



PENS *Against* **POVERTY**

GUIDE FOR YEAR 7-10 TEACHERS AND STUDENTS



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 7-10 students 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.

A MESSAGE TO STUDENTS FROM ANGLICARE AUSTRALIA

Every day, people across Australia experience poverty, homelessness and financial hardship. Yet these experiences are often misunderstood. Many people have assumptions about what poverty looks like, who experiences it and why it happens.

One of the most powerful things writing can do is help us see beyond those assumptions. Stories and poems allow us to step into another person's world. They help us understand experiences that may be different from our own, challenge stereotypes and build empathy. They remind us that behind every statistic is a person with hopes, fears and dreams.

This guide has been designed to help you explore these ideas. Along the way, you will learn more about poverty and homelessness in Australia, listen to stories and perspectives, reflect on your own assumptions and develop your skills as a writer.

You do not need to have all the answers. What matters is your willingness to learn, listen and think deeply about the experiences of others. Most importantly, we want you to find your own voice.

The strongest pieces of writing are not necessarily the most polished or complicated. They are the ones that make us feel something, help us see the world differently, or inspire us to think in a new way.

I hope this guide challenges you, inspires you and gives you the confidence to share your ideas through poetry or storytelling.

I look forward to reading your work.

Kasy Chambers
Executive Director
Anglicare Australia

PENS AGAINST POVERTY

THE BASICS

YEARS 7-10

Welcome to Pens Against Poverty

Pens Against Poverty is more than a writing competition. It is an opportunity to explore important issues, challenge assumptions, and discover how creative writing can help us better understand the world around us.

Through this unit, you will learn about poverty and homelessness in Australia, hear stories from people with lived experience, reflect on your own ideas and assumptions, and develop your skills as a writer.

You do not need to be an expert on poverty to take part. What matters most is curiosity, empathy and a willingness to learn.

By the end of this unit, you will have developed ideas, characters, observations and writing techniques that can help you create your own entry for the Pens Against Poverty Writing Competition.

Why stories matter

Facts and statistics can help us understand the scale of poverty and homelessness. Stories help us understand the people behind those numbers.

Writers have the power to challenge stereotypes, spark conversations and encourage others to see the world through a different perspective.

Throughout this unit, you will explore how poetry and storytelling can create empathy and inspire change.

What you will learn

Lesson One: Poverty is...

Explore common assumptions about poverty and investigate who experiences poverty in Australia, what causes it, and how it affects people's lives.

Lesson Two: The experience of homelessness

Listen to stories, conduct research and develop a deeper understanding of homelessness and housing insecurity.

Lesson Three: Finding your voice

Reflect on what you have learned and explore how writers use language, imagery and emotion to challenge assumptions and create empathy.

Lesson Four: Imagining stories drawn from reality

Develop characters, settings and story ideas inspired by real-world experiences and begin creating your own poem or short story.

Final Reflection: Learn, reflect and act

Consider how understanding can lead to action and explore ways individuals, schools and communities can make a difference.

Competition criteria

The judges will assess entries according to the following criteria:

- Demonstration of empathy and humanity through creative writing.
- Creative treatment of the competition theme.
- Effective control of language to communicate meaning.

As you work through this guide, keep these criteria in mind. Strong entries are not simply informative. They use storytelling, imagination and language to help readers connect with the experiences of others.

Key resources

Your writer's journal

Throughout this unit, keep a notebook, journal or digital document where you can record your ideas. Use it to collect:

- facts and information that surprise you
- interesting words and phrases
- observations about people and places
- character ideas
- story and poem concepts
- reflections from each lesson.

Many writers begin with small notes and observations. Your journal will become a place to experiment, explore ideas and develop material for your final competition entry.

Pens Against Poverty

www.pensagainstopoverty.com

Anti-Poverty Week

www.antipovertyweek.org.au

Harvard Thinking Routines

www.pz.harvard.edu/thinking-routines

Drama Games

www.bbbpress.com/dramagames

Website links

Anglicare NSW South, NSW West and ACT

www.anglicare.com.au

Anglicare WA

www.anglicarewa.org.au

Anglicare Victoria

www.anglicarevic.org.au

Anglicare Tasmania

www.anglicare-tas.org.au

AnglicareSA

www.anglicaresa.com.au

St Barts, Perth

www.stbarts.org.au

Samaritans, Newcastle and the Hunter Region

www.samaritans.org.au

ac.care, regional SA

www.accare.org.au

LESSON ONE

POVERTY IS...

Before you begin

Without using the internet or discussing with others, decide whether you think the following statements are true or false:

- Most people experiencing poverty are unemployed
- Poverty only affects adults
- People experiencing poverty usually have no home
- Poverty is rare in Australia
- Anyone can experience poverty if their circumstances change.

Keep your answers. After completing this lesson, return to them and see whether your views have changed.

Do some research

First do some quick research and thinking. Visit the Australian Council of Social Services website for some recent research and statistics about poverty in Australia:

<http://povertyandinequality.acoss.org.au/poverty>

Watch this SBS video describing the realities of poverty in Australia:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=synx-wByGRA



Create a word map

Before completing the next activities, give yourself five to ten minutes to fill a blank page with every word you can think of when you think of 'poverty'. Don't overthink, just write everything that comes to mind.

In pairs or small groups, compare your word maps. Then talk about:

- Which words appeared on most maps?
- Which words were different?
- Are any of these words based on stereotypes or assumptions?
- Which words describe causes of poverty and which describe its effects?

Return to the word map

After you finish the questions on page seven, go back to your word map. Circle all the words you think reflect the stereotypes or incorrect assumptions you held about poverty before completing the activities. Add new words to your word map that reflect your new impressions.

Throughout the unit, keep coming back to your word map and add more as your awareness about poverty broadens.

Answer the questions below

1. What is poverty? _____

2. Who lives in poverty? _____

3. What causes poverty? _____

4. What is one thing that surprised you about poverty in Australia? _____

LESSON TWO

THE EXPERIENCE OF HOMELESSNESS

Research further and dig deeper

What is it like to be homeless? Using the library or online resources, find one of each that help you to understand homelessness, especially, in Australia:

- 1. A news report
- 2. A poem
- 3. A novel or short story
- 4. A video story or interview.

To inspire you and get you started, we've included one of each. Find your own and then write down the references or web link to the ones you have found in the table below.

What did you learn?

After completing your research, discuss or write short responses to the questions below:

- What did you learn about homelessness that you did not know before?
- What surprised you most?
- Did any of your assumptions change?
- Were there any similarities between the people in your research and people you know?

This is only a few lines, but it helps process information before moving into empathy and imagination.

WHAT IS IT LIKE TO BE HOMELESS?	OUR EXAMPLE	YOUR EXAMPLE
A news report	www.theguardian.com/launch-housing-winter-appeal-2026/2026/may/01/the-surprising-face-of-australias-hidden-homelessness-epidemic	
A poem	www.borgenproject.org/4-poems-about-poverty	
A novel or short story	'Somewhere around the Corner' by Jackie French	
A video or interview	www.youtube.com/watch?v=66MAcfbFVDw	

Step inside

This is a short writing exercise to do after completing your research task.

Image credit: Matthew Abbott, taken in Martin Place, Sydney. Photograph first featured in The Guardian.

Step inside the picture and reflect:

- What do you see?
- What can you hear?
- What do you smell?
- How do you feel?
- What happened before this moment?
- What do you hope happens next?



LESSON THREE

FINDING YOUR VOICE

Reflect

Based on what you have learned so far, where would you place the following statements? Reflect and place each statement on the continuum.

After you finish, think about which line stayed with you after you finished reading? Why?

Poverty affects very few people in Australia

True <----- Sometimes true -----> Untrue

Poverty means you have no food and no money

True <----- Sometimes true -----> Untrue

Poverty only affects people who have no job

True <----- Sometimes true -----> Untrue

All homeless people live outside on the streets

True <----- Sometimes true -----> Untrue

Homeless people are usually very old

True <----- Sometimes true -----> Untrue

Homeless people have always been homeless

True <----- Sometimes true -----> Untrue

No homeless people live in my suburb

True <----- Sometimes true -----> Untrue

Very few children in Australia are homeless

True <----- Sometimes true -----> Untrue

It is really obvious that someone is homeless

True <----- Sometimes true -----> Untrue

Homelessness is something no one can do anything about

True <----- Sometimes true -----> Untrue

Discussion

Choose two statements from the continuum that generated the most debate. Discuss:

- Why do people believe these things?
- Where do these ideas come from?
- How might these assumptions affect people experiencing poverty or homelessness?

Quick writing exercise

Complete one of the following sentences:

- Poverty is not...
- Homelessness is more than...
- I used to think...
- I was surprised to learn...
- Everyone deserves...

Write for five minutes without stopping.

How writers create empathy

Poetry can help us see the world through someone else's eyes. It can challenge stereotypes, communicate emotions and tell stories that facts alone cannot.

Read one of the poems below and consider how the writer helps you understand another person's experience:

www.borgenproject.org/4-poems-about-poverty

Each poem addresses poverty from a very different perspective, time, place and circumstance. Choose one you like and respond to the poem with the following:

1. Who is the speaker in the poem? Is it the poet or a character they have created? What makes you think that?
2. Circle five or ten key words throughout the poem that evoke an emotion.

3. Poetry tends to be a loaded form of writing, where every word carries connotations or connected ideas. Poets often use short lines, rhyme, rhythm, repetition and imagery to make it memorable and to connect with our emotions. With this in mind, what tools has the writer used in the poem?

Experiment with similar strategies in your own poem about poverty.

Feel free to borrow the structure of the poem and experiment with it to make it your own.

LESSON FOUR

IMAGINING STORIES DRAWN FROM REALITY

Writing with empathy

Writing is a form of action. When you write for Pens Against Poverty, you have the opportunity to bring together not only your knowledge and learning about poverty, but also your empathy and imagination.

Good writers help readers see the world through another person's eyes. They encourage us to understand experiences that may be different from our own. This requires curiosity, compassion and careful observation.

In the words of author and competition judge Jackie French:

"First you need to feel something; you need to empathize with people and with the environment around you. Then the words will naturally come."

As you begin planning your own story or poem, remember that your goal is not simply to describe poverty or homelessness. Your goal is to help readers understand the experiences, feelings and hopes of another person.

Writing with respect

When writing about poverty or homelessness:

- Avoid stereotypes and assumptions.
- Remember that people are more than their circumstances.
- Focus on the whole person, not just the challenges they face.
- Draw on what you have learned through research, stories and interviews.
- Consider the dignity, strengths and hopes of your characters.

Good writing creates understanding, rather than judgement.

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 listen, discuss the questions below and think about how the writing helps you understand the story:

- When did you first realise that Shane might be homeless?
- How does the story make you feel about Shane and the cat?
- Why do you think the author chose to tell the story through their journey together?
- How do you imagine the characters feel at the end of the story?
- Do you think the cat has found a home with Shane?
- What does the story tell us about belonging, safety and home?

How writers create empathy

Good writers rarely tell readers exactly what a character is feeling. Instead, they use description, action and imagery to help us work it out for ourselves. Consider the way the cat is described:

'Such a tight little ball of fierce cat'

'It's very dark down there for the cat in the coat.'

'He talks and talks until growls slide into silence'

The author never simply says, 'The cat is afraid.' Instead, the reader understands the cat's fear through its behaviour and the descriptive language.

What words or phrases help you understand how the cat feels? How does the author help you understand Shane's feelings without directly telling you what he is thinking?

Try it yourself: Show, don't tell

Writers often show emotions rather than naming them directly. For example, instead of writing 'the boy was scared,' you could write 'he checked over his shoulder again and pulled his jacket tighter around himself.'

Rewrite the sentences below without naming the emotion:

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

Use actions, body language, sounds or descriptions instead.

Step one: Building a scene

Consider this passage from 'A Way Home':

'Past the windows and clean steps. Past a crumbling dark church. Past the sharp smell of food shops.'

Notice how the author uses sights, sounds and smells to build a picture of the world. Write four or five short sentences describing a place through the eyes of your character. Think about:

- What can they see?
- What can they hear?
- What can they smell?
- What details stand out to them?
- How does the place make them feel?

Step two: Building a character

Every person has a story. Imagine a character experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity. Your character might be staying with relatives or friends, moving between places to stay, sleeping in a car, or sleeping rough.

Write a short character profile. Consider:

- How old are they?
- What do they care about?
- What are they worried about?
- What are they hoping for?
- What makes them laugh?
- What strengths do they have?

Remember, people are more than the challenges they face.

Step three: Building a story

Choose a moment in your character's day. It might be arriving somewhere safe for the night, leaving school, catching a train, sharing a meal, meeting a friend, trying to stay warm, or finding a moment of hope.

Write a short scene from your character's perspective. Focus on their emotions, observations, dialogue, and small moments that reveal character.

Developing your competition entry

Review your notes from Lessons One to Four. Think about:

- What surprised you most?
- What assumptions have been challenged?
- What stories stayed with you?
- What emotions do you want readers to feel?
- What message do you want to communicate?

Spend five minutes brainstorming ideas for your Pens Against Poverty entry. Write down:

- possible characters
- possible settings
- themes you would like to explore
- interesting images or phrases
- ideas for a poem or short story.

FINAL REFLECTION

LEARN, REFLECT, AND ACT

From understanding to action

By now, you have learned more about poverty and homelessness in Australia. You have explored statistics, stories, poems and personal experiences. You have also thought about the role that empathy and imagination can play in helping us understand the lives of others.

The scale of poverty can feel overwhelming. However, small actions by individuals, communities, charities, schools and governments all have a role to play in creating a fairer society.

Making a difference

Watch the Behind the News story on Anti-Poverty Week and work experience:

www.abc.net.au/btn/classroom/anti-poverty-week/10529584

As you watch, think about:

- What actions are people taking to reduce poverty or homelessness?
- Why do these actions matter?
- What difference could they make to someone?
- What other ideas do you have for creating change?

Ways you can take action

Learn more and speak up

One way to make a difference is by learning about the causes of poverty and sharing what you have learned with others. Understanding the issue helps challenge stereotypes and encourages informed conversations.

You can also contact your local Member of Parliament to share your views about issues that matter to you. Elected representatives make decisions that affect housing, income support and community services.

Volunteer in your community

Many organisations rely on volunteers to support people experiencing hardship. Opportunities may include sorting donations, helping at community events, assisting in op shops or supporting local programs.

Talk to your local Anglicare service or other charities in your area to find out what opportunities are available in your area.

Organise a school collection drive

Schools can support local communities by organising food, toiletry or clothing drives. Donations of non-perishable food and essential items can help families experiencing financial hardship. Quality second-hand clothing may be provided directly to people in need or sold through charity shops to help fund community programs.

Reflection activity

Working individually or in small groups, discuss and record your responses to the questions below:

- What has surprised you most about what you have learned?
- What stereotypes or assumptions about poverty have been challenged?
- What is one action governments can take?
- What is one action your school could take?
- What is one action you would like to take personally?

Your action plan

Choose one action from the list above and write a short paragraph explaining:

- What you would do
- Why it matters
- Who it would help
- What impact you hope it would have.

