



PENS *Against* **POVERTY**

GUIDE FOR YEAR 3-6 TEACHERS



About Pens Against Poverty

The Pens Against Poverty Schools Writing Competition that encourages schools, teachers and students to become educated in the important issues of poverty and homelessness in our communities in Australia, while nurturing brave young voices through creative writing.

How to use this guide

This Teaching Guide has been developed to support year 3-6 teachers with curriculum resources to empower their students to develop their creative writing skills and create a genuine awareness of poverty and social issues in Australia.

This resource has been developed to accommodate:
The Australian Curriculum
(used in Western Australia, Tasmania, South Australia and the ACT)
The NSW Curriculum
The Victorian Curriculum
The International Baccalaureate Primary Years Programme
Visible Learning Intentions and Success Criteria

Further information about curriculum links are provided in the following pages.

CURRICULUM LINKS

The Australian Curriculum, NSW Curriculum, and Victorian Curriculum

English, Years 3-6

These resources are compatible with ACT, WA, Tasmania, and SA curricula.

Language: Expressing and developing ideas

(ACELA1484;1498;1512;1525) (NESA EN2-9B; EN3-6B) (VCELA248; 279; 311; 340)

Literature: Literature and context

(ACELT1594;1602;1608;1613) (NESA EN2-10C; EN3-8D) (VCELT282; 313)

Literature: Responding to literature

(ACELT1596;1603;1609;1615) (NESA EN2-11D; EN3-6B) (VCELT251; 283; 314; 342)

Literature: Creating literature

(ACELT1791;1794;1798;1618) (NESA EN2-2A; EN3-7C) (VCELT264; 265; 297; 298; 328; 356)

The Australian Curriculum

Humanities and Social Sciences Inquiry and Skills Years 3-6

These resources are compatible with ACT, WA, Tasmania, and SA curricula.

The Australian Curriculum for the Humanities and Social Sciences empowers students to shape change by developing a range of skills to enable them to make informed decisions and solve problems, including through:

Questioning: Develop appropriate questions to guide an inquiry about people, events, developments, places, systems and challenges

(ACHASSI052, ACHASSI073, ACHASSI094, ACHASSI122)

Analysing: Interpret and analyse data and information

(ACHASSI 057, ACHASSI 078, ACHASSI100, ACHASSI128)

Reflecting: Reflect on learning to propose personal and/or collective action in response to an issue or challenge

(ACHASSI060, ACHASSI081, ACHASSI104, ACHASSI132)

International Baccalaureate Primary Years Programme

Transdisciplinary theme: Sharing the Planet

Concept: Equality

Enduring Understanding: All human beings deserve to enjoy basic rights in order to live a good life

Central Idea: Children, families and older Australians who live in Australia live in poverty, homelessness and hardship.

Lines of inquiry:

All human beings need to live a good and healthy life and to thrive

(Humanities and Social Sciences)

Poverty is a real problem in Australia

(Humanities and Social Sciences)

As authors we can employ effective writing techniques to help us to respond to important issues to express a perspective, emotion, opinion and to persuade others to take action

(English)

PENS AGAINST POVERTY

INTEGRATED ENGLISH WRITING AND HASS UNIT

YEARS 3-6

Introduction

The Pens Against Poverty Writing Competition invites students to explore important issues in their communities through creative writing.

This unit has been designed to help students develop both their understanding of poverty and homelessness in Australia and their confidence as writers. Across four lessons, students are encouraged to ask questions, challenge assumptions, listen to different perspectives and reflect on the experiences of others.

The unit begins by exploring a simple but important question: What do people need to live well? Students then learn from real stories, examine how assumptions can shape the way we see others, and develop characters and ideas for their own writing.

At every stage, the focus is on people rather than problems. Students are encouraged to recognise that people experiencing hardship are diverse, capable and resilient, and that everybody has a story worth hearing.

The unit concludes by supporting students to create their own original piece of writing for the Pens Against Poverty competition. Through storytelling, students are encouraged to communicate understanding, empathy and hope for a fairer future.

Social awareness, attitudes and knowledge

For some students, the themes explored in this unit may connect to their own experiences or those of family members, friends or people in their community. Teachers should create a classroom environment where students feel safe to ask questions, share ideas and learn from one another with respect.

The goal of this unit is not to make students feel sorry for people experiencing poverty or homelessness. Rather, it is to help students develop understanding, curiosity and empathy while recognising the dignity, strengths and aspirations of all people.

Students should be encouraged to explore different perspectives, reflect on their own assumptions and approach these topics with care and respect.

The Primary Years Programme learner profile is particularly relevant to this unit, especially the attributes of being caring, open-minded, principled and reflective.

Creative writing journals

Students will need a creative writing journal throughout the unit.

Ideally, this will be a blank art diary or notebook rather than a formal workbook. The aim is to encourage students to experiment, record ideas, take risks and develop their writing over time.

The journal can be used to collect observations, questions, reflections, character ideas and draft writing. Students should be reminded that first drafts do not need to be perfect. Many of the activities in this unit can later be developed into polished competition entries through conferencing, editing and revision.

Unit learning intention

Students will understand that poverty and homelessness affect many Australians, including children, families and older people. Through inquiry, discussion, reflection and creative writing, students will explore how stories can build understanding, challenge assumptions and inspire hope.

Structure of the lessons

The unit follows a four-lesson sequence designed to build understanding, empathy and writing skills.

Lesson One: What do people need?

Students explore the things all people need to live healthy, safe and fulfilling lives. They are introduced to poverty as a situation where some of those needs are not being met and begin asking questions about poverty in Australia.

Lesson Two: Listening to stories

Students learn from real experiences and consider how poverty and homelessness affect different people in different ways. They explore the importance of listening, questioning and understanding before making assumptions.

Lesson Three: Everybody has a story

Students examine how assumptions and stereotypes can shape the way we see others. They develop characters with strengths, interests, relationships and aspirations, recognising that people are more than the challenges they face.

Lesson Four: Telling a story that matters

Students learn how writers create empathy and understanding through storytelling. They apply what they have learned to develop characters, settings and ideas for their own competition entry.

Key resources

Pens Against Poverty

www.pensagainstpoverty.com

Anti-Poverty Week

www.antipovertyweek.org.au

The Australian Curriculum

www.australiancurriculum.edu.au

Harvard Thinking Routines

www.pz.harvard.edu/thinking-routines

Success criteria

Students will be able to:

- identify things people need to live healthy, safe and fulfilling lives
- ask thoughtful questions about poverty and homelessness in Australia
- listen to and learn from other people's stories and experiences
- recognise that people are more than the challenges they face
- create characters, settings and stories that help readers understand another person's perspective
- use creative writing to communicate ideas, empathy and hope.

Key messages for teachers

Throughout the unit, students should be encouraged to understand that:

- Poverty exists in Australia and affects many different kinds of people.
- Poverty is not always visible
- People experiencing hardship are more than their circumstances
- Stories can help us understand experiences that may be different from our own
- Good writing helps readers connect with people, not stereotypes.

LESSON ONE

WHAT DO PEOPLE NEED?

Connect

Ask students to imagine a child arriving on Earth from another planet. They know nothing about humans or how we live. What would they need in order to live a healthy, safe and happy life? Record student responses on a large class chart.

Encourage students to think beyond physical needs. Possible categories include:

- Food and water
- A safe place to live
- Healthcare
- Education
- Friends and family
- Love and belonging
- Opportunities to play
- Safety
- Clothing
- Community

Ask your students:

- Which of these needs are most important?
- Are all of these needs equally important?
- What might happen if someone did not have some of these things?
- Would it affect how they feel?
- Would it affect their opportunities?

Explain that while most Australians have access to many of these things, not everyone does.

Think, pair, share

Ask students:

- What do you already know about poverty?
- Have you heard the word before?
- What do you think poverty means?
- What questions do you have about poverty?

Allow students time to think individually before discussing with a partner. Invite pairs to share ideas and questions with the class.

Record student questions on a visible “Wonder Wall” that can be revisited throughout the unit.

What is poverty?

Explain that poverty means not having enough money or resources to meet important needs and participate fully in everyday life. Ask:

- Can someone have a home and still experience poverty?
- Can someone have a job and still experience poverty?
- Can children experience poverty?
- Does poverty only happen in other countries?

Explain that poverty exists in every part of Australia, including cities, suburbs, regional towns and rural communities. Many people experiencing poverty are children, families, older people and people who work hard but still struggle to make ends meet.

True or false?

Read each of these statement aloud:

- Poverty only happens in poor countries.
- Children can experience poverty.
- Everyone experiencing homelessness sleeps on the street.
- Poverty exists in Australia.
- It is always easy to tell if someone is experiencing poverty.
- Communities can work together to help people experiencing hardship.

Ask students to move to one side of the room for True, the other for False, or remain in the middle for Not Sure. Allow students to explain their thinking.

Avoid immediately correcting misconceptions. The goal is to surface ideas that will be explored throughout the unit.

Tell students they may discover different answers as they learn more.

Meet someone's story

Watch this short Behind the News segment or another age-appropriate resource about poverty or homelessness in Australia:

www.abc.net.au/btn/classroom/povertycampaigner/10527564

Ask students:

- What surprised you?
- What did you notice?
- How did the story make you feel?
- What questions do you still have?

Encourage curiosity rather than judgement.

Reflect

Ask students to create a KWL chart in their writing journals.

K – What I Know

What do I think I know about poverty?

W – What I Want to Know

What questions do I have?

L – What I Learned

What have I learned today?

Explain that students will revisit this chart throughout the unit.

Writing journal

Allow students five minutes to write freely, choosing one of these exercises:

- One thing that surprised me today was...
- One question I still have is...
- I used to think _____, but now I think _____.

Remind them that their writing journal is a place to explore ideas, take risks and record their thinking. It does not need to be perfect.

Lesson one success criteria and teaching notes

- I can identify things people need to live well.
- I can explain what poverty means in my own words.
- I can ask thoughtful questions about poverty and homelessness.
- I can reflect on my learning through writing.

This lesson is designed to build curiosity and challenge assumptions rather than provide answers. Students should leave the lesson understanding that poverty exists in Australia, that it can affect many different kinds of people, and that there is still much to learn.

Curriculum links

ACARA: HASS

Develop appropriate questions to guide an inquiry about people, events, developments, places, systems and challenges (ACHASSI052, ACHASSI073, ACHASSI094, ACHASSI122)

Interpret and analyse data and information (ACHASSI057, ACHASSI 078, ACHASSI100, ACHASSI128)

ACARA: English

Language: Expressing and developing ideas (ACELA1484;1498;1512;1525), (NESA EN2-9B; EN3-6B) (VCELA248; 279; 311; 340)

LESSON TWO

LISTENING TO STORIES

Watch and listen

Before you play the recording, ask students:

- What do you think poverty looks like?
- What do you think homelessness looks like?
- Who do you think experiences poverty?

Record responses on a class chart. Explain that today's lesson is about learning from real people and real experiences.

Now watch the following Behind the News segment:

www.abc.net.au/btn/classroom/homelessness/10531424

Encourage students to record notes, observations or questions in their writing journals as they watch.

Turn and talk

After viewing the video, ask students to discuss the following questions with a partner before sharing with the class. Ask:

- What surprised you?
- What did you learn?
- What challenges were people experiencing?
- What strengths did they show?
- What questions do you still have?
- Did anything challenge your assumptions?

Explain that people experiencing hardship are not defined by their circumstances. Like everyone else, they have interests, talents, families, friendships and dreams.

Look closely

Display a photograph connected to poverty or homelessness, such as the image at the top of this story: www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/oct/16/more-than-three-million-australians-living-in-poverty-across-report-reveals

Use the Harvard Thinking Routine:

What do you see?

Students describe only what they can observe.

What do you think?

Students share ideas and inferences.

What do you wonder?

Students ask questions.

Record student responses, and ask:

- Can we tell everything about a person just by looking at them?
- What things might we not know about their life?
- Why is it important not to make assumptions about people?

Explain that everyone has a story, and we rarely know everything about another person's circumstances.

Understanding someone's story

Choose a person from one of the videos or photographs. Discuss:

- What do we know about this person?
- What challenges might they be experiencing?
- What strengths have they shown?
- What questions would you ask if you could meet them?
- What would help us understand their story?

Remind students that empathy means trying to understand another person's experiences while recognising that we may never know everything about their life.

Reflect, think back

Return to the questions students recorded before watching. Ask:

- Which questions were answered?
- Which questions remain?
- What new questions do you have?

Add these responses to the class Wonder Wall from Lesson One.

Writing journal: The story behind the picture

Choose a person from one of today's photographs or videos. Write a short piece beginning with:

"There is more to me than people can see."

Students might write about:

- things the person enjoys
- people who are important to them
- their hopes for the future
- things they are proud of
- challenges they are facing

Remind students that people are more than the difficulties they experience.

Extension: Helping our community

As a class, brainstorm practical ways people can support others experiencing hardship.

Examples might include:

- donating food or clothing
- volunteering
- fundraising
- learning more about poverty
- treating everyone with kindness and respect
- writing to local decision-makers about issues they care about

Record these ideas for future lessons.

Lesson two success criteria and teaching notes

- I can describe some of the challenges people experiencing poverty or homelessness may face.
- I can identify strengths, hopes and aspirations in people's stories.
- I can ask thoughtful questions about other people's experiences.
- I can use writing to explore ideas and perspectives.

Through this lesson, students will develop a deeper understanding of poverty and homelessness by listening to real stories, examining different perspectives and reflecting on what they learn.

This lesson is not intended to make students feel sorry for people experiencing poverty or homelessness. Instead, it aims to build understanding, empathy and curiosity. Throughout the lesson, emphasise that people experiencing hardship are diverse, capable and resilient, and that poverty can affect many different kinds of people.

Curriculum links

ACARA: HASS

Develop appropriate questions to guide an inquiry about people, events, developments, places, systems and challenges (ACHASSI052, ACHASSI073, ACHASSI094, ACHASSI122)

ACARA: English

Language: Expressing and developing ideas (ACELA1484;1498;1512;1525), (NESA EN2-9B; EN3-6B), (VCELA248; 279; 311; 340), (VCELA248; 279; 311; 340)

LESSON THREE

EVERYBODY HAS A STORY

First impressions

Show students a photograph of a person. Ask:

- What is the first thing you notice?
- What assumptions might people make about this person?
- Can we know everything about someone just by looking at them?

Explain that people often make assumptions about others, but every person has a story we cannot immediately see.

Now choose several photographs showing different people. For each image, ask:

- What can we observe?
- What can't we know?
- What questions would we ask this person?
- What might surprise us about them?

Create a class chart with two headings, What we know (for example, they are wearing a school uniform, they are smiling, they are carrying a bag) and What we don't know (for example, their favourite subject, who they live with, what they worry about). This activity helps students distinguish between observation and assumption.

Everybody has a story

Read a short picture book, poem or excerpt featuring a character facing challenges. Ask students some discussion questions:

- What challenge was the character facing?
- What helped them cope?
- What strengths did they show?
- What did they care about?
- What do you think the author wanted readers to understand?

Explain that strong stories help us understand people, not just problems.

More than one thing

Ask students to imagine someone described you using only one fact. For example:

- "She wears glasses."
- "He plays soccer."
- "They are in Year 5."

Would that tell your whole story? Why not?

Discuss how people are complex and have many different experiences, interests and feelings.

Connect this idea to poverty and homelessness. People experiencing hardship are also friends, family members, students, workers, neighbours and community members.

Build a character

Students create a character profile. Encourage them to focus on the whole person, not simply a problem they are facing. Ask them to include:

- Name:
- Age:
- Favourite activity:
- Something they are proud of:
- Someone important in their life:
- Something that makes them laugh:
- Something they worry about:
- A hope or dream they have:
- A challenge they are facing:

Writing journal: A day in my life

Write a diary entry from your character's perspective. Students should focus on:

- feelings
- relationships
- hopes
- observations
- everyday experiences.

Encourage students to include details that show readers who the character is. Remind them that your character is much more than the challenge they are facing.

Reflection: Finish the sentence

- I learned that everybody...
- One assumption I challenged today was...
- A good story helps readers...
- One thing I want readers to understand is...

Lesson three success criteria and teaching notes

- I can identify assumptions and stereotypes.
- I can explain why everybody's story is unique.
- I can create a believable character.
- I can use writing to help readers understand another person's experience.

The purpose of this lesson is to help students move beyond stereotypes and develop empathy through storytelling. Rather than focusing solely on poverty or homelessness as problems, students are encouraged to think about people as whole individuals with strengths, relationships, interests and aspirations.

Students will explore how stories help us understand other people's experiences and practise creating characters with depth, personality and emotions.

Curriculum links

ACARA: English

Literature: Literature and context (ACELT1594; 1602; 1608; 1613), (NESA EN2-10C; EN3-8D), (VCELT282; 313)

Literature: Responding to literature (ACELT1596; 1603; 1609; 1615), (NESA EN2-11D; EN3-6B), (VCELT251; 283; 314; 342)

LESSON FOUR

TELLING A STORY THAT MATTERS

Why do stories matter?

Ask students:

- Have you ever read a book that changed how you thought about something?
- Have you ever read a story that made you feel strongly about a character?
- What makes a story memorable?

Explain that stories help us understand experiences that may be different from our own. Good writers help readers feel connected to other people.

Read and discuss

Listen to this reading of 'A Way Home' by Libby Hathorn and Gregory Rogers:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=rjzP18bsSdQ

As you read, ask students to listen for characters, emotions, settings, and moments that stand out.

Ask your students:

- How did Shane feel throughout the story?
- What clues helped you understand his feelings?
- What role did the cat play in the story?
- What did the story teach us about belonging?
- What did the story teach us about home?
- Why do you think the author chose this story?

Learning how writers work

1. Show, don't tell

Writers often help readers understand feelings without naming them directly. For example, instead of saying 'Shane was lonely,' a writer might write 'Shane sat quietly on the steps and watched people hurry past.' Instead of 'The cat was frightened,' a writer might write 'The cat curled into a tight ball and wouldn't come out.'

Ask students how these examples help readers imagine the feelings.

2. Practise

Rewrite the following sentences by showing the feeling instead of naming it:

- She was worried.
- He was excited.
- They felt nervous.
- The child was hopeful.

Share examples and discuss as a class.

3. Build a place

Good stories help readers picture a place. Ask students to imagine one of the following:

- a busy street
- a park
- a school playground
- a bus stop
- a place where someone feels safe.

Using their senses, describe:

- What can be seen?
- What can be heard?
- What can be smelled?
- What can be felt?

Encourage students to use vivid details.

4. Build a character

Ask students to return to the character they created in Lesson Three. Now add:

- something they want
- something they fear
- a challenge they face
- a person who supports them
- a special memory.

5. Build a moment

Choose one important moment from your character's life. For example:

- starting at a new school
- finding somewhere safe to stay
- receiving unexpected help
- helping a friend
- overcoming a challenge
- feeling hopeful about the future.

Ask students to write a short scene describing that moment. Encourage students to focus on:

- actions
- dialogue
- sensory details
- emotions.

6. Writing with respect

Remind students to:

- Avoid stereotypes.
- Remember that people are more than their circumstances.
- Focus on strengths as well as challenges.
- Draw on what you have learned throughout the unit.
- Write about people with dignity and care.

Good writing helps readers understand others rather than judge them.

Developing your competition entry

Ask students to review their writing journals from all four lessons. Ask:

- Which activity inspired you most?
- Which character interests you most?
- Which story would you like to tell?
- What message would you like readers to take away?

Now ask students to create a simple planning page:

- My idea:
- My main character:
- My setting:
- My message:
- How I want readers to feel:

Reflection

Finish the unit by asking students:

- What is one thing you learned about poverty or homelessness?
- What is one thing you learned about writing?
- How can stories help create understanding?

Lesson four success criteria and teaching notes

- I can identify techniques writers use to help readers understand a character.
- I can create a setting and character using descriptive language.
- I can write with empathy and imagination.
- I can develop ideas for my own competition entry.

This lesson will help students explore how writers create empathy and use their own ideas, observations and imagination. Students will also be supported to develop a piece of writing for the Pens Against Poverty competition.

Curriculum Links

ACARA: English

Literature: Literature and Context (ACELT1594; 1602;1608;1613), (NESA EN2-10C; EN3-8D), (VCELT282; 313)

Literature: Responding to literature (ACELT1596; 1603;1609;1615), (NESA EN2-11D; EN3-6B), (VCELT251; 283; 314; 342)

