Bibliography for

Books Featuring Homelessness & Poverty for Children and Young Adults


Selamawi and his family had to leave his homeland of Ethiopia at three years old. This story is his journey as a war refugee, eventually ending up in America. Mawi’s story ends in success as he graduates from Harvard, but there are insightful experiences to be shared from the journey.

Interest Level: Grades 7-12


Social misfit Nicolas, a musical and mathematical genius, finds clues, thwarts bullies, recruits ex-cons and fellow outcasts from school to solve a huge mystery. With skill, brains, and luck, and a bit of humor, this unlikely crew will find the family heirlooms that can save Nicolas’s family home from being sold.

Interest Level: Grades 3-7


After her father disappears mysteriously and their small apartment is ransacked, Early, her younger brother, and her mother must move to a homeless shelter. When the police prove to be less than helpful, Early takes on the task of solving the mystery of her father’s whereabouts to get the family back together, while managing the anxieties and challenges of homelessness.

Interest Level: Grades 3–7


After several misfortunes, Sugar Mae Cole and her dog Shush, along with Sugar’s mother, Reba, end up in a shelter in Chicago. When depression overwhelms Reba, Sugar is placed in foster care. With the help of her foster family and a caring teacher, Sugar, Reba, and Shush recover. Note: the dog makes it.

Interest Level: Grades 4–9

What would you do if your parents didn’t seem to care that your family does not have enough money to replace your worn-out shoes, and that you eat at a scratched-up, homemade table. Mountain Girl’s parents have different values than most people and she has to decide what is important to her.

Interest Level: Grades 2-3 ALA Booklist.


Who says playing marbles is for boys? Not Freedom Jane McKenzie, that’s for sure! But she must convince her mother, the marble-playing boys (they won’t include her now that they are 6th graders), and her former best friend, Daniel. That’s enough to be getting on with, but she is also concerned about the upcoming arrival of a new baby in the family and her father’s drinking problem. Note: set in Idaho.

Interest Level: Grades 3-6


Everyone wants to have the right shoes, but Jeremy’s grandmother cannot afford the black high tops his heart desires. The good news is Jeremy finds a pair of black high tops in the thrift store; the bad news is they are too small. Is wearing the “right” sneaker worth bandaged feet or can someone else make better use of those high tops?

Interest Level: Grades K-3


Maddie and Sofia are best friends and play together at the park. One day, when Sofia is ready for a snack, she heads to Maddi’s place, throws open the fridge door to discover it is empty. Sofia tries to help in a number of disastrous ways, but finally hits on a solution.

Interest Level: K- Grade 3

“Young Callie’s family must have a yard sale to shed belongings that won’t fit into their new, very small, apartment. It is a sad and bewildering day for Callie, but by the end of the yard sale she comes to realize that it isn’t stuff that makes a home.”

Interest Level: PreK – Grade 2


An old homeless Parisian man finds three children under a bridge and discovers his own capacity for love and for family.

Interest Level: Gr. 3-6 Newbery Honor, 1959.


CJ and Nana take the bus from church to the soup kitchen every Sunday and CJ learns to find what’s beautiful.

Interest Level: PreK- Grade 3


A young boy wonders about what his Uncle Willie does while he works at the local soup kitchen. Then, on a school holiday, he accompanies his uncle to work and recognizes some in his neighborhood who need help, along with those that provide it, and the warm relationships between the two.

Interest Level: K – Grade 3


When a fire takes Ember’s home and the family business, she finds herself living with her family in a campground. She spends the summer coming to terms with her homelessness, her family’s religion (Wicca) and her suspicion that her best friend started the fire.

Interest Level: Grades 5-9


Wanda Petronski wears the same dress to school every day, so her classmates do not believe her when she boasts of having 100 dresses at home. Her claim leads to teasing and cruelty from her classmates, until they find out she was telling the truth.

Interest Level: Grades 3-5 Newbery Honor, 1945.

Times are tight at home, but that doesn’t stop a young boy from wanting a dog. Things get even tighter when Dad loses his job. What will he think of the new pet that his son brings home?

Interest level: Grades K-3 Reading Rainbow Book


Young Ari decides to stick with her 19-year-old brother, Gage, when he leaves their guardian to strike out on his own. They want to stay together, but Gage does not actually have a place for them to live. All this moving around makes it difficult for Ari to keep up with her school work and makes her doubt her ability to keep a death bed promise to her mother: to attend a middle school for gifted students.

Interest Level: Grades 4-8


The true story of a boy who emigrated from Mexico with his family as a child, was deported, but found his way back to the United States. Although set in California in the 50’s and 60’s, the themes will ring true today.

Interest Level: Grades 5-8 Pura Belpré Honor, 2002.


A grieving run-away teen and her beaten nanny find healing with three beekeeping sisters. Set during the civil rights movement in South Carolina, this is a story of finding friendship and female power, even in dire circumstances.

Interest Level: YA NY Public Library Books for the Teen Age 2004


Georgina has lived in a car with her mother and younger brother since their father abandoned the family and they were evicted from their apartment. Mom is working two jobs to save some money to get a roof over their heads again, but Georgina is desperate to help. And so is born the scheme to steal a dog to get the reward money that the owner will inevitably offer. Or maybe not. A heavy topic tempered with gentle story-telling and humor.

Interest Level: Grades 3-7 Wilson’s Children & Wilson’s Jr. High

Gilly is a foster child who prides herself on being unmanageable. She is angry and bewildered with her latest foster placement and is determined to thwart anyone’s efforts at kindness. Meanwhile, she futilely yearns for her mother to come and take her home.


With eight people in a small house, there is no privacy for the only girl in the family. With some creativity and support from her family, she is able to create a small space for herself.

Interest Level: Grades Pre-2 Horn Book Award, 2001.


Perpetual optimist Amber Appleton lives in a school bus with her dog and her alcoholic mother. She also has an active life with teaching English to Korean women, learning Haiku and spending time with friends. When tragedy strikes (not the dog), Amber must find her way again.

Interest Level: Grades 8 and up


Esperanza’s family live a life of comfort in 1930’s Mexico. A crisis forces them to flee to the United States. This award winning book details the changes Esperanza and her mom have to make to live happily again.

Interest Level: Grades 5-9 Pura Belpré Medal, 2002.


Mike Wilson lives with his mother and younger sister in a small town in Iowa. Before he turns 15, Mike begins to receive letters in the mail from his father full of advice about life. Will appeal to reluctant readers and boys.

Interest Level: Grades 5-9

Jesse is a street-smart homeless teen who makes her way in the world using awesome skateboarding and martial arts skills. She and her sidekick, Bald Eagle, irreverently fight the powers of evil with wit, snark, and angst. Note: Graphic Novel. Contains mature themes.

Interest Level: Grades 10 – 12


Auggie and her grandfather, Gus, live in the poor part of town. Life is good until the 5th grade brings friend problems and the attention of the town’s House Beautification Committee. A feel good story about the truth of beauty and art and the shiny spirit of Auggie.

Interest Level: Grades 2-6


Twelve-year-old orphan Hugo lives in the train station in 1930’s Paris. He tends the clocks, just as his father taught him, and becomes entwined in a complex mystery involving an animatron and early cinema. This is the best kind of blend of illustration, graphic novel, narrative, and brilliant story telling.


A memoir based on the author’s experience as a Polish refugee during World War II in Kazakhstan. His father brings home a map that provides hours of distraction from the misery and the family’s destitute situation. Beautifully written and illustrated.


What goes on in the mind of a bully? More than you might think in the case of Tod Munn, who is serving detention by writing in a notebook under the careful watch of his school counselor. As we get to know Tod through his writing, we see what makes him tick.

Emma’s family moves around the country harvesting crops to support themselves. They put their extra money in a hard-times jar to save up in case they need something important before payday. But Emma desperately wants a real book of her own. How can she make that happen?

**Interest Level:** Grades 1-4

*Horn Book Award*, 2004.


Dan, a high school senior with a baseball scholarship to college, becomes homeless after his parents lose their jobs. This middle-class family find themselves living in the town’s tent city after exhausting the hospitality of relatives.

**Interest Level:** Grades 6-12


A funny take on the bad-kid-turned-good story. Jake is sent to the crazy Applewhite family’s Creative Academy and discovers he has talent of his own and that he’s not so bad after all.

**Interest Level:** Grades 4-8


Jeannette’s parents care more for nature and the arts than worldly possessions. Due to alcoholism their family becomes dysfunctional and struggle to meet their physical and emotional needs.

**Interest Level:** Grades 5-12

*ALA Booklist*, 2005.


Rosa’s home is destroyed by a fire, so she and her mama and grandma have to start over. Mama works hard every day to take care of the family and Rosa wants to be able to replace the comfy chair they lost so Mama will have a place to rest.

**Interest Level:** Grades K-3

*Caldecott Honor Book*, 1983.

Follows a year in the life of Mikey, who stays in an emergency shelter, and then, with his family, is referred New York’s Henry Street Settlement Urban Family Center. A more positive take on the situation of homeless families and the services available to them.

Interest Level: Grades 1-5


Maya is a new girl in class but she doesn’t look like the other kids. Her clothes are old and ragged so the other kids don’t want to play with her. When the classroom teacher gives a lesson about kindness, will it change things for Maya?


Death is the surprisingly compassionate narrator of this WWII era novel about Liesel Meminger. The story opens with Liesel on route to live with a foster family in a small German town, when she steals her first book. She lives with sweet and sour foster parents, who care deeply for her. One of the best YA books out there.