan Mahoney suggested that "lessons will take root deep down to inspire meaningful action when they [students] become older and more aware of a larger world" (Mahoney). Once foundational knowledge and awareness have been intentionally built, children may be more likely to feel compelled and able to act. However, waiting until children are old enough to fully understand and act may not necessarily justify delaying their education about such issues.

While young children may not understand fully or be able to act on behalf of other children experiencing social injustices, Jeremy Vallerand advocated for the need to teach children about social justice issues at an early age. He stated, "Obviously, it needs to be done in a way that is age appropriate, but I think it is important for kids to learn about what the world around them looks like" (Vallerand). When asked about the age at which children should be learning about global social justice issues, Bill Forbes, Global Lead of Child Protection and Participation at World Vision, concluded that "Learning in early childhood can leave lasting impressions and can be a foundation for continued interest" (Forbes). When we find ways to help

children understand more about our global community, including teaching about the positive and negative aspects of our world, it can help them gain perspective and develop their worldview. Highlighting both issues that are ‘close to home’ and issues that affect people in other places are equally important. Donalyn Miller and Colby Sharp also stress how important this understanding is, emphasizing that “As much as we try to shelter children from the harsh realities of our world, we do them a disservice when we avoid tough topics such as poverty, violence, family issues, and prejudices that many of our children suffer every day” (132). While the age at which children can process and act upon information about social injustices can be debated, the need to educate them cannot be ignored.

When children are too young to comprehend the scale or gravity of the issues approached in the books being read, a parent, caregiver, or teacher is the perfect person to help guide the child as they make meaning of what they read. Finding ways to connect what is happening in the books to the child’s life can help to cement the urgency and importance of the cause. Parents, caregivers, and teachers can also be wonderful models when it comes to acting in response to their own emotions and connections made because of the book.

As children listen to or read a story for the first time, their responses and reactions are often the most genuine and should be discussed and relived as the reading concludes to solidify their emotional connection with the character(s) and events in the story. This initial reading and reaction, however, is only scratching the surface. Children need additional time to process and make meaning from the stories they read. Providing a second or even third reading of a book can allow the child to understand different perspectives, make multiple types of connections, and even engage in higher level thinking around the message of the story. Posing formulated discussion questions about a story can help with this, as well. The questions do not need to be

overly complex to be effective. Rather, they should be worded so that students can easily comprehend what is being asked to open the door to deeper thinking and additional conversation. Questions like, “If you were the character, how would you have reacted?” or “Is there a time you’ve felt the same way as the character?” and “What would you say to the character to encourage them through their tough time?” and “If you and the character switched places for a day, how might that be for you/them?” These questions are open ended and allow the child to make connections with what is happening in the story and allow them to adopt the perspective of another without worrying about if their answer is the correct one or not (Hadjioannou and Loizou). In addition to asking and answering questions, children can benefit from additional exercises that are designed to help them connect with the stories they encounter.

Drawing, play acting, and journaling are all effective methods that allow children to connect with the stories they read and can unlock and develop what children are thinking and feeling. Dunkerly-Bean et al. notes that “through play, discussion, and drawing [children are able] to explore injustice in their local and global worlds” (683). When children can respond in different ways, each child can discover their own unique thoughts and feelings about what they are reading. Drawing can be especially effective with younger children, who do not yet have words to express their ideas. Often, drawings can reveal the unconscious connections the child is making with the story. Play acting allows children to interact with the imaginary characters in a more spontaneous, unscripted setting. Journaling allows children to expand upon and explore their answers without the pressure of presenting a polished response to the person who is posing a reflective question. Journaling also gives children time to return to the question or prompt on their own time, which can reduce the pressure to respond that may be felt by the child. It is

important for children to interact with and process what they read in a way that suits them and allows them to connect with the story in a meaningful way.

Children's Literature as a Powerful Tool

When a child opens a book, they have the opportunity to experience something new and wonderful. Whether a picture book with vibrant illustrations, a chapter book with characters who become like friends, or a nonfiction book that teaches something new, the sky is the limit with how the child can be impacted. Children's books may seem like overly simplistic tools, but in reality, they can be powerful vehicles for awareness and change (Johnson et al.). In fact, many teachers frequently use children's books to help encourage their students' engagement. When reflecting about her reading of a children's chapter book to her class, Dana Bogel commented that, "This book opened up discussion about the issue of refugees and immigration, and exposed students with no experience to the topic in a relatable way [. . .] It led the class into further discussions and into non-fiction text about the Lost Boys of Sudan" (Bogel). In addition to being more engaging than reading textbooks or news articles, Dana noted that "Novels are particularly effective because children immerse themselves in the life experiences of the characters. The characters become real and invite the reader to explore feelings and emotions they might not experience" (Bogel). There is something magical about opening a book and becoming part of another reality for a while. According to Cain, children "like to get the message through relating to the characters" (70). Walking in the footsteps of someone else can provide a perspective that the reader might not otherwise understand or even have access to.

Children's book authors and illustrators are now, more than ever, writing engaging, thought-provoking, and redemptive stories, memoirs, and biographies. They are intentionally bringing the experiences of children and youth who are enduring poverty, the refugee/migrant

crisis, and global conflict into stark focus. Among the many books that present their readers with topics of injustice, three books stand out as exceptional examples of children's literature that allow their readers to understand and feel what their characters are experiencing.

The first book, *Still a Family* (2017), is written by Brenda Reeves Sturgis and illustrated by Jo-Shin Lee. The story allows the reader a glimpse into the life of a little girl, her mom, and her dad and their homelessness. While the family has found temporary residence in a homeless shelter, the girl is separated from her father at night, due to his needing to stay in a different shelter somewhere else in town. Despite being homeless and enduring the other hardships that come with it like sharing a large sleeping space with strangers, finding shelter during the daytime, and relying on soup kitchens for meals, the girl remains positive, often reflecting on the fact that she, her mom, and her dad are "still a family" (Reeves Sturgis & Lee). The words and pictures of this story work together to help the reader understand that "income alone doesn't adequately convey the full meaning of poverty [. . .]" but rather that poverty is a much more complex issue "encompassing deprivations across a number of important domains" (Save the Children 7). It also helps the reader to empathize with the circumstances and feelings around what it might be like for a young child experiencing homelessness. The book also does well at showing that homelessness is not what defines the girl or her family. This fact is something that is often overlooked in books dealing with similar subject matter. In addition to the powerful story, a note and some suggested resources from the author encourages the reader to learn and do more to help within their community.

The second book, *The Journey* (2016), is written and illustrated by Francesca Sanna and endorsed by the human rights organization Amnesty International. This narrative, also told from the perspective of a young child, is beautifully illustrated and brings the reader on the harrowing

journey a family is forced to take as they flee their war-torn homeland in search of a better life. While the text is used more sparingly, the pictures in this book transport the reader from the depths of despair and worry into a hopeful longing as the family lose their father/husband, put their trust in strangers, encounter many dangers, and endure a seemingly endless migration to arrive at a place where they “can be safe and begin our [their] story again” (Sanna). The author pays respect to the journeys of the many refugees and migrants who strive for freedom and safety, allowing the reader to be reminded of the fact that the story is rooted in the lives and experiences of real people around our globe.

The third book, *When Stars Are Scattered* (2020) by Victoria Jameson and Omar Mohamed, was a National Book Award Finalist in 2020 and is told in the graphic novel (or comic book like) format. This beautiful memoir is co-written by Omar Mohamed, the man whom the story is about. Through vivid pictures and a strongly written narrative, the reader is granted a firsthand account of what it means to live life in a refugee camp, experiencing the daily struggles Mohamed and his younger, nonverbal brother Hassan endure. Mohamed and Hassan rarely have enough to eat, must collect water and firewood each day, and struggle to keep hope alive with the knowledge that their mother may be out looking for them somewhere. Following Mohamed’s life over the course of fifteen years, from childhood to young adulthood, gives the reader a small glimpse of the time it takes for many refugees to find peace in a new home. As the story ends, the reader is encouraged by the hope of this single story and moved to consider how to get involved in supporting organizations that help refugees and migrants worldwide.

Without books like these, children's ability to understand what life is like for those who suffer from social injustices would be much more difficult. With books like these, readers are invited to feel what the characters and subjects feel, and for a moment, experience what it might

be like to live like they do. Burke and Collier note that a goal of reading is for “children to empathize with those in inequitable circumstances [. . . and] participate in actions that will bring about social change” (272). Books like these can make an impact by sparking knowledge, empathy, and the desire to act on behalf of others.

The Resource Kit

Each resource kit will be available to check out from a school library. Families, teachers, and students will have access to these resource kits and be encouraged to borrow them to use at home and in the classroom. Each kit will provide the family, teacher, or student with:

- An in-depth introduction with suggestions and considerations for parents and teachers who are using the kit.
- A carefully curated selection of children’s books (picture, chapter, fiction, and nonfiction) that focus on social justice issues children and youth are experiencing.
- Reader’s guides for each book with questions to help the reader make connections to the social justice issue highlighted in each book.
- A resource list and guide for further action should the reader desire to learn more and/or respond to their newfound knowledge and empathy.

Families can read both the nonfiction and fiction picture and chapter books together, while teachers can read and discuss the books with their classes as part of or connecting to a unit of study. While the books may be suited for a particular grade level or age, a parent and teacher may use their discretion as to which are best suited to engage their family or class. After reading the children’s books, they can make sure to discuss each book’s events, characters, and parallels to real life. These discussions are an important part of making connections with the stories and with each other. Simpson-Hargreaves notes, "Students are encouraged to question, analyze their

understanding of the text, drawing from their own social understanding, and to hear others' responses" (35). After discussing the books, parents and teachers may also want to learn more about the social justice issues or even determine how they would like to help. As they find ways to help, students may require some guidance and assistance from parents and teachers. While some support may be necessary, teachers and parents would do well to keep in mind what Short et al. note, "Sustainable social justice projects are ones in which children and adolescents are involved with the ideas, planning, implementation, and reflection" (35). When children and youth lead the way with these projects, they can feel empowered and engaged.

These resource kits can help in a small way by providing the users with a glimpse into the lives of those children who suffer from social injustices. As Julie McLeod notes, "When human rights are at the core of the curriculum, teaching and learning becomes rich, relevant and responsive" (1227). So, gathering and tailoring resources to help the next generation prepare for their future and develop a concern for others is an important piece of social justice.

Funding

While the list of books, reading guides, and other parts of the kits are provided at no cost, purchasing the books themselves can be costly, regardless of a library's budget. For a library to add one of these kits to their collection, they will more than likely need to find funding outside of their own organization to build and maintain the kit. While funding can come from a variety of sources, the organization(s) providing the funding may require a description of "the need for your program in a way that clearly shows how it fits the funder's priorities" (Karsh and Fox 196). Therefore, it is important to understand and communicate the goal of this project and the needs it meets clearly, so that the necessary funding can be secured.

Funding will be garnered more easily from an agency or organization that supports the mission and vision of the school and the goal of the project. Begin the search for funding with organizations that align with the project's goals. In the case of these specific kits, and their intent to provide their reader(s) with a knowledge of and empathy toward children experiencing social injustices around our globe, Snapdragon Book Foundation would be a strong candidate to help with funding. Snapdragon Book Foundation has funded many projects for school libraries who want to provide their students with books that reflect diverse characters and books that will help to broaden students' perspectives and worldviews. This kit will more than likely fit with the mission of a school or school district. A school will also need to check with their PTA/PTSA/PTO and the various education associations that work in partnership with their school district for funding. Inviting organizations like these to "participate with us in our vision and mission" can strengthen existing ties and can also "create new, lasting relationships" that can benefit everyone involved (Nouwen 15, 49). In time, if the use of the kit(s) proves to have a positive impact on families in the school and district communities, additional funding will be more easily procured as "Collaborative efforts are more robust in such a web of relationships when diverse actors come together around a common cause" (Kuenkel 269). When everyone's efforts are channeled to help students grow as members of our global community, everyone wins.

To allocate library funding responsibly, the library purchasing the books for the kit might start by buying one copy of each book that is recommended. As the kit is used by families, teachers, and students with more frequency, additional copies of the kit can be assembled. Along with purchasing copies to build additional kits, there may be newly published books to add to the kits. Including this as part of the budget in the grant request shows "a vision for the future and a blueprint for action" and sets the library up for continued success when it comes to the use of the

kits (Joyaux, loc. 5088). However, if the grant request does not allow for future purchases and planning, another grant could be written to obtain these copies, or, due to the small cost incurred for the purchase of a book or two, the library could build this into the budget.

Conclusion

Children's books allow their readers to be transported to different worlds, experience the realities of the characters therein, and learn more about themselves and the world around them (Bishop).

As part of a well-curated resource kit, children's books can encourage children and youth to move beyond basic knowledge and understanding and empathize with those who are experiencing social injustices. Now more than ever, our world needs citizens who will act on behalf of those who are suffering from poverty, displacement, conflict, prejudice, and other injustices. It is imperative that we help children and youth to develop an understanding that "all of us are community members [. . .] interconnected with our present world in many ways" and that the future of our global community depends on our convictions and compassion (Goudzwaard et al. 199). Children's books, paired with a convenient, high-quality, and trustworthy resource kit are one of the many tools that can help realize this goal.

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Appendix I – Social Justice Issues Facing Children Kit

A Note for Families and Teachers

Today, more than ever, injustices like poverty, the refugee/migrant crisis, and global conflict are affecting millions of children and youth around our world. These children and youth need the support and help of you and me, their fellow, global community members.

This resource kit is designed to help you learn more about some of the many global social injustices facing children and youth and, in the end, help and encourage you to make a difference in the lives of others. These books, their guides, and the additional resources provided in this kit are a wonderful place for you to start. Regardless of how much you already know about injustices like poverty, the refugee/migrant crisis, and global conflict, there is always more to learn. The more you learn, the more you can do to help.

Included in this kit you will find:

- Suggestions for using the kit.
- A reading list of high-quality children's books.
- A reader's guide for each book.
- Additional resources and some ideas for taking action.

To get the most out of the kit, it is recommended that you follow these steps:

- Read the nonfiction title(s) for each social justice issue. Reading these at the outset will provide some background knowledge about the issue and help you as a reader to understand each of the other books better.
- Read as many of the picture and chapter books as you can. The more books you read, the more you will know and understand the issue.

- Make time to read through and answer the questions provided in the reader's guide.
Doing this will help you connect with the stories and deepen your understanding of how these issues affect real people.
- Discuss your answers to the questions found in the reader's guide with others. Seek to understand their perspective and share your own.
- Explore some of the additional resources that are provided. Some give more information about the issues, while others provide an understanding of organizations that are working to make a difference.
- Reflect on how you might make a difference. Think and work together with others to find ways you can help.

Good luck as you learn, reflect, and work to make our global community a better place for those experiencing social injustices.

Suggestions for Using the Kit

While a single book can teach a reader, evoke an empathetic reaction, and inspire them to act, multiple books centered on the same theme or subject can be much more powerful in the response they inspire. Exploring the reality of global social injustices in-depth is an important consideration when using these resource kits. Making sure to read as many of the books as possible will provide the reader(s) with a much needed, thorough understanding of the issue. Each book included in a kit is recommended for a specific age range and has been written to help its reader understand more about the social justice issue highlighted within its pages. Every book has been selected because of the care each author and illustrator has taken to help their reader understand more about the critical issue within. There are some considerations that will help the reader(s) get the most out of the kit.

Considerations for Families

As families seek to find ways to help their children understand more about the world around them, it is important for them to have the right tools to do so. One of the main hesitations that parents have when introducing tough topics like poverty or global conflict to their children is that their children will be exposed to harsh realities that they are not ready for yet. These kits use children's literature in a way that addresses this parental concern. According to Dever et al., the medium of "Children's books provide a safe forum for talking and writing about social justice issues because children address them in the context of the story and its characters..." (19).

Students can process their thinking about hardship, pain, and loss at their own pace and 'from a safe distance.' Allowing children to view and experience social injustices through the eyes and lives of fictional characters can be powerful and effective. In addition to books with fictional characters, there are some nonfiction books included that approach each social justice issue with

sensitivity, carefully presenting the reader with age-appropriate information about the topic. Both fiction and nonfiction books work together to lay a foundation of accurate knowledge for the reader. Families that use the resource kits are provided with convenient and engaging ways to approach, talk about, and act upon important and relevant issues communities around the globe are facing every day.

The kits are designed to be user-friendly and provide the family with books, reader's guides, resource lists, and suggestions for action. When a family uses a resource kit to explore the global social justice issue they are interested in learning about, they can start reading and discussing the books right away. Families can choose to spend time reading and discussing the same books together, aloud, or divide the books up and read at a pace that suits the individual members of the family. Discussing the questions in the guides is also an important part of creating meaning about what is read. In addition to discussing the contents of the books, it is important to discuss and plan how to apply this new knowledge and perspective the family has gained.

As mentioned, families can read together or on their own at a pace that suits each family member. Each reader should take their time to engage with the story or information presented in the book. Reader's guides are provided for each book and guide the reader in developing a deeper understanding of and connection to the book. After reading and reflecting, families should set aside time for discussion. Discussing the stories and books could happen around the dinner table or at another time that is convenient for the family members. Families could use the reading guides to help their discussion or feel free to share in a more unstructured way.

As families discuss their thoughts and feelings regarding the social justice issue presented in the books, the conversation may turn toward a desire to know more or do something about

what was highlighted in the books. Burke and Collier note that a goal of the reading is for “children to empathize with those in inequitable circumstances [. . . and] participate in actions that will bring about social change” (272). Finding ways to explore more about what was read is a powerful way to express that new empathy. The Ideas for Action and Resource sections of the kit can provide each family with a place to start. While the books are appropriate for children to access independently, depending on their age designation, the websites listed in the Resource List should be previewed by parents before children view and use them. Likewise, a family should take time to consider the Ideas for Action. The time, resources, and interest levels of all family members should be considered before committing to help an organization or start a project. After this consideration, contacting an organization that specializes in addressing the social injustices discussed in the books is always a great idea. Often these organizations offer practical suggestions for how to help. Once a family determines the appropriate course of action for them, it is important that they serve, give, and work together as a family to meet the needs of those they are trying to help. If parents and children work alongside each other, the effect of their actions will be felt more widely and powerfully.

Considerations for Educators

One of the aims of education is to make sure that what is being taught and learned relates to and is applicable to the life of the learner. If a student cannot understand how their new knowledge is rooted in and useful to their ‘real life,’ then the motivation for and application of what they have learned is not as strong or meaningful. Equally so, when a reader connects with the characters and events in a story or book, they are more likely to derive meaning from what they are reading than if no connections are made. As schools attempt to educate their students about cultural awareness and engaged citizenship, they are challenged to find the most effective ways to do so.

According to Julie McLeod, “Educating for peace through human rights entails providing opportunities for students to develop these values along with their knowledge of human rights and the skills needed to use these knowledges and values to use in contexts to promote just and peaceful societies” (1227). Using the children’s literature provided in the resource kits as a tool can allow educators to teach their students about global social justice issues in a developmentally appropriate and relevant way. Lysaker and Sedberry support the use of children’s literature in teaching, stating that “In schools, picture book read-alouds are often used to provide a shared context for exploring the social, political and personal realities of a range of ‘others’ – all within the safe arms of classroom community” (105). When a classroom community can read, learn, and reflect together, the gains in learning can be impressive.

Educators can choose to use the resource kit in a variety of ways. First, an educator could conduct a whole class read aloud. Gathering students together in a shared space is important for their concentration and a feeling of togetherness. Reading the story once without commentary or interruption is necessary because it allows the class to experience all the elements of the story. If students have questions or comments during this read through, providing sticky notes for them to write their questions on can be helpful. After reading the book for the first time, an additional reading can be helpful for students to share their reactions or process their thinking. Allowing students to share their thoughts aloud to the whole class can often be time consuming and counterproductive to the momentum that may be occurring. So, having students pair-share in groups of two or three can be more productive and meaningful for those listening and sharing. Providing students with guidelines for listening and sharing in these pairs or groups will allow them to interact in ways that welcome and honor everyone’s perspective. These guidelines should be pre-taught and already exist as part of the classroom structure and small group routine.

Likewise, if students disagree or have divergent thinking about an answer to a question, providing them with additional responses, such as “Can you please tell me more about your thinking?” will help them think through their peers’ responses. Simpson-Hargreaves notes, “Students are encouraged to question, analyze their understanding of the text, drawing from their own social understanding, and to hear others’ responses. During the session, they see that not everyone may share the same opinion and that changing their own minds without judgment is OK” (35). Once the book has been read and students have been given the opportunity to share their initial reactions, an in-depth discussion can be helpful for students to cement any connections they have made to the story. These discussions are often most effective when students are given the discussion questions in advance and are provided time to think through and write about them as individuals. After journaling or writing brief notes, students can be divided into groups once again to share their answers to the discussion questions. The educator is best served to choose a few discussion questions to focus on within a whole class discussion. This whole class discussion can take place after the smaller groups have a chance to discuss. In addition to a whole class reading aloud and the subsequent small group discussions, an educator could choose to organize smaller, more independent groups in which readers work with each other to read, explore, and act. Often there is not time in the schedule to explore extracurricular topics, and so, an educator could also recommend or assign one of the kits to a student or students who are self-driven and motivated to learn about a particular global social justice issue.

However educators decide to facilitate this new learning and response, they will do well to encourage students to connect with the texts they are reading. As Martin et al. note, there are two types of responses that readers come away with after reading, “An efferent response is one in which students react to the facts and ideas they learn in a text, and an aesthetic response is one

in which their personal feelings and attitudes are touched by their transactions with the text and they make connections between the text and their own life” (159). The goal would be for students to develop the latter response, so that they move beyond a basic knowledge and develop an empathy toward and connection with the characters in the literature. Picture books inspire students to “develop a sense of shared fate for the globe on which they live and to examine difficult and complex issues of poverty and social injustice through the use of a fictional character” (Bradbury 3). Teachers can facilitate the engagement and action of their students by encouraging them to act upon what they have learned and the empathy they may feel. However, for students’ activism to be meaningful it must originate with them. Short et al. note, “Sustainable social justice projects are ones in which children and adolescents are involved with the ideas, planning, implementation, and reflection” (35). If teachers do more than facilitate or provide the necessary resources or connections, the project may not last very long or have the desired impact on the students or those that they wish to help.

After reading books about child poverty and its consequences (hunger, homelessness, feelings of shame and embarrassment, etc.) a class may decide to contact a local shelter for children and families experiencing homelessness. After hearing about the shelter’s needs, the class could hold a meeting in which they brainstorm to discuss the ways they would be able to help. Since shelters often need basic goods to provide for the people they serve, the class may organize and implement a school-wide food or toiletry drive to help the shelter. In addition to this food and toiletry drive, some students may want to write encouraging letters to families and children who stay at the homeless shelter. Creating leaflets and posters, working with the PTA and student advisory council, collecting the food/toiletries, and writing letters are all part of the students’ desire to respond with empathy to the new knowledge they have gained.

Conclusion

These suggestions are meant as a guide to help parents and educators do their best as they begin to educate their children and students about global social justice issues. What matters are the connections that children and youth make as they read and what they decide to do as a result. Children's literature can be a tool when combined with other thoughtfully curated resources. Together, these resources have the power to change hearts, minds, and our global community for the better.

Reading List – Child Poverty

Depending on the age of your child(ren) or student(s), read and discuss as many of these books as makes sense in the time you have. The more you read, the more opportunities there are to connect with and reflect on the information and stories.

Nonfiction Books

- *On Our Street: Our First Talk About Poverty* written by Jillian Roberts and Jaime Casap, illustrated by Jane Heinrichs (ages 5+)
- *Children in Our World: Poverty and Hunger* written by Louise Spilsbury, illustrated by Hanane Kai (ages 5+)

Picture Books (ages 5+)

- *Those Shoes* written by Maribeth Boelts, illustrated by Noah Z. Jones
- *It's a No Money Day* written and illustrated by Kate Milner
- *Maddi's Fridge* written by Lois Brandt, illustrated by Vin Vogel
- *Lulu and the Hunger Monster* written by Erin Talkin, illustrated by Sheryl Murray
- *A Shelter in Our Car* written by Monica Gunning, illustrated by Elaine Pedlar
- *Still a Family* written by Brenda Reeves-Sturgis, illustrated by Jo-Shin Lee

Chapter Books

- *How to Steal a Dog* written by Barbara O'Connor (ages 8+)
- *No Fixed Address* written by Susin Nielsen (ages 10+)

Reader's Guide

You will notice that all the characters in the books you are about to read approach their problems and hardships in different ways. Making connections with the characters and events in each story can help you understand the characters' realities better. After reading on your own or with someone, think through and discuss the questions provided for each book. Journaling responses to some of the questions before discussing them can help you, the writer, to formulate your thoughts. Discussion of the questions as a family can also help to solidify the meaning made by you, the reader.

Along with questions specific to each book, here are some things to think about the stories in general:

- In which ways are you and the main character are similar? In which ways are you different?
- If you were facing a problem like the main character, how would you see it or approach it?
- What emotions is the character feeling? What do you do when you experience 'big' emotions?
- Does the character have anyone to help them through the tough times they are experiencing? Who helps you when you are going through a tough time?
- If you could offer help or advice to the main character, what would you do or say?

On Our Street: Our First Talk About Poverty (Jillian Roberts, Jaime Casap, and Jane Heinrichs)

- What does it mean when someone is homeless? Living in poverty?
- Who is affected by homelessness and poverty?
- What are some reasons people are homeless or poor?
- Where do people stay when they are homeless?
- What are some ways to help someone who is homeless?
- What kinds of poverty are there?
- Why is it so important that children go to school?
- Why is it so important that children have access to medical care?
- Can you list some of the fundamental human rights?

Children in Our World: Poverty and Hunger (Louise Spilsbury & Hanane Kai)

- What does it mean that someone is poor or lives in poverty?
- How does living in poverty affect people?
- What are some things that cause poverty and hunger?
- What does it mean that things are ‘outside of people’s control?’
- What happens to a family when the person who makes the money does not earn enough money or cannot work?
- What are natural disasters and how can they cause poverty and hunger?
- If someone cannot afford medicine or a doctor when they are sick, how can this affect their health?
- If children are too poor or hungry to do well in school, how can this affect them later in life?
- What is a charity? How do charities help people in need?

- How does it feel to know that many people around the world, including children, experience poverty and hunger?
- How does it feel to know that this problem is getting better?
- How does it feel to know that you have the power to help others who are experiencing poverty and hunger?
- What ideas do you have to help others who are experiencing poverty and hunger?

Those Shoes (Maribeth Boelts and Noah Z. Jones)

- Why does Jeremy dream about and want new shoes?
- Are there things that you dream about and want? What are they?
- What might Jeremy's grandma mean when she says, "There's no room for 'want' around here—just 'need'"? How might Jeremy feel about this statement?
- How might Jeremy feel as he sees all his friends with the shoes he wants? How might you feel if you were in the same situation?
- Why does Jeremy's school counselor give him a pair of shoes?
- What does Jeremy think of the shoes? What do his friends and classmates think and say about the shoes?
- How might Jeremy feel when his grandma tells him she may have enough money to get him the new shoes? How might he feel when they see the price of the shoes?
- Why is Jeremy determined to get the shoes even though they do not fit properly?
- Why doesn't Jeremy's grandma stop him when he buys the shoes?
- Why does Jeremy try to talk himself out of giving Antonio the shoes?
- Why do you think Jeremy gives Antonio the shoes?
- How might Antonio/Jeremy be feeling after this act of kindness?

- Are there things like toys/clothes/books/games that you have that you might not want/need anymore?
- How might someone feel if they were given those things? How might you feel if you gave them to someone who really needed them?

It's a No Money Day (Kate Milner)

- Why do you think the mother and daughter share a bed?
- How do you think mother/daughter feels about sharing a bed with the other?
- What is inside of their cupboard/pantry?
- How might you feel if you had so little?
- When the girl says, “Luckily Mum isn’t hungry,” do you think this is true?
- Why might the mom have told her daughter that she was not hungry?
- What are the things the girl and her mom save money for and spend money on?
- What are some things you save money for and spend money on?
- How does the illustrator show that “It is a no money day” for the girl and her mom?
- How does the girl/mom feel about not having any money?
- Do you think the girl/mom still have fun together, even though they have no money?
- What is a foodbank? Who uses foodbanks?
- Why doesn’t the girl’s mom like going to the foodbank?
- How might you feel if you needed to get your food from a foodbank?
- When the girl and mom play the “maybe one day game,” what do they each dream of getting one day?
- How are their dreams different? How are their dreams the same?
- How might it feel to depend on “kind people” to be able to eat the food you need?

- How are you similar/different from the girl in the story?
- What would you tell the girl if you spoke to her?

Maddi's Fridge (Lois Brandt and Vin Vogel)

- When Sofia notices that Maddi and her family do not have much food in their fridge, what is her reaction?
- Why does Maddi ask Sofia to keep a promise not to tell anyone what she notices?
- What do you notice about the difference between Maddi's and Sofia's fridges?
- Why do you think some people have more to eat than others?
- How does Sofia find a way to help Maddi while keeping her promise?
- Sofia helps Maddi (and her family) by bringing them food to eat. How does Maddi help Sofia? Why is this important to their friendship?
- Why does Sofia eventually break her promise and tell her mom what is happening with Maddi's family? How do you think she feels about this?
- How does Maddi react when she finds out that Sophia broke her promise? How would you feel if someone close to you broke a big promise like this?
- Sophia says to Maddi that "You're more important" than a promise. What does she mean when she says this to her friend?
- Do you think there are times when it is ok to break a promise? When/not?
- How do you think Maddi and her family feel when Sofia and her family help by buying them food?
- How do you think Sofia and her family feel when they are able to help Maddi and her family out by buying them food?
- How do you feel when you help or receive help from others?

A Shelter in Our Car (Monica Gunning and Elaine Pedlar)

- Why are Zettie and her mom frightened whenever they hear or see the police?
- Why do Zettie and her mom have to keep moving their car from place to place?
- Zettie and her mom must wash up in the park bathroom and then sit on a park bench as they eat. Why don't they have a place of their own?
- Zettie is ashamed of her mom's car because of what some boys at school say about it. What would you say to Zettie if you were a friend of hers?
- Zettie's mom cannot find enough work to afford food, gas for their car, or rent for an apartment. How does this affect her and Zettie?
- Even though Zettie and her mom do not have much, they still share with others. Why do you think they are so generous?
- How does Zettie react when her mom tells her they will stay in a hotel instead of their car?
- How does Zettie's situation change when her mom is offered a job?
- How would your life change if it were more like Zettie's?
- How would Zettie's life change if it were more like yours?
- What would you say to Zettie and her mom to encourage them in their situation?

Lulu and the Hunger Monster (Erik Talkin and Sheryl Murray)

- How do you think Lulu feels knowing that her mom has no money to buy groceries?
- What is the Hunger Monster and why does it stay around Lulu?
- How does not eating affect Lulu while she is at school?
- How does the Hunger Monster influence Lulu? What things does it make her do/think about doing that she would not normally do?

- When Lulu’s friends start sharing with her, how does that make her feel? Why does Lulu stop accepting their food?
- What makes Lulu decide to tell her teacher about her problem? Would you have taken a risk like Lulu?
- How does Lulu feel when she leaves the Hunger Monster behind?
- If you had a friend who was hungry like Lulu, how would you help or encourage her?

Still a Family (Brenda Reeves-Sturgis and Jo-Shin Lee)

- Why do you think the young girl in the story is living in a shelter? What may have happened that made it so she, her mom, and dad lost their home?
- The young girl says she moved from “[my] quiet room, my comfy bed, and my cozy quilt” to sleeping in a shelter with people she does not know? How would you feel if you had to make a move like that?
- How do you think the young girl’s parents feel about their situation?
- Even though the young girl and her mom live in a different shelter than her dad, she tries to stay positive, saying “We are still a family.” How do you think she manages to stay positive? Would you have this same outlook and attitude?
- What would you think/feel if, like the young girl, you were separated from one of your parents?
- The young girl and her family stay in their shelters as “Days and weeks and months go by.” Why do you think it is taking so long for them to find a place to call home?
- If you met this young girl and learned more about her situation, what would you say to encourage her in this challenging time?

- Imagine you are the young girl, the mother, or the father in the story. Write a letter to one of your family members telling them what you are feeling, thinking, and hoping.

How to Steal a Dog (Barbara O'Connor)

- Georgina is conflicted about telling her friend Luanne her new situation. Would you have let your friend know, or tried to hide it for a while like Georgina did?
- How do you think Georgina and Toby's mom feels about their new situation? Do you think Georgina and Toby are too hard on her?
- Georgina and Toby try to find a way to help get the money they need to get a real place to live. What words would you use to describe their plan?
- Georgina struggles in school because of being homeless. Would you be able to do your best without having your basic needs (food, shelter, and clothing) met?
- As Georgina struggles with whether to steal the dog, her desperation gets the better of her concern for right vs. wrong? Is it wrong for someone to steal if they have a good reason for doing so (like they need the money for food/shelter)?
- Georgina and her family eventually get a place to stay and things return close to normal. How do you think Georgina and her family felt when they got this opportunity?
- If you were in Georgina, Toby, or their mom's situation, what would you have done?

No Fixed Address (Susin Nielsen)

- Felix transitions from a comfortable, stable life with his mom and grandma to eventually living in a van with his mom. How would you feel if you were in Felix's position?
- How was Felix able to have such a positive attitude about living in the van?
- What is Felix's thinking about his mom's habits of lying, stealing, and losing her job(s)?
- Is it ok for people to lie and steal if they need to survive or get by?

- How do you think Felix feels when he has to take care of himself and his mom when she is in one of her 'slumps?'
- When Felix thinks he has found a solution to his problems in 'Who, What, Where, When.' How would you do with putting that much pressure on yourself?
- How do you think Felix feels when he finds himself starting to lie and then steal?
- Felix experiences small and large acts of kindness from strangers and those he knows. How much do these gestures mean to him? Do you think it would be hard to accept the kindness of others?
- Felix finally tells his friends, the police, social worker, and then the nation about his situation. Describe how he must have felt with the burden of his situation and secret lifted?
- Felix is angry and devastated at having to wait five years to collect his prize money. How does he find a positive way to look at the situation?
- At the end of the story, Felix finds a small way to repay the kindness he has experienced by helping an old lady. How do you think he felt and how did she feel when this happened?

Additional Resources

If you would like to learn even more about child poverty here are some extra books you can read.

There is also a list of organizations who are working to end child poverty both locally and globally.

Books

- *Last Stop on Market Street* written by Matt de la Pena, illustrated by Christian Robinson (ages 5+)
- *Crenshaw* written by Katherine Applegate (ages 8+)
- *Free Lunch* written by Rex Ogle (ages 10+)

Websites

- Feeding America – <https://www.feedingamerica.org/our-work/hunger-relief-programs/school-pantry>
- National Alliance to End Homelessness – <https://endhomelessness.org/>
- National Coalition for the Homeless – <https://nationalhomeless.org/>
- StandUp for Kids – <https://www.standupforkids.org/>
- Safe Horizon – <https://www.safehorizon.org/get-help/homeless-youth/>
- World Concern – <https://worldconcern.org/getinvolved/>
- Family Promise – <https://familypromise.org/>
- UNICEF Kid Power – <https://unicefkidpower.org>

Ideas for Taking Action

Think about these different ways to help people who are experiencing homelessness or poverty.

Then, with parent permission and support, choose one or more of them to do.

- Contact a local foodbank or shelter and find out what kinds of items they provide for people who are experiencing homelessness. If you have the resources, think about buying and then donating items for those in need.
- Start your own fundraising drive. Contact family, friends, and others you know to raise money/goods to donate to a foodbank or shelter.
- Share what you have learned about homelessness and how it affects, children, families, and other people. Make a poster, video, or write something to share with your friends, family, or classmates.

Reading List – Refugees, Migrants, and Global Conflict

Depending on the age of your child[ren] and student(s), read and discuss as many of these books as makes sense in the time you have. The more you read, the more opportunities there are to connect with and reflect on the information and stories.

Nonfiction Books (ages 5+)

- *Children in Our World: Refugees and Migrants* written by Ceri Roberts, illustrated by Hanane Kai
- *Children in Our World: Global Conflict* written by Louise Spilsbury, illustrated by Hanane Kai
- *What is a Refugee?* written by Elsie Gravel

Picture Books (ages 5+)

- *The Journey* written by Francesca Sanna
- *Four Feet, Two Sandals* written by Karen Lynn Williams and illustrated by Khadra Mohammed
- *My Name is Not Refugee* written and illustrated by Kate Milner
- *Wherever I Go* written by Mary Wagley Copp, illustrated by Munir D. Mohammed
- *Brothers In Hope: The Story of the Lost Boys of Sudan* written by Mary Williams, illustrated by R. Gregory Christie

Chapter Books

- *When Stars Are Scattered* written by Victoria Jamieson and Omar Mohamed (ages 10+)
- *A Long Walk to Water* written by Linda Sue Park (ages 8+)

Reader's Guide

You will notice that all the characters in the books you are about to read approach their problems and hardships in different ways. Making connections with the characters and events in each story can help you understand the characters' realities better. After reading on your own or with someone, think through and discuss the questions provided for each book. Journaling responses to some of the questions before discussing them can help you, the writer, to formulate your thoughts. Discussion of the questions as a family can also help to solidify the meaning made by you, the reader.

Along with questions specific to each book, here are some things to think about the stories in general:

- In which ways are you and the main character are similar? In which ways are you different?
- If you were facing a problem like the main character, how would you see it or approach it?
- What emotions is the character feeling? What do you do when you experience 'big' emotions?
- Does the character have anyone to help them through the tough time they are experiencing? Who helps you when you are going through a tough time?
- If you could offer help or advice to the main character, what would you do or say?

Children in Our World: Refugees and Migrants (Ceri Roberts & Hanane Kai)

- What are some reasons people must leave their homes? Draw a picture of at least one of the reasons.
- What is the difference between a refugee and migrant?
- Why do some refugees or migrant children have to travel alone?
- How is their experience different from those who are still with their parent(s)?
- Which kind of countries do many refugees and migrants come from?
- How is moving away from home different for a refugee and migrant?
- What kind of dangers and hardships can a refugee or migrant face as they travel?
- What are some reasons why the circumstances of a refugee or migrant do not always change right away when they arrive at their destination?
- How do you think they feel about this?
- What is a refugee camp like? Draw a picture of what it might look like?
- Who are some people that help refugees and migrants?
- What do/can they do to help?
- Why do you think they choose to help?
- What does it mean when a refugee or migrant seeks asylum?
- If a refugee or migrant can settle down in a new place, how does their life improve?
- Are there ways in which their life is still like the way it was before? How?
- What are some ways you could help refugees and/or migrants?

Children in Our World: Global Conflict (Louise Spilsbury and Hanane Kai)

- Why do people, governments or countries have conflict with each other?
- Why do countries go to war and who does the war affect?

- What is terrorism and who does it affect?
- How do people's lives change because of conflict?
- How do people get help when they experience the effects of conflict?
- How do others help those who have experienced the effect of conflict?
- Is there a way to end conflict?
- Why is it important to listen to others and think about their perspective?
- How can you help those who have or are experienced the effects of conflict?

What is a Refugee? (Elise Gravel)

- What is the most important thing to remember about refugees?
- What are some of the reasons refugees must flee or leave their countries?
- What are some of the things a refugee must leave behind when they flee or leave?
- How might a refugees be feeling as they leave/flee their country?
- Why is it so difficult for a refugee to find another place to live?
- What are some things you might have in common with refugee kids?
- What are some things that might be different about you and refugee kids?
- What would you say to encourage one of the refugee kids featured at the end of this book?
- Is there something you would do to help one of the refugee kids featured at the end of the book? What is it?

The Journey (Francesca Sanna)

- What is the reason for the family's life changing forever?
- How do the illustrations (on page 1–2) show this change?
- What does it mean when the girl says her father is “taken away” by the war?

- Why do you think the family's life is 'darker' because her father is gone?
- Why does the girl's mother worry more and more?
- How will traveling to and living in a new place help the family?
- Why does the family have to leave behind so many of their things as they travel?
- How is the family feeling when the guards turn the family away at the border?
- Do you think that the children's mother is never scared?
- What might the mother be feeling?
- How does the family escape the guards and get helped over the border?
- How might they feel that their journey is not over yet?
- How might telling stories to each other help the people who are traveling together?
- How are the family like birds? How are they different?
- What would you tell the family as they hope for a "home where they can be safe and begin their story again?"
- Do you have a safe place to live?
- If you do, what kinds of things are special about your home?
- If not, what would you want your home to have so it felt safe?
- Do you think everyone in our world should have a safe place to live? Why?
- Is there a way that could happen? How?

Four Feet, Two Sandals (Karen Lynn Williams and Khadra Mohammed)

- Why are Lina and others in the camp barefoot?
- Why are they being given clothes by relief workers?
- When Lina approached the girl with the other sandal, why did the girl turn and walk away?

- Lina and her brother traveled from Afghanistan to the refugee camp in Pakistan. What might that long walk/journey been like for the two of them?
- Why do you think Lina decided to share the sandals with the other girl, Feroza?
- Why are the two girls and their families waiting for new homes? What happened to their other family members?
- Why weren't the girls in school with the boys?
- When Lina and her family find out they are going to America, how might they be feeling?
- When Feroza hears the news that her friend is going to America, how might she be feeling?
- Why does Feroza want Lina to keep one of the sandals, even though she has no shoes and Lina has shoes to wear as she travels to America?
- What does Feroza mean when she says, "It is good to remember...Four feet, two sandals?"
- Why does Lina tell Feroza, "We will share again in America."?
- Do you think Lina and Feroza will see each other again?
- What do you think their friendship meant to each of them while they stayed in the refugee camp?

Wherever I Go (Mary Wagley Copp & Munir D. Mohammed)

- Why does Abia's father say they have been at the Shimelba Camp for "Too long."?
- Why does Abia think differently about this than her father?
- What is the camp that Abia stays in like?
- What does Abia hear, see, smell, and feel around her in the camp?

- How do you think Abia feels as she does her chores each day?
- Do you do chores? How do you feel as you work to get them done?
- Why do you think Abia calls herself a 'Queen'?
- Does Abia's life match the life of a queen? Why/not?
- When Abia was younger, she had to flee her village. What does this mean?
- Abia was too young to remember what happened, but how do you think her parents felt the night they had to flee?
- Abia's family is on a journey to find a 'forever home.' What does this mean?
- How might Abia feel about leaving her camp to find a new home?
- Abia's mom says they will have to leave everything behind, except their stories. What does this mean?
- What might Abia mean when she says she is still a queen, no matter where she goes?
- How do you think Abia feels in her new home?
- If you had to move and leave your home, how might you feel?
- What is different about Abia's new home?

My Name is Not Refugee (Kate Milner)

- Why do the little boy and his mom have to leave their home?
- What will it be like for the boy as he and his mom leave?
- What does the boy take with him?
- What would you take with you if you could only pack what you could carry in one bag?
Why would you choose those things?
- What is it like for the boy as he travels to a new place, seeing different people, sleeping in strange places, seeing new things, eating new foods, and hearing new languages?

- How might he feel as he travels and experiences these things?
- How far could you walk if you had to travel?
- What things are important for the boy and his mother to have in their new home?
- What things would be important for you to have?
- Why do you think the mother tells the boy to remember that his name is not ‘refugee?’

Brothers in Hope: The Story of the Lost Boys of Sudan (Mary Williams and R. Gregory Christie)

- What was Garang’s life like before everything changed for him?
- How did Garang describe the attack on his village?
- Where did he go to get away from the attack?
- What did Garang find when he went to look for his family?
- How did the boys survive without the help of their families and parents?
- How did Garang feel when he was chosen to lead 35 other boys?
- Where did he find the strength and encouragement to be a leader?
- How did the boys forget about the hardships they were enduring as they traveled?
- How might the lost boys have felt when the kind women showed them the way to the refugee camp?
- Why was going to school so important for the boys in the refugee camp?
- After finding help in the refugee camp, what might Garang and the other lost boys feel when they had to flee once more?
- How might Chuti have felt when he and Garang were reunited at the Kauma camp?
- Why was it so important for Tom to record Garang’s story?
- Where did Tom go when he left Garang and the other boys at the camp?
- Why was it necessary for him to leave?

- How did Garang overcome his fear of starting a new life in the United States?
- In the Afterword, the author discusses why some of the Lost Boys have struggled with their new lives. What do you think it would be like to flee the life you know and restart somewhere new?

When Stars Are Scattered (Victoria Jamieson & Omar Mohamed)

- Describe what Omar and Hassan’s refugee camp, Dadaab, looks like.
- Why does Omar feel unsafe in other parts of the refugee camp?
- Why does Omar “breathe a sigh of relief” when he gets back to his “block”?
- Why did Omar, Hassan, and others leave Somalia and other countries?
- How long have Omar and Hassan been living in Dadaab?
- How does Omar describe the refugee camp?
- What kinds of activities or games do Omar, Hassan, and the other children in the camp do each day?
- What challenges does Omar’s brother Hassan face?
- How does meeting Salan change Omar and Hassan’s lives?
- What worries does Omar have when he is given the opportunity to go to school?
- What is school like at first for Omar?
- What happened when Omar returns home after his first day of school?
- What does Omar notice about the responsibilities of the girls in the refugee camp?
- What does he think of the differences between the girl’s and boy’s responsibilities?
- What are the “empty days,” and how does Omar describe them?
- How do refugees like Omar and Hassan get their rations? What kind of food are they given?

- How does Omar feel toward his mom for leaving him and Hassan?
- How does Omar deal with the news of the upcoming school exams?
- When Omar finds out that Hassan was hurt by some other children, what does he decide to do?
- Who offers to help Omar care for Hassan so Omar can go to school? How does Omar react to this?
- What does Omar aspire to be when he grows up?
- After talking with some grownups, how does Omar's view of his future change?
- How does Omar deal with the news of other refugees, including Omar's friends, getting resettled to American and other countries?
- How does a visit from the UN change life around camp and school for Omar and the other refugees?
- How does Omar's outlook change when he finds out that he and Hassan are going to be interviewed by the UN for possible resettlement?
- How does Omar feel when he is asked to tell his story to the UN official?
- How does Omar feel knowing he has to wait up to four months to hear about his eligibility for resettlement?
- How does Omar react when he hears his friend Nimo is being resettled in Canada?
- How does Omar describe what it is like being a refugee?
- After years of waiting, Omar and Hassan find out that they have been selected for resettlement in America. How does this opportunity affect them?
- How does Omar feel about leaving Fatuma?
- What other things does Omar say 'goodbye' to when leaving for America?

- What hopes does Omar have for himself and Hassan as they resettle in America?
- What can the lives and journey's of Omar, Hassan and other refugees teach us?

A Long Walk to Water (Linda Sure Park)

- What is life like for Salva at the beginning of the story? Why is Salva considered 'lucky' to be able to attend school?
- What is life like for Nya at the beginning of the story?
- What happened that forced Salva to run and not return home?
- As they began to travel, how did Salva feel not knowing where he was going and whether he would see his family again?
- Why did Nya have to travel so far to collect water? How often did she need to collect water?
- Describe what it is like for Salva as he travels? How does Salva feel knowing others view him as a burden?
- How does finding a friend and then his uncle help Salva as he travels?
- What is Nya and her family's life like in the lake camp?
- When Salva loses his friend Marial, the book says, "A cold fist seemed to grip Salva's heart" (38). What does this mean?
- When Nya's sister falls ill, their family is faced with a tough decision? How does this add to Nya's family's troubles?
- Do you think Salva would have made the journey across the desert without his uncle's encouragement and help? Why/not?
- When Salva loses his uncle, what keeps him going?

- What is Salva's experience when he reaches the refugee camp? As Salva comes to the realization that he is the only surviving member of his family, what is he thinking and feeling?
- Why is Nya so skeptical of the visitors and their efforts to drill for water in her village?
- Why do you think Salva chose to help and lead all the other children as they try to make it to new camps?
- Why is Salva "torn in two" between hoping to go to America and trying not to hope too much (89)?
- What is Salva feeling as he is traveling to his new home in America?
- How is it for him as he adjusts to his new life?
- When Salva finds out that his father is alive, he begins planning his return to Sudan. How do you think he feels waiting for the day he can see his father again?
- When she heard her father's plans for their village, "Nya's eyes widened" (103). What was she thinking and feeling in this moment?
- Describe the moment when Salva and his father are reunited after 19 years apart.
- Why can't Salva see the rest of his family? How does that affect him?
- How does Salva approach the solution for the people of Sudan? What is his inspiration?
- How does daily life change for Nya, her family, and the members of her village after the well starts working?

Additional Resources

If you would like to learn even more about the refugee/migrant crises and global conflict here are some extra books you can read. There is also a list of organizations who are focused on helping to address the refugee/migrant crises and global conflict.

Books

- *Tani's New Home: A Refugee Finds Hope and Kindness in America* written by Tanitoluwa Adewumid, illustrated by Courtney Dawson (ages 5+)
- *Mama's Nightingale: A Story of Immigration & Separation* written by Edwidge Danticat, illustrated by Leslie Staub (ages 5+)
- *Stepping Stones: A Refugee's Journey* written by Magriet Ruurs, illustrated by Nizar Ali Badr, and translated by Falah Raheem (ages 5+)
- *The Paper Boat: A Refugee Story* written and illustrated by Thoa Lam (ages 5+)
- *My Name is Sangoel* written by Karen Lynn Williams and Khadra Mohammed, illustrated by Catherine Stock (ages 5+)
- *Inside Out and Back Again* written by Thanhha Lai (ages 8+)

Websites

- Care International – www.careinternational.org
- The International Rescue Committee – www.rescue.org
- UNICEF – www.unicef.org
- Save the Children – www.savethechildren.org
- The Red Cross – www.redcross.org
- The American Refugee Committee – www.arcrelief.org
- The Canadian Council for Refugees – www.ccrweb.ca

- Water for South Sudan – <https://www.waterforsouthsudan.org/>
- World Vision International – <https://www.wvi.org/ittakesaworld>
- World Relief – <https://worldrelief.org/refugees-immigrants-and-displaced-people/>
- Refugee Strong – <https://www.refugeestrong.org>

Ideas for Taking Action

Think about these different ways to help refugees, migrants and those experiencing hardship as a result of global conflict. Then, with parent permission and support, choose one or more ideas for action.

- Find an organization that specializes in helping refugees/migrants and read about how you can partner with them.
- Start your own fundraising drive. Contact family, friends, and others you know to raise money/goods to donate organizations that offer help to refugees/migrants.
- With your parents, write a letter to an elected official letting them know about your concern for refugees and migrants. Ask for their support and help.
- Share what you have learned about refugees/migrants and how it affects children, families, and other people.

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