

# Hunger in the World

## Summary

Different dimensions of world hunger.

## Background for Teachers

Realization of world hunger is a problem which needs to be a concern for all the people of the world. It is not a problem just for those it directly affects.

As citizens of the United States of America (U.S.A.) we constitute about 6% of the world's population. If the students in this classroom represented the world population then two people (have 2 students stand) would represent the population of the United States. Imagine these two people consuming 40%, or a little under half, of all the resources produced by everyone in the class. For example, these two would eat close to half of all combined lunches of the class.

It sounds ridiculous, doesn't it. And, if not ridiculous, it certainly sounds unfair. Well, it is true! The United States constitutes about 6% of the world's population and consumes about 40% of the world's resources. Resources include fuel, manufacturing materials, fabrics, food, and many other commodities. (Illustrate these facts by drawing pie charts on the board - one for population and one for world resources.)

In the U.S.A. we have so much food that we have millions of people who are trying to eat less, so they can lose weight. Dieting is almost a national obsession and is sometimes a health hazard. Food is the resource we are most concerned about in our discussion on world hunger. The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) estimates that of the world's 6-billion-plus people: (NOTE: these facts would make a good bulletin board)

- at least  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a billion people suffer from some form of malnutrition.

- about 50,000 people die each day as a result of malnutrition.

- 800 million people know what it is like to go to bed hungry.

- about 200 million children under the age of 5 are underweight.

- millions of children die each year from the diseases of poverty: parasites and infectious diseases such as whooping cough, measles, tuberculosis, and malaria, with accompanying diarrhea, which interact with poor nutrition in a vicious cycle.

- one child dies of these causes every two seconds

- 15 children have died in the 30 seconds it took to read these statistics.

The four groups most often suffer the effects of hunger and malnutrition due to high nutrient needs or low tissue reserves are: children, pregnant women, those who are ill, and the elderly.

People in other countries also have an obsession. Their obsession is to have enough food to eat and to maintain life. Many are so poor they do not have the means to buy enough food for their families to stay well and stay alive. Many countries do not have the abundance of food which U.S. citizens have available.

## FACTS TO KNOW:

- The number of hungry and malnourished people in the world continues to grow.

- The problem is not that some nations are over-populated; it is that some nations have inadequate food production.

- Most people in the United States do not know hunger as "ceaseless discomfort, weakness, and pain"; people in developing countries do know hunger in those ways.

Pose the following question to students: "How can hunger be controlled?" To answer that question, other questions must be asked and answered first. What is meant by restricting the poor's access to food? How can these restrictions be removed? Adequate nutrition can be achieved only when the economics, political, and social structures that hinder food consumption become the targets of change, both at home and abroad.

## WHAT IS HUNGER?

Everyone knows the feeling of hunger as the urge to eat that signals the time for the next meal. But many know hunger as a constant companion because that meal does not follow. Then hunger is ceaseless discomfort, weakness, and pain. The term as used here means a continuous lack of the nutrients necessary to achieve and maintain optimum health, well-being, and protection from disease. People who live with hunger may simply have too little food to eat, or may not choose enough nutritious foods from those available. One form of hunger is a "choice they are forced to make" and the other is a "choice they freely make". To say this, though, is to fail to describe the depth of the experience of living without food. The following excerpt from a writer in India describes hunger in more personal terms:

*For hunger is a curious thing: at first it is with you all the time, waking and sleeping and in your dreams, and your belly cries out insistently, and there is a gnawing and a pain as if your very vitals were being devoured, and you must stop it at any cost, and you buy a moment's respite even while you know and fear the sequel. Then the pain is no longer sharp but dull, and this too is with you always, so that you think of food many times a day and each time a terrible sickness assails you, and because you know this you try to avoid the thought, but you cannot, it is with you. Then that too is gone, all pain, all desire, only a great emptiness is left, like the sky, like a well in drought, and it is now that the strength drains from your limbs, and you try to rise and you cannot, or to swallow and your throat is powerless, and both the swallow and the effort of retaining the liquid tax you to the uttermost.*

When people in the United States go to the grocery store they have a choice of thousands of products including fresh meats, fruits and vegetables, and dairy products, as well as countless prepared foods. Few nations in the world have these choices. Even people in some supposedly developed countries have limited food choices.

In the book *Mig Pilot*, John Barron tells of the escape of Viktor Belenko, a Russian pilot, who defects to the United States. At one point his CIA companions take Viktor to a shopping center. This story illustrates that in many modern countries people have limited resources and only the very rich in many other nations can afford the things that United States citizens often take for granted.

In countries known as third world countries, or developing countries, the food situation is much more severe. In countries such as India, several areas of Africa, and parts of South America hundreds of people die of starvation every day.

It is hard for us to imagine situations like the one described in the poem, *THE ARITHMETIC OF POVERTY*.

## Instructional Procedures

### LEARNING ACTIVITIES AND TEACHING STRATEGIES

#### OPTION #1

As an introduction to the World Hunger unit have students write a 100 word essay on "What Food Means to Me". Discuss in class and relate discussion to the realization of hunger in the world and hunger at home.

#### OPTION #2

In the center of the chalk board, in large letters, write the words **WORLD HUNGER**. Ask students to work in groups to list factors they think are related to the problem of world hunger. Summarize groups' answers and write factors in a cluster around the words "World Hunger". Use [ACTIVITY ON WORLD HUNGER](#) and transparency [WEB CHART DIAGRAM](#) as a guide for this discussion.

VARIATION: Use a blank world map ( [THE WORLD](#) ) and Culturegrams available from BYU (see resources), a printed map or world globe to have students identify industrialized and developing countries. Supplement with videos or current world events from websites, news magazines, and newspapers.

#### OPTION #3

Have 6% of the students in the class stand up. (In a class of 30-35 students, 6% would be 2 students.) Use these students to illustrate the statistical points given in the content of this lesson. Use the following from the background information (possible transparencies) to help students see the enormity of the world problem.

THE REALITIES OF HUNGER

CAUSES OF THE WORLD FOOD PROBLEM

THE GAP BETWEEN DEVELOPED AND LESS DEVELOPED COUNTRIES

Find pictures, video presentations or slides which will visually show the hunger problem in the world. Summarize the principals of global hunger using [HUNGER IN THE WORLD](#).

OPTION #4

Have students play [THE WORLD ECONOMY GAME](#) to support understanding of the logistics of distribution. Emphasize the fact that the United States is often the first and sometimes the only country to give aid to other countries to prevent starvation in the face of natural and man-made disasters.

OPTION #5

Use [WORLD HUNGER REPORT](#) worksheet and have individual or groups of students prepare written reports on an assigned country. Ask students to identify the countries that have the most food distribution problems and where they are located in the world.

Students will listen to the class reports and take notes using [WORLD HUNGER CLASS NOTES](#) worksheet.

OPTION #6

A student will read the account of [VIKTOR BELENKO'S VISIT TO THE SHOPPING CENTER](#). Have the student emphasize the parts written in italics which tell Belenko's thoughts during the visit. After reading story discuss the following:

Question #1: What was Viktor's reaction to the shopping center? Have students identify the differences in grocery markets both here in the United States and the shops Victor described in Russia.

Answer: He thought it was a show place where they took foreigners to impress them. He thought it was a fake.

Question #2: How would you react to a grocery store like the ones in Russia described in the account?

Answer: Let students respond by identifying the differences in the stores they shop at and the shops Viktor described in Russia.

Question #3: Would you consider Russia an under-developed country?

Answer: No, not really. They have technology but are struggling with conversion to a free market economy.

Question #4: How do you think you would feel if you were in Victor Belenko's shoes?

Answer: Student responses would vary.

TEACHER NOTE: Underdeveloped countries are not technologically advanced. Nations in what was formerly the Soviet Union have the technology but do not have the free economics and are therefore struggling.

OPTION #7

A student will read [THE ARITHMETIC OF POVERTY](#). Discuss the meaning of the poetry and the implications, meanings, thoughts and new ideas that comes from the poetry. Or have individuals or groups write 1/2 page on hunger thoughts generated by the poem.

OPTION #8

Students will brainstorm some realistic things they can do to help those in other nations who are hungry. As a co-operative leaning activity, have each group of students write ideas on a blank sheet of paper (7-10 minutes). Combine lists on the board by having a group member present one idea and

rotate to next group until all ideas are presented.

(Students' ideas may seem unrealistic; the teacher needs to push them with their ideas.)

Possible answers: (let students respond freely)

- contribute to charitable organizations
- give volunteer service to help these organizations
- buy local produce and avoid purchasing imported foods
- make wise food purchases, avoiding processed and convenience foods
- raise herb gardens, fruit trees, etc. so we can use less and export more of our food
- preserve and store food for cold months
- plant neighborhood gardens
- teach children to put on the plate "only" what they will eat

#### OPTION #9

Divide the students into groups. Have them draw the name of a country from a "hat" or give colored candy and divide it among the groups according to color. Seat the students at a table. Set a plate of food before each student (or select one student to participate for each country and let the rest of the class be the audience). Provide each with the food they would eat for an evening meal if they were in:

- The United States -- chicken dinner with dessert
- Mexico -- holote (cold corn on the cob)
- Cambodia -- 1/3 cup rice
- Romania -- 1/3 cup cooked squash
- Russia -- 1/3 cup boiled, salted potatoes
- Bolivia -- boiled potatoes and macaroni
- Somalia -- cracked wheat
- Other nations as desired --

NOTE TO TEACHER: One way to do this is to seat the students at tables. Place cards can indicate the country assigned to the students. Food should be prepared and served after they are seated, or placed on a platter in the center of the table and covered with plates or foil. All students receive or uncover their meals at the same time. Have students eat their meals. Allow plenty of time to share feelings.

VARIATION: Select a number of students to participate in this activity. Have the rest of the class be silent observers and record silently their observations of the participating students on [WORLD HUNGER OBSERVATION SHEET](#). This would save on the food budget by not having to supply so much food for the entire class's participation. If the cost of this lab is a factor, the exercise could be done with food models, however, it will not be as effective.

Discuss how students felt during the experience. Plan sufficient time (10-20 minutes) for the discussion, as this is critical to success of the option.

NOTE TO TEACHER: Remember that different foreign countries are similar to the United States in that they have different regions and regional foods, e.g. one region of Mexico might have corn as a staple and another might not even eat corn.

#### OPTION #10

Show foreign film "Children of Heaven," Rated PG, 88 minute running time, DVD release 2002. This Iranian film is the story of nine-year old Ali and his younger sister Zahra, growing up in a poor part of town. Their mother is ill and their father doesn't earn enough money to make ends meet. See what happens when Zahra's only pair of shoes come up missing. How will she go to school? How will they hide this from their parents? After watching the film, discuss how lack of resources affects every aspect of family life, not just food choices.

#### OPTION #11

HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT: After the lesson(s) on world hunger the students will express how they feel about world hunger by writing a poem. Several styles of poetry are given in the following resource

[JINGLES, LIMERICKS AND OTHER SHORT VERSE](#) - diamond, limericks, haiku and rhyme. (Diamond is an easy style of poem to write). To help the students accomplish this assignment, pass out and discuss the examples.

Have the students put themselves in the place of someone who is starving. Like the Indian mother who wrote the poem about hunger, the students will write a poem about hunger and the tragedies that accompany it. Encourage them to express their thoughts and feelings about the problem of world hunger. Share the writings.

Display the completed poetry on bulletin boards or have them printed in the school paper, town paper, entered in the PTSA Reflections contest, etc. The use of computer graphics would enhance the display.

NOTE TO TEACHER: This is a good activity to integrate FCCLA in the classroom.

### Bibliography

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- *Nutrition and the World Food Crisis*  
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- "Culturgrams"  
(leaflet giving background on nutrition and culture for different countries) available from Brigham Young University, David M. Kennedy International Center, Provo, Utah 84602
- *MIG Pilot: The Final Escape of Lieutenant Belenko*  
, John Barron. Reader's Digest Press, McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1980.
- *Nutrition Curriculum Activities Kit*  
, The Center For Applied Research in Education, Inc., West Nyack, New York 10995.

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