



Exploring Homelessness Through Young Adult Literature:

Learning Activities

Bedard, Michael. *Stained Glass*

Bibliographic Information:

Plattsburgh: Tundra Books, 2002. ISBN: 0887766021.

Book Description:

- Genre: novel (magical realism)
- Number of Pages: 297
- Suggested Grade Level: 8-10, appropriate for average to advanced readers
- Other Key Issues: death, grieving process, spirituality, nature of memory, amnesia

Issues of homelessness in the text:

The main character, Charles, encounters a homeless girl with amnesia in a local church. Meanwhile, the church's caretaker, Mr. Berkeley, reflects on the time he spent as a homeless man following his wife's death. Spiritual "homelessness" is linked directly to literal homelessness.

Plot Synopsis: While skipping his piano lesson one day, Charles witnesses a stained glass window break in the local church. The window appears to have shattered on top of a homeless girl sleeping in the pew. She has a cut on her forehead and no recollection of who she is or where she comes from. Feeling concerned for her injury, Charles decides to accompany her around the city in the hopes that she will see something that jogs her memory. Over the course of the day he is forced to confront his own memories and in doing so comes to terms with his father's death. A subplot involves Mr. Berkeley reflecting on his past. After his wife's death he became a homeless drifter. When he regained his faith and sense of purpose he found a literal home in the church building.

Major Characters:

- **Charles:** An introspective fourteen year old still grieving for his father who died two years prior to the beginning of the novel.
- **Ambriel:** A homeless girl with amnesia. She is roughly the same age as Charles.
- **Mr. Berkeley:** A former homeless man who now lives in the basement of the local church and works as its caretaker.

Teaching Ideas:

Strategy 1: *Intertextuality in Stained Glass*:

The plot and overtones of magical realism in this novel are similar to Gabriel García Márquez's short story "A Very Old Man With Enormous Wings." This strategy will help students become comfortable with discovering intertextuality by using a young adult novel as a springboard to other literary texts.

- Objective: Students will be able to detect allusions to other literary texts in Michael Bedard's young adult novel, *Stained Glass*.
- Entering the text: Have students read *Stained Glass*. As a pre-lesson activity, have students write journal entries on what they think of as "home." Is it only a physical house or something more? Then divide students into small groups. Have each group form a list of stories, songs, movies, etc. that remind them of *Stained Glass*, or that they thought of

while reading the novel. Let each group share their list with the whole class and discuss what the lists have in common.

- Exploring the text: In class, read Márquez's "A Very Old Man With Enormous Wings." Have students jot down notes as they read on the similarities and differences between this text and *Stained Glass*.
- Extending the text: Have a class discussion on how Ambriel and the Old Man With Enormous Wings might be considered homeless, and whether or not they find a home at the end of their respective stories. Ask students to recall their journal entries. Do Márquez and Bedard think of home in the same way the students do? Does the word "home" have a single, concrete definition or does it mean different things to different people?

Strategy 2: *Stained Glass* as a Visual Text

- Objective: Students will engage with Michael Bedard's young adult novel *Stained Glass* through multi-disciplinary artwork.
- Entering the text: Display an image of a medieval stained glass window. Have students write a narrative in their journals about what they see happening in the picture. What story is the image telling?
- Exploring the text: In a think-pair-share activity, have students create individual lists of the way stained glass images and memory are linked in Bedard's novel. Let students form pairs and compare lists. Then create a master list on the board of the most cohesive and relevant connections. Discuss how Bedard uses the metaphor of a stained glass window to explain how our memories are made up of many separate pieces that join together to form a whole.
- Extending the text: Have the students create their own stained glass windows, either by drawing or collage, depicting one or more of their most treasured memories. Allow students to volunteer to share why the memory they chose to depict is particularly important.

Suggested Related Readings:

- *Four Quartets*, T.S. Eliot
- *A Very Old Man With Enormous Wings*, Gabriel García Márquez

Designed by: Emily Claire Williams

Booth, Coe. *Tyrell*.

Bibliographic Information:

New York: PUSH, Scholastic Inc., 2007.

Book Description:

- Genre: novel
- No. of Pages: 310
- Suggested Grade Level: 11-12; explicit language and content; most appropriate for reaching minority or low-income students
- Other Key Issues: absent fathers, violence, domestic violence, drug use and dealing, children assuming parental roles, discovering sexuality

Issues of homelessness in the text:

Tyrell's family is left homeless for a second time after the father is sent to jail again. The novel addresses issues of difficulties attending school, food and nutritional problems, child welfare system, shelters, solutions to homelessness, and causes of homelessness.

Plot Synopsis: Tyrell is a fifteen-year-old African American boy living in a shelter with his mother and little brother, Troy, in Brooklyn. Tyrell's father is in jail, and his mother refuses to get a job, leaving Tyrell to assume the male role in the family. Tyrell takes care of Troy and devises a plan to make money so his family can afford an apartment. Meanwhile, Tyrell's mother leaves Troy alone once again, but this time the manager of the shelter calls ACS. Deciding that Troy is better off in foster care, Tyrell leaves his mother and goes back to the projects to live with a friend.

Major Character:

- **Tyrell:** A fifteen-year-old African American boy who struggles to take care of his little brother, Troy, and get his family out of the shelter and into an apartment.

Minor Characters:

- **Novisha:** Tyrell's fourteen-year-old girlfriend who occasionally feeds and shelters him. Novisha is successful in her school and community. Tyrell feels as though Novisha does not understand him, which makes him feel worse about his situation and lack of success.
- **Jasmine:** Another homeless girl staying at the shelter. Jasmine inspires Tyrell to achieve because he feels she understands him, which causes him to question his relationship and future with Novisha.
- **Tyrell's mother:** She refuses to get a job and places the burden of taking care of the family square upon Tyrell's shoulders.

Teaching Ideas:

- Students can keep journals while reading to connect with and respond to the sensitive material in the novel.
- Think-Pair-Share may be the best way to enter the novel.

- Discussion Topics, Quotations, and Questions:
 - Absent fathers: “Mothers and children. That’s all I see. Moms and they kids. No fathers nowhere” (8). In the novel, Tyrell seems to be blaming only fathers for the homeless situation of these mothers and their children. Are the fathers to blame? Does Tyrell blame his own father? Why or why not?
 - Male responsibility: “A man gotta take care of his family” (22). Why does Tyrell’s mother pressure Tyrell to take care of his family in their situation? Is his mother right to expect Tyrell to fix the situation? Why or why not?
 - Religion and faith: “I never really believed in God ‘cause I knew if there was a God he wouldn’t never take my pops away from me. And my pops always taught me not to depend on nobody but myself” (48). Is faith in God depending on someone? Why would Tyrell question his faith in his situation?
 - Education: “[My school was] like a prison...they was s’posed to be getting us ready for college, not a life behind bars” (167-168). Considering the environment of Tyrell’s school, was he right to drop out? Would you give up on school if you were in Tyrell’s position? Why or why not? Why do you think Tyrell is so adamant about keeping Troy in school when he feels school is pointless for his own future? Should Tyrell finish high school? Why or why not?
- Listen to and study the lyrics of “The Message” by Melly Mel. Explore and discuss why Tyrell includes this story. How does the song illuminate the novel?

Multidisciplinary Connections:

- Music: Compare “old school” and new rap artists. Tyrell claims there is no substance in the music of newer rap artists, that they are just angry without reason. He says “old school” rap artists are real “deep.” Rap artists to compare and contrast:
 - “Old School”: Tupac, Rakim, Big Daddy Kane, Public Enemy, Afrika Bumbaatta, 2 Live Crew, Run D.M.C.
 - New rap artists: Mobb Deep, DMX

Designed by: Amelia Y. Courtis

Burgess, Melvin. *Smack*.

Bibliographic Information:

New York: Henry Holt and Company, LLC., 1996.

Book Description:

- Genre: young adult novel
- Number of Pages: 321
- Suggested Grade Level: 9-11, appropriate for struggling readers
- Other Key Issues: physical abuse, drugs, prostitution, relationships

Issues of homelessness in the text:

The two main characters in this novel, Gemma and Tar, both run away from their homes and choose a life on the street. The novel's protagonists take up with other people who are temporarily experiencing homelessness in the streets of Bristol, England. The novel explores how the streets can transform life as the teenagers know it as Gemma and Tar experience drugs, robbery, and prostitution.

Plot Synopsis:

Fourteen-year-old Tar decides he can no longer suffer the physical abuse of his father and runs away with his girlfriend, Gemma. The two find company in other homeless squatters who introduce them to drugs; Tar and Gemma quickly become junkies. As their lives spiral out of control, Gemma becomes pregnant and it is only then—after three years of experiencing the streets, drugs, prostitution, and robbery—does she move back home with her new baby girl, and without Tar.

Major Characters:

- **Gemma:** young girl who runs away to the streets after her boyfriend Tar when her parents' overbearing ways push her away.
- **Tar:** young boy who is abused by his father; he chooses a life of homelessness.

Teaching Ideas:

- Journal Prompt: "If you had no rules, no parents, no curfew, and no place to be...what would you do?" Students will reflect on life without the normal constraints of home life; this can be done before reading *Smack* or early on in reading the novel.
- Small Group Character Exploration: Assign students to character groups. Each group uses quotations from the text to explore how the experience of homelessness affects the characters individually. The students prepare a visual or written presentation to showcase their findings.
- Research Projects: Students choose to research a controversial topic in the novel such as domestic abuse, heroin addiction, teenage prostitution, and petty robbery. Put students in groups based on their choices; groups complete research and write out a summary of research findings to present to the class; summary should also draw on the relationship between homelessness and the assigned controversial issue.

- **Student Write:** Students write a first-person chapter as if they are a character in the novel. Students should concentrate on voice and description in their writing and can insert their chapter anywhere in the novel's text.

Designed by: Karen Richardson

Cooley, Beth. *Shelter*.

Bibliographic Information:

New York: Delacorte Press: Random House Inc., 2006.

Book Description:

- Genre: novel
- Number of Pages: 211
- Suggested Grade Level: 9-12
- Other Key Issues: death of father, art, early motherhood

Issues of homelessness in the text:

The novel explores what it is like to live in a shelter, the different reasons people live at one, and how people experiencing homelessness attain the skills and earn enough money to live on their own again.

Plot Synopsis:

After her father's unexpected death, Lucy Durbin, along with her mother and younger brother, is forced to live in a homeless shelter. Initially Lucy feels as if she is living a nightmare, but by the time her mother earns enough money to move her family out of the shelter, Lucy has formed close relationships with the other residents and has accepted the reasons for her own homelessness.

Major Characters:

- **Lucy:** A fifteen year old girl who moves into a shelter with her family and struggles to reconcile the luxurious life she was living only months ago with the life she is living now.
- **Cindy:** Lucy's mother who resists her new living situation until she realizes that the recent changes in her life have given her a chance to begin a new chapter of her life; she can now pursue her dream of becoming a chef.

Minor Characters:

- **Aspen:** Lucy's love interest and the first person from her school that discovers she is living in a shelter.
- **Crystal:** A seventeen year old mother who lives at the shelter and teaches Lucy to go after what she wants in life.
- **Jan:** Lucy's first friend at the shelter, a former drug addict trying to make sure she maintains custody of her child and his friend Alonzo

Teaching Ideas:

- Before students are introduced to *Shelter* and its topic, homelessness, ask them to think about the word *shelter*. Students can brainstorm individually or discuss the word in small groups.

- Students think about how their opinions of the word *shelter* change when *homeless* is added before it. Students compare their answers to the ones they gave in activity #1. As students begin to read *Shelter* they will see how their second set of words correlates to Lucy's feelings about her new home, and as students progress through the novel they will see Lucy's attitude towards the shelter shift towards the first set of words students produced.
- Lucy and her family have to adjust to a new set of rules and way of living when they first arrive at the shelter. In a class discussion, discuss what this transition would be like.
- Lucy has to figure out which food products in the pantry belong to specific individuals and which are for everyone's use. Early in the novel Lucy accidentally uses Crystal's carton of milk and quickly finds out for herself the consequences of her actions. In a journal prompt students respond to this scene, specifically, if they would have reacted the way Lucy did and why, and if Crystal's angry reaction was justified.
- *Shelter* explores the different reasons why people become residents at homeless shelters. For example, Lucy's family has to give up their apartment because Mr. Durbin did not have any life insurance, and Jan came to live at the shelter after she was busted for having a methamphetamine lab in her basement and lost everything. In small groups students create character maps that outline why each character is at the shelter and how this affects students' opinions of each character. Students can work on their maps throughout their reading of *Shelter* to see how their attitudes towards specific characters change.
- In a Readers' Theatre activity students dramatize and perform key scenes (the Durbins' arrival at the shelter, Lucy's discovery that Aspen, her crush, knows she lives at a homeless shelter, and the fire at the shelter).

Designed by: Jennie Mokodean

Cushman, Karen. *The Midwife's Apprentice*.

Bibliographic Information:

New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1995.

Book Description:

- Genre: historical novel
- Number of Pages: 117
- Suggested Grade Level: 6-8, appropriate for struggling readers
- Other Key Issues: bullying, medieval England, midwifery, identity struggle

Issues of homelessness in the text:

The novel begins with the description of a small, pale, underfed girl with no home, no parents, and no name sleeping in a dung heap. The main character that has never had a stable home or a sense of companionship finally finds her place in the world. The poverty of homelessness is depicted as it was in medieval England.

Plot Synopsis:

One night in medieval England, a girl with no home, no parents, and no name struggles to keep warm in a roadside dung heap. The town's midwife, Jane, takes the newly named "Dung Beetle" into her home as an ill-used and poorly-fed apprentice. For the first time "Beetle" has the semblance of a home, makes friends, and decides her own identity as "Alyce." But, she leaves all this behind and runs away to a nearby Inn after failing an assignment—she was unable to help a woman give birth without the midwife. After spending time at the Inn, and learning how to read and write, Alyce realizes she does have a name and a place in the world and returns to be the midwife's apprentice.

Major Characters:

- **Alyce:** The novel's protagonist; she is also called "Brat" and "Beetle." Alyce struggles to find a home and a sense of belonging in the world and eventually does so as the midwife's apprentice.
- **Jane:** The mean-spirited midwife who takes Alyce in off the streets as her apprentice in exchange for feeding and giving Alyce a place to sleep.
- **Purr:** Alyce's adopted cat; he remains her constant companion while she moves around looking for a place to belong.
- **Edward:** A homeless boy for whom Alyce finds a home serving at the village manor.
- **Magister Reese:** A patron at the inn who teaches Alyce how to read and write and that she deserves to want something in her life.

Teaching Ideas:

Strategy 1: Teaching the novel in its time period.

- Objectives:
 1. Students will understand medieval history as presented in the novel.
 2. Students will creatively write a chapter of the novel using appropriate voice and vocabulary of the time period.

- Entering the text:
 1. Journal Prompt: “Imagine you lived in the Middle Ages. What would your life be like? Who would your family be? What would you do all day? Who would your friends be?”
 2. Students do individual or partner research on “What was it like to really live in the Middle Ages?” via an interactive website like this:
<http://www.learner.org/interactives/middleages/feudal.html>
 Students complete a graphic organizer or KWL chart as they research.
- Exploring the text:
 - Give students daily (or bi-daily, weekly) roles in a group setting, 4-5 people per group. A role is defined by what subject a student pays attention to and takes notes on throughout the literary circle cycle. For example, roles include note-takers of: women, men, jobs, the streets, reading and writing. Students switch roles, read, and discuss their notes in small-groups until novel is completed.
 - In groups ask students to pick their favorite chapter or scene; monitor choosing so that no two groups share the same scene. Now, have each group practice the dialogue and actions of the scene to perform for the class. After all student groups perform, have students journal on the following topic: “How did you feel in your role? How did playing a part change your perception of life in the Middle Ages?”
- Extending the text:
 1. Individually, each student writes another chapter of the novel. Prompt students to pay attention to their writing style so they use appropriate voice and vocabulary for the Middle Ages just as Karen Cushman did.
 2. Have student volunteers read aloud their chapters; for students who do not wish to read aloud, give them the option of having it read aloud by another student. If time permits, hold a class discussion on what students heard in their classmates’ versions, what they liked, and what students can work on now that they heard other versions.

Strategy 2:

- Objectives:
 - Students will explore the meaning of identity and how it is defined.
 - Students will identify what defines who they are in their life.
- Entering the text:
 1. Journal Prompt: “Who are you? Describe yourself as you would to someone who’s never met you from the THIRD PERSON point of view.”
 2. Homework assignment: Give students a graphic organizer with 6 columns and 4 rows like this:

Who are you?	Person 1:	Person 2:	Person 3:	Person 4:	Person 5:
Description 1:					
Description 2:					
Description 3:					

Have students fill out the chart by asking 5 different people (family members, friends, can be on the phone or in person) “Who are you.” Each person interviewed needs to provide three ways of describing themselves. Students are to only ask them to answer the question “Who are you?” without any further prompts.

- Exploring the text:
 1. Read the novel in a combination of Reader’s Theatre in class, small groups in class, and individual in/outside of class. As students read have them make interactive bookmarks that answer the questions “Who is the Midwife’s Apprentice?” Tell students they will be responsible for having at least 17 answers (one for each chapter) by the end of the novel.
 2. As a whole class, create an interactive bookmark that includes all the answers to “Who is the Midwife’s Apprentice?” Have a class vote to pick the top 5 answers that best describe the novel’s protagonist. After picking the top 5 answers, code them to be a classification description if not so already; for example, code “midwife’s apprentice” to “job.” Now have students discuss what it means for a person to be identified by these 5 classification descriptions. Discuss if it was fair for Alyce, and if it is fair for them.
- Extending the text:
 1. Have students write a reflection on the group discussion of the 5 classification descriptions, how they fit into these descriptions, and whether this is really who they are or not.
 2. Have students create a representation of who they are. This can be done as a movie, a song, a poster, a one-person skit, a paper, a PowerPoint, or another approved idea. Share student projects in class. Provide a rubric with specific criteria so that no matter the format the projects meet the requirement that students identify what in their life defines who they are to the same degree.

Suggested Related Readings: *Catherine Called Birdy* and *The Ballad by Lucy Whipple* by Karen Cushman

Designed by: Karen Richardson

Ellis, Deborah. *Parvana's Journey*.

Bibliographic Information:

Toronto: Groundwood Books/Douglas & McIntyre, 2002. ISBN: 0888995148.

Book Description:

- Genre: novel (contemporary realism)
- Number of Pages: 197
- Suggested Grade Level: 7-9, average reading level (teacher discretion advised re: content material)
- Other Key Issues:
 - Taliban and the war in Afghanistan/their effect on young people
 - The importance of family

Issues of homelessness in the text:

Parvana and her father have been displaced from their home in Kabul and are living in a refugee camp. After her father dies, Parvana strikes out on her own to search for her mother and sibling. During the course of her journey she is joined by three other young people who are currently without homes. They must struggle with hunger and the elements in the oncoming fall weather.

Plot Synopsis:

Parvana and her father have been living in a refugee camp since losing their home in Kabul. After her father dies of pneumonia, Parvana sets off in search of her mother and siblings, who had gone to a wedding out of town when their home was lost. Parvana is joined along the way by three other displaced children, all of whom have suffered from the Taliban and constant warring in Afghanistan. They endure freezing nights, exhaustion, and starvation before finally arriving at a crowded refugee camp. Space is limited because the camp is adjacent to a mine field, but Parvana and her friends decide to remain, relieved to finally be among adults again. One day a relief plane flies over the camp and drops food parcels to the refugees. Many of the parcels fall in the mine field. Leila runs out onto the field to get one and is injured by mine exploding. Parvana rushes out and carries her back to the safety of the camp, but Leila dies moments later. A large crowd witnesses this, and a woman among them goes to comfort Parvana and Asif. Parvana lifts the woman's burqa to find that the woman is her mother. Her siblings are also there in the camp. Parvana's mother adopts Asif and Hassan so that they can be one whole family. They still must live in the refugee camp, but having a family again gives Parvana the will to look to the future with hope.

Major Characters:

- **Parvana:** A thirteen-year-old girl who is very responsible and determined to survive. Due to the Taliban's restrictions on women's rights, she disguises herself as a boy. This enables her to move and speak freely, and to avoid wearing a burqa.
- **Hassan:** an infant boy Parvana finds while scavenging for food in a bombed-out village. Parvana adopts and names him after she discovers his mother is dead.

- **Asif:** A ten-year-old boy Parvana encounters at the beginning of her journey. Asif lost his parents and one of his legs to a land mine, now using crutches to walk. When Parvana finds him, Asif had just run away from his abusive uncle.
- **Leila:** A nine-year-old girl whose house is next to a mine field. After her house is destroyed by an airplane bomb, she joins Parvana and the others on their journey.

Teaching Ideas:

- **Connections to Media (7-9):** Show news clips from the United States and from the Middle East regarding the displaced people of Afghanistan. Discuss how each country represents them. Is it in a positive or negative light? Are the representations alike or different? How does the media influence our perceptions of the homeless condition in general?
- **Care Packages (7-9):** Parvana shows great courage and responsibility for her age, yet deep down she longs for an adult to take charge and care for her. Have students research Afghani culture and daily life, then create a list of items displaced Afghani children might need or want. Put together care packages for children living in refugee camps. These care packages can be sent through the Red Cross.
- **Letters from France (7-9):** Throughout the course of the novel, Parvana writes many letters to her best friend Shauzia, who has moved to France. Parvana keeps the letters in her notebook in the hopes that she will one day be able to mail them. Have students write letters from Shauzia to Parvana describing her own journey from Afghanistan to France.

Designed by: Emily Claire Williams

Hallowell, Janis. *The Annunciation of Francesca Dunn.*

Bibliographic Information:

New York: Harper Collins Publishers Inc, 2004.

Book Description:

- Genre: novel
- Number of pages: 310
- Suggested Grade Level: 10-12, appropriate for on-level or above-level readers.
- Other Key Issues: religion, sexuality, cutting, identity, abortion, alcoholism.

Issues of homelessness in the text:

Chester, a man experiencing homelessness, has a vision about a teenage girl named Francesca. His vision suggests that she is the Virgin Mary. Chester believes that he is supposed to be Francesca's protector. The novel discusses the psychological aspects that accompany homelessness as well as connection between identity and homelessness.

Plot synopsis:

The Annunciation of Francesca Dunn is a text of interwoven voices that come together to tell a story of faith, pain, and identity. Chester, a man experiencing homelessness, has a vision that Francesca, a girl who works in the diner, is the Virgin Mary. The news about Francesca spreads quickly, and soon she has a large following of believers. Francesca questions her new position as a religious idol but ultimately believes she is the reincarnation of the Virgin Mary. However, when Francesca finds out that she may be pregnant, she and her mother visit an abortion clinic and her followers become outraged. Francesca and her mother are forced to flee and hide out in a cabin removed from town. During the time at the cabin, Francesca struggles with her identity and is only able to accept reality when she cannot heal a sick child, Jonah. After the death of Jonah, Francesca is able to come to terms with reality and find her place in the world.

Major Characters:

- **Chester:** A homeless man who has a vision about a young girl and believes that she is the Virgin Mary. He dedicates himself to her as her protector. As the novel progresses, Chester questions his status as a homeless man and his assumptions about Francesca.
- **Francesca:** A fourteen year old girl who struggles with the attention she receives after Chester suggests that she is the Virgin Mary. She acquires many followers and believers and struggles with her identity and the cult that surrounds her.
- **Anne:** Francesca's mother, who is a scientist. Anne does not believe Francesca could be holy.
- **Ronny:** owns the diner where Chester begins to worship Francesca when she is serving food to the homeless. Francesca stays with Ronny while her mother is away on an archeological dig.
- **Rae:** Ronny's sister who takes advantage of Francesca's situation by encouraging her followers.
- **Jonah:** Rae's brilliant five-year-old son who becomes a brother figure to Francesca and Sid. He dies from a fever after Rae tries to get Francesca to heal him.

- **Sid:** Francesca’s best friend, who becomes jealous of Francesca and ends up selling Francesca’s things to her “believers.” Sid struggles with cutting as a release from her alcoholic mother.

Teaching Ideas:

Strategy 1: Janis Hallowell sets up a binary opposition between Chester, a man experiencing homelessness, and Anne, a scientist. Students will talk about the preconceptions they have about homelessness and how the text change their conceptions.

- **Objectives:**
 - Students will discuss their preconceptions about why people experience homelessness.
 - Students will read and discuss the reasons that Chester gives for being homeless.
 - Students will demonstrate how their opinions about homelessness have changed as a result of reading *The Annunciation of Francesca Dunn*.
- **Entering the text:**
 - Students will write in journals and address the following topic: Describe at least three reasons that people experience homelessness. Do these people have a choice about being homeless?
 - Student will discuss their journal entries with a partner or the class.
 - The teacher can make a list of reasons on the board of why people are homeless.
- **Exploring the text**
 - Students will explore multiple passages from the novel and look back at their preconceptions.
 - **Chester:** Anne had offered me a bed inside;...beneath the weight of it (Hallowell 142).
 - **Chester:** “The guest bedroom has clean sheets....It was new for me, someone’s wanting to see things from my perspective (Hallowell 224).
 - **Anne:** I knew how it was to be dirty, Lord knows...I had no idea what it would be like to have no choice (Hallowell 101).
 - Students will construct Venn diagrams to compare and contrast Anne and Chester
 - Students can compare their Venn diagrams with other students in small groups.
- **Extending the text**
 - Teachers can have students write a reflective essay about how their views have changed about the homeless as a result of reading the text.

Strategy 2: Students will look at the different homeless characters in *The Annunciation of Francesca Dunn* and how they construct a comprehensive view of homelessness in the text.

- **Objectives:**
 - Students will identify the different characters in *The Annunciation of Francesca Dunn*.
 - Students will compare and contrast the different homeless characters in *The Annunciation of Francesca Dunn*.
 - Students will write a chapter of the novel from the point of view of a homeless character other than Chester.
 - Other characters experiencing homelessness in the novel:
 - Cristos: “totally sweet and afraid of everything” (9).

- Mary Lein: a “scary woman who hollered every few minutes at no one in particular” (9).
 - Briggs: “An old guy with one eye that was scarred shut” (9).
- **Enter the text:**
 - Students will list the different reasons why they believe that people experience homelessness.
- **Exploring the text:**
 - Students will take notes on homeless characters in the novel other than Chester.
 - Students will be split into groups and make a character profile for the character that they are assigned.
 - Students will jigsaw and create a Venn diagram for the different characters experiencing homelessness in the text.
- **Extending the text:**
 - Students will re-write a scene from the novel from the point of view of their character

Designed by: Kelly Woodard

Hamilton, Harriet. *Ribbons of the Sun.*

Bibliographic Information:

Connecticut: Brown Barn Books, 2006.

Book Description:

- Genre: novel
- Number of Pages: 150
- Suggested Grade Level: 11-12
- Other Key Issues: rape, poverty, identity, heritage

Issues of homelessness in the text:

The main character and her two best friends find themselves without homes or families. The characters live in abandoned buildings and beg for food. They often go hungry and cold. They struggle to survive and, with the help of kind people, succeed in starting over.

Plot Synopsis:

Ribbons of the Sun is the story of Rosa, a twelve-year-old Indian girl in Mexico. She is sold by her family to be a maid in the city. While she is there, she is repeatedly raped by the patron and eventually becomes pregnant. The patroness throws her out on the street where she gives birth a few weeks later. She is given a home by a kind patroness, but, after a month, is again thrown out onto the street. No one will hire an Indian girl with a baby, so Rosa and her daughter Flor beg in the streets during the day. In the course of a year, Rosa sinks to the depths of poverty and despair and then begins to rebuild her life through the help of kind people. Eventually, she is able to overcome her shame and return home to her village to build a new life and family.

Major Characters:

- **Rosa:** The heroine of the story. The reader sees a glimpse into a few years of her life.
- **Martin:** an orphaned boy experiencing homelessness. He befriends Rosa and helps her rebuild her life.
- **Micaela:** Rosa's childhood friend. She is also sold into servitude and raped. She and Rosa reconnect at the mission that houses abandoned girls.
- **Flor:** Rosa's daughter and reason for living.
- **Sara:** The head of the mission, she trains girls to live independently and develop their own voice. She wants to empower the powerless.

Minor Characters:

- **Grandmother:** taught Rosa the religion of the village, dies at the beginning of the story
- **Father:** He sells Rosa in order to survive. He feels guilt over this and is glad to receive her forgiveness in the end.
- **Patron:** raped Rosa and many before and after her.
- **Patroness:** jealous of Rosa and throws her out into the street when the pregnancy is discovered.

Teaching Ideas:

This book can be included in a unit about identity. It is not until Rosa purposefully claims her individuality that she can build a life and leave a homeless existence. High school students can relate to this theme of identity because they are struggling with building their own.

- Ask students to look at clothing in the novel. In groups, they can discuss the importance and meaning behind the things the characters wear. They can make connections between the clothing and the situations of the character's life. How does the clothing change as certain characters experience homelessness? Why is clothing important?
- Journal prompt: How does an individual's voice empower them and determine the circumstances of their life? Do you think someone's life can change if they learn to speak up for themselves? How does homelessness influence a person's voice?
- Students can look at this book through an archetypal reading. Rosa is on a quest for her identity. She goes through the stages of separation, initiation, and return. Students can identify the stages and determine how the initiation of homelessness makes Rosa a hero.

Designed by: Rebekah Hess

Hamilton, Virginia. *Plain City.*

Bibliographic Information:

New York: Blue Sky Press, 1993.

Book Description:

- Genre: novel
- Number of Pages: 194
- Suggested Grade Level: 6-8
- Other Key Issues: racial plurality, poverty, single-parent family, self-image

Issue of homelessness in the text:

The main character, Buhlaire, discovers that her father is homeless and suffers from a mental illness. Buhlaire's friend Grady and his father, Mr. Terrell, who now runs a homeless shelter, were also once homeless. The novel addresses reasons for homelessness, attitudes toward the homeless, and having a homeless family member.

Plot Synopsis:

Buhlaire Sims is a lonely and imaginative twelve-year-old girl living in the poverty-stricken Water Houses with her aunts, uncles, and her mother, who is rarely home. Her family refuses to speak about Buhlaire's father, Junior, telling her he died in Vietnam. Buhlaire discovers that her father is alive, but he is homeless and suffers from a mental illness. Yearning to have a relationship with him, regardless of his condition, Buhlaire eagerly seeks out Junior, finding him living under the underpass of a highway on the edge of town. Buhlaire eventually realizes that Junior can never fulfill his role as her father.

Major Character:

- **Buhlaire:** A twelve year old is a girl who feels like an outsider because her family lives in the poor section of the Water Houses and because of her usual skin color and hair. Contrary to what she had been told, she discovers her father is alive and homeless.

Minor Characters:

- **Grady:** Buhlaire's classmate who is with her when she finds her father. Grady becomes Buhlaire's first true friend.

Teaching Ideas:

- Writing prompt: How do you think it feels to be homeless? Share and discuss, listing key descriptors on the board.
- Listen to and study the lyrics of "Bridge Over Troubled Water." What is the significance of this song to the homeless theme of the novel? How does the song reflect Buhlaire's feelings towards her father?
- Think-Pair-Share. Writing Prompt: Respond to this quote: "All kinds of things happen to people...Some are helpless against it" (146).

- Discuss characters' attitudes towards Junior's situation: Buhlaire, Uncle Sam, Aunt Digna, Aunt Babe, Grady, Bluezy, and Mr. Terrell. Are the characters sympathetic or unsympathetic? So they believe Junior is at fault or helpless? What do they believe are the reasons for Junior's homelessness? Are they compassionate?
- Writing prompt(s): Do you think the homeless are helpless against their situation? Why or why not? What is your attitude toward the homeless? Have you seen or heard others react to the homeless? What was their attitude toward the homeless?

Designed by: Amelia Y. Courtis

Herrick, Steven. *The Simple Gift.*

Bibliographic Information:

Australia: University of Queensland Press. 2000.

Book Description:

- Genre: free verse novel
- Number of pages: 192
- Suggested Grade Level: This novel is appropriate for high school students and struggling readers
- Other Key Issues: alcoholism, abuse, friendship, love, coming of age.

Issues of homelessness in the text:

Two of the main characters of the novel, Billy and Old Bill, choose to be homeless. Billy fled from home to escape his abusive and alcoholic father and Old Bill left home after his wife and daughter died in two tragic accidents.

Plot synopsis:

Billy, a sixteen year old boy, leaves home to flee his alcoholic and abusive father. Billy moves into an abandoned freight car where he meets Old Bill who struggles with his tragic past and inhabits the freight train next to Billy. Billy meets Caitlin, a rich and beautiful girl, when he is at McDonalds one night waiting for rejected scraps of food. Billy and Caitlin become friends and eventually fall in love. When Caitlin's parents leave town, Caitlin and Billy invite Old Bill over to Caitlin's home for dinner. Old Bill is so appreciative of Caitlin and Billy's kindness that he tried to think of a way to thank them. When Billy is confronted by the police about his homelessness, Old Bill decides to give Billy his home. Old Bill could not go back to his old home because it is where his daughter died. Billy moves into Old Bill's house and continues to visit Old Bill at his freight car.

Major Characters:

- **Billy:** A sixteen-year-old boy, who leaves home to escape his alcoholic father. Billy moves into an abandoned freight train, and attempts to make a life for himself through reading and his relationship with Caitlin.
- **Caitlin:** A wealthy girl who befriends, and later falls in love with, Billy.
- **Old Bill:** A middle-aged man who chooses to become homeless after his daughter and wife die. His friendships with Billy and Caitlin help him to deal with his grief and to renew his faith in humanity.

Teaching Ideas:

- Journal prompt: "The two homeless characters in the novel, Billy and Old Bill, choose to experience homeless. What are some possible reasons you can think of for people to voluntarily become homeless?"
- Venn diagram: The novel is told from the point of view of three different characters. Create a Venn diagram to show how the three characters view homelessness in the text.

- Discussion question: How does the relationship between Caitlin and Billy reflect how society views, should view, or does not view homelessness?
- Discussion questions: Did this text change how you view homelessness?
- Extension: Choose one of the three characters in the novel and write what you think happens next in the text in free verse.

Designed by: Kelly Woodard

Holtwijk, Ineke. *Asphalt Angels*.

Bibliographic Information:

Trans. Wanda Boeke. Ashville: Lemniscat, 1995.

Book Description:

- Genre: novel
- Number of Pages: 177
- Suggested Grade Level: 10th and above
- Other Key Issues: drugs, the role of authority, wealth, sex, and violence

Issues of homelessness in the text:

The characters live on the street. They steal and beg to survive. They huff glue for recreation and sometimes run drugs for extra cash.

Plot Synopsis:

Asphalt Angels is based on the true story of a boy. Alex is a thirteen-year-old boy living on the streets of Rio de Janeiro. The novel opens on one of his first days on the street. He has just been thrown out by his step-father after the death of his mother. He makes friends with a boy named Robson who shows him where to find food, how to make a few *real*, and where to find safe places to sleep. Robson has the good fortune to be adopted by a lady in the community. Alex wanders in loneliness and fear until he meets Duda, the only female member of a group of street kids called the Asphalt Angels. Alex joins them, and eventually, he becomes an equal to them. He learns to beg, steal, and run drugs. He lives in fear of violence, hunger, and death, and he wishes he had a hope of someday getting off the streets. In the end, Roy, the leader of the Asphalt Angels, is killed trying to rob a bus. The Angels scatter and Alex and Duda, in their grief, become determined to stand against the rich and all those who would try to ignore or belittle them.

Major Characters:

- **Alex/Crusoe:** an orphaned boy living on the streets of Rio de Janeiro
- **Duda:** a fifteen-year-old girl, the girlfriend of Roy, and a member of the Asphalt Angels
- **Roy:** the leader of the Asphalt Angels
- **Scissors:** the youngest member of the Asphalt Angels
- **Huff, Big Mouth, and Pear:** various members of the group

Teaching Ideas:

- Students journal about a time when they felt utterly alone or completely unsafe. Have them imagine what that would feel like 24/7.
- As a pre-reading activity, have students write a short story in which a character encounters something truly terrifying from which they cannot escape.
- Have students compare the portrayal of homelessness and abandonment in the story of Peter Pan with *Asphalt Angels*. They can draw parallels between the characters and events in the two stories and look at fairy tale versus reality.

- Have students journal about the “American Dream.” Ask them to discuss how the dream is a struggle or even an impossibility for the teens in the novel.

Designed by: Rebekah Hess

Jones, Patrick. *Cheated*.

Bibliographic Information:

New York: Walker & Co.: Distributed to the trade by Macmillan, 2008.

Book Description:

- Genre: novel
- Number of Pages: 197
- Suggested Grade Level: 9-12, especially 9 and 10
- Other Key Issues: puberty, divorce, drugs and alcohol, crime and punishment, friendship

Issues of homelessness in the text:

Although he is a minor character, “the Scarecrow” represents all the stereotypical aspects of a person experiencing homelessness. He is an alcoholic living in the woods behind a trailer park. The book does not really deal with “the Scarecrow” directly, but homeless issues can be found through how he is treated by Mick and his friends. They only ask him to buy them alcohol, they see him as beneath themselves, and they accuse him of stealing from them, because “that’s what drunks do” (123). Finally, Mick’s friends beat him to death and Mick burns the body. At the end of the novel, we read “the Scarecrow’s” obituary and discover that he is really named Edward Shreve and was just a man down on his luck after he got laid off. He is, after all, a real person with real problems who does not deserve to be treated as less of a man.

Plot Synopsis:

Mick is in the tenth grade and has recently been dumped by his girlfriend due to his own indiscretions with another girl. Furthermore, his mother recently divorced his father because of his father’s indiscretions with another woman. Mick finds escape in his friends, drugs, and alcohol, but things take a serious turn when his friends kill a homeless man dubbed “the Scarecrow.” Mick helps them cover up the crime, but all three are arrested for murder. Torn between protecting his friends and facing up to his responsibilities, he finally chooses to tell the police what happened, thus breaking the strong bonds he once had with his friends, while repairing ties once severed with his family.

Major Characters:

- **Mick:** A confused and depressed tenth grader who is struggling with his parents’ divorce, friends who are not good for him, and drug and alcohol abuse. He helps cover up the killing of a homeless man, which was perpetrated by his friends.
- **Brody:** Mick’s best friend. He was a star football player but was kicked off the team for violating the alcohol pledge taken by every team member. He helped kill the Scarecrow.
- **Aaron:** The other friend of the trio, whose father is in jail for violent crimes. He also helped kill the Scarecrow.

Minor Characters:

- **The Scarecrow:** The homeless man who the three friends kill.

- **Mick's Mother and Father:** They are divorced because Mick's father cheated on Mick's mother. Their problems mirror some of the problems Mick himself deals with in the novel about relationships.

Teaching Ideas:

- **Enter**
 - Has there ever been a time when you reacted to someone according to stereotypes?
 - Tell me what you know about the homeless situation.
 - Was there ever a time when you learned something new about someone that completely changed your image about him or her?
- **Explore**
 - What are Mick and his friends' assumptions about the Scarecrow?
 - What do we learn about the Scarecrow as a character?
 - How does the Scarecrow's obituary affect Mick and his friends?
- **Extend**
 - What other characters do we know from other texts who are not who they seem to be?
 - What stereotypes do we attach to the Scarecrow? Why? Which are true? False? To whom else might we attach the same stereotypes?

Multidisciplinary and Literary Links:

- *The Great Gatsby*
- Severus Snape in *Harry Potter*
- *Heart of Darkness* – Kurtz
- *To Kill a Mockingbird* – Boo Radley and Tom Robinson

Designed by: Kyle Minner

Koja, Kathe. *The Blue Mirror*.

Bibliographic Information:

New York: Frances Foster Books: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2004.

Book Description:

- Genre: novel
- Number of Pages: 119
- Suggested Grade Level: 10-12
- Other Key Issues: art, first love, alcoholic mother

Issues of homelessness in the text:

The novel explores stereotypes of persons experiencing homelessness, the crimes homeless teenagers must commit in order to survive on the streets, and situations that often occur at homeless shelters.

Plot Synopsis:

Maggy, a sixteen-year-old aspiring artist, becomes romantically involved with Cole, a charming boy who is also homeless. As she grows closer to Cole and spends more time with Marianne and Joly, two homeless girls he looks after, Maggy discovers Cole is an abusive monster and not the perfect boyfriend she thought him to be. She ends her relationship with Cole and finds solace in her art.

Major Characters:

- **Maggy:** A teenager who is more interested in her development as an artist and avoiding her alcoholic mother than in her academics. As she gets caught up in the whirlwind of first love, she becomes less concerned with school, her friends, her family, and her art.
- **Cole:** Maggy's boyfriend who has lived on the streets for several years. He has a long list of ex-girlfriends, girls he was once as fixated on as he is with Maggy.

Minor Characters:

- **Marianne:** One of the two girls with whom Cole lives in their makeshift home. She dislikes Maggy immediately and tries to come between the new couple.
- **Joly:** The other girl with whom Cole lives. Her child-like nature hides a disturbing past of sexual abuse.
- **Monica:** Maggy's alcoholic mother who tries her best to emotionally connect to her daughter as Maggy becomes more distant because of her involvement with Cole.

Teaching Ideas:

- Ask students to describe the stereotypical homeless person's physical appearance. After students have finished writing, begin reading the novel. Ask students to compare their initial ideas about homeless people to Cole's initial description and discuss any

differences. Students can keep this exercise in mind as they continue to read, and they can find other homeless characters that do not fit their free write descriptions.

- One ethical issue to explore in *The Blue Mirror* is when it is acceptable to steal. Students might discuss what items homeless people might need to steal, such as food and warm clothing. Also, students can bring up items that are less black and white. For example, Cole steals a Raggedy Ann doll for Jouly because he knows it will make her happy. In small groups the class discusses if his actions were ethical.
- Students can also trace stealing throughout the text and analyze how each incident affects Maggy's feelings towards Cole. In the previously mentioned example, Maggy justifies Cole's actions to herself, partly because she is infatuated with him and wants to appear cool. Later in the novel though, stealing is one of the issues that Maggy and Cole argue about.
- In a journal, students keep track of how they feel about Marianne and how their opinions change throughout the novel. Discuss if students' initial feelings are swayed by the fact that Marianne is homeless.
- Show students examples of Hieronymus Bosch's paintings. In the novel Maggy compares her sketches of homeless people on the streets to Bosch's body of work. Students discuss what Maggy's sketches might look like after examining Bosch's. What does this comparison say about Maggy's attitude towards homeless people?

Multidisciplinary Connections or Other Literary Connections:

Frida Kahlo

Hieronymus Bosch

Designed by: Jennie Mokodean

O'Connor, Barbara. *How to Steal a Dog: A Novel.*

Bibliographic Information:

New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2007.

Book Description:

- Genre: novel
- Number of Pages: 170
- Suggested Grade Level: 6-8, appropriate for struggling readers
- Other Key Issues: The difference between right and wrong, Family, Friendship

Issues of homelessness in the text:

Georgina, her brother Toby, and her mother all find themselves suddenly homeless when Georgina's father leaves them with nothing but a few rolls of quarters and a mayonnaise jar of dollar bills. The family begins living in their car, moving from place to place while Georgina's mother works odd jobs. The novel discusses what it is like to go from living in a house to being homeless and the social stigma that goes along with it, especially in the school setting.

Plot Synopsis:

Georgina's father has left the family with nothing. They now have to live in the family car, moving from place to place in order to not be discovered. Georgina has difficulty coping with the new situation, but her mother does not have the money for a new apartment, so Georgina hatches a scheme to steal a dog and collect the reward money in order to pay for a new home. She and her brother find the perfect dog and steal it, but over time, Georgina comes to realize that some actions are never right no matter the situation you may be in.

Major Characters:

- **Georgina:** A young girl who used to enjoy a normal life, but who is now having difficulty adjusting to not having a home. Her education suffers and all her friends abandon her because of her new status.
- **Toby:** Georgina's younger brother who doesn't seem to fully comprehend the family situation.
- **Mother:** A determined woman who is floundering with her new status as sole provider of the family and her inability to provide shelter for her children.
- **Willy:** The dog that Georgina and Toby decide to steal. Willy represents hope to Georgina because she anticipates receiving reward money which would, she believes, allow them to have a home again.

Minor Characters:

- **Mookie:** A hobo living by an abandoned house. He helps Georgina come to realize her mistakes.
- **Carmella Whitmore:** Willy's owner.

Teaching Ideas:

- Free Write: “Has there ever been a time when, in a tough situation, you chose to do something you normally would not have? Could you imagine a time when you might do this?”
 - Extension: “How did Georgina handle this situation? How did her newfound status as homeless affect her decisions?”
- RAFT (Role, Audience, Format, Topic) Writing: Have students assume the role of one of the characters in the story. From that perspective, they will write to a specific audience, in a certain format, on a specified topic. These roles can all be assigned by the teacher, or freedom can be given to assign the categories themselves.
 - Examples:
 - Georgina writes a letter to Mr. White (her teacher) explaining why her work has been suffering.
 - Mookie calls Georgina’s mother in order to talk about Georgina and her decisions.
- Discussion Topic: “Do you agree with Georgina’s decisions? What were the positives of her actions? Negatives?”
 - Extension: “Put yourself in her position as a homeless person. Might you have tried the same thing? What other actions would you have tried?”
- Character Map: Students draw character maps for various characters, specifically highlighting how their opinions of those characters change over the novel. Two good characters to follow might be Georgina and Mookie.

Designed by: Kyle Minner

Pyle, Kevin C. *Blindspot*.

Bibliographic Information:

New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2007.

Book Description:

- Genre: graphic novel
- Number of Pages: 89
- Suggested Grade Level: 12+, appropriate for struggling readers
- Other Key Issues: mobile families, war, the Holocaust

Issues of homelessness in the text:

Dean Tollridge's family is somewhat mobile (moved twice in three years). Dean's encounter with a man experiencing homelessness helps shape his own definition of home.

Plot Synopsis:

Dean Tollridge is a boy whose frequent moves with his family may be the cause of his general disengagement with his parents and school. In his most recent neighborhood Dean leads his friends on faux-army expeditions through the woods: sometimes hide-and-seek and sometimes more serious activities like stealing an old woman's drying laundry or destroying a woodland shack. This leads to an extended conversation between the shack's tenant and Dean. Following the conversation, Dean comes back to reality by spending time with his parents, concentrating on his school work, and no longer plays army games.

Major Characters:

- **Dean Tollridge:** A boy in a somewhat mobile family. His encounter with a man experiencing homelessness changes his perception of home and family.

Minor Characters:

- **Woodland veteran:** Name unknown, he is an army veteran living in a woodland shack destroyed by Dean and his friends.
- **Dean's parents:** Concerned about their son's disengagement with them and school, Dean's parents have a psychiatrist prove that Dean's IQ normal.
- **Lt. Glenn Baker, Pvt. Todd Baker, & Sgt. John O'Boyle:** Dean's peers and the faux-army ranks they have assigned themselves. These boys accompany Dean on all his woodland military exploits.

Teaching Ideas:

Strategy 1: Deconstructing *Blindspot*

- Objective: Students will explore the changing meaning of language in *Blindspot*.
- Entering the text: Students identify changing language in their own lives, including instances of language with changed connotations or definitions. For example: How would you define these terms for yourself today, and how would you have defined them in the

third grade? Best friend. Santa Claus. Parents. Religion.

- Exploring the text: How does Dean define *home*? How does the woodland veteran define *home* (76)? How does Dean's definition of *blindspot* change in the novel? *Home? Games?*
- Extending the text: What are some definitions you have that you think will change in ten years? How will your definition of *home* change? *Friends?*

Strategy 2: Questions to consider on the state of *homelessness* in *Blindspot*

- Based on what the woodland veteran's circumstances and what little Dean passes on to the reader of the veteran's life story, can you think of some factors that may have led to the veteran's state of homelessness? Do you think he chooses to remain homeless? Why or why not?
- Should Dean tell his parents about the woodland veteran? Should Dean try and meet him again? What should Dean do next?

Suggested Related Readings:

SHAZAM! The Monster Society of Evil

Designed by: Eric Brinker

Rugg, Jim & Brian Maruca. *Street Angel Volume One: The princess of poverty.*

Bibliographic Information:

San Jose: SLG Publishing, 2005.

Book Description:

- Genre: graphic novel
- Number of Pages: 146
- Suggested Grade Level: 15+, appropriate for struggling readers; the structure and style of this book would also work well for an advanced study with upper high school students
- Other Key Issues: magical realism

Issues of homelessness in the text:

Jesse Sanchez is a girl experiencing homelessness who, despite fearlessly fighting ninjas and cowboys, fears above all to be seen by her classmates diving for food in a dumpster. At the end of each adventure lie painful reminders of her homeless state, usually hunger.

Plot Synopsis:

Street Angel is split into episodes. Jesse Sanchez rescues the governor's daughter from an evil geologist; restores peace between ninjas, 15th century conquistadors, and an Australian-sounding Irish astronaut; beats up a Satanist thanks to a miracle of health by Christ; assists a retired 1970's superhero sex icon; and defeats a power-bent robot with one swift kick to the head. In each story, however, Jesse's painful reality cannot be defeated so easily: she must still find food somehow. The line between reality and imagination blurs when some of Jesse's friends participate in her adventures.

Major Characters:

- **Jesse Sanchez (“Street Angel”):** A twelve year-old girl on the streets whose vivid imagination comes alive for her as she becomes a skateboarding, crime-fighting vigilante.

Minor Characters:

- **Bald Eagle:** A man whose only limb is his left arm and who travels by skateboard, he plays Street Angel's sidekick on many of her adventures.

Teaching Ideas:

Strategy 1: “Magical Realism” writing assignment

- Objective: Students will write their own magically realistic story: a fusion of the normal and the paranormal.
- Definition of magical realism: when a fictitious text has “magical,” illogical, or fantastical elements in an otherwise realistic and believable situation. For example, when the surreal title character of *A Very Old Man With Enormous Wings* appears in a woman's

chicken coup. The woman does not seem fazed by his wings; she responds to his appearance by tending his wounds.

- Option 1: Students will rewrite a news article (realistic) with their own fantastic elements added in (magical).
- Option 2: Students will recount a personal story, such as their last family gathering or travel narrative (realistic) with their own fantastic elements added in (magical).
- Option 3: Reminiscent of *Street Angel*, students will base their story on a conflict (e.g. being in a state of homelessness) and build their magical realism as a direct response to the conflict.

Strategy 2: *Don't Touch the Grass It's Lava: Street Angel and Tom Sawyer* in conversation

- Objective: Students will discuss differences and similarities between reality constructions in *Street Angel* and in *Tom Sawyer*.
- How does each character construct an alternate reality to improve their settings? What does each character seek to improve in their lives? How is each character's constructed reality a reflection of her/his desires? Their weaknesses?
- Do the people in Tom's life participate in his reality? Do the people in Jesse's life participate in her reality? Do these people believe Tom/Jesse, or do they simply play along?

Suggested Related Readings:

SHAZAM! The Monster Society of Evil, Blindspot

Designed by: Eric Brinker

Smith, Jeff. *SHAZAM! The Monster Society of Evil.*

Bibliographic Information:

New York: DC Comics, 2007.

Book Description:

- Genre: graphic novel
- Number of Pages: 206
- Suggested Grade Level: 6-8, appropriate for struggling readers
- Other Key Issues: orphaned children, role of government, role of media

Issues of homelessness in the text:

Billy Batson and his sister Mary are homeless. Billy chooses to remain homeless: “I can take care of myself!” said Billy to the Wizard, “I don't need a family. I told the lady from the shelter I don't want a family!” Billy does not fear family, however, because we see him eagerly adopt his long-lost biological sister; rather, Billy must fear the pain of loss and/or broken homes. While on the streets Billy must deal with homeless thugs who repeatedly abuse and rob him. On the other hand, Billy has a friend in Talky Tawny, an elderly homeless man who encourages Billy to choose another life.

Plot Synopsis:

Little homeless child Billy Batson is selected to be the host for the guardian spirit Captain Marvel, a Superheroesque crime-fighter infused with the powers of the Olympians. After accidentally inviting an alien invader to Earth, Billy, his new alter-ego, and his newfound sister Mary must find a way to stop both the alien and a greedy government official from destroying humankind.

Major Characters:

- **Billy Batson:** A young boy living alone in an abandoned apartment since the death of his parents. Shown to be kind and brave, Billy is selected as the host for Captain Marvel.
- **Captain Marvel:** He can fly, has super strength, and wears a cape. Technically a different character than Billy, Marvel can switch places with Billy in this dimension when Billy commands it—by saying *SHAZAM*. Although Billy is “absent” when Captain Marvel is on the scene, Billy sees and hears everything Marvel sees.
- **Mary Batson:** Billy's long lost sister. She stands too close to Billy once when Billy transforms into Captain Marvel, and the lightning storm that accompanies the transformation strikes Mary into her own form of superhero: Mary Marvel. Her superhero form is not, however, a separate being; Mary Marvel is Mary Batson, whereas Captain Marvel dwells inside Billy Batson.
- **Talky Tawny:** a wandering *ifrit* spirit that changes from human to animal, mostly a tiger, but once in this novel into a house cat. Tawny works for the wizard to make sure Billy/Marvel are adjusting well to their new symbiotic relationship.

- **The Wizard:** Evidently the previous host for Captain Marvel (“But I am getting old, Billy Batson, and it is time for me to pick a replacement,” the wizard says), he turns Billy into Marvel's new host.

Teaching Ideas:

Strategy 1: Use the RAFT writing strategy (Role, Audience, Format, Topic) to understand point of view about homelessness in the novel.

- Objective: Students will demonstrate different points of view about homelessness. Students will adopt the perspective of a character to write to another character using a given format about a given topic, homelessness.
- Entering the text: How would you feel if you were homeless? What would you do if you were homeless today, and where would you go?
- Exploring the text: How does Billy feel about being homeless? How does Captain Marvel feel about it? Talky Tawny? Mary? Do you think Billy likes being homeless?
- Extending the text: Choose two characters: Billy, Captain Marvel, Talky Tawny, or Mary. You will pretend to be one character (“role”), and you will communicate with another character (“audience”): the communication could be a letter, a phone call, an email, or an IM chat (“format”). The conversation is about homelessness (“topic”). Imagine: What would your role say to your audience about homelessness? Would your role try and convince your audience not to be homeless, convince your audience that homelessness is not so bad, or agree with your audience?

Strategy 2:

- Entering the text: Think-Pair-Share conversations: A *deus ex machina* is a plot device where the hero is miraculously and unexpectedly saved from an unsolvable dilemma, or basically given an all-purpose Get Out of Jail Free card. If you could give yourself this card, how would you eliminate the conflicts of your life? Super powers? Billions of dollars? Long life? Straight A's for life? Consider this: what would the *negatives* be of having a *deus ex machina* in your life?
- Exploring the text: Billy Batson is given superpowers and a new family member—free gifts as if they had fallen from the sky. How do these solve his problems? How do they complicate his life?
- Extending the text: *Great Expectations* also has a character whisked out of hardship, yet forced to navigate an “easier” life with all new challenges. What are the similarities? Differences? Can you think of other texts with this theme?

Suggested Related Readings:

Blindspot, Street Angel

Designed by: Eric Brinker

Spinelli, Jerry. *Maniac Magee*.

Bibliographic Information:

New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1990. ISBN: 0316807222.

Book Description:

- Genre: novel
- Number of Pages: 184
- Suggested Grade Level: 6-9
- Other Key Issues: racism, the grieving process

Issues of homelessness in the text:

The protagonist runs away from his emotionally distant guardians and becomes homeless. During the course of the novel, he befriends a man who lives at the local YMCA.

Plot Synopsis:

Jeffrey Lionel Magee's parents are killed in a train accident when he is three years old. He is sent to live with his aunt and uncle who hate each other, but refuse to get a divorce. When Jeffrey is ten years old, he grows so angry with their refusal to speak to each other he runs away in search of a more loving home. After a year of drifting, Jeffrey arrives in the racially divided town of Two Mills. All the white people live on the West End and all the African American people live on the East End. Jeffrey seems unaware of the racial tension in the town, and crosses freely back and forth between the West and East Ends. Jeffrey gains celebrity status among the kids—and eventually among the adults—of Two Mills for his amazing athletic feats. This earns Jeffrey the nickname “Maniac” Magee. He finds a home with Amanda Beale and her family in the East End, but leaves when the family is harassed for adopting a white child. Jeffrey finds a home in the West End with an elderly man named Grayson, but Grayson dies of old age after they are together for only a year. Jeffrey goes to live in the buffalo pen at the zoo and continues to run everyday around Two Mills. He makes an attempt to overcome the racial barriers in the town, but is unsuccessful. The novel ends with Amanda Beale finding him at the zoo and convincing him to come back home with her. Although many of the people in Two Mills are still prejudiced, Jeffrey at last has a home and family.

Major Characters:

- **Jeffrey Lionel “Maniac” Magee:** A young man who wants nothing more than a home with an address and a loving family. He goes to great lengths to put an end to the racism in the town of Two Mills and acquires a mythic status there. He is eleven at the beginning of the novel and thirteen at the end.
- **Amanda Beale:** An East End girl who loves to read. She and Jeffrey are the same age, and become good friends after Jeffrey comes to live with her family.
- **Mrs. Beale:** Amanda's mother. She is tough and no-nonsense, but also extremely warm and loving. She and her husband adopt Jeffrey when they learn he has no home.
- **Earl Grayson:** An elderly former baseball player who takes Jeffrey in after Jeffrey is forced to leave the Beale home. Emotionally, Grayson is Jeffrey's father.

- **John McNab:** A twelve-year-old West End boy and the best ballplayer in the Two Mills Little League. He loathes Jeffrey at the beginning of the novel for showing him up on the baseball field, but by the end they have formed a tenuous truce. John McNab and his family are virulently racist.
- **Mars Bar Thompson:** A twelve-year-old East End boy and the self-proclaimed “baddest” kid in Two Mills. He is called Mars Bar because he always eats Mars candy bars. He hates Jeffrey at the beginning of the novel because Jeffrey is white, but at the end they become good friends. Mars Bar also helps Amanda convince Jeffrey to come back to live with the Beales.

Teaching Ideas:

- **Helping Out (6-9):** During the time Jeffrey Magee is living on the streets, one of the ways he finds food is by going to soup kitchens. Have students volunteer to help at their local soup kitchen and write about their experience. How did it change their views on the homeless condition? How did it change the way they read *Maniac Magee*?
- **Narratives (6-9):** Jeffrey spends many nights sleeping in the buffalo pen at the zoo and comes to treat the baby bison almost as a pet. Have students write narratives from the baby bison’s point of view. How would Baby Bison understand the homeless condition? What would it think of Jeffrey sleeping its pen every night?
- **Class Discussion (8-9):** *Maniac Magee* deals with homelessness in conjunction with racism. With older students, have a class discussion on how Jeffrey Magee’s homelessness might symbolize his racial “colorblindness.” (Because doesn’t have a home on either end of town, he is not tied down to a particular side.) Jeffrey also seems wiser and more mature than many adults he encounters. How might his lifestyle have built his character?

Designed by: Emily Claire Williams

Walls, Jeannette. *The Glass Castle.*

Bibliographic Information:

New York: Simon and Schuster. 2005.

Book Description:

- Genre: memoir
- Number of pages: 288
- Suggested Grade Level: 12, appropriate for advanced students.
- Other Key Issues: poverty, lack of parental support, sexual abuse, alcoholism.

Issues of homelessness in the text:

The Walls family experiences homelessness at multiple times throughout the text. Rex and Rose Mary Walls constantly move their family around to avoid debt collectors, and in-between homes, the Walls family lives in their car or in the desert. Later in the text, after the Walls children move to New York City, Rose Mary and Rex Walls follow them and are homeless for nearly fifteen years. Jeannette Walls experiences difficulty acknowledging and accepting her parents' choice to be homeless in New York City.

Plot synopsis:

While Jeannette Walls was growing up, she and family moved constantly. Her parents were never able to hold steady jobs, so when times got tough they packed up their car and moved to a new location. In between moves, there were times when the Walls family did not have a home, had to sleep in their car, or had to live in crumbling establishments with no electricity or plumbing. After the family settled in a small town in West Virginia, the four Walls children decide that they have to escape from their parents. One by one, the Walls children move to New York to establish lives for themselves. Finally, Jeannette's parents move to New York and become homeless. Jeannette and her siblings face the challenges of supporting their homeless parents and of coming to terms with their own pasts.

Major Characters:

- **Jeannette Walls:** Jeannette Walls is the protagonist and author of *The Glass Castle*. She fights to take care of her family when her parents are not able, or are unwilling, to support her and her siblings. Walls fights to receive an education, and views education as her ticket out of poverty.
- **Rex Walls:** Rex is Jeannette's alcoholic father, who is not able to hold a steady job. Rex has big ideas and Jeannette admires his ability to dream even when he disappoints her constantly.
- **Rose Mary Walls:** Rose Mary is Jeannette's mother who is an artist. She is more interested in her art than her children, and chooses to buy art supplies over feeding her children.
- **Brian Walls:** Brian is Jeannette's younger brother. Brian is Jeannette's closest ally, and the two always protect one another from the other neighborhood children.
- **Lori Walls:** Lori is Jeannette's older sister. Like her mother, Lori is an artist, and is the only child in the family to empathize with Rose Mary Walls.

- **Maureen Walls:** Maureen is Jeannette's younger sister. Maureen does not experience poverty and hunger in the same way that the other Walls children do, because other people are constantly taking care of her.

Teaching Ideas:

- In *The Glass Castle*, Jeannette Walls describes how other students made her feel because she lived in a situation of poverty. Teachers can ask students to write a journal about a time that they felt out of place in school because of something over which they had no control. This journal prompt will help students identify with the Walls and to view homelessness as an issue with which they can identify.
- Rose Mary Walls comes from a very wealthy family. She inherits a home, expensive land, and expensive belongings. However, she does not choose to sell any of her possessions in order to help her family. Students will explore several passages in the text and analyze Rose Mary's rationale in keeping her expensive possessions over taking care of her family.
- Sample passages:
 - Pg. 186: Rose Mary refuses to pawn a two carat diamond because it improves her self esteem.
 - Pg. 258-259: Rose Mary refuses to sell her land in Texas that is worth one million dollars.
- People often assume that people experiencing homelessness will be open and forthcoming about their situation. However, Jeannette Walls experiences a situation in *The Glass Castle* where Professor Fuchs assumes that she knows nothing about poverty.
- After engaging with this passage, have students break into groups and form debate groups. Students will have completed *The Glass Castle* and have a better understanding about the complex issues surrounding homelessness. Students will research their positions and engage in an in-class debate.
- Throughout the text, Jeannette and her siblings eat out of the trash cans at school and stay at school for an extended period of time to experience warmth and comfort. Students will engage in a group project where they will propose programs that could help students like Jeannette at their school. For example, a group of students could propose a can food drive for students at the school who are experiencing homelessness. The class could vote on their favorite idea and follow through with the implementation of the idea.
- The glass castle is the dream home that Rex Walls plans to build for his family. Students will draw a picture of what they think the glass castle looks like and then trace the weave of the glass castle throughout the novel and explain how its meaning changes throughout the novel. Students will write an essay stating whether they would make any changes to their original artwork after tracing the weave of the glass castle throughout the text.

Designed by: Kelly Woodard

Walters, Eric. *Sketches*.

Bibliographic Information:

New York: Viking, 2007.

Book Description:

- Genre: novel
- No. of Pages: 226
- Suggested Grade Level: 6+
- Other Key Issues: parents suffering from drug and alcohol addiction, homosexual youth, youth centers, sexual abuse, self-mutilation/cutting, youth self-expression

Issues of homelessness in the text:

Dana runs away from home because her stepfather sexually abused her. She befriends other “street kids” experiencing homelessness, and they work together to survive. This novel addresses issues of the dangers homeless youth face: pedophiles, violent street kids, lack of medical care for illness and bodily injury, malnutrition, shelters and finding a place to sleep, protecting yourself, and how to get money to eat when youths are not legally old enough to work.

Synopsis:

After fleeing from her suburban home, fourteen-year-old Dana struggles to survive in the alleys, squats, and subway stations of downtown Toronto. Dana's graffiti on an underpass catches the eye of a counselor at Sketches, a drop-in center where homeless teens can express themselves through art. Through her art, Dana begins to confront the reason she left home: her stepfather sexually abused her. Dana realizes her younger sister may also be in danger. Dana reunites with her mother at a Sketches gallery showing, determined to return home to help her sister.

Major Characters:

- **Dana:** A artistically talented fourteen-year-old girl who struggles to survive on the streets after running away from home to get away from her stepfather who sexually abuses her.
- **Brent:** A friend of Dana's who believes he is homosexual; his father is a preacher, and he ran away from home because he knew his family would not accept his sexual identity. He and Dana work together to survive on the streets.
- **Ashley:** A friend of Dana and Brent's who ran away from home because her mother was a drug addict, alcoholic, and prostitute. Ashley works with Dana and Brent to survive.

Minor Characters:

- **Robert Erickson:** A counselor at the Sketches youth center who sees Dana graffiti art on an underpass and invites her to come to the center.
- **Nicki:** The director of the Sketches youth center who helps Dana express herself and break her silence about her sexual abuse through her art.

Teaching Ideas:

- The novel presents many questions to instigate discussion. Some of these questions are:

- What does a person experiencing homelessness look like? What are the many ways a person may enter into a homeless situation?
- What would you be willing to do to survive if you were in Dana, Brent, and Ashley's situation? Could you beg for money to eat?
- How might creating art help homeless youth?
- Is running away from home the best way for Dana, Brent, and Ashley to deal with their troubles at home? Why or why not? What else could they have done?
- Students may research homeless youth centers, exploring where they are located and why, what services they provide, and the mission of these centers. One guiding question for this project: what is the purpose of youth centers and are they effective?
- Discuss the dangers youths experiencing homelessness face, such as pedophiles, other violent street kids, illness and injury, malnutrition, and finding a place to sleep.

Multidisciplinary Connection:

- **Art:** Art is prominent in Sketches, specifically the controversy centering on whether or not graffiti is art, presenting the opportunity for a variety of art-related student projects and presentations. Suggested project topics are:
 - Graffiti is compared to avant-garde artists, such as Picasso. Student groups can explore Picasso's life and art, learning what "avant-garde" means. Other groups can explore the history of graffiti, the purpose and use of graffiti, and the art itself. One essential question that may guide these projects: Why is the ideology of graffiti art compared to the ideology of Picasso's art?
 - Focus on graffiti: What is art? Is graffiti art? Why graffiti? Who tends to consider graffiti art and why? Who tends to deny that graffiti is art and why? Students can research the etymology, history, purpose, controversy, and art of graffiti. As part of this process, students can create a graffiti gallery in the classroom to stimulate a debate, using each piece to explain why they think graffiti is or is not art.
 - Self-expression though art is a prominent theme in Sketches. Allow students to transform something they have written, something they feel/think, or something they do not know how to verbalize into a visual expression. Ideally, students would specifically work with the graffiti medium, but any artistic medium would serve the purpose of this lesson. In this way, students can create their own class art gallery, and understand the difficulty and power of expressing yourself visually.

Designed by: Amelia Y. Curtis

Whelan, Gloria. *Homeless Bird*.

Bibliographic Information:

New York: Harper Collins, 2000.

Book Description:

- Genre: novel
- Number of Pages: 216
- Suggested Grade Level: 9-10th
- Other Key Issues: conflict between traditional and modern ways of life, literacy, social class

Issues of homelessness in the text:

The main character is abandoned in a city with no money, shelter, or friends. She survives through the help of friends and begins to build a new life. At the end of the novel, she succeeds in finding a permanent home.

Plot Synopsis:

Homeless Bird is the story of Koly, a thirteen-year-old girl living in India. She marries a sickly boy who dies shortly after their wedding, and Koly is left to survive with a bitter mother-in-law and an absent father-in-law. When the mother-in-law is widowed and decides to move, she abandons Koly in Vrindavan, a city of widows, with only her clothes and a quilt she embroidered. Koly manages to survive with the help of strangers and, after time, is able to support herself with her embroidery skills. In the end, Koly decides to marry a man whom she loves and who will support her passion for embroidery.

Major Characters:

- **Koly:** The protagonist. Koly is a thirteen-year-old girl who is married off to a young man by her parents. After her husband dies, she is abandoned in a city of widows by her mother-in-law. She makes friends and learns to survive on her own through her skills in embroidery and reading.
- **Hari:** Koly's husband. He is sickly and dies a few weeks after their wedding. His parents choose a bride for him so they can get the money from the dowry. They take him to Varanasi to bathe him in the Ganges River in hopes that he will be healed. He insists that Koly come on the trip because he enjoys the stories she tells of her family.
- **Chandra:** Koly's sister-in-law. Chandra and Koly become good friends and share their thoughts with one another. Chandra is always favored over Koly, but the difference does not influence their friendship. A year after Koly's wedding, Chandra marries and moves away. Unknown to Koly, Chandra's dowry was formed of her widow's pension.
- **Sass:** Koly's hateful mother-in-law. She resents Koly and the reminder of the loss of her son. She makes Koly work hard and feeds her little. She steals Koly's pension and gold earrings, and she eventually abandons her in the city of Vrindavan. Sass is a bitter woman who is left widowed at the end of the novel.

- **Sassur:** Koly's father-in-law. He is a kind man who keeps to himself. He teaches Koly to read and shares his passion for the poet Rabindranath Tagore with her. He is a scribe who cannot compete with the influence of computers over his field. He dies a broken man.
- **Raji:** Koly's first friend in Vrindavan. He drives a rickshaw to save money for his farm where he wants to build a home. He introduces Koly to Maa Kamala who runs a house for abandoned widows. Koly teaches him to read. He eventually asks Koly to marry him and while he awaits her answer, he builds a house. She finally agrees when he proves his respect for her by building a special room for her embroidery work.
- **Maa Kamala:** She runs a house where widows can live until they get jobs and earn enough to live on their own. She has strict rules and expects the girls to succeed. She insists that the girls no longer call themselves widows.
- **Madam:** She is a wealthy benefactress who funds the widow's home. She recognizes Koly's skills in embroidery and gets her a job making expensive saris.
- **Tanu:** Koly's friend and roommate.
- **Mala:** Koly's co-worker. Mala steals from her employer and invites Koly to a party where she gets drugged.

Teaching Ideas:

- Students will write a journal about identity. Possible prompts include: Identify a moment in your own life that shaped your identity, How is a person's identity formed? Do we have any say in how our identity is formed?
- In groups, students will trace the thread of various characters' identity, as shaped through homelessness, throughout the text and present their findings to the class.
- Students can connect the text to other readings that deal with identity and/or homelessness as a major theme. The text could be studied in conjunction with short stories, novels and poetry. Students can explore the connection between the condition of homelessness or searching for a home and identity.

Designed by: Rebekah Hess

Yansky, Brian. *Wonders of the World.*

Bibliographic Information:

Woodbury, MN: Flux: Llewellyn Publications, 2007.

Book Description:

- Genre: novel
- Number of Pages: 221
- Suggested Grade Level: 10-12
- Other Key Issues: acting, loss of father, prostitution

Issues of homelessness in the text:

The novel explores the reasons why children end up on the streets, what they must do to survive, and the lack of attention given to their situation by society.

Plot Synopsis:

Soon after his mother remarries, Eric runs away from his home in Omaha. He decides to live on the streets of Riverton, Nebraska, a city in which his absent father once lived. As Eric and his friends Catgirl and Payback become involved in drugs, prostitution, and revenge, Eric discovers his talent for acting and becomes immersed in his role for a local play. His love for theatre ultimately saves Eric from inevitable death, unlike his friends.

Major Characters:

- **Eric:** A seventeen year old boy who makes the decision to leave his home after the disappearance of his father and his mother's remarriage.

Teaching Ideas:

Strategy 1: The foci of this strategy are personalizing the novel's characters and revealing students' misconceptions and stereotypes about homeless people.

- Objective: The student will identify common beliefs about homeless people.
- Entering the text:

Students write a response to the following prompt: Many homeless adolescents have to carry their possessions with them at all times. If you had only one backpack in which to keep your things in, what vital items would I find in your bag?

- Exploring the text:

An opinion survey is an effective way to generate discussion about homeless children. Ask students to individually mark true or false in response to the following statements:

- Homeless teenagers end up on the street because they did something bad.
- Homeless teenagers are involved with drugs, prostitution, and gangs.
- I would dig through dumpsters or steal from others in order to eat something every day.

After students pick a side for each statement, discuss students' responses in small groups or as a class.

- Extending the text:

Students select one of the minor characters in the novel, such as Catgirl, Payback, or Birdboy, and create a story about how the character came to be on the streets of Riverton. Some details about these characters' back stories are included in the text, but this activity will allow students to fill in the missing facts based on their individual interpretations of single characters.

Strategy 2: The focus of this strategy is to highlight homeless adolescents' responsibilities and transitions into adulthood.

- Objective: The student will choose a position in a discussion and provide evidence from the text to support ideas.

- Entering the text:

Students write a response to the following prompt: When do you think teenagers become adults? Is it age related? Caused by an event they experience? The absence of parents/adult role models?

- Exploring the text:

Using the Socratic seminar format, students discuss if the characters in the novel should be considered adults and why. Students must provide evidence from the text (paraphrases of scenes or actual quotations).

- Extending the text:

During the novel some of the minor characters talk about trying to go back home and the rejection they receive from their parents. In a writing exercise, students decide whether the absent parents in the novel would consider their children adults or not.

Suggested Related Readings:

Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

Designed by: Jennie Mokodean