

Grade Level: Middle School Lesson Length: 1 Hour	Lesson Topic: PART 1 (A): WHAT IS POVERTY?
Lesson Authors: Met Council on Jewish Poverty	Date Created: 2007

Goal(s):

- To learn the causes of poverty and break down the traditional stereotypes.

Suggested Learning Sequence: Week one. First out of six lessons.

Objective(s):

- Students will play a game in which they learn how quickly people fall into poverty.
- After reading and discussing the handouts, students will have a clear view on the definition of poverty and how it can happen to anyone.

Equipment and Materials:

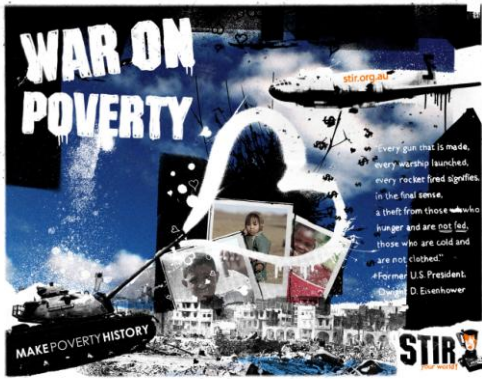
- Paper
- Pencil/Pen
- Big posters or space on the board, color markers, chalk, pens or crayons.
- Handouts:
 - Handout #1: NEW YORK TIMES NEEDIEST CASES- Single Father Fights for Family While Pursuing His Passion
 - Handout #2: NEW YORK TIMES NEEDIEST CASES- He Witnessed a Bombing and is Still Paying the Price
 - Handout#2a- Answering questions about the two articles.

ACTIVITY

Warm Up (15 Min):

A. Warm Up: Brainstorming

1. Split up the students into groups of 4-6 people
2. Create a poster around the word poverty and give students 5-7 minutes to draw pictures or write words that come to mind when the students see the word POVERTY.
3. Results might include negative stereotypes such as: dirty, homeless, lazy, or mentally ill. Take a few minutes to discuss these stereotypes and why students chose those words.
4. There are two examples on the next page of what the posters might look like.



B. “How does poverty affect our lives?” activity: Step forward to demonstrate how many people are affected by poverty.

1. **Before beginning activity, say:** The objective of the activity is to show that poverty affects all of us one way or another. However, some people might have more experience with poverty than others and their input is highly appreciated. Everyone is expected to behave in a mature and respectful manner during and after the activity. If anyone does not feel comfortable participating, they will not be penalized in any way.
2. Have all the students line up in the back of the classroom.
3. Explain to students the rules of the activity.
4. Demonstrate one simple example such as: everyone who is wearing blue, take one step forward.
5. Then ask questions below:
 - Question 1:** Take a step forward if you have a grandparent who lives with you or you know someone who has an older relative living in their household.
 - Question 2:** Take a step forward if you know someone who has been laid off or fired from a job before.
 - Question 3:** Take a step forward if you know someone who is taking classes to either better their education or advance in the work place.
 - Question 4:** Take a step forward if you ever heard someone complaining about bills they had to pay.
 - Question 5:** Take a step forward if you think that most poor people are on Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, commonly known as welfare.
 - Question 6:** Take a step forward if you think poor people contribute to their situation.
7. **Reflection:** Have a 5-10 minute reflection activity about how many people are affected by poverty. A number of students might end up in the front of the room, meaning their lives or the lives of people they know are affected by poverty. Sometimes people run into bad luck and end up in financial trouble. If they do not have the financial security or others helping them, they may find themselves in poverty. However, just because you have things in common with people in poverty, does not mean that you or your family will end up struggling financially.
8. **Wrap up activity: Letter to Yourself**
 Have students take out a piece of paper and a writing utensil. Students should spend 5 minutes writing a letter about what poverty means to them.
 - i. How does it affect your life?
 - ii. What does it make you think of?

- iii. Why is it important to learn about poverty?
Collect and save letters to be handed back during the last lesson of the curriculum.

Activity (40 Min):

9. Directions: Reading and Discussing Article 1, Handout #1:

- b. Divide students into groups of 3-4 and pass out Handout #1.
- c. Have one student in each group read aloud while others follow. Read over the articles: the 'intro', 'problem' and glossary.
- d. When each group has completed reading 'intro' and 'problem' discuss:
 - i. Why do you think the father is in this predicament?
 - ii. What are some ways the single father could get his life back on track?
- e. After ample discussion time, have all the students return facing the front of the room looking at the teacher.
- f. **Class Discussion:** Have students answer questions.
 - i. Raise your hand if you think the father could have avoided the situation?
 - ii. Based on this article how would you define poverty?
 - iii. What were some of the father's needs that he was unable to fulfill?
 - iv. Do you think that someone should abandon his or her passions in order to pay bills?
- g. Read the 'resolution' out loud to the class.
 - i. Ask students if they think if the help is sustainable.

10. Directions: Reading and Discussing Article 2, Handout #2:

- a. Direct students back to the front of the room and have one student pass out Handout #2. Ask students to follow along with the reading since they may be called on.
- b. Teacher allows students to take turns reading the glossary and Handout #2 aloud to class.
- c. **Class Discussion:** How poverty affects people.
 - i. How do you think people in poverty feel on a daily basis?
 - ii. Can stress be a contributing factor to poverty? Why or why not?
 - iii. Is there a way the Baxter family could find a way out of poverty?
 - iv. What are some ways they could find help?
 - v. Throughout the discussion, have the students generate a list on the board about possible solutions for Baxter to find a way out of poverty.

Teacher Wrap Up (5 Min):

11. Conclusion:

- a. **Class Discussion:** Why did we read these stories?
 - i. Did the handouts change your opinion about those in poverty?
 - ii. These were just a couple of examples about how families might find themselves in poverty. Can you think of other examples?
 - Many times when we hear the word poverty, we think of those in third world countries with no food or shelter or medical help.
 - We also think of those in poverty as people who are on the streets, or those who need homeless shelters or soup kitchens.
 - Keep in mind that poverty accounts for a lot more people than just the stereotypes:
 - Now and then incidents such as a rent increase or having to pay for medication may push people into debt.

- Single parents, seniors who are no longer able to work, those who have unexpected emergencies or students and families that cannot pay off loans or debt all contribute to the percentage of those in poverty.
 - Federal help and certain non-profits organizations are opportunities that are open for people who are in need of assistance.
 - Poverty is not an unsolvable problem. And it is our responsibility to help alleviate it.
- b. Take any further questions students might have.



NEW YORK TIMES NEEDIEST CASES

Single Father Fights for Family While Pursuing His Passion

Michael is a hardworking single father of two. Since his recent divorce, he has shared custody of his two young sons with his wife. His passion is art; his love of painting and graphic design has driven his career aspirations since an early age. He teaches Graphic Arts full-time at a University's art school in New York City and works out of his apartment on other artistic pursuits. While he enjoys teaching, his ultimate goal is to support himself exclusively from his own work. Michael is extremely pro-active and motivated to support his family and follow his passions.

Problem:

Over the past two years, unexpected costs have overwhelmed Michael. His rent has been raised twice in the past year – from \$805 to \$1195 for his small apartment on the Lower East Side. Michael has worked independently to research whether this is a legal increase. In addition to these rent costs, the costs incurred* by his divorce have taken their toll. With the legal costs from the divorce and the unexpected costs for his apartment, Michael fell behind in paying his bills. One bill in particular was from a purchase of needed computer equipment for his freelance design projects that supplement* his income. This outstanding computer bill was forwarded to the collection agency that issued a legal process to Michael's bank. The bank froze his account. While only \$180 was in the account, it had been used for immediate expenses to feed his children and pay his bills. This left Michael unable to cover basic costs including childcare and his January 2005 rent. Michael found himself in a Catch-22*; his attempts to further his career and better his financial situation for his family could not be met because of the crisis situation he found himself in with his rising rent and costs associated with being a single parent.

Resolution:

Michael took a proactive* approach to getting help and making changes in his life. When coming to Met Council's Crisis Intervention Department, he met with a social worker to review his situation and look ahead to his future. Together, they worked on identifying ways to earn extra income*. Through the Crisis Department*, Met Council provided Michael with \$500 for rent, referrals to Budget & Credit Counseling Services (BUCCS),* and free tax assistance. Perhaps the most valuable source was the social worker's referral* to the Career Services Department at Met Council. There, Michael met with a career counselor to identify potential patrons for his artwork and additional work opportunities to supplement his income. Since this meeting in January, Michael has continued to produce his work with great results. With help from Career Services*, Michael found a private patron through craigslist.com* who purchased two pieces from Michael. In May, he exhibited in his Lower East Side community in the LES Arts Show at Theater For the New City and currently has his portraits on display at The Meat Market at Jeffrey's on Essex Street. Perhaps the most exciting component is Michael's recent completion of a large project of portraits representing the Lower East Side. He is now looking to find a gallery willing to sponsor him and sell his pieces. Michael, with Met Council's help, has found a way to both support his family and do what he loves.

Glossary

Incurred: To acquire or come into (something usually undesirable); sustain

Supplement: Something added to complete a thing, make up for a deficiency, or strengthen the whole

Catch-22: A no-win dilemma or paradox; i.e. you can't get a job without experience, but you can't gain experience without a job

Proactive: Acting in advance to deal with an expected difficulty; taking a situation into your own hands to come up with a solution

Income: The amount of money received during a period of time in exchange for labor or services

Crisis Department: Metropolitan Council on Jewish Poverty's department that helps people avoid eviction, obtain medical and pharmaceutical assistance, receive emergency donations of food, shelter and furniture, and prevent domestic violence and abuse

Budget & Credit Counseling Services (BUCCS): A community service organization licensed by the New York State Banking Department. Their mission is to assist individuals and families that are experiencing financial difficulties and to educate consumers about their rights and responsibilities

Referral: To direct to a source for help or information

Career Services: Metropolitan Council of Jewish Poverty's department that helps jobseekers through programs such as job development, vocational counseling, vocational skills training teams, thereby opening doors to job opportunities

Craigslist.com: A website on which people can list or search for job opportunities (or many other goods and services) in a specific city

Sustainable (see questions below): To be able to maintain; to supply with necessities



Adapted from **NEW YORK TIMES NEEDIEST CASES**
He Witnessed a Bombing and Is Still Paying the Price

By **STEPHANIE ROSENBLUM**
The New York Times December 7, 2004

"This is a song about freedom," says the man with the guitar as the band begins to play. It is after midnight on a beachfront strip by the Mediterranean Sea, and music wafts from Mike's Place, a popular blues bar in Tel Aviv.

Inside, people are dancing on the tables. Hips twitch. Fists shake. Couples kiss. Waitresses wriggle through the crowd carrying foamy beers high above their heads.

But then the music stops. There is only darkness, and silence so palpable, it is like a high-pitched scream. Suddenly, orange-vested men are running with stretchers. Glass is everywhere. People who were dancing moments before are on their knees in the streets; their skin is red in the glow of ambulance lights as they press their hands to their faces and cry.

This is footage from "Blues by the Beach," a documentary produced by Jack Baxter and his wife, Fran Strauss-Baxter, New Yorkers whose comfortable lives were cast into chaos when a suicide bomber detonated his explosives at the entrance to Mike's Place on April 30, 2003.

Mr. Baxter and his crew were there that night to film the lighter side of life in Israel. They ended up capturing the horror.

Into the hospital the camera goes, into a white antiseptic room where Mr. Baxter, 52, lies with his neck in a brace, his arm in a cast, his skin scorched, his limbs lacerated, and his eardrums blown out.

A brain contusion has left him partly paralyzed on his left side, and last winter he developed bumps on his body that doctors call organic shrapnel - pieces of the bomber's body embedded in his.

Ms. Strauss-Baxter, 53, was in the couple's loft on West 29th Street in Manhattan when she got the call about her husband. She flew to Ichilov Hospital in Tel Aviv, where three days later Mr. Baxter regained consciousness.

The Baxters wanted to make a documentary about peace, about a place where Israelis and Arabs could sit at the same bar and listen to the blues; where religion and politics take a backseat to dancing.

"That's what life should be," Ms. Strauss-Baxter said. "People living alongside each other."

She and her husband know about religious harmony. Mr. Baxter is a filmmaker and a freelance journalist who grew up Catholic in the Bronx. Ms. Strauss-Baxter is a children's book designer from Great Neck, N.Y., and is Jewish. They met seven years ago at the rooftop pool at the Holiday Inn on West 57th Street.

Though their love for each other remains strong, their ordeal has left them destitute* and exhausted. "We have absolutely no money," said Ms. Strauss-Baxter, who quit her job last year to care for her husband.

Transportation to and from medical appointments and rehabilitation for Mr. Baxter depleted the couple's savings. Bills piled up, and Ms. Strauss-Baxter did not know where to turn.

A childhood friend of Mr. Baxter's suggests that the couple seek help from UJA-Federation of New York*, one of seven charities supported by The New York Times Neediest Cases Fund*.

The Federation referred the Baxters to the Metropolitan Council on Jewish Poverty*, one of its beneficiaries, where \$1,083 from the Neediest Cases was used to pay the couple's rent and Consolidated Edison bills for two months while they got back on their feet.

"You have no idea how much this meant; it helped me not only financially, but to be able to talk," Ms. Strauss-Baxter said, referring to the supportive staff at the Metropolitan Council.

Ms. Strauss-Baxter recently began working again, designing children's textbooks. Mike's Place is recovering, too. It reopened only seven days after the bombing, on Israel's Memorial Day.

"Evil walked into Mike's Place, trying to ruin us, trying to erase us," Gal Ganzman, the owner of Mike's Place, says in the documentary. "But you can't beat us, because love can't be beat. We got stronger. We got closer."

The same can be said of the Baxters. Their labor of love, "Blues by the Beach," had its premiere in October at the Hamptons International Film Festival on Long Island, where it received the Dan and Ewa Abraham and Tammy Abraham Films of Conflict and Resolution Award.

Two British Muslims killed 3 people and wounded more than 50 in the bombing that changed the Baxters' lives. Asif Hanif detonated his explosives; those strapped to his accomplice, Omar Khan Sharif, failed to detonate. Yet there is one thing that both men failed to do: deter the Baxters from returning to Israel. When they are financially able, they plan to go back to Tel Aviv, and to Mike's Place, where every night the sound of the blues still wafts along the Mediterranean.

Glossary

Destitute: Lacking resources or the means of subsistence; completely impoverished

UJA-Federation of New York: Caring for those in need, rescuing those in harm's way, and renewing and strengthening the Jewish people in New York, in Israel, and around the world

New York Times Neediest Cases Fund: Raises millions of dollars to help thousands of individuals and families in distress

Metropolitan Council On Jewish Poverty: A not-for-profit organization representing and coordinating the efforts of grass roots Jewish Community Councils and citywide and national Jewish organizations. It is the primary advocate for the needs of poor Jews, reaching out to the isolated Jewish poor and elderly, and increasing public recognition of the extent and nature of poverty among Jews through legislative and social advocacy

For more information about the bombing in Tel Aviv at Mike's place which changed the Baxter's lives, check out the following sites:

- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mike's_Place (Encyclopedia account of the event)

Discussion questions for articles 1 and 2.

Article#1

- 1) Do you think the father could have avoided the situation? How?

- 2) Based on this article how would you define poverty?

- 3) What were some of the father's needs that he was unable to fulfill?

- 4) Do you think that someone should abandon his or her passions in order to pay bills?

Article#2

- 1) How do you think people in poverty feel on a daily basis?

- 2) Can stress be a contributing factor to poverty? Why or why not?

- 3) Is there a way the Baxter family could find a way out of poverty?

- 4) What are some ways they could find help?