A PLACE AT THE TABLE

A FILM BY
KRISTI JACOBSON & LORI SILVERBUSH

EDUCATOR GUIDE
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HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Whether you’re an educator, administrator, parent, student, or just someone who wants to learn more about media literacy, you can use this guide as a way to discuss the themes in the film. Lessons are aligned with time-coded video modules, and ‘Resources for Students and Teachers’ offers further reading, further watching, and a list of local and national arts organizations. Above all, we understand that educators are multifaceted artists in their own right, so we encourage you to utilize your own artistic experiences to spark dialogue.

A PDF of this and other creative, incisive Tribeca Film Institute® Educator Guides can be found at TRIBECAFILMINSTITUTE.ORG
Fifty million people in the US—including one in four children—don’t always know where their next meal is coming from. In the film, directors Kristi Jacobson and Lori Silverbush examine the issue of hunger in America through the lens of three people struggling with food insecurity: Barbie, a single Philadelphia mother who grew up in poverty and is trying to provide a better life for her two kids; Rosie, a Colorado fifth-grader who often has to depend on friends and neighbors to feed her; and Tremonica, a Mississippi second-grader whose asthma and health issues are exacerbated by the largely empty calories her hardworking mother can afford.

ABOUT THE FILM

KRISTI JACOBSON – DIRECTOR / PRODUCER
Kristi Jacobson has been producing and directing non-fiction films for the past decade. For television Jacobson has tackled a wide range of subjects including violence against women, HIV and AIDS, and the extreme sport of BASE jumping. She has produced and directed shows for HBO, PBS, ESPN, ABC, A&E, CBS, Lifetime, Sundance Channel and Channel Four (UK). Jacobson also directs commercials and short films for a variety of clients in the corporate and non-profit worlds. She is a member of the Directors Guild of America, NY Women in Film and Television and was a 2009 Sundance Institute Creative Producing Fellow. She graduated with honors from Duke University, where she studied sociology.

LORI SILVERBUSH – DIRECTOR / PRODUCER
The New York Times called writer-director Lori Silverbush’s first feature film, On the Outs, “shockingly fresh” in their July 2005 review. Silverbush received her Master’s Degree from New York University’s Tisch School of the Arts and was chosen in 2000 to participate in the American Film Institute’s Directing Workshop for Women. Silverbush is a member of the Director’s Guild of America, the Writer’s Guild of America, East, and the Independent Feature Project. She graduated from Cornell University, with a B.S. in Communications. She works as a screenwriter in New York City.

ABOUT THE CURRICULUM WRITER
Sarah Dahnke is a multimedia artist and arts educator. She has worked as a teaching artist in public schools throughout New York and Chicago, writing original curricula that weave arts into social studies within the classroom. Using the moving image, she has created video dances for traditional screens, installations and web. She is the former artist residency manager at chaNorth, where she managed a partnership with McEnroe Organic Farm that brought artists to the farm to work, harvest and connect to the land. Sarah has a master’s degree from NYU’s Interactive Telecommunications Program and is a student at Just Food’s Farm School NYC.
In *A Place at the Table*, we are introduced to three Americans: Barbie, a Philadelphia single mom struggling to make ends meet for her two children. She swore that she would never feed her own kids canned spaghetti three times a day like she had growing up, but sometimes it is the best she can do. Colorado fifth grader Rosie, who often has to depend on friends and neighbors to feed her, and has trouble concentrating in school because she’s hungry. Tremonica, a Mississippi second grader whose asthma and health issues are exacerbated by the largely empty calories in the foods her hard-working mother can afford. Through each of these stories, filmmakers Jacobson and Silverbush examine the key factors contributing to the hunger crisis in America, illustrating how our nation’s food distribution system, social support programs and even well-meaning charitable organizations, allow the cycle to continue. Barbie's story shows the inadequacy of our current governmental assistance plans such as SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) and school meal programs. *A Place at the Table* shows us how hunger poses serious economic, social and cultural implications for our nation. Ultimately, the film asks us to examine our priorities as a society.

**GLOSSARY**

**FOOD INSECURITY** - Not knowing where your next meal will come from.

**FOOD SECURITY** - Access by all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life.

**FOOD ASSISTANCE** - Government-sponsored programs that provide monetary allotments for food.  
**SNAP** - Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, the government-sponsored program formerly known as food stamps.

**MINIMUM WAGE** - Refers to the lowest hourly, daily, or monthly wage that an employer may legally pay workers.

**SOUP KITCHEN AND FOOD PANTRY** - A place providing free emergency food services and hot meals to those in need.

**DISCUSSION PROMPTS**

**FOOD INSECURITY**

The U.S. has the highest wage inequality of any industrialized nation. People can work full time at a minimum wage job and still not earn enough to cover the basic costs of living. Families in this situation often have to choose between paying for food and other basic necessities. According to the film, one in six Americans says they don’t always have enough to eat. Were you aware that hunger affects so many people in the US? Do you know someone who has ever struggled to put food on the table? If so, where did you turn for help?

**FOOD INSECURITY AND HEALTH**

Obesity is widespread in the United States with studies showing that certain racial groups are more affected by obesity than others. The rate of obesity and diabetes may be higher in certain communities because access to affordable and nutritious food is difficult. This is especially true for those living in low-income communities of color and rural areas in food deserts. In your opinion, what is the relationship between race, class and obesity? What are some possible solutions to slowing down diet-related illnesses?

**FOOD DESERTS**

Residents of food deserts may rely more on convenience stores and fast food restaurants since access to grocery stores is limited. These kinds of stores and restaurants don’t typically sell the variety of foods needed for a healthy diet such as fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, fresh dairy and lean meat products. If they do sell them, these items often cost more than at grocery stores. This puts those who live in food deserts at a financial and nutritional disadvantage. How far do you personally have to travel to reach a grocery store? In your opinion, how would proximity to a grocery store impact peoples’ eating choices and habits?
In the decades that followed the Great Depression, soup kitchens and food pantries addressed the immediate food needs of those who had fallen upon unexpected hardship. In the 1980s, an economic recession and sweeping cuts in both federal and state spending pushed millions of Americans into poverty. The number of soup kitchens and food pantries skyrocketed, and many providers found that instead of helping people pull through emergency situations, they were replacing government-sponsored programs for those living in poverty. The United States currently puts $20 billion into supporting food production. How would you spend $20 billion to reimagine food systems in the U.S.? What steps can a community take to better meet the needs of undernourished children? Why do you think hunger is now such a large problem after being almost completely eradicated in the 1970s? Do you think ending hunger is possible today?

**VIDEO MODULES**

1. "IF CHIPS ARE CHEAPER THAN APPLES, I BUY CHIPS"
   (00:10:43-00:14:47)

2. "TWO BUSES, ONE HOUR IN EACH DIRECTION"
   (00:20:47-00:24:01)

3. "WITNESSES TO HUNGER"
   (00:36:12-00:40:18)

4. "LET'S FEED PEOPLE THROUGH CHARITY"
   (00:48:05-00:51:13)
PART A:

Time: 30 minutes
Tools: White board or chart paper and markers (you may choose to map your classes’ responses during the class discussion).

50 million people in the United States struggle with food insecurity. Food assistance in this country is a highly politicized topic with many misconceptions. Many who need assistance feel ashamed of the way they will be perceived due to the stigma associated with being poor, needing to rely on food stamps or soup kitchens, and being on welfare.

Below are a list of facts and myths. Have the class stand, and designate one side of the room as “fact” and the other side as “myth.” As you read from the list below at random, don’t tell the class which items are facts or myths. Instruct the students to go to the side of the room that corresponds with their opinion of each sentence. Pause for discussion after each item on the list, allowing for each side to state their reasoning.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FACTS</th>
<th>MYTHS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One in six people in the United States is struggling with food insecurity.</td>
<td>People who receive food assistance should just get a job.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One out of every two kids in the United States will be on food assistance at some point in their lives.</td>
<td>Most people who receive food assistance abuse the system.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>85% of families struggling with food insecurity have at least one working adult.</td>
<td>Government-based food assistance causes dependency on the system.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One in three children born in the year 2000 will develop Type 2 diabetes.</td>
<td>People who receive food assistance spend most of their money on junk food.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SNAP fraud is currently at 1%</td>
<td>Hunger exists because there is not enough food.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The average SNAP benefit is $1.40 per meal per day.</td>
<td>Food assistance lets lazy people live off of the government.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The average amount of time a new SNAP recipient receives assistance is 8 to 10 months.</td>
<td>If you are overweight, you cannot be food insecure.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

DISCUSSION

1. Did you know how many people struggled with food insecurity or required food assistance in the United States?

2. Why do you think stigmas exist about people who need government assistance?

3. How could we work to change the misconceptions associated with food assistance?
PART B:

Time: 45 minutes
Tools: White board or chart paper, markers, video module 3: “Witnesses to Hunger” (00:36:12-00:40:18).

What do hungry people look like? As a class, brainstorm a series of adjectives to describe the image that comes to mind when you think of a “hungry” person.

DISCUSSION

1. Do you imagine them to be extremely thin?
2. Are they children or adults? What country do they live in?
3. Do they appear to be of a certain ethnicity?

Divide into groups, and have each group use chart paper and markers to sketch a portrait of the typical hungry person, as described by the adjectives on the board. You may choose to provide magazine clippings for collage. Each portrait should be a collaborative effort, with each member adding aspects. Each group will share their portrait.

DISCUSSION

1. Why do we think hungry people to look a certain way?
2. Is it possible to look differently and still be malnourished?
3. Can you be overweight and still be hungry?
4. What are some factors that might cause hunger in the United States?

Taking it further:

What is Hunger?

Using this question as a prompt and your new portrait as inspiration, write a poem that describes how hunger feels, looks or tastes.
PRE-SCREENING ACTIVITY 2
LESSON 2: CONTRADICTIONS AND COMMUNITY

PART A:

Part A:
Time: 60 minutes
Tools: White board or chart paper, markers.

The United States is the richest country in the world, yet there are 49 million Americans living without enough to eat. We have the highest obesity rate in the world, yet there are 17 million hungry children in this country.

On a board or chart paper, draw 3 bubbles labeled: Hunger, Poverty, Obesity/Disease. Have students come to the board and attach written answers to the appropriate bubbles, based on the following prompts:

DISCUSSION

1. What are some reasons the U.S. has so many people who suffer from hunger?
2. What causes poverty in the United States?
3. Why do you think the obesity rate in this country is so high?

Draw lines to connect common themes and complete your class map of food insecurity.

Further discussion question:

What options do people have if they don’t make enough money to feed their families?

PART B:

Time: 30 minutes
Tools: White board or chart paper, markers, video module four: “Let’s Feed People Through Charity” (00:48:05-00:51:13).

Forty million Americans rely on charitable food for basic needs. Their food comes from community-based organizations such as food banks, community centers or churches. Yet, most of the food available is considered emergency food—processed with tons of preservatives and sodium. On the board or chart paper, first create a class-generated list: What defines a community?

Then, using your definition of community, answer the following:

1. What are a community’s responsibilities, if any, to keeping its residents healthy?
2. Are food banks a solution to hunger? Why or why not?
3. Despite the fact that there are 40,000 food banks in the United States, there is still widespread hunger and food insecurity. Why is this?
4. What changes would you suggest in your community to make sure its residents receive consistent access to healthy food?
PART A:

Time: 45 minutes  
Tools: *Why Hunger?* worksheet, pens, video module 2: “Two Buses, One Hour in Each Direction”  
Paper, pencils, white board and markers, calculator, video module 1: “If Chips are Cheaper Than Apples, I Buy Chips” (00:10:43-00:14:47).

The average SNAP benefit is $1.40 per meal per day, which comes out to approximately $29.40/week and $126/month.

1. As a class, brainstorm a list of foods you believe to be cheap and nutritious that could be included on a weekly shopping list.
2. Divide students into small groups. Each group should create a weekly shopping list, utilizing the brainstormed ideas and adding their own.
3. For each item on the list, instruct the students to assign an estimated price for each food, making sure the total for all items does not exceed $29.40.
4. Have each group present their shopping list and discuss why these particular items were chosen.

**Going further:**

Visit a grocery store in your community and check the prices of the items on your list vs. your estimated prices. Is it actually possible to purchase all of the foods on your shopping list within the SNAP budget?

PART B:

Time: 45 minutes  
Tools: *Why Hunger?* worksheet, pens, video module 2: “Two Buses, One Hour in Each Direction” (00:20:47-00:24:01).

In the film, Tremonica’s mother Rhee says she has to drive 45 minutes from her small town in Mississippi to reach a fully stocked grocery store. But once she gets there, she usually buys whatever is cheapest. If potato chips are cheaper than fruit, she buys chips.

- What are the direct health effects on Tremonica as a result of this diet?  
- Does Rhee have many choices when it comes to purchasing healthy food for her family? Why or why not?  
- What are some reasons that processed foods with empty calories are cheaper than fresh produce?

1. Divide into groups and distribute the Why Hunger? worksheet.
2. Have each group discuss and fill out the chart, determining what food purchasing options are nearest to the school community.
3. Reassemble as a class and discuss your findings. What conclusions can you draw about the impact of living in a food desert?
PART A:

Time: 1 hour
Tools: Paper, pens or pencils, a timer (if you choose to put a time limit on team responses).

In the film, we hear discussion of food being a right, not a need. As a class, first discuss the difference between a need and a right. What makes something so essential that it becomes a right? The definition of a right is “legal, social, or ethical principles of freedom or entitlement; rules about what is allowed of people or owed to people, according to some legal system, social convention, or ethical theory.” Based on this definition, is food a right?

Divide the class into two teams and assign the teams one of the below arguments. Give each group time to develop and build support for their argument, taking notes as a group. Once the teams are ready, each should make a case for their argument.

ARGUMENT 1
If you want good food, you need to get a better job and pay for it. If you ask for a government handout, you should accept the consequences. It’s not the government’s job to feed you. Food is a privilege, and you’re lucky the government will give you any help to buy some.

ARGUMENT 2
The government’s role should be to take care of its citizens. If they are hungry, they deserve access to healthy, fresh food just like everyone else. Food is a right, and we’re all entitled to food that will nourish our bodies, not harm them.

DEBRIEF
Have students discuss the following questions as a class:

- What was it like supporting the argument you were assigned? If you could choose, which argument would you support and why?
- What is your opinion of each argument? What do you think about the statement each makes?

DISCUSSION
The film shows us two rural families in Colorado and Mississippi and one urban family in north Philadelphia who all live in food deserts without immediate access to a grocery store. In the U.S., 23.5 million people live in low-income neighborhoods located more than 1 mile from a supermarket. African-Americans are half as likely to have access to chain supermarkets, and Hispanics are a third less likely to have access to chain supermarkets. Many low-income neighborhoods have smaller grocery stores that carry higher priced, less varied food products than neighborhoods with higher incomes and/or predominantly white populations.

Ask the class to vote: strongly agree/agree/disagree/strongly disagree

- It’s easy to buy and eat healthy food
- Limited access to a grocery store is linked to obesity
- Supermarkets should be forced to build in urban and rural areas of all income levels
Distribute or project the New York Times chart “American Shame”:
www.nytimes.com/imagepages/2011/02/19/opinion/19blowcht.html

Discuss as a class:
- What kinds of imbalances do you see in this chart when comparing the United States to other countries?
- Do you think we need changes in the government to change any of these problems?
- What government-based repairs would you suggest?

PART B:

Designing a PSA
Tools: Paper, pencils, drawing utensils

Take all of the information you’ve learned about food insecurity and food policies in the United States and design a Public Service Announcement around your message.

1. Develop your argument. Potential topics include:
   - Eliminating shame around needing food assistance
   - Awareness about how many people in the United States suffer from food insecurity
   - Lobbying for food policy changes in the government, including an increased SNAP budget or healthier school lunches

2. Design your PSA:
   - Create a storyboard of shots or write a script. Is your story emotional? Do you make your point by telling one person’s story? Do you utilize lots of facts and statistics? How do you illustrate them, so your audience can understand them?

3. Distribution plan:
   - Once you’ve created your PSA concept, decide how you could get this to the masses. Would you play it on TV? If so, when and what channels or during what shows? Would you distribute it on the Internet? Where and how will you make sure people know about it?

Taking it further
If you have access to cameras, consider having students film their PSAs. Students may also choose to do audio recordings and create an audio PSA or podcast. Students may follow through with their distribution plan by getting their message out to the school community and beyond. There are several peer examples that can be found on Schootube.com by searching the word “hunger.”
RESOURCES FOR STUDENTS & TEACHERS

FURTHER READING

**Stuffed and Starved**  By Raj Patel
In this book, Patel, whose commentary is featured prominently in A Place at the Table, explains the steps to regain control of the global food economy, stop the exploitation of farmers and consumers, and rebalance global sustenance.

**Bet the Farm**  By Frederick Kaufman
In 2008, farmers grew enough to feed twice the world’s population, yet more people starved than ever before—and most of them were farmers. Kaufman sets out to discover the connection between the global food system and why the food on our tables is getting less healthy and less delicious even as the world’s biggest food companies and food scientists say things are better than ever.

**Ending Hunger in Our Lifetime**  By C. Ford Runge
Strikingly illustrated with photographs by the renowned Brazilian photographer, Sebastião Salgado; this book illustrates systemic problems with global food production and research from experts in the field. It’s a useful resource for those wanting a better understanding of poverty and hunger and how to end it.

**The Good Food Revolution**  By Will Allen
Strikingly illustrated with photographs by the renowned Brazilian photographer, Sebastião Salgado; this book illustrates systemic problems with global food production and research from experts in the field. It’s a useful resource for those wanting a better understanding of poverty and hunger and how to end it.

**Stuffed and Starved**  By Raj Patel
In this book, Patel, whose commentary is featured prominently in A Place at the Table, explains the steps to regain control of the global food economy, stop the exploitation of farmers and consumers, and rebalance global sustenance.

**The Gleaners and I (2001)**
This documentary is both a diary and a kind of extended essay on poverty, thrift and the curious place of scavenging in French history and culture. Agnes Varda spent eight months traveling through France recording the lives of people who gather what others have thrown away or left behind.

**We Feed the World (2005)**
From struggling fishermen and long-distance truckers, to agronomists and multi-national corporate executives, We Feed the World presents a sobering portrait of the people who define the contemporary food industry, where the constant pursuit of profit takes precedence over the health of the workers, the hungry, and the environment.

**Grown in Detroit (2010)**
A documentary focusing on the efforts of a Detroit high school, where the majority of students are young mothers, to teach self-reliance and nutrition through urban gardening. As part of the curriculum, the girls are taught agricultural skills on the school’s own farm and begin to turn a profit by selling the fruits of their labor.

**Growing Change**
Follows the filmmaker’s journey to understand why current food systems leave hundreds of millions of people in hunger and shows what’s possible when communities take control of food.

**The Gleaners and I**
[www.gleaners.com](http://www.gleaners.com)
In this book, Patel, whose commentary is featured prominently in A Place at the Table, explains the steps to regain control of the global food economy, stop the exploitation of farmers and consumers, and rebalance global sustenance.

**GET INVOLVED**

**Witnesses to Hunger**
[www.centerforhungerfreecommunities.org](http://www.centerforhungerfreecommunities.org)
Started in Philadelphia in 208, Witnesses to Hunger is a research and advocacy project partnering with real experts on hunger-mothers and caregivers of young children who have experienced hunger and poverty. Through their photographs and stories, Witnesses advocate for their own families and others, seeking to create lasting changes on a local, state, and national level.

**Why Hunger**
[www.whyhunger.org](http://www.whyhunger.org)
A leader in building the movement to end hunger and poverty by connecting people to nutritious, affordable food and by supporting grassroots solutions that inspire self-reliance and community empowerment.

**Just Food**
[www.justfood.org](http://www.justfood.org)
New York City-based organization that helps food producers and everyday eaters establish and experience healthy food systems—in every neighborhood.

**Food Research Action Center (FRAC)**
[www.frac.org](http://www.frac.org)
FRAC is the leading national nonprofit organization working to improve public policies and public-private partnerships to eradicate hunger and undernutrition in the United States. FRAC works with hundreds of national, state and local nonprofit organizations, public agencies, corporations and labor organizations to address hunger, food insecurity, and their root cause, poverty.
## WHY HUNGER?¹

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example Closest To My Home</th>
<th>GROCERY STORE/SUPERMARKET</th>
<th>CONVENIENCE STORE</th>
<th>FAST FOOD RESTAURANT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Approximate Distance From My Home</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are There Healthy Options Such As Fresh Fruit, Vegetables, Low-Fat Milk Products, Whole Wheat Products And Lean Meats?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rank From 1 To 10 (1 = Expensive And 10 = Least Expensive)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How Many Of These Are In A One-Mile Radius Of Your Home?</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ Concept borrowed from Teaching Tolerance, A Project of the Southern Poverty Law Center
POVERTY

- In 2011, 46.2 million people (15.0 percent) were in poverty.
- In 2011, 26.5 million (13.7 percent) of people ages 18-64 were in poverty.
- In 2011, 16.1 million (21.9 percent) children under the age of 18 were in poverty.
- In 2011, 3.6 million (8.7 percent) seniors 65 and older were in poverty.
- The overall poverty rate according to the Supplemental Poverty Measure is 16.1%, as compared with the official poverty rate of 15.1%.
- Under the Supplemental Poverty Measure, there are 49.7 million people living in poverty, 3.1 million more than are represented by the official poverty measure (46.6 million).
FOOD INSECURITY AND VERY LOW FOOD SECURITY

- In 2011, 50.1 million Americans lived in food insecure households, 33.5 million adults and 16.7 million children.
- In 2011, households that had higher rates of food insecurity than the national average included households with children (20.6 percent), especially households with children headed by single women (36.8 percent) or single men (24.9 percent), Black non-Hispanic households (25.1 percent) and Hispanic households (26.2 percent).
- In 2011, 4.8 million seniors (over age 60), or 8.4% of all seniors were food insecure.[v]
- Food insecurity exists in every county in America, ranging from a low of 2.4 percent in Slope County, ND to a high of 35.2 percent in Holmes County, MS.
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ABOUT TRIBECA YOUTH SCREENING SERIES®

Tribeca Youth Screening Series® is a media literacy program begun in 2006 by the Tribeca Film Institute®. The academic year is divided into two series, screened from September through June in partnership with national and neighborhood partners. These screenings are augmented by in-class sessions led by a Tribeca Teaching Artist, who works with a film-specific curriculum written and edited by a team formed through Tribeca Film Institute®. Schools are selected based on relationship, location, and need; in 2012 we will be working in eight schools in New York and New Jersey. Connect and download free curricula at TRIBECAFILMINSTITUTE.ORG

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The Tribeca Film Institute® (TFI) is a year-round nonprofit arts organization that empowers working filmmakers through grants, professional development and resources, while also helping New York City students discover independent film and filmmaking.