

Unit 1 Teacher's Guide

Grades 9–12

Unit 1: Economics, Government, and Housing

Unit Overview

Designed to align with the curriculum in a high school government or economics class, Unit 1 will help students make deeper connections between how economic and government decisions and policies affect individuals. Students will also be given the opportunity to act as civic-minded problem solvers by analyzing a problem and making thoughtful and realistic recommendations for change. Unit 1 will address the following questions: What are the causes of poverty and homelessness? What are the barriers to overcoming these problems? What are your solutions to addressing these barriers? In the end, students should be able to make thoughtful and informed recommendations for change.

Standards Addressed

Curriculum Standards for Social Studies (National Council for the Social Studies)

- Strand 3: People, Places, and Environments – Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of people, places, and environments.
- Strand 5: Individuals, Groups, and Institutions – Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of interactions among individuals, groups, and institutions.
- Strand 6: Power, Authority, and Governance – Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of how people create and change structures of power, authority, and governance.

National Standards for Civics and Government

- Standard V: What are the Roles of the Citizen in American Democracy?
 - Students should be able to evaluate, take, and defend positions on issues regarding political rights.
 - Students should be able to evaluate, take, and defend positions on issues regarding economic rights.
 - Students should be able to evaluate, take, and defend positions on the relationships among personal, political, and economic rights.
 - Students should be able to evaluate, take, and defend positions on the importance to American constitutional democracy of dispositions that foster respect for individual worth and human dignity.

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Standards Addressed

Geography for Life: National Geography Standards

- Standard 9: The Characteristics, Distribution, and Migration of Human Populations on Earth's Surface – The student knows and understands trends in world population numbers and patterns.
- Standard 11: The Patterns and Networks of Economic Interdependence on Earth's Surface – The student knows and understands the classification, characteristics, and spatial distribution of economic systems.

2002 NAEP Writing Assessment Framework Objectives

- Students should write for a variety of purposes: narrative, informative, and persuasive.
- Students should write from a variety of stimulus materials, and within various time constraints.

Standards for the English Language Arts (The National Council of Teachers of English and the International Reading Association)

- Students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, and by posing problems. They gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources (e.g., print and non-print texts, artifacts, people) to communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience.
- Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).

Learning Objectives

Students will:

- Review statistical snapshots surrounding the main factors of poverty and homelessness.
- Analyze and evaluate causes and possible solutions to issues surrounding poverty housing and homelessness, with particular emphasis on economics.
- Create and justify proposed policy regarding poverty housing and/or homelessness.

Teacher Preparation Time

15 minutes

Class Time

180 to 250 minutes (2 to 3 block periods)

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Materials Needed

- Internet access
- Media center access
- Materials to create visual presentations (optional)

Activity Sheet(s)

- Poverty Housing and Homelessness: Who, What, Where, and Why? (hand-out/overhead with statistics on poverty housing and homelessness)
- Issue analysis worksheet

Lesson Steps

1. Help students tap into their prior knowledge and assumptions about poverty and homelessness by posing the following questions and having them answer aloud or individually on paper:
 - a. What is poverty? (Answers may be objective or subjective, but should be summed up with an objective definition.)
 - b. Do you think poverty has increased or decreased over the past 20 years? Why?
 - c. What percentage of the U.S. population do you think lives in poverty?
 - d. Do people work more or fewer hours than they used to?
 - e. What is welfare?
 - f. Do you believe that welfare provides relief from poverty? Explain your opinion.
 - g. What factors do you think can contribute to the lack of affordable housing?
 - h. Do you think the following statement is true or false? *One in four people in a homeless situation is employed.*
 - i. What is the average length of stay for a family in a homeless shelter?
2. Give students a copy of the handout "Poverty Housing and Homelessness: Who, What, Where, and Why?" or display it on the overhead. It cites numerous statistics on poverty housing and homelessness, and it provides some background information on Habitat for Humanity. As a class, have students share some of the statistics that stand out to them.
3. Divide students into groups, and have groups choose (or assign groups) one of the following factors of poverty, poverty housing, and homelessness on which to concentrate:
 - worst-case poverty housing
 - lack of a living wage
 - section 8 rental assistance
 - lack of affordable housing

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Lesson Steps

- lack of tax incentives to encourage building low-income housing
- mental illness and addiction disorders connected with homelessness

(NOTE: "Poverty housing" is severely physically inadequate housing that often lacks necessities such as hot water, electricity, and either a bathtub or shower. "Worst-case" housing situations are those where renters have very low incomes and pay more than half of that income toward housing. Also, they often live in severely substandard housing.)

4. Have student groups use the issue analysis worksheet to help guide them through the process of further analyzing their issue, discussing alternative solutions, developing a policy or solution, and creating a class presentation about their issue and solution. The worksheet lists some resources that will help students in their research.
5. Have students present their issue and policy/solution to the class. Both the teacher/student presentation checklist and the peer presentation checklist that are part of the issue analysis worksheet can be used to assess the presentations.

Assessment

- Teacher/student presentation checklist
- Peer presentation checklist

Extension Activities

- Invite a housing advocate to the classroom to discuss the current poverty housing and homeless situation in your immediate area and services designed to help. See the list of resources on the following pages. (social studies, current events)
- Have students research poverty housing and homelessness in your state to discover any connections among economic trends, the number of people living in poverty housing, and the number of people who are homeless. See the list of resources on the following pages. (economics)
- Present the groups' policy recommendations to local and state government officials. See the list of resources on the following pages. (social studies, literacy, public policy)
- Have students investigate how other countries/societies address the causes and consequences of poverty housing and homelessness. (social studies, geography, world cultures)

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***Extension
Activities***

- Have students write a response to the following quote from the Habitat for Humanity Web site: "We encourage governments to do what they can to help alleviate the suffering of all those who have no decent, adequate place to live." (civics, public policy)

***Abridged Unit
Activity***

Concentrate on only one issue surrounding poverty housing and/or homelessness, and work through the issue analysis worksheet as a class.

***Modified Unit
for Classes
with Limited
Internet Access***

Arrange ahead of time for students to contact local resources, such as the local Habitat for Humanity affiliate and your city/county housing authority. Within those organizations, identify the person(s) with whom students should speak. Student groups should examine their textbooks for some background information and formulate questions to ask an authority. Then you can e-mail the questions and/or students can call to ask the questions.

Resources

- To get a broad overview of poverty housing, as well as some specific issues and action plans to address those issues, the National Low Income Housing Coalition has produced an advocate's guide, available at <http://www.nlihc.org/advocates/index.htm>.
- To find a local organization dedicated to homelessness and poverty housing, consult a directory of organizations by state at <http://www.nationalhomeless.org/state/>.
- Habitat for Humanity International is at the forefront of addressing poverty housing needs. For information on the organization and to explore some of the issues surrounding poverty housing, visit <http://www.habitat.org/how/factsheet.html#cost>.
- For a report on the status of poverty (particularly regarding housing and hunger) in U.S. cities, download "A Status Report on Hunger and Homelessness in America's Cities" by the United States Conference of Mayors at <http://www.usmayors.org/uscm/hungersurvey/2003/onlinereport/HungerAndHomelessnessReport2003.pdf>.
- To learn about the state of children's well-being throughout the United States, broken down by state, go to "Children in the States" by the Children's Defense Fund at <http://www.childrensdefense.org/data/childreninthestates/default.asp>.

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Resources

- For information on Section 8 rental assistance programs from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), go to <http://www.hud.gov/offices/pih/programs/hcv/index.cfm>.
- For help in coming up with ideas on how to address homelessness, the Washington State Coalition for the Homeless includes “Five Things You Can Do to End Homelessness” and “Eight Things You Can Do About Homelessness” on their Web site at http://www.endhomelessnesswa.org/personal_action.htm#Five
- “Toolkit for Ending Homelessness: Featuring the Ten Essentials for Ending Homelessness in Your Community” by the National Alliance to End Homelessness is available at <http://www.endhomelessness.org/pub/Toolkit.pdf>.

Lost in the shuffle of the election of 2004 was the release of a book on affordable housing called *Opportunity and Progress*. Two former secretaries of Housing and Urban Development (one who served under President George H.W. Bush and one who served under President Bill Clinton) were among the four authors of the book. Their book is a call to help millions of Americans who live in substandard housing, or no housing at all. The book cites statistics, recommends strategies for addressing the issues surrounding affordable and safe housing, and generally illustrates why it is critical to attend to the housing needs of so many people.

What follows are some statistics from the National Coalition for the Homeless and from Habitat for Humanity International that spotlight some of the critical needs and concerns expressed in *Opportunity and Progress*.

Why is there a lack of affordable housing?

- Overall, 14.4 million *families* have critical housing needs.
- Between 1973 and 1993, 2.2 million low-rent apartment units disappeared from the market. These units were either abandoned, demolished, converted into condominiums or expensive apartments, or became unaffordable because of cost increases. (Daskal, 1998)
- In the 20 years from 1973 to 1993, the number of low-income renters increased due to factors such as eroding employment opportunities and the declining value and availability of public assistance.
- From 2000 to 2002, the national cost for a two-bedroom home increased by 18 percent.

What is poverty housing?

- One family in seven living in poverty lives in housing that is severely physically inadequate — i.e., lacking hot water, electricity, a toilet, and either a bathtub or a shower. (U.S. Census Bureau)

Of the 10.9 million individuals living in worst-case poverty housing situations:

- 3.6 million are children
 - 1.4 million are elderly
 - 1.3 million are disabled adults
- (Worst Case Housing Needs 2001 Summary)

Why are people homeless?

- In 2000, 11.3 percent of the U.S. population — or 31.1 million people — lived in poverty. (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2001)
- Nationally, approximately half of all women and children experiencing homelessness are fleeing domestic violence. (Zorza, 1991; National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 2001)
- Approximately 22 percent of the single adult homeless population suffers from some form of severe and persistent mental illness. (U.S. Conference of Mayors, 2001)

How many people are homeless?

- About 3.5 million people — 1.35 million of whom are children — are likely to experience homelessness in a given year. (Urban Institute, 2000)

What kind of people are homeless?

Families with children are among the fastest growing segments of the homeless population.

- In 2002, families made up 41 percent of the urban homeless population, an increase of 5 percent in just two years. (U.S. Conference of Mayors, 2002)
- In rural areas, research indicates that families, single mothers, and children make up the largest group of people who are homeless. (Vissing, 1996)
- Nationally, children make up approximately 39 percent of the homeless population. (Urban Institute 2000)

What does it “look like” to be homeless and young?

According to the McKinney-Vento Act, many homeless children and youth:

- lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence;
- are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason;
- are living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to a lack of alternative adequate accommodations;
- are living in emergency or transitional shelters;
- are abandoned in hospitals, or are awaiting foster care placement;
- have a primary nighttime residence that is a private or public place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular place to sleep;

Poverty Housing and Homelessness: Who, What, Where, and Why?

- are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings;
- are migratory children who move regularly with their parents to find work, such as picking crops.

What is Habitat for Humanity International?

- Habitat for Humanity International is a nonprofit Christian housing ministry that seeks to eliminate poverty housing and homelessness from the world.
- Habitat for Humanity International has built more than 175,000 houses around the world, providing safe, decent, affordable shelter for nearly 900,000 people.
- Habitat for Humanity International was founded in 1976 by Millard Fuller along with his wife, Linda.

What does a Habitat house cost?

- House costs vary from as little as \$800 in some developing countries to an average of \$46,600 in the United States.

Where does Habitat for Humanity build houses?

- There are more than 2,300 active affiliates in 100 countries, including all 50 states of the United States, the District of Columbia, Guam, and Puerto Rico.

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Which of the issues surrounding poverty housing and homelessness do you find the most compelling — so compelling, in fact, that you want to investigate it further? Choose one from the list below, and then use the following resources and questions to help you investigate and analyze the issue and create a presentation.

- worst-case poverty housing
- lack of a living wage
- section 8 rental assistance
- lack of affordable housing
- lack of tax incentives to encourage building low-income housing
- mental illness and addiction disorders connected to homelessness

(NOTE: “Poverty housing” is severely physically inadequate housing that often lacks necessities such as hot water, electricity, and either a bathtub or shower. “Worst case” housing situations are those where renters have very low incomes and pay more than half of that income toward housing. Also, they often live in severely substandard housing.)

Issue: _____

There are numerous Internet resources to help you in your quest. Consider using the following Web sites as you investigate your issue:

- To get a broad overview of poverty housing, as well as some specific issues and action plans to address those issues, the National Low Income Housing Coalition has produced an advocate’s guide, available at <http://www.nlihc.org/advocates/index.htm>.
- To find a local organization dedicated to homelessness and poverty housing, consult a directory of organizations by state at <http://www.nationalhomeless.org/state/>.
- Habitat for Humanity International is at the forefront of addressing poverty housing needs. For information on the organization and to explore some of the issues surrounding poverty housing, visit <http://www.habitat.org/how/factsheet.html#cost>.
- For information on Section 8 rental assistance programs from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), go to <http://www.hud.gov/offices/pih/programs/hcv/index.cfm>.

I. Analyzing the Issue

Use the following questions to help you analyze the issue you chose:

- a. What are some of the root causes of the issue?
- b. In what ways does this issue directly affect the lives of people?
- c. In what ways does this issue indirectly affect the lives of people?
- d. How many people in the United States are affected by this issue?
- e. In general, what types of people are affected by this issue?
- f. Do you see any relationships between the root causes of the issue and the types of people affected by the issue? If so, what are these relationships?
- g. What is the current position of the federal, state, or local government on this issue? Do you agree or disagree with this position? Explain your answer by citing specific policies that affect the issue.
- h. According to experts, will this problem get better or worse in the immediate future? Why?

Now that you have worked through these questions, summarize the current status of the issue you have selected to investigate in two or more paragraphs.

II. Discussing Alternative Solutions

Use the following questions to help you find out more about alternative solutions to the issue:

- a. If you could do anything you wanted to solve the problems surrounding the issue you have chosen to investigate, what would it be?
- b. What actions can government take to help alleviate this problem? What are the benefits and drawbacks of these actions?
- c. What actions can nonprofit groups such as Habitat for Humanity take to help alleviate this problem? What are the benefits and drawbacks of these actions?
- d. What actions can private citizens take to help alleviate this problem? What are the benefits and drawbacks of these actions?
- e. What actions can the people directly affected by this issue take to help alleviate this problem? What are the benefits and drawbacks of these actions?
- f. Talk with classmates, teachers, family, and community members about this issue. What solutions do they suggest? What are the benefits and drawbacks of these actions?

Now that you have worked through these questions, consider and write about the following:

Out of all the solutions proposed above, which do you consider the most effective? Why? Which do you consider the least effective? Why? Explain your answer in two or more paragraphs.

III. Developing a Policy or Solution

Use some or all of the following questions — in addition to your work in sections I and II — to develop and define a policy recommendation:

- a. Describe the policy that you are recommending.
- b. Do you foresee any stumbling blocks to this policy being implemented? If so, what are they?
- c. If your answer to question b was “yes,” can you think of any ways to counter these stumbling blocks?
- d. Are there any groups or individuals that are currently working toward a similar goal? If yes, is there a way that you could pool resources and ideas to work toward a shared goal?

After thinking about the answers to the above questions, rewrite your updated policy below:

IV. Presenting the Policy or Solution

Now that you have defined and refined your policy, it is time to share your ideas with your classmates. Use the attached checklists to plan your presentation and list your ideas below.

Teacher/Student Presentation Checklist

Student's Name: _____

Issue: _____

Criteria (25 points possible)	Teacher score and justification	Student score and justification
Organization: Presentation is well-planned and coherent.		
Content Knowledge: Presentation provides appropriate background information to the audience, explains possible solutions and/or drawbacks, and explains reasons for developing chosen policy.		
Communication: Presentation uses communication aids that are clear, useful, and help the audience further their understanding of the issue; the method of communication was relevant to and appropriate for the issue; presenter maintains eye contact with the audience and speaks in a clear voice.		
Audience Response: Presentation and presenter involved the audience; presenter elicited and answered questions from the audience.		
TOTAL		

Peer Presentation Checklist

Your Name: _____

Issue: _____

Criteria (25 points possible)	Peer score and justification
<p>Organization: Presentation is well-planned and coherent.</p>	
<p>Content Knowledge: Presentation provides appropriate background information to the audience, explains possible solutions and/or drawbacks, and explains reasons for developing chosen policy.</p>	
<p>Communication: Presentation uses communication aids that are clear, useful, and help the audience further their understanding of the issue; the method of communication was relevant to and appropriate for the issue; presenter maintains eye contact with the audience and speaks in a clear voice.</p>	
<p>Audience Response: Presentation and presenter involved the audience; presenter elicited and answered questions from the audience.</p>	
<p>TOTAL</p>	