

UNIT 1

What Is Homelessness?

What is a home?

Who has a right to a home?

What does it mean to experience homelessness?

How do we react to and think about homelessness relative to other disasters or crises?

Elementary School

UNIT 1: Drawing a Home

Essential Questions

1. What is a home?
2. Who has a right to a home?
3. What does it mean to experience homelessness?

Overview

- Students will explore their perception of what a home is and the concept of homelessness, both sheltered and unsheltered.
 - Students will examine the negative impacts homelessness can have on people without a stable place to stay.
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Materials

Teachers:

- Chart paper, a white board, or a chalkboard
- One-pager: Why is it important to talk to your child about homelessness?
- Illustrated Statistics cards

Students:

- Blank paper
- Crayons, colored pencils, or other coloring supplies

Prep

Read through procedure to determine which of the provided materials will be most helpful in framing the lesson based on the needs of your student group, making sure to be sensitive to any of your students who have or are experiencing homelessness.

UNIT 1: Drawing a Home

Procedure

Explain that the class will think and talk about what it means to have a home and also will look at the problem of homelessness, which affects many people in our society, and how it can impact their lives.

Homelessness can be a sad and difficult topic for people of any age, and your students may have questions or want to share their own feelings. Some of your students may have even experienced homelessness themselves or know someone who has, and it's important to be sensitive to their emotions as you talk together. Consider using the one-pager included in this lesson to frame conversations now and moving forward, and pause throughout the lesson to allow your students to react and express anything that it surfaces for them.

In future lessons, students will learn about what causes homelessness and how they can help people in their communities who are living without a stable home.

1. In the center of the board or a piece of chart paper, write the word “home.” Ask the students to think about words and ideas they associate with home and to share their ideas which you will form into a web around the central word.

Help guide students to language about what home provides for us (e.g., security, protection, privacy) and any feelings they associate with home (e.g. warmth, safety, love, closeness, a place of your own). Some students might share words describing things that people do in their homes: e.g., prepare and eat meals, sleep, play, read, watch TV, do homework, bathe and shower, keep their things (clothes, toys, etc.).

2. Pass out blank paper and coloring materials and ask your students to draw a home from a bird's-eye view, as if the roof was taken off the home, it does not have to be their own home. As students finish up their drawings, look around and see if the children have included the amenities that make a home livable. Did your students include things like bathrooms, lights, and electricity? This is a good way to begin a conversation on what makes something a home. Discuss this with your students and bring to light some of the amenities they might take for granted in their own home.
3. Ask students to imagine not having a home. Share with them that the U.S. government counted more than 2.5 million children experiencing homelessness last year, meaning that they lived for some amount of time without a stable home. You'll discuss what it means to experience homelessness next. Share that in the county of Los Angeles, 4,673 children and youth experience homelessness each year.

These numbers will be very large and difficult for your students to imagine, you can use the illustrated statistics cards included in this lesson to help them visualize the numbers.

UNIT 1: Drawing a Home

Procedure (cont'd)

4. Not all people experiencing homelessness live in shelters, lots of people stay in crowded spaces with family and friends, or in their car, or even outside in a tent or other shelter. Ask students to draw a picture of a home. Ask students whether they've ever seen someone living or sleeping somewhere that isn't their own home. Write down their answers on the board. Some examples may include:
 - a. In a tent
 - b. On a park bench
 - c. In an alley
 - d. In a car
 - e. On a friend's couch
 - f. In a shelter
5. Explain the difference between sheltered and unsheltered homelessness, and that even if someone has a temporary place to stay like a shelter or a friend's couch, they are still experiencing homelessness.

Unsheltered homelessness: when someone is staying in a place where people are not meant to live, such as a car, a park bench, a sidewalk, or an abandoned building.

Sheltered homelessness: when someone is staying in a place that is inside but it isn't their home and they may not be able to stay there long—somewhere like a shelter, or a friend or relative's house.

6. Ask students to share what impact sheltered or unsheltered homelessness might have on a person without a stable place to stay. Write down their answers on the board. Some examples might include:
 - a. Worsened mental and physical health
 - b. Experiencing worry, stress, or anxiety
 - c. Difficulty accessing essentials like food, laundry services, healthcare, and bathrooms/showers
 - d. Feeling unsafe, having trouble sleeping
 - e. Feeling like people might be judging them
 - f. Having trouble getting a job, signing up for school, registering to vote, or receiving mail without a permanent address
 - g. Difficulty storing personal belongings
 - h. Trouble doing homework without stable internet access or electricity

UNIT 1: Drawing a Home

Procedure (cont'd)

7. Tell your students that all of these reasons (and more!) make it very difficult for people of any age to experience homelessness, and most of the time when someone has to live outside or in a shelter it's because they don't have another choice. Share with your students that over the next few lessons you'll all learn together about what causes this problem, what people are doing to end homelessness in L.A. County, and how each one of us can show kindness to people experiencing homelessness and help them in very real ways.
 8. Ask your students for any reactions or questions they have as a result of the lesson and discussion, write these down on a piece of chart paper. Consider leaving these displayed in your classroom and adding to them as your progress through the lessons. It is likely that your students who do not have personal experience with homelessness will begin to notice the issue around them and comment on it.
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Supplementary Materials

- Photos of different places that people might live other than a home.
- Illustrated Statistics Cards
 - 2.5 million children experience homelessness each year in America. *Show them a photo of a full Dodger Stadium Ask how many people this looks like to them. Wait for answers.* It holds 56,000 people, meaning that the children who experience homelessness each year in the United States would fill Dodger Stadium FORTY FIVE times over!
 - 4,673 children experience homelessness in L.A. county each year. That's enough children to fill 65 school buses.
 - 65,484 students in L.A. County are experiencing homelessness. That's 9% of students. So, you most likely know someone who is experiencing homelessness.

Extension Activity

- Read and discuss a book from our list of [children's books about homelessness](#) in the appendix.
- Example lesson plan for: [Fly Away Home](#)

Sources

- [America's Youngest Outcasts: A Report Card on Child Homelessness](#) (National Center on Family Homelessness, 2014)
- [2019 Greater Los Angeles Homeless Count](#) (Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority, 2019)
- [2020 Greater Los Angeles Homeless Count](#) (Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority, 2020)
- [School on Wheels, Inc.](#)





**2.5 million children experience homelessness each year in America.
That's enough to fill**

Dodger Stadium 45 times

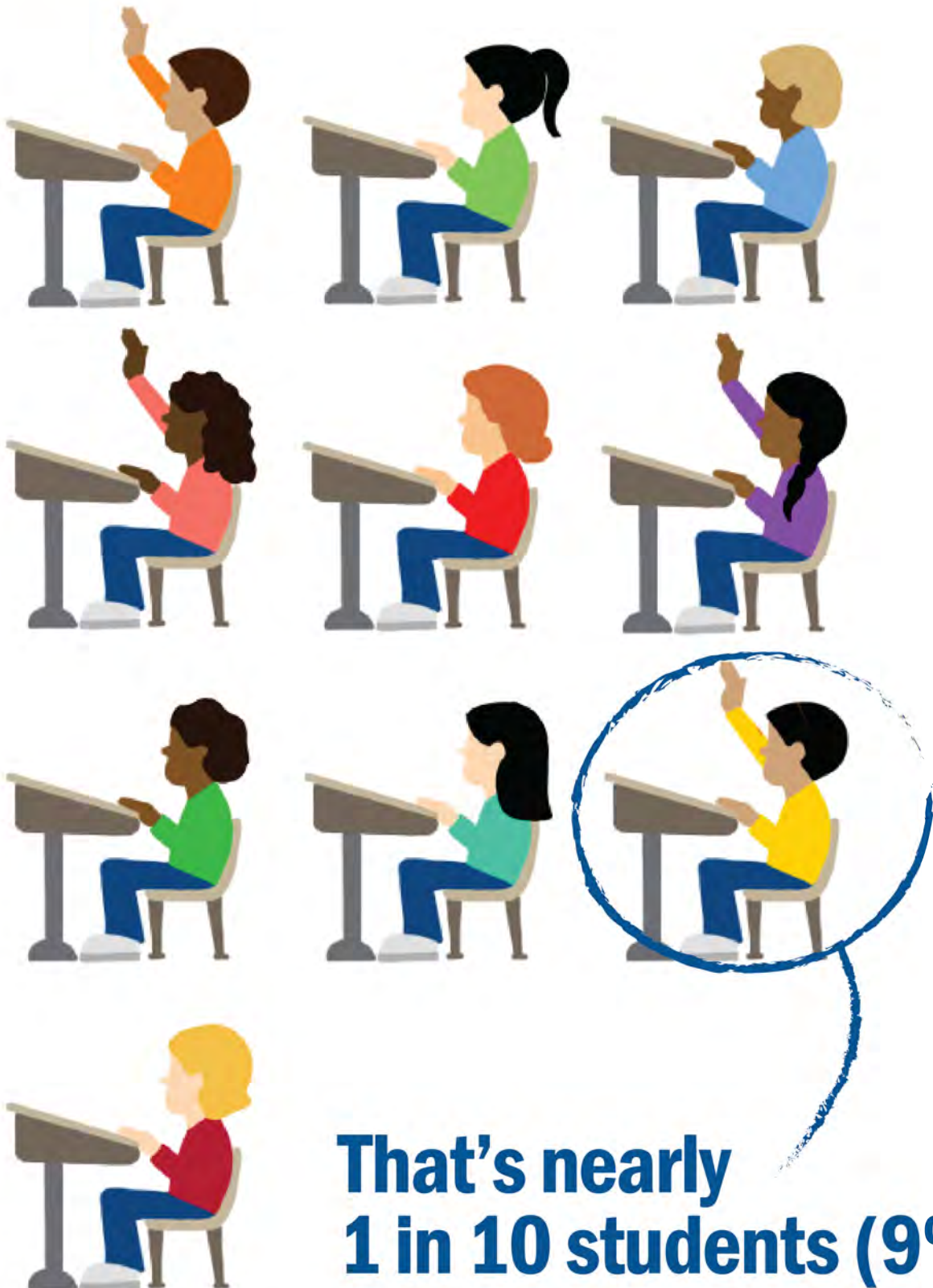


4,673 children experience homelessness in LA county each year.
That's enough children to fill

65 school buses.



65,484 students in Los Angeles County are experiencing homelessness.





Why is it important to talk to your child about homelessness?

Children are interested in the world around them and have the capacity for a deeper understanding about homelessness and poverty. They are likely to have more complex questions and may even want to really get involved in helping people. This is an opportunity to build empathy and critical thinking in your child through conversations about something they are seeing all around them: homelessness.

This set of tips could help you talk to your child about friends of theirs who are experiencing homelessness.

What are some effective ways to have these conversations?

- **Use inclusive language.** Explain to your child that people experience homelessness, rather than referring to anyone as a homeless person. Talking about homelessness as a temporary state enforces humanity, and acknowledges the many reasons that people experience it. Using the right language around homelessness ensures that the person, figuratively and literally, comes first, and the temporary condition of homelessness does not define them.
 - **Answer questions based on your child's developmental level.** Your child may ask you why people are sleeping outside or in their cars, and depending on your child's age, you can give a simple explanation or begin to open up a larger conversation about the reasons people might not live in a house.
 - **Housing costs.** Houses are getting more expensive to buy and people aren't earning enough at their jobs to keep up. Most of the people who are without a home in the next 10 years are going to be there because they can't afford one.
 - **Mental illness, disability, addiction.** Some people are sick, and because people are sick they don't always have or can't afford the proper treatment and help for that. Sometimes if you see someone on the street who's acting strangely, it's because they're sick and need help.
 - **Domestic violence.** Sometimes people are on the streets because they don't have anywhere else to go. They may have a very bad situation that makes it safer for them to leave their home, even though living outside is also a scary place to be.
 - **Bad luck.** Sometimes people just have bad luck. If someone only makes enough money to pay their bills and not enough to save money, if they lose their job, they may not have enough money to pay for their house anymore. It's important to remember that if you have a bad day or bad luck, that doesn't mean you are a bad person. It is fixable.
 - **Express empathy for people experiencing homelessness.** It's totally natural to feel sad when you see people living on the street. It is sad. Affirm these feelings in your child and explain that the sad and hard things that people who don't have homes experience is exactly why it's so important to always be nice to people, to offer things when you can, and to remember that you can help them.
 - **Model how to interact with people experiencing homelessness.** Be aware that your physical cues are as important as your verbal ones. Your child will pick up on the mindset you convey each time you encounter a person experiencing homelessness. Explain that eye contact and smiling are important when you greet people, and that everyone living around you is a neighbor, no matter where they sleep at night.
 - **Talk to your child about how they can help.** Ask your child how they want to help, and be open to their suggestions. Encouraging action will foster a generous spirit in your child and will give them a way to channel their feelings of sadness and empathy into action.
 - **Donate food, items, or clothing with your child.** Help your child select their own gently used toys or clothes to give to a local charitable organization, or help them donate to a food drive. The United Way's Everyone In campaign hosts several events for children and youth throughout the year across L.A. These events are designed to help children learn more about how they can make a difference in their community.
 - **Volunteer with your child.** Volunteering together or as a family is an excellent way to continue the conversation and help your child develop a lifelong habit of giving back. They will get real joy from helping people and the experiences will make them better advocates down the road. Volunteering helps children engage with people who are experiencing homelessness in an area that's safe and positive. People ask what to do when a kid points out someone on the street, but that shouldn't be the only time your child notices or engages with people experiencing homelessness, volunteering allows kids to engage with people experiencing homelessness in a variety of different contexts, such as:
 - Serving a meal
 - Tutor or working on homework with children living in a shelter (Schools on Wheels)
 - Holding a donation drive
 - Attending an informational event
- For more information on how to volunteer or take action with your child, visit everyoneinla.org/getinvolved**