

# Understanding the Local Face of Hunger

**Maine Learning Results:** Math: M1, B1; Social Studies: A1, A2, A3, C2

**Purpose:** This activity is a great introduction when you are ready to use the garden as a platform for talking about social issues and embarking on a community service activity.

## Key Concepts:

- Identify the many different types of hunger and their effects
- Identify the types of hunger that we have here in Maine
- Identify some of their causes
- Identify things that families can do to avoid hunger both in their personal lives and for our state

**Activity:** *Before beginning to talk about hunger, I like to remind kids that we are talking about a social issue here that is none of our fault. Sometimes people feel guilty or ashamed when talking about hunger, either because they do or don't experience it. I like to remind kids that none of us should feel guilty or ashamed or feel pressured to reveal personal information, because though this is a serious problem, it is a problem that is much bigger than us. The best thing that we can do now is learn more about it so that we can help in the future.*

- 5 minutes: Take a student brainstorm on the word "hunger". Have students share whatever come to mind, there being no wrong answers, and record their responses on the board.
- 15 minutes: Then read the list back to them and begin to dissect what they have shared into categories. Some of what they describe will probably be describing the effects of hunger, like thin, tired, tummy hurts, can't concentrate. Others will be describing starvation, famine, death. Some kids might talk about anorexia and imposed eating issues. Explain that though anorexia is a serious issue, it's not related to what we are going to talk about today. Identify the kinds of hunger; normal hunger like before lunch, famine, malnutrition, starvation like we see in Africa. Talk about some of the effects of famine: extreme malnutrition, weight loss, loss of hair, loss of eyesight, and eventually death if starvation continues. Famine and starvation is when there is not enough food, plain and simple. We don't have that problem so much here in the U.S. today. We do have a pretty serious problem of hunger though, but our kind of hunger is called food insecurity and malnutrition. Ask students what they think malnutrition is. You should derive some sort of response like it's when you don't get the right kind of food to keep you healthy. Then ask if anyone can guess what food insecurity is. Food insecurity is the uncertainty in knowing if you will be able to obtain food on a regular basis. Many many families in the U.S. live with this uncertainty. If they had to guess, what do they think the percentage of kids in Maine is that live with food insecurity? The correct answer is at least 40%. That's almost half of the kids in Maine!
- 20 minutes: Now it's time to identify some of the causes:

TURN THIS INTO A MATH PROBLEM ON THE BOARD

How much does it cost to rent an apartment in Gorham or Portland for a family? Let's say \$900, and that's cheap.

RENT \$900

How much does a family of four spend on groceries a month? Let's say \$800 and that's cheap!

FOOD \$800

How much does a family of four spend on bills a month?

BILLS

phone and cable \$130

electric \$50

water \$20

heat \$250

Let's say this family has two parents who work full time, so they need some child care for the younger child that isn't in school yet. That's probably about \$320 a month.

CHILDCARE \$320

And to go to their jobs they have two cars. Let's say they are used cars so they don't need to make a payment, but they do need to each fill up the tank at least once a week. That's \$40 a week for two cars, which equals \$320 a month.

GAS \$320

At their jobs one makes 9 dollars an hour, and the other makes 11 dollars an hour, working 40 hours a week. How much do they make a month? \$1440 \$1760

INCOME: \$3200

How much do they need to spend a month just on basic things?

\$2790

How much extra do they have after basic things are paid for?

\$410.

With that money they need to pay for all clothes, toys, entertainment, plus taxes and additional expenses. What happens if the car breaks? Car repairs can cost 100s to 1000s of dollars. Or if it dies and they need a new one? New cars, even used, are 1000s of dollars. What happens if the price of oil or gas goes up? They may need to spend all of their extra money just paying for their house to be warm or their cars to run. The parents' jobs don't have health insurance, so if someone gets sick and needs to go to the doctors, or see the dentist, or gets hurt and needs to go to the emergency room or have an operation, the family could owe thousands of dollars that they can't pay off.

Since life invariably includes accidents, broken cars and additional expenses, this family will sometimes end up making very tough decisions. They won't be able to meet all of their basic needs every month. Since their cars are very important, because without them they wouldn't be able to keep their jobs, they will probably end up needing to spend money on the car. That will mean that they will need to choose some other expense not to pay. They need to pay rent and bills because without paying rent you don't have a place to live, and without paying bills you don't have electricity, water, and phone, or heat. But then all of the money would be spent, and none of it would have gone to food. What's that family going to do that month?

- 10 minute: Does anyone know of any solutions?

Food Pantries and Soup Kitchens

Heating Assistance

Rent Assistance and Public Housing

Free Childcare and Preschools

Public Transportation

WIC and food stamps

Are these short term or long term solutions? What are some solutions that could help people living in situations like this in the future? Solicit answers from students, and here are some suggestions:

Legislation that supports the creation of higher wages

More educational support for kids living in poverty

Better Public Transportation

Sustainable energy housing

Education and support for people growing their own food

**Materials:**

- dry erase board
- markers
- scratch paper
- pencils
- calculators to check work

**Time Frame:** 50 minutes