

# “I WAS HOMELESS”

Students learn about homelessness in America through the engaging story of a teenage boy whose family became homeless.

**Teaching Objectives:** to integrate key ideas from multiple texts—narrative nonfiction, an infographic, an essay, and (optionally) a video; to evaluate the state of homelessness in the U.S.

**Featured Skill:** synthesizing information from multiple texts

**Other Key Skills:** author’s craft, text structures, text features, tone, inference, supporting details



## Step-by-Step Lesson Plan

### Preparing to Read

#### 1 Set a purpose for reading. (5 minutes)

It’s likely that some of your students have misconceptions about homelessness that will be addressed as they read these texts. Begin by asking students to reflect on the question in the As You Read box on page 5 (“What challenges do the homeless face?”). Note their responses on the board. Guide the discussion by asking students to think about homeless people they’ve seen and how homeless people are depicted in the media.

#### 2 Preview vocabulary. (3 minutes)

Preview the challenging boldface words in the article by projecting or distributing our **Vocabulary** word list and definitions.

### Reading and Discussing the Article

#### 3 Read the article. (30 minutes)

Break students into groups to read the article.

Make sure they also read the infographic and essay. Then have students answer the close-reading questions below, referring to the text as needed. Walk around the classroom to monitor and guide discussions. *These questions (without answers) are also available online as a pdf to print or project.*

#### CLOSE-READING QUESTIONS

- ▶ **What role does each text—the narrative nonfiction, the infographic, and the essay—play in helping you understand homelessness?** (text structure) *The narrative nonfiction provides an in-depth look at what it’s like to be homeless and provides general information about the causes of homelessness. The infographic provides statistics about homelessness. The essay challenges you to think more deeply about the issue and form an opinion about what should be done.*
- ▶ **Consider the last sentence of the first section: “They had no money, no jobs, and nowhere to go.” What is the tone of this sentence? How do you know?** (tone) *Answers will vary. Students may*

say the tone is sad, ominous, dramatic, etc. You can tell from the content; it summarizes the challenges Kevin's family is facing. Also, the repetition of a word (in this case, "no") is a tool writers use for dramatic effect. In addition, single-sentence paragraphs are used to isolate and emphasize an important point—in this case, the gravity of Kevin's family's situation.

► **Although the author focuses on Kevin and his family, "I Was Homeless" isn't just about them. What other information does the article include? Where in the article does this information appear?** (text structure) *The author provides background information on homelessness in the section "Homelessness in America." On page 6 she provides general information about the realities of living in a shelter. In the section "Homeless, Not Hopeless," she describes the ways communities can help those in need.*

► **Reread the last two paragraphs on page 8. How does their tone compare to the tone of the rest of the article?** (tone; compare and contrast) *The tone is more hopeful than in the rest of the article. The author talks about how Kevin's life has improved, how Kevin is helping other homeless kids, and Kevin's dreams for the future. The rest of the article is grave, particularly when the author discusses Kevin's life in the shelter.*

**4 Answer the critical-thinking questions.** (15 minutes) As a class, discuss the following questions. *These questions (without answers) are also available online as a pdf to print or project.*

### CRITICAL-THINKING QUESTIONS

► **What is the controlling idea, or theme, that unites these three texts? Use text details to support your answers.** *Answers will vary. One possible answer: The U.S. is not doing enough to help the most needy. The main article describes the plight of a teen who became homeless, and how difficult it was for his family to escape homelessness. The infographic*

## Complexity Factors

See how these texts will challenge your students.

**PURPOSE:** Has multiple purposes which are not explicitly stated. Purposes: to generate empathy for the homeless, to provide information about homelessness in the U.S., and to provoke consideration of society's responsibility for the needy.

**STRUCTURE:** Nonlinear; includes narrative and informational passages; includes an infographic

### LANGUAGE CONVENTIONALITY AND CLARITY:

► **Vocabulary:** Includes economic terms that are likely to be unfamiliar, such as *minimum wage* and *affordable housing*; also includes high-level general vocabulary, such as *dehumanizing* and *belittling*.

**KNOWLEDGE DEMANDS:** Comprehension will be aided by knowledge of what it's like to live in a city, an idea of what a homeless shelter is, and the relationship between government assistance programs and taxes. The text describes an experience (homelessness) that will be unfamiliar to many students.

**LEXILE:** 940 (combined)

*shows that there are many homeless people in the country. The essay points out the high rate of child poverty in the U.S. and questions whether we are doing enough to help the less fortunate.*

► **Explain how society contributed to Kevin's family's becoming homeless and how it contributed to his family getting back on their feet.** *Answers will vary. Students might say that society failed to enforce the laws that should have protected them from unfair eviction, and that the lack of affordable housing made it impossible for them to find a new apartment. Society helped Kevin's family in the following ways: The family was able to stay in a shelter, Kevin attended an after-school program, and Kevin's family received an apartment*



Find all activity sheets and other support materials at [www.scholastic.com/scope](http://www.scholastic.com/scope).

through a government assistance program.

► **Explain what you think the author's purpose was in writing this article.** *The author's purpose seems to be to inform the reader about the state of homelessness in America and to generate compassion for the homeless through the story of a teenager that readers can relate to.*

## 5 Show the video. (15 minutes)

As a class, watch our video “I Lived in a Truck,” about a teenager who lived with her brother, her dog, and her father in a truck after they became homeless. Project our **Video-Discussion Questions** and discuss as a class. These questions guide students to make connections between “I Was Homeless” and the video.

## Featured-Skill Activity

### 6 Synthesizing information for multiple texts. (15 minutes)

Distribute our **Homelessness in America** graphic organizer for students to complete in groups. It will prepare students for the writing prompt on page 8.

## Differentiated Performance Tasks

7 You will find a writing prompt on page 8. Below are alternate tasks for lower- and higher-level students.

**Lower-level:** What is it like to be homeless in America? Support your answer with details from the article and video.

**Higher-level:** Consider the Gandhi quote on page 6. In your opinion, how does the U.S. measure up? Support your opinion with details from the article, essay, infographic, and video.

## Extension

### 8 Research local aid organizations.

Divide students into small groups to research organizations in your community that help the needy. Each group should select one organization to study further and/or volunteer for. Have groups present what they learned through a video or slide show.

### ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- How can people in positions of power help those who are powerless?
- What is “home”?

### LITERATURE CONNECTION

Connecting *Scope* content to your curriculum

Other texts that relate to the themes of poverty and homelessness in this article:

- *Oliver Twist* by Charles Dickens
- *The Prince and the Pauper* by Mark Twain

## ONLINE RESOURCES

**Activities, quizzes, videos, audio articles, and more!**

**VIDEO:** “I Lived in a Truck”

**AUDIO:** Hear the article read aloud.

### ACTIVITIES TO PRINT OR PROJECT:

- Homelessness in America\*
- Video-Discussion Questions
- Close-Reading and Critical-Thinking Questions\*
- Vocabulary\*
- Quiz (modeled on PARCC, Smarter Balance, and state assessments)
- Read, Think, Explain: Identifying Nonfiction Elements (two levels available)
- Contest Entry Form

\*Supports the lesson plan

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