

## **The Struggle: Work, Poverty, & What We Can Do**

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### **Abstract**

In the United States, poverty is often associated with blame and shame. The goal of this unit is to help students, especially those who have experienced the struggle, to develop a nuanced understanding of poverty and to consider what can be done to eliminate it. Students will focus both on understanding the experiences of people close to them who have experienced poverty and on contextualizing these experiences by connecting them with data and research. Students will explore the connection between work and poverty in America, the conditions of workers in the fast food industry, data on poverty in Philadelphia, and historical examples of strategies to change the conditions of those facing poverty. As the culminating performance task, students will create a page for a class website that highlights an alternative vision of poverty and the struggle, connecting the story of their interviewee to context and ultimately considering which strategy might work best to improve conditions for their interviewee and others like them. Students will use skills in interviewing, reading, and informational writing to move their perspectives on poverty from blame and shame to action and justice.

### **Content Objectives**

Through my TIP course this year, I was inspired to create a unit that gets students to think about fast food, work, poverty, and activism. This unit would be taught to my 12th Grade Humanities class as a lead-in to their Senior Project work, which asks students to focus on a “wicked problem” impacting their community. Through the unit, students would develop a critical understanding of “the struggle”, or poverty. Our city, Philadelphia, has the highest poverty rate in the largest 10 cities in the United States, and nearly half of those who live in poverty live in deep poverty. While 25% of Philadelphia’s citizens are poor, around 37% of its children are (Pew Charitable Trusts). By all accounts, this should be treated as a crisis. However, it often goes unacknowledged.

When poverty comes up in class, it is common to hear students distancing themselves from the issue, and ultimately blaming those in poverty for their own struggle. This is common beyond Philadelphia, as Matthew Desmond noted in the New York Times, “But rather than hold itself accountable, America reverses roles by blaming the poor for their own miseries.” All of the students in our school receive free or reduced-price lunch, many have close friends and family who have experienced deep poverty, and some face it themselves. Even so, the stigma and stereotypes attached to poverty at our school is not so different from what you might find in a more affluent school. In framing

this unit, I hope to get students to consider poverty as a structural issue that extends beyond individual blame. Rather than leading exclusively with the terms “poverty” and “poor,” I hope to also tie in the colloquial framing of the struggle, which will hopefully be more relatable for students.

I work at The U School, an “Innovation Network” school in the School District of Philadelphia. We are a non-selective school, with about half of our students coming from our broadly defined neighborhood (including Kensington and North Philadelphia) and half from the rest of the city (mainly South and West Philadelphia). We serve just under 300 students, with 80% of our students identifying as African-American, 13% as Latinx, 4% as White, and 1% as Asian. All of our students receive free or reduced-price lunch, and 28% of our students receive Special Education services.

Over the past two years, I have worked with our 12th graders on their Senior Projects, which ask them to focus on a “wicked problem”, our term for complex and contradictory challenges, that impacts their community. Students then create a portfolio of work, including narrative, argumentative, and informational writing, that seeks to understand and address that problem. While the narrative and creative components of these projects are often most evocative and engaging, the informational and argumentative components can fall flat, and lack some of the insight.

Last year, I worked to encourage students to better incorporate data into their projects, and ultimately found a lot of success in having students collect their own data and then refer to data from sources. Through my TIP unit this year, I am hoping to build on this success by having students create informational pieces that combine their own interviews with data that can help contextualize the experiences of those facing the struggle.

With students primarily choosing “wicked problems” focused on addiction, gun violence, mass incarceration, and mental health, I often find that poverty and deep economic marginalization are unacknowledged factors that unite many of these issues. I did better this year at having students understand the connections between issues, but did not quite reach the level where students understood how systemic factors, like racism and poverty, related back to their “wicked problems”. In many cases, students hinted at references to those systemic factors, but did not devote the level of in-depth analysis that they did to other aspects of their projects. For students who did explicitly deal with poverty, their analysis often lacked the necessary complexity.

This unit may also be a part of next year’s school-wide Humanities course at The U School, which will focus on English and American History. Our school operates on a competency-based model, which means that we use the Common Core standards as the basis for our grading. This also means that students are not graded for “Practice” assignments, but only graded for “Mastery” assignments. Each unit culminates with a

“Performance Task,” or project, where students are asked to show what they learned in a particular unit of study in an authentic way, meaning that they are creating a product with value in the “real-world”, often meaning that it is intended for an audience beyond simply the teacher. In the Humanities classroom, we combine English and History competencies for a two-credit course. Our end of unit Performance Tasks are generally graded on mainly English writing competencies, either of the narrative, argumentative, or informational variety. Though this unit will touch on narrative and argumentative work, students’ final performance tasks will be informational in format.

In encouraging students to understand the systemic causes of poverty, I find it particularly important to look at the relationship between poverty and wages. As our students reach their 11th and 12th grade years, many of them end up taking jobs at fast food restaurants - from national chains McDonald’s and Burger King to local chains like Honeygrow. Teaching a significant number of Seniors over the past two years, I have noticed that students often begin to prioritize work over school long before they graduate. A significant number of our students work a full shift after leaving school for the day, often not finishing work until 11pm or midnight. Under Pennsylvania law, minors who are 16 or 17 years old are permitted to work a maximum of 8 hours on school days, and 28 hours per week. Many of our students push that maximum, and it often cuts significantly into their academic performance and focus.

I also worked while I was in high school, but normally for less than 10 hours per week, and only on the weekend. I understand, though, that my experience growing up in a middle-class family in the suburbs is significantly different from the experiences of my students. The money I made working was extra spending or saving money for me, not to help support my family or meet my basic needs. It was always assumed that I would go straight to college after high school, and there was never the idea that I might stay in that job beyond high school. My students’ experiences and responsibilities are different. Many of them have parents and family members who spend their adult lives working in fast food or other low wage jobs.

In *Fast Food Nation*, Eric Schlosser frames his chapter on work at McDonald’s by focusing on teenage workers, much like my students. He describes the dynamics of work among teenagers in Colorado Springs, which match my observations about my own experience and that of my students. While students at the predominantly white, upper-middle-class school do not work at fast food restaurants, those at the working class and predominantly student of color school often do. He describes students from that school, Harrison High, working long hours, and quotes that school’s guidance counselor who says, “I have lots and lots of kids who are terribly depressed. I’ve never seen so many, so young feel this way” (80). Schlosser found that her observations were matched by the findings of a national report *Protecting Youth at Work*, which “warned that short-term considerations are now limiting what millions of American kids can ever hope to achieve” (80). In many ways, the relationship between working class teenagers of color

and fast food work is exploitative. Through this unit, I hope to use these insights to encourage students to critically examine the conditions of work, and to consider why they are as they are. Students will also consider how teenage labor is used to justify the underpaying of workers in general, especially in the fast food industry.

My intention with this focus for a unit is not to wag my finger at students and threaten them with ending up saying, “Do you want fries with that?” for a career. Too often, the emphasis in this conversation is on personal choice, which results in blame heaped on employees and customers of fast food chains like McDonald’s. A glance at the Urban Dictionary page for McDonald’s will give you a sense of how widespread this blame is in our society. A primary goal of this unit would be to shift students’ thinking from a narrow focus on individual “choices” and “responsibility” to a broader vision that looks at the way structures of our society and policy impact the options that are available for workers and consumers. As with most of the curriculum I create, an underlying goal is to give students the tools necessary to critically analyze their own lives. The curriculum of this course gives me a particularly powerful opportunity to do just that.

I have also long wanted to incorporate the history of labor activism, with a focus on unions, into my curriculum. The purpose of focusing on labor activism in this context is twofold. First, a look at collective action led by working class people can powerfully counteract concepts of “rugged individualism” so built-in to our culture and conception of the world, and especially work. Second, many view the nature of work in our society as unchanging and unchangeable. By exploring the history of labor, and especially labor activism, I hope that students will get a historical sense of continuity and change in terms of work, and understand how today’s work, in fast food and beyond, fits with these trends.

It took me a lot of reflection and reading to consider how to frame this work for students, and I appreciate Professor Simon’s guidance as I worked through labor history to consider how to connect this work to my students’ experiences. Union work in Philadelphia, as across the United States, is not as prevalent as it once was. In addition, some of the most powerful unions in the city, the building trades, have often been implicitly or explicitly segregated and can be inaccessible for neighborhood like those where my students live. For many of my students, the only major strike they would remember in Philadelphia is the 2016 SEPTA transit workers strike - and it’s likely they only remember that because it got them out of school.

To make labor activism relevant to students, I will frame it around 4 different types of strategies, and encourage students to consider which seems most applicable to the person they interviewed. The strategies I will focus on will be: legislative, trade union, alt-labor, and beyond work. For each of these strategies, I will introduce students to a historical or contemporary example that encourages students to think about its effectiveness for getting low wage workers out of poverty.

In looking at legislative action that improved the lives of working people in the United States, we will examine the Wagner Act (1935) and the Fair Labor Standards Act (1939) which established the right to collective bargaining and workplace regulations such as a minimum wage, the 40 hour work week, and the outlawing of child labor respectively. We will briefly examine the process for these acts to be passed, the historical context of the Great Depression, and the impacts of their passing on American workers.

For trade union strategies, we will focus on one of the major American unions, the United Auto Workers (UAW). We will focus primarily on their 1945-46 strike, which coincided with the national 1946 “Strike Wave”. While workers earned a 17.5 percent wage increase, they did not achieve the major goal of having General Motors open their books to their employees and a halt to the rise of automobile prices so that the wage increase wasn’t passed on to consumers. This will be used as an example to consider the role of negotiation in collective bargaining, and the centrality of compromise.

In many ways, today’s economy has moved away from the type of large-scale manufacturing unions exemplified by UAW. “Alt-Labor” is a term used to refer to the development of collective action strategies that have moved beyond the bounds of labor unions. In examining these strategies, we will investigate the Coalition of Immokalee Workers campaign against Taco Bell, which took place from 2001 to 2005. This boycott shows a strategy that involves solidarity across industries, and especially focuses on those for whom it is difficult or impossible to organize a union, such as agricultural workers and fast food chains. In the end, Taco Bell was forced to take responsibility for the conditions faced by farmworkers who pick its tomatoes, an unprecedented result.

Finally, we will extend beyond work and consider other strategies that can be used, focusing our attention on rent strikes. This final piece of context will explicitly tie the past to today, considering both current and historical examples of tenants standing up for their rights to safe, affordable, and clean housing.

We generally begin and end our thematic units with a focus on today’s world, drawing close connections to our students’ own lives. In the middle of units, we take a look at historical content that connects to the present day, and encourage students to use that understanding to inform their work on their final project for the unit. In addition, their final project, or Performance Task, is designed to be publicly displayed or distributed. At the end of this unit, our class will put together a website that highlights an alternative vision of work & poverty, inspired by the Broke In Philly website created by various journalistic organizations from across Philadelphia. While this is not technically a journalistic unit, the work that students are doing will be connected to the major skills involved in journalism.

For their page on our website, students will combine three different informational pieces they will create during this unit. First, students will record an interview with a person who they see as a hard worker who faces the struggle, and write a reflection based on that interview. This work will be inspired by the work of Studs Terkel to highlight the dignity in the lives of working people. Then, students will take inspiration from readings by Desmond and Schlosser earlier in the unit to provide contextual information to help readers understand how the individual experience of the person they interviewed connects to the larger picture of poverty in Philadelphia. Finally, students will take inspiration from four strategies of anti-poverty activism, both tied to labor and beyond, to write a letter to the person they interviewed explaining which strategy might work best for their particular context. After writing, editing, and combining their pieces, students will work together in groups to put together our website, including giving it a title, writing a description, and creating the layout.

I want students to understand that there is dignity in hard work and that exploitation is at the core of much low-wage work in the United States. I also want students to understand that these conditions faced by low wage workers are not permanent and unfixable - and that action and legislation can help fundamentally change the conditions in which people live their lives.

### **Teaching Strategies**

This unit is designed so that students can complete it in an asynchronous manner - with students not having to wait for other students before moving to the next activity. While there will be some whole class activities (particularly early in the unit, and those focused on readings), much of this work will be designed in order for students to access information and complete the steps independently. I do not emphasize whole class direct instruction or an “I Do, We Do, You Do” structure in my classroom. Most strategies implemented in this unit are designed for self-driven work.

#### *Mini-Lesson*

This is the primary structure of instruction in this unit. This will be a 10-15 minute lesson that focuses on skills or content that are necessary to complete the current unit of study. At times, these lessons will be convened with the entire class. At other times, they will be convened only with students working on a particular task or skill, or for those who need additional support.

#### *Barometer*

This strategy will be used in an introductory lesson that gets students thinking about poverty and “the struggle”, and processing their own opinions, as well as hearing those of

others. In this activity, “Strongly Agree” and “Strongly Disagree” are posted on the wall on opposite ends of the classroom. Desks and chairs are moved aside, and students are asked to stand in the center of the room. Students are then given a statement (“Individuals are responsible for living in poverty. They have no one to blame but themselves.”) and asked to move to the place on the line where they fall. Then, students are asked to have a quick discussion with 3-4 students standing near them, and then students from each section of the line are asked to share their thoughts.

### *Voice & Choice*

This unit, as with all of the units I design, is grounded in the belief that we need to give students voice and choice when it comes to their learning. This applies to both what they are learning about as well as what they are creating. While this does make managing projects more challenging from a teacher’s perspective, it also makes it more engaging from a student perspective. In addition to encouraging student opinions and perspectives early in the unit, this unit really moves into encouraging the most Voice and Choice when students choose who they will interview, and therefore choose how they will focus the rest of their unit.

### *U School Design Process*

This unit will follow the normal structure we use for our Humanities curriculum, based in our U School Design Process: Students will Discover, Define, Design, Develop, then Deliver. This is meant to guide students through a structured process that leads to them completing quality, informed projects at the end of the unit.

The Discover stage will engage students in the content and skills that will be explored in this unit. As this unit is about the struggle, poverty, and work, I plan to start by getting students to express their opinions and ask questions. Primarily, I want to get students to consider who is “responsible” for poverty, and challenge the common assumption that those who face poverty are responsible for their own struggle. The purpose of this segment of the unit is to get students “hooked” to the content of the unit, while encouraging to ask questions that will be answered during the rest of the unit.

The Define stage of a unit is where the heavy content lifting occurs for students. During this unit, this stage will focus on two readings, an article from Matthew Desmond that contextualizes work and poverty in America today focused mainly on a home health worker, and a chapter from Fast Food Nation by Eric Schlosser that shows the way that corporate and government policy impact the wages and working conditions of workers at McDonald’s. At the close of the Define stage, students will choose a person who they feel works hard in the face of “the struggle” and interview them. They will use this person’s experience as a lens to focus their work for the rest of the unit.

Moving into the Design stage, students will begin to take what they learned and start writing pieces that will ultimately be combined into their final webpage. First, students will transcribe and then reflect on what they learned from this interview, incorporating direct quotes. Then, students will consider how what they learned in their interview, and their interviewees experience, connects to others in Philadelphia. They will write another piece which incorporates contextual data that relates back to their interviewee's experience.

As students Develop their work, they will begin by exploring potential solutions to poverty, and will explain which of those solutions best works for their interviewees context through a letter addressed to their interviewee, but planned to be shared publicly. After writing this piece, students will combine all of their writing for this unit into a rough draft of their Informational web page. They will then get peer feedback from a classmate to help them revise their work.

The unit will close with students having their work published on a class website, highlighting experiences of poverty in Philadelphia and showcasing potential solutions. Students will work together in groups to design the website, give it a title, and write an introduction for our work. At the end of the unit, students will reflect on what they liked, what can be improved, and their takeaways through a Google Form, as we do during each unit.

#### *Assignment Numbering for Project Management*

With voice and choice as key components of the unit, it is essential for an educator to focus on project management. As a starting point, it is helpful to number each stage in the unit. Generally, the unit number will precede the activity number. For example, the 5th assignment in Unit 7 would be 7.05. This allows for easy tracking of student progress through a project in a spreadsheet.

#### *Using Mentor Texts*

When students are working to create authentic performance tasks, it is important that they can see mentor texts to inspire their own work. In this unit, students will use the work of Schlosser and Desmond as mentor texts to help them as they combine individual stories with contextual information such as data.

#### *Peer Revision*

It is productive to encourage students to give feedback on the work of their classmates at multiple stages in the design process. Not only does this provide students with advice for how to reiterate and improve their own work, but it also allows students to see additional examples that can inspire their own work. While products differ throughout the year, it is

helpful to have a protocol for peer revision that is consistent, which will encourage it to become a habit for students.

## **Classroom Activities**

Inspiration for this series of activities, especially those that deal most directly with having students process and understand poverty, come from a series of Teaching Tolerance lessons titled “Issues of Poverty.”

### 01: Defining “The Struggle” (Discover)

#### *Guiding Questions*

- What is poverty? How do different individuals and groups define it?
- Who is responsible for poverty? Who is responsible for ending it?

#### *Materials*

- Wall signs for “Strongly Agree” and “Strongly Disagree”
- Student computers
- Computers or copies of the [Federal Poverty Guidelines](#)
- Copies of [Cost of Living Calculator from Teaching Tolerance](#)
- 3 pieces of chart paper: Definitions, Causes, and Effects of Poverty

#### *Standards*

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.1
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.2
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.7

#### *Objective*

Students will explore their preconceptions of poverty and consider where responsibility lies.

#### *Activity/Task*

In this activity, which will last 1 or 2 days, students will explore their own definitions of poverty and “the struggle” (and consider whether these terms mean the same thing to them, or different things), and compare those to federal guidelines used to define poverty. They will consider the cost of living in Philadelphia, and compare that to the federal poverty guidelines as well as the federal minimum wage by budgeting the cost of essential items over the course of a month and comparing that to the income of a minimum wage earner. Throughout the unit, the class will keep running lists (on chart

paper) of definitions of poverty, as well as the causes and effects of poverty for people living in Philadelphia. We will introduce and begin to explore questions about who is responsible for poverty. Students will work together in groups (which will serve as their “family group” for this lesson) to determine the cost of living for “basic needs” in Philadelphia today, and then will compare that to the federal poverty guidelines and consider how it lines up with the current minimum wage. We will conclude the lesson by talking about stigmas that are attached to poverty.

### *Hook*

Begin the lesson by getting students to reflect on their own opinions about poverty through a Barometer activity. On one side of the room, there will be a “Strongly Agree” sign, on the other a “Strongly Disagree” sign. Students will be given the statement: “Individuals are responsible for living in poverty. They have no one to blame but themselves.” Students will be asked to move to the space along the line that aligns with their opinion on the statement. Once they have found their space, students will have a conversation with their peers and share why they stood where they did. After a few minutes of small group conversations, I will have students from different parts of the line share their perspectives.

### *Mini-Lesson*

The mini-lesson will focus on getting students to consider different definitions of poverty, and getting them to understand the disconnect between actual cost of living and the federal poverty guidelines and minimum wage. After the initial discussion, I will walk students through how to find the cost of living.

### 02: Connections Between Work & Poverty (Define)

#### *Guiding Questions*

Can “hard work” get people out of poverty?

#### *Materials*

- Wall signs for “Strongly Agree” and “Strongly Disagree”
- Computers or copies of “Americans Want to Believe Jobs Are the Solution to Poverty. They're Not.” (either full or excerpted, depending on reading levels of class)
- 3 pieces of chart paper: Definitions, Causes, and Effects of Poverty

#### *Standards*

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.1

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.2
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.7

### *Objective*

Students will examine the causes and effects of poverty in America, especially through the lens of those who work and still live below the poverty line.

### *Activity/Task*

Through this lesson, students will explore how someone can work and still live in poverty. We will continue to add to our Definition, Causes, and Effects of poverty as we work through this article. As they read, students will highlight or underline Causes, Effects, and Potential Solutions in different colors. Students will be asked to focus on both individual aspects, but also larger, systemic factors. Students will close the lesson by reflecting on the closing quote of Desmond's article, "And if we respect hard work, then we should reward it, instead of deploying this value to shame the poor and justify our unconscionable and growing inequality. 'I've worked hard to get where I am,' you might say. Well, sure. But Vanessa has worked hard to get where she is, too." They will consider how this quote, and this article, connects back to the essential question of this lesson. We will revisit the barometer activity at the end of the lesson, to see if the perspectives of students changed.

### *Hook*

As with the first lesson, we will again start this lesson with a Barometer activity. For this lesson, we will start with the statement: "Working hard can help someone 'get out' of poverty."

### *Mini-Lesson*

Depending on the reading skills of the class that will engage with this lesson, it is likely that we will read the Desmond article together, and complete the annotation as a class.

03: Low Wage Work: Personal Choice, Government Oversight, and Corporate Power (Define)

### *Guiding Questions*

Why are the wages of fast food workers so low? Why are their working conditions so dangerous?

### *Materials*

- Copies of Fast Food Nation p. 67-88
- Markers / Highlighters
- Chart paper

### *Standards*

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.1
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.2
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.7

### *Objective*

Students will explain the role that corporations and government play in keeping the wages of fast food workers low and their working conditions dangerous.

### *Activity/Task*

The goal of this lesson is for students to understand the causes of the low wages of McDonald's workers. Students should come to understand the role that individuals, the government, and corporations play in keeping wages down for McDonald's (and other fast food) workers. As students read the chapter, ask them to highlight using 3 different colors (or types of underline) to indicate the responsibility of individuals, government, and corporation in these wages and conditions. After reading the article, students will work in groups to create a 3 section chart with the ways that individuals, government, and corporations cause these low wages and difficult conditions.

### *Hook*

Begin by getting students to consider their preconceptions about McDonald's, and especially working at McDonald's. Students can list their own preconceived ideas, and then look at McDonald's entries on Urban Dictionary and Dani Ruth's YouTube video "My Experience Working at McDonald's". Consider stigmas associated with McDonald's and work at McDonald's, and the emphasis on "control" in work stories.

### *Mini-Lesson*

Depending on the reading skills of the class that will engage with this lesson, it is likely that we will read the Fast Food Nation chapter together, and complete the annotation as a class.

04: Interviewing About Work (Define)

### *Guiding Questions*

How can we uplift the voices of low wage workers?

### *Materials*

- Student cell phones or voice recorders
- Student computers or copies of StoryCorps resources
- SmartBoard or projector
- Interview Release Form

### *Standards*

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.2.B

### *Objective*

Students will prepare for an in-depth interview with a person who works and struggles in Philly.

### *Activity/Task*

At the end of this activity, students will be prepared to conduct their interview. They will know who they are going to interview and why, have a list of initial questions prepared, know how to record the interview using their cell phone, and understand that an interview should be more of a conversation than a series of questions and answers. We will begin by listening to an interview together from Studs Terkel's working tapes, talking about the questions he asked, and what stood out to them about the interview. Then, we'll go over a video of "4 Tips for an Effective Interview" by StoryCorps, with students taking notes on the tips and how they could apply them to their own interviews. Then, students will record practice 2 minute interviews with a classmate, where they ask an initial question (which can be inspired by the StoryCorps "Great Questions" list) and then at least 2 follow-up questions that are unscripted. Students will then practice sharing the interview audio, so that they can do that with their own interviews. To wrap up the class, students will be told about the importance of getting consent from their interviewee. The teacher will distribute a release form, and review it with students. As students leave class, they will be asked to record their interview. In addition to recording the interview, students will be asked to bring in at least 1 picture that pairs with the interview. This can be a picture of the person they interviewed (either a current photo or a past photo), a picture of an object that connects to the interview, or a picture of a place that is important to the interview.

### *Hook*

Students will begin by brainstorming a person they want to interview about work and struggle, based on our discussions from previous units. They will be asked to consider someone who they deem a hard worker, but who they often see struggling. This can be a peer, family member, or neighbor.

### *Mini-Lesson*

The focus of this lesson will be encouraging students to spend their time listening and asking follow-up questions in interviews, rather than simply on asking a list of questions. Parts of this lesson can be done independently, but can also be done as a group.

### 05: Transcribing & Reflection on Interviews (Design)

#### *Guiding Questions*

What insights about “the struggle” did I gain from my interview?

#### *Materials*

- Recorded interviews (on student phones)
- Signed release form
- Photo to accompany interview
- Computers
- Headphones
- Copy of sample interview transcription

#### *Standards*

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.2.A
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.2.B
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.2.D
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.2.E
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.9

#### *Objective*

Students will compose a piece about their interview, combining their own explanation and direct quotes from their interviewee.

#### *Activity/Task*

Students will transcribe and then reflect on their interviews. Students will look at a sample transcription, and then have time to transcribe their own interview. If their interview was longer than 5 minutes, they will be asked to choose the best 5-minute

excerpt to transcribe. For their transcription, they will be encouraged to use initials each time a new person speaks, rather than full names. After completing their transcription, students will write their interview reflections. These reflections should be 3 paragraphs, and will be included as a part of their final written piece for the unit. The first paragraph will provide background information about the person they interviewed. The second and third paragraphs will focus on what their interviewee said about the definition, causes, effects of, and solutions to “the struggle” or poverty in Philadelphia. These paragraphs should include at least 3 excerpted quotes from their transcription, with each quote being no more than a sentence in length. For both the background and the explanations, the teacher should refer back to examples from the Desmond article. Students will submit their reflections and transcriptions.

### *Hook*

Each student will be asked to share one thing they learned during their interview.

### *Mini-Lesson*

Teacher should begin by explaining the dual importance of transcription: it helps students reflect on their interview and makes it easier to quote their interviewee in writing. Then, the teacher will review the sample transcription, and then give students time to transcribe. After they have had transcription time, come back together to review guidelines for interview reflection.

## 06: Contextualizing Interviews (Design)

### *Guiding Questions*

How do the experiences of my interviewee relate to others in “the struggle” in Philly?

### *Materials*

- Student Computers or Copies of Pew Data
- SmartBoard or Projector

### *Standards*

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.2.A
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.2.B
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.2.D
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.2.E
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.7
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.9

### *Objective*

Students will analyze data about poverty in Philadelphia in order to explain context for their interviewee's experience.

### *Activity/Task*

In this lesson, students will consider the cyclical nature of poverty by exploring cause and effect through data and their own interview. The data will primarily be drawn from the Pew Charitable Trusts report, "Philadelphia's Poor". Students will be asked to review this report, focusing specifically on the overview and sections that they choose during the "Hook". Students will select at least 3 pieces of data that fit with the experience described by the person they interviewed, and provide a quote from the interview that connects to that data. The purpose of this assignment is for students to contextualize the experience of their interviewee within the broader scope of marginalized people in Philadelphia. They will then be asked to incorporate at least one quote or piece of data from the Schlosser or Desmond pieces as well. This written piece will be included as a component of their final project for the unit.

### *Hook*

Students will look back at their interview transcriptions, and share one quote that relates the experience of the person they interviewed to one of these categories (aligned with the Pew report "Philadelphia's Poor: Experiences Below the Poverty Line"): Health and well-being, Work, Housing, Exposure to crime, and Access to quality schools and education.

### *Mini-Lesson*

Students will revisit an example from the Desmond or Schlosser pieces to show how the author used data to provide context of the individual they interviewed.

07: What can we do about The Struggle? (Develop)

### *Guiding Questions*

What solutions have been used to address economic inequality? How can those solutions be used to address poverty in Philadelphia today? Which do you think is the most effective?

### *Materials*

- Student Computers

- Excerpts from There is Power in a Union on Wagner Act & Fair Labor Standards Act (p. 449-459)
- Excerpts from Labor in America: A History on the 1945-46 Strike Wave, especially the UAW Strike (p. 326-333)
- Audio/Article from Marketplace, “Rent strikes make a comeback in tight housing markets”
- Article from the Global Nonviolent Action Database on the CIW Taco Bell Boycott
- SmartBoard or Projector

### *Standards*

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.1
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.2
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.7
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.2.B
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.2.D
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.2.E
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.2.F
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.7
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.9

### *Objective*

Students will identify which solution would best address poverty in Philadelphia and explain it through a letter to their interviewee.

### *Activity/Task*

In this assignment, students will be exposed to solutions that have been tried, and sometimes worked, in the past for solving economic inequality and poverty. These strategies will be divided into 3 categories, which will be defined for students and connected to examples: Legislative (Wagner Act (1935) & Fair Labor Standards Act (1938)), Trade Union (1946 UAW Strike), Alt-Labor (CIW Taco Bell Boycott, 2001-2005), and Beyond Work (rent strikes). After defining the strategy and connecting it to historical examples, students will consider which they think would work best in Philadelphia in 2019. After deciding on the strategy, they will compose a letter to the person that they interviewed, explaining what strategy they would recommend, connecting to their experience, data in Philadelphia, and the historical example provided.

### *Hook*

We will have a brief discussion for steps that can be taken to address poverty, from a student's perspective. Likely, students will begin by suggesting individual solutions, but I will then encourage them to think about systemic level changes that could be made.

### *Mini-Lesson*

Through the mini-lesson, we will explore examples of each of the 4 different strategies explored in this unit, defining them and connecting them to the examples. The lesson will begin with a definition of each strategy. After reviewing definitions, students will spend time reading or listening to examples of each, noting benefits, challenges, and victories of each example of how the strategy was applied. From there, students will review their notes to consider which strategy best applies to the context of the person they interviewed in the previous lesson. This will lead students into writing their letter, which will explain the strategy they chose and connect the example and strategy to their interviewee's lived experience.

08: Composing Final Piece (Deliver)

### *Guiding Questions*

How can we share our stories and solutions publicly?

### *Materials*

- Student writing:
  - Interview Audio Transcription, Reflection, and Photo (05)
  - Contextualization of Interview (06)
  - Letter to Interviewee (07)
- Computers
- Peer Revision Form
- Class Website (on Google Sites, Weebly, or other Platform)
- Broke in Philly website
- SmartBoard or Projector

### *Standards*

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.2.A
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.2.B
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.2.C
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.2.D
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.2.E
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.2.F
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.7
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.9

### *Objective*

Students will publicly showcase their work, highlighting an experience of struggle in Philadelphia and a potential solution.

### *Activity/Task*

In this assignment, students will create and revise their own pages of a class website highlighting poverty and the struggle in Philadelphia. They will create the page by combining the pieces they have written in the previous 3 assignments. Once they put together all of their pieces in a document with section headings, they will go through a peer revision process and edit their work so that it is ready for “publication”. As student pages are ready, they will be updated on the shared website, with the student’s picture being used as a link to their individual page. As their pieces are revised, students will be divided into groups: web design (laying out the website and uploading student work), executive editors (putting together a description of the project and an “About Us” page), copy editors (revising student work for clarity, readability, and conventions). Teachers can also add additional roles, as they see fit. Once student work is posted, and a description is written, the class will go through a process of brainstorming ideas for a title for the site. After coming up with a list in groups, then sharing them with the class, the whole class will vote on the name for the website, and that will be used as its title.

### *Hook*

Teacher will show students the website template that will be used for showcasing student work, and let them know that we will be working for the next few days on putting it together - and will come to an agreement on a title once finished.

### *Mini-Lesson*

Through the mini-lesson, we will explore examples of each of the 3 different strategies explored in this unit, defining them and connecting them to the examples. Then, students will consider which potential solution would fit best with their person’s experience.

### **Resources**

#### Bibliography for Teachers

Desmond, Matthew. *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City*. Penguin Books, 2017.

In this book, Matthew Desmond follows the stories of eight families from Milwaukee to help us understand deep poverty in America, and consider the various parties involved. This book paints a complex and harrowing portrait. For this unit, I will

look primarily at the final chapter, which focuses on solutions to poverty through the lens of housing and eviction.

Desmond, Matthew. "The \$15 Minimum Wage Doesn't Just Improve Lives. It Saves Them." *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 22 Feb. 2019, [www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/02/21/magazine/minimum-wage-saving-lives.html](http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/02/21/magazine/minimum-wage-saving-lives.html).

In this article, Matthew Desmond frames poverty as a health issue, incorporating statistics and experiences of individuals. This can be a great resource for a unit framed more around the minimum wage, but I decided on a different Desmond article (see below) based on the framing of my unit.

Dray, Philip. *There Is Power in a Union: the Epic Story of Labor in America*. Anchor Books, 2011.

In the Introduction to this book, Dray quotes labor lawyer Thomas Geoghegan, who said, "A union movement in America will always be a scandal. The subversive thing about labor is not the strike, but the idea of solidarity" (8). This text is a comprehensive history of the labor movement in America, which focuses on key tensions within the movement.

Dubofsky, Melvyn, and Joseph Anthony. McCartin. *Labor in America: a History*. John Wiley & Sons, 2017.

I will be picking up this book from the library this week, so I cannot yet comment on what I hope to learn from this text.

"Issues of Poverty." Teaching Tolerance, 2011, [www.tolerance.org/classroom-resources/tolerance-lessons/issues-of-poverty](http://www.tolerance.org/classroom-resources/tolerance-lessons/issues-of-poverty).

This is a series of four lessons designed to help students better understand poverty. In this unit planning, I drew mostly on the earlier lessons in the unit, as the later lessons go in a different direction than my unit. I also updated the data and strategies to focus more specifically on Philadelphia and incorporate more current data.

Leidner, Robin. *Fast Food, Fast Talk: Service Work and the Routinization of Everyday Life*. Univ. of California Press, 2006.

In this book, the "Over the Counter" chapter is of particular interest. Leidner writes that at McDonald's "the routines sharply limit the workers' autonomy without giving them much leverage over customers" (45). I will use this text, and particularly this chapter, to understand how labor is managed (controlled) at McDonald's, and to what ends. I will use this for my own historical background, and may incorporate it in classroom as student readings.

Newman, Katherine S. *No Shame in My Game: the Working Poor in the Inner City*. Vintage, 2000.

While I have some understanding of how my students view their own work from observation and discussion, the main purpose of this text is to help me frame the unit with a clearer understanding of the lives of the working poor in American cities. Though this book is twenty years old, its descriptions of work and life ring true today. In many ways, the conditions described here are exacerbated in today's America. As I plan this unit, a core consideration of mine is the shame around fast food, both in terms of consumption and work. This text will help me frame the unit in a way that leans in to this shame, but does not exacerbate it.

Schlosser, Eric. *Fast Food Nation: the Dark Side of the All-American Meal*. Mariner Books/Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012.

While this unit will draw more broadly on historical context and the development of McDonald's in American History, I will primarily focus on Chapter 3, "Behind the Counter". This chapter provides excellent and detailed context of work at McDonald's, and may be excerpted for students to use in the classroom. As the unit develops, I may also get into other aspects of labor connected to McDonald's, such as work in the meatpacking industry. For this, I would reference Chapter 7, "Cogs in the Great Machine" and Chapter 8, "The Most Dangerous Job".

#### Student Reading List

These are resources that are used during the above lessons - either as full readings or as student reference materials. I intend to have my students access most of this online, but most resources can also be printed, if necessary.

"Broke in Philly – Collaborative Reporting on Economic Justice." *Broke in Philly*, [brokeinphilly.org/](http://brokeinphilly.org/).

This website is a collaboration between Philadelphia news outlets to rethink and deepen their coverage of issues of poverty and economic justice. This site will be used as an example for students when creating their own sights, and can be drawn on as a resource throughout the unit. I also reached out to this site to see if they could help publish student work to a broader audience.

Desmond, Matthew. "Americans Want to Believe Jobs Are the Solution to Poverty. They're Not." *The New York Times*, *The New York Times*, 11 Sept. 2018, [www.nytimes.com/2018/09/11/magazine/americans-jobs-poverty-homeless.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/11/magazine/americans-jobs-poverty-homeless.html).

This article can be used to get students to question their preconceived notions about wealth and poverty, and to get past the idea that poverty is about "individual

failing”. It also does a great job of combining individual stories with contextual data and background information, and can be used as a model for students’ own informational writing.

“Four Tips for an Effective Interview: A StoryCorps Education Tool.” *YouTube*, StoryCorps, 22 July 2017, [youtu.be/G70rR2vG5wY](https://youtu.be/G70rR2vG5wY).

These tips can be used to introduce students to interviewing, and can get them to start thinking about interviewing as less about asking a series of questions and more about having an engaging conversation with the interviewee. After reviewing tips, students will complete a practice interview.

“Poverty Guidelines.” *ASPE*, US Department of Health and Human Services, 20 Mar. 2019, [aspe.hhs.gov/poverty-guidelines](https://www.aspe.hhs.gov/poverty-guidelines).

This website will be used to access the most up-to-date poverty guidelines for the United States. This will be used early in the unit to get students to consider how the poverty guidelines compare to the actual cost of living in Philadelphia.

Ruth, Dani. “My EXPERIENCE Working at MCDONALDS.” *YouTube*, 6 June 2016, <https://youtu.be/2tBQqctouNU>.

Many of my students spend a lot of time watching YouTube videos, including tutorials, streams, and commentary. Through this TIP course, I was exposed to the wide array of “Working at McDonald’s” videos on YouTube. To engage students in the work of this unit, I plan to use this commentary by Dani Ruth. It stood out to me because, in addition to being entertaining and relatable, she expresses a certain class consciousness in her analysis of the relationship between employees and managers, and employees and customers. Through an engaging and familiar form of video, I would hope to get students considering how hierarchies function in the work at McDonald’s and other fast food establishments.

“McDonald’s.” Urban Dictionary. <https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=McDonald%27s>, Accessed 25 March 2019.

In our TIP seminar, we were also asked to look at the Urban Dictionary results for “McDonald’s”. When I look, I was struck by the extent to which the “definitions” emphasized both blame (of customers and employees) and also shame (especially fat shaming). I will consider using this as a “hook” to have students consider some of the associations we have with McDonald’s, and the ways that those associations are connected to blame and shame.

Musynske, Gavin. "Coalition of Immokalee Workers Campaign against Taco Bell (Boycott the Bell), 2001-2005." Global Nonviolent Action Database, 30 Nov. 2011, [nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/content/coalition-immokalee-workers-campaign-against-taco-bell-boycott-bell-2001-2005](http://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/content/coalition-immokalee-workers-campaign-against-taco-bell-boycott-bell-2001-2005).

This reading presents the most comprehensive history I have found of the Taco Bell boycott organized by the Coalition of Immokalee Workers. This will be used to build student background in understanding this strategy to combat poverty by pushing for increased wages across many aspects of one large corporation. This is a strategy that is most relatable to other large fast food chains, like McDonalds, which are often difficult to unionize because of their corporate structure.

"Philadelphia's Poor: Experiences From Below the Poverty Line." *The Pew Charitable Trusts*, 26 Sept. 2018, [www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/reports/2018/09/26/philadelphias-poor-experiences-from-below-the-poverty-line](http://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/reports/2018/09/26/philadelphias-poor-experiences-from-below-the-poverty-line).

This study, which continues to be updated with additional data, will be used to help students understand the context of poverty in Philadelphia. It will be used for students to contextualize the experiences of their interviewee, understanding that their experiences are connected to the experiences of others from across our city.

Tinoco, Matt. "Rent Strikes Make a Comeback in Tight Housing Markets." *Marketplace*, 16 May 2019, [www.marketplace.org/2018/10/01/rent-strikes-make-comeback-tight-housing-markets/](http://www.marketplace.org/2018/10/01/rent-strikes-make-comeback-tight-housing-markets/).

While this piece connects to historical examples of rent strikes, it mainly focuses on a contemporary example in Los Angeles. This will be used to get students to consider strategies for countering poverty which involve collective action, but take place outside of the workplace.

#### Materials for Classroom

- Smartboard, projector, or television
- Student computers
- Chart paper
- Student phones or voice recorders (for interviews)
- Headphones (for interview transcription)
- Class website (either specifically for this project, or a page of an existing website)
  - For School Districts on Google, Google Sites is easy to use through your school account.

- If you don't have easy access to Google Sites, or are looking for something more aesthetically pleasing, Weebly provides excellent websites for free.

## Appendix

### Content Standards

- Informational Reading
  - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.1 - Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.
  - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.2 - Determine two or more central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to provide a complex analysis; provide an objective summary of the text.
  - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.7 - Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem.
- Informational Writing
  - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.2 - Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.
  - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.2.A - Introduce a topic; organize complex ideas, concepts, and information so that each new element builds on that which precedes it to create a unified whole; include formatting (e.g., headings), graphics (e.g., figures, tables), and multimedia when useful to aiding comprehension.
  - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.2.B - Develop the topic thoroughly by selecting the most significant and relevant facts, extended definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples appropriate to the audience's knowledge of the topic.
  - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.2.C - Use appropriate and varied transitions and syntax to link the major sections of the text, create cohesion, and clarify the relationships among complex ideas and concepts.
  - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.2.D - Use precise language, domain-specific vocabulary, and techniques such as metaphor, simile, and analogy to manage the complexity of the topic.

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.2.E - Establish and maintain a formal style and objective tone while attending to the norms and conventions of the discipline in which they are writing.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.2.F - Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the information or explanation presented (e.g., articulating implications or the significance of the topic).
- Research
  - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.7 - Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.
  - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.9 - Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.