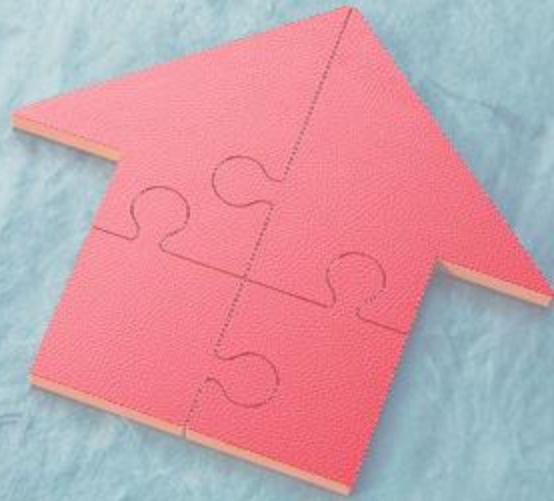


# Talking With Children about Homelessness



Homelessness can be a “tough to talk about” topic. There are many causes, and the solutions are not always simple. But talking about the topic with children opens an opportunity to talk about how we as followers of Christ are called to share compassion and pursue justice.

Stories can be used to introduce complex issues and, perhaps more importantly, to encourage empathy and help children understand more about the people involved. You may find these recommended books or others at your local library, and some of the books on this list can be found as read-alouds or for purchase online. Parents and teachers are invited to use applicable books as starting points, followed by discussions or lessons on what it means to be homeless, the causes, and how we can help make a difference for our neighbors in the world.

## Recommended Books

### *The Can Man*

by *Laura E. Williams*

Tim would like to collect cans and save the coins he gets from recycling them to buy a new skateboard. But when he learns why the “can man” has been collecting cans, Tim chooses to share instead.

- To think/talk about: respect/dignity, causes of homelessness, having enough/sharing
- What was the “can man’s” name? Tim’s parents did not call him the “can man” or the “homeless man.” We don’t want others to define us by a negative situation in our lives. We can offer the same consideration when we speak about our neighbors who are experiencing homelessness. Instead of saying “homeless person,” we can talk about the person experiencing homelessness, or about the person who doesn’t have a home right now.
  - Why did Joe not have a home? According to the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, the leading causes of homelessness are insufficient income and lack of affordable housing. Job loss, low wages, medical expenses, or other emergencies or issues can play a part in someone not having enough money to pay for a place to live.
  - When Tim heard that “the can man,” usually collected the cans, Tim still chose to collect them. Tim didn’t know the man needed a coat until he talked with him. Are there times when we take more than we need, and it leaves someone else with little? What can we do if we have more than we need?
  - *The Can Man* teacher’s guide: [https://www.leeandlow.com/books/the-can-man/teachers\\_guide](https://www.leeandlow.com/books/the-can-man/teachers_guide)

## ***A Rose for Abby***

*by Donna Guthrie*

Abby saw a woman on her street who had no place to live and was cold. She shared gloves and a hat with her, but she wanted to do more. She helped inspire the business owners nearby, the preacher of the local church (her father), and neighbors to get involved. Together they offered a meal for the people on their street experiencing homelessness. The rose plays a sweet part in this story of a young person making a difference.

To think/talk about: connecting needs with resources

- We can each make a difference (Abby did), and *together* we can make a difference (the community did).
- There were hungry people in Abby's community, but there were people and groceries available to help. What are the needs in our community? What resources (people, supplies, services) are available? How could we help connect the two?

## ***Shoebox Sam***

*by Mary Brigid Barrett*

Shoebox Sam serves the poor man who visits his shop as quickly as he serves the doctor. The children listen and watch as the kind shoe repairman sees the needs of his customers and treats them each with dignity.

To think/talk about:

- Consider James 2:1-18 for a discussion of avoiding favoritism and how our faith guides our actions.

## ***Sam and the Lucky Money***

*by Karen Chinn*

Sam has money to spend, and it's Chinese New Year in Chinatown! He sees so many sweet things he could buy with his money, but reconsiders when he remembers the homeless man he saw earlier.

To think/talk about:

- Needs vs. wants
- Consider Luke 3:11, "Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise." (NRSV)

## ***Benjamin Brody's Backyard Bag***

*by Phyllis Vos-Wezeman and Colleen Aalsburg Wiessner*

Benjamin's paper bag served him well in many ways: as a butterfly catcher, a garage for play cars, and a carrier for a variety of rocks. When he meets a woman sitting on a bench with a similar bag, he finds out she uses hers to hold everything she owns.

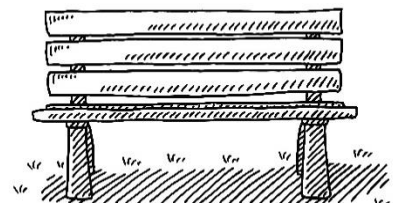
To think/talk about:

- The end of the story provides a segue into a discussion of ways to help those who are experiencing homelessness.
- When considering actions to take: if you plan to collect supplies, please be sure to first find out what items are needed/requested from the place you will deliver the supplies.

## ***A Kids' Guide to Hunger & Homelessness: How to Take Action!***

*by Cathryn Berger Kaye M.A.*

This workbook helps children learn what others in the world are doing to address the issues, how they can find out about needs in their community, and how to develop a service project. Includes facts, real-life examples, write-on pages, resources, and inspiration for making a difference.



## Children's books related to homelessness, immigration & refugees

When Jesus was a young child, his family had to run from their home to be safe. Many people today run from their homes to be safe, or so they can meet basic needs for themselves or their families. Sometimes their journeys are difficult and dangerous. In the new places they reach, they may find challenges, but when we have an opportunity to offer help and support, it is an opportunity to offer the love of God to our new neighbors.

### *A Shelter in Our Car*

by Monica Gunning

Zettie had lived with Mama and Papa in Jamaica, in a place with flowers in their yard and a place to pick cocoa beans to make hot chocolate. Now that Papa is gone, she and Mama are trying to begin a new life in America. But until Mama finds a steady job, they sleep in their car most nights, and hot dogs are a step up from their typical meal of peanut butter sandwiches. It is loud in the city and hard to live this way, but Zettie is glad that at least she and Mama have each other – and hope for the future. The story was developed with help from the Homeless Children's Network in San Francisco.

To think/talk about:

- Where do people live when they don't have a home? Consider outdoor public places, vehicles, tents, community shelters, or living with other people. Are basic necessities available? Are there pros and cons? Are any of these meant to be permanent solutions?
- How does the word "homeless" make you feel? How did Zettie feel about living in her car? (Remember when she didn't want mama to drop her off in front of the school.) Some children who don't have a home might feel lonely, scared, angry, or embarrassed. All children need someone to be their friend, to speak kindly to them, to listen to them, to include them, and sometimes to speak up for them.
- Alex made fun of Zettie. If you were there, what could you do to help Zettie?
- Zettie and her mother are immigrants – they have moved to America from another place. Consider what they had to leave behind to seek a place to live in America.
  - It is hard to start over, and most people who move to a new country don't do it just for fun. Often it is for safety, or so they can afford food, education, or other basic necessities for their families.
  - Many immigrants are smart and brave. It may take time for them to learn new skills or get training to do a new kind of job.
  - What could our communities do to help newcomers as they look for jobs and homes?
- *A Shelter in Our Car* teacher's guide, with ideas for talking with students about homelessness, questions to consider, and links to additional resources:  
[https://www.leeandlow.com/uploads/loaded\\_document/96/A\\_Shelter\\_in\\_Our\\_Car.pdf](https://www.leeandlow.com/uploads/loaded_document/96/A_Shelter_in_Our_Car.pdf)



### *Crocodile's Crossing: A Search for Home*

by Yoeri Slegers

Featuring bright artwork and playful details, this thoughtful tale introduces the complex topic of immigration, sensitively portraying the challenges faced by refugees and other newcomers. Discussion and activity guide: [www.flyawaybooks.com/resources](http://www.flyawaybooks.com/resources)

### *Four Feet, Two Sandals*

by Karen Lynn Williams & Khadra Mohammed

Lina and Feroza are friends in a refugee camp in Pakistan. They take turns wearing a single pair of sandals, and they practice writing their names in the sand while the boys attend school. When Lina's family gets to leave for resettlement in a new country, the sandals become a reminder of their friendship and hope that they will meet again someday. Discussion guide, teacher's guide and other resources: <https://childrenslibrarylady.com/four-feet-two-sandals/>

## Discipleship Connections

The Bible reflects God's desire for God's people to love our neighbors not only in word, but in our actions. These are just a few of many passages that might be helpful when planning to speak with children about how faith in Christ guides us to care for our neighbors.

- 1 John 4:19 – loving others because God loved us first
- Deuteronomy 15:7-11 – being open-handed for those in need
- Matthew 6:19-21, Luke 12:32-34 – storing up treasures in heaven
- Mark 6:30-44 – Jesus' example of seeing and meeting people's needs
- Matthew 25 – our care for others is care for Christ
- James 2:14-18 – our good works show our faith
- Leviticus 19:9-18, Mark 12:28-31 – loving our neighbors as ourselves



## Additional Resources

### Sharing is Caring calendar

This calendar highlights ways that some people have plenty and others do not. Created to help raise funds for those in need, it could also be used as an inspiration to learn more about the needs in a community. Request the calendar by emailing [php@pcusa.org](mailto:php@pcusa.org).

**Teaching resources** from the National Coalition for the Homeless:

<https://nationalhomeless.org/references/teaching/>

**Teacher Toolkit**, including a true/false quiz about homelessness and lesson plans for primary, elementary and middle school students, prepared by the Homelessness and Housing Umbrella Group, 2009: <https://homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/q2ebqbz3.pdf>

**To locate community resources** that may help with food, health, housing, or emergency needs in the United States, visit [www.211.org](http://www.211.org) or call 211.

**Teaching about Refugees** – videos and activities from the UNHCR to teach primary and secondary students about refugees, asylum and migration: <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/teaching-about-refugees.html>

**“On the Move”** refugee simulation activity (for older children), from the Catholic Agency for Overseas Development (CAFOD): <https://cafod.org.uk/content/download/47609/575739>



The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) recognizes Hunger and Homelessness Sunday each year in November. Resources and more information about how the PC(USA) is working to help make a difference for people experiencing homelessness is available at [pcusa.org/homeless](http://pcusa.org/homeless).