

LESSON 5: TWO KINDS OF HUNGER FAMINE AND CHRONIC HUNGER

In Part 1 of this lesson *Maria's Dream*, a short story, takes students inside the world of a twelve year old refugee as she struggles to recover physically and emotionally from the civil war and drought that forced her family to flee their homeland. In spite of her circumstances, Maria is determined to return to her land and begin rebuilding her family's health and future. Students discuss and write about what is necessary to prepare for and survive a natural disaster such as drought. They measure, prepare and sample food rations and a dehydration cure given to famine victims.

In Part 2 students read and discuss *Really Mister He's Nine*, a true story in which doctors investigating the extent of hunger in the United States discover that nine year-old Lee's growth has been stunted from a life of insufficient nutrients. Students explore the root causes of Lee's hunger and solve math problems that expose the relatively inexpensive costs of preventing serious illnesses caused by chronic hunger.

PART 1: FAMINE

The world has always been slow to notice hunger. We usually pay attention only after thousands of people, mostly children and elderly, have perished from starvation and disease. Famine, the most widely recognized kind of hunger, is responsible for only 10% of the estimated 20 million hunger deaths every year. The other 90% of deaths not portrayed by the media are the result of chronic hunger --- the long-term consumption of too few nutrients.

FAMINE IS AN EMERGENCY. IT MEANS PEOPLE ARE NEAR DEATH.

Famine is a widespread lack of access to food caused when political forces and/or environmental forces disrupt the availability of food in a community that does not have the institutional capacity to compensate for the crisis. Sometimes this food shortage affects a specific ethnic, religious or economic group of people. Food is usually available in other parts of the country, but only to those who can pay for it.

Political Causes of Famine

Famine may result from food embargoes, civil unrest or war. War is the major cause of famine today. It destroys food and water systems, roads, homes and hospitals. It complicates emergency food delivery. Sometimes delivery is purposely blocked and the lack of food is used as a weapon of war.

War forces people to flee their homes and land in search of food and safety. The **refugees** must leave quickly, taking with them only what they can carry and travel long distances usually on foot. **Relief agencies** need to act swiftly to set up make-shift towns called **refugee camps** at a safe distance,

usually in a neighboring country. Aid workers must find ways of overcoming tremendous obstacles such as a lack of roads, military blockades, violence and expensive planes that can carry limited amounts of supplies. When so many exhausted, hungry and sick people are forced to gather suddenly in one small area, there is rarely enough food, medicine, clean water and shelter for everyone. Food is **rationalized** and consists of items that are easily transportable such as flour, rice, cornmeal, beans and water. Seldom do famine victims get meat, fruits or vegetables.

Initially there is no sewage system in place and limited water sources become contaminated, spreading diseases such as typhoid and polio. People, especially children, suffer severe dehydration caused by diarrhea. Refugees cannot survive long on rations. Relief agencies work together to provide food deliveries from around the world, drill wells, build shelters and begin dispensing tools and seeds for planting.

The unexpected convergence of thousands of needy people into a country already struggling with hunger has devastating effects, economical and environmental, on that country as well. In 1994 1.5 million people escaped Rwanda's civil war and streamed into nearby Zaire and Tanzania at a rate of 500 refugees per minute. Sometimes famine is complicated by a combination of war and natural disaster such as when civil war and drought in Somalia drove millions from their homes.

Environmental Causes of Famine

Earthquakes, floods, hurricanes and drought result in famine when countries lack the resources that would enable them to better prepare for and withstand nature's violence.

Severe soil erosion also leads to regional food shortages. In their desperation to satisfy a chronic hunger, people in poor countries cannot always concern themselves with the long-term consequences of their actions on their environment. In Africa, for example, soil is poor and weak from overuse. Crop yields are meager even in the best of seasons, leaving no food available for storage in case of emergencies. The land needs fertilizer or a rest between plantings to regain its life-giving nutrients, but many African farmers have large, hungry families and cannot afford fertilizer or the time the land needs to renew itself. With each season they are forced to plant in empty soil. This leads to soil erosion.

Rainfall in many parts of Africa is seasonal. Certain regions are prone to drought during which crops wither and livestock die if there is no water storage or irrigation system in place. The thin topsoil is blown away and sand and rock remain.

When there are too few plant roots to bind the soil, sudden heavy rains can cause violent flooding. Crops and soil both are washed away. Hungry people's hard labor is wiped out and they are left without the basic resources to grow or obtain food. To create new farmland farmers cut down forests, but eventually this land is degraded as well by overcultivation, wind and water erosion.

It is not an accident that the most devastating natural disasters have occurred in the poorest nations. People in these countries lack the materials and technology to prepare for, withstand and recover from the violent acts of nature. These resources include fertilizer for improving soil fertility, trees to bind the soil, dams to control flooding, irrigation systems, roads, storage facilities, sturdier homes, medical care and communications systems. The U.S. experiences natural disasters, but we do not suffer famines. Five years of drought in California resulted in no loss of life. Five years of drought in Ethiopia resulted in a famine that killed over 1 million people.

PROCEDURE:

1. Ask students to share news reports they have seen or read involving famine. Do they know what caused these famines?
2. Explain that they will be reading a story of famine based on true experiences. In *Maria's Dream* a family flees Mozambique for a refugee camp in Malawi. Locate these countries on the class map.
3. Read the story aloud or have students read it for homework. They might write, then discuss personal reactions to the story. Discussion questions, writing exercises and activities follow the story.

IMPORTANT: Encourage students in their discussions and writing to go beyond the traditional ways of helping famine victims --- giving food and medicine and supplies (although these are crucial) --- to a deeper exploration of the **root** causes of famine such as: lack of access to resources to help prepare for drought, lack of negotiating power and credit, and unequal relationships between and within countries (such as between farmers and landlords, armed rebels and peasants, well-fed people and malnourished people). Urge students to focus on how eliminating these inequalities will help people become self-reliant.

Before planning the fund-raiser activities in the **MAKE A DIFFERENCE!** section of this lesson encourage a discussion of **how** providing farm animals or planting trees goes beyond mere charity toward helping people become self-reliant. Be sure students understand the long-term consequences of such gifts.

MARIA'S DREAM

It was still dark when Maria awoke in the mud-pole hut in the refugee camp. She had been dreaming again of going home and, rolling over on her grass mat, she tried crawling back inside the lovely dream, but her work called to her. She stretched her long, thin arms. A life of too little food and too much work had left Maria small for her age, but her will remained unbreakable. She had taken over her father's chores while he was away at the border investigating rumors that it was safe for refugees to return to their homes in Mozambique. It had been nearly a year since the terrible war and drought had forced thousands of them to flee their homes for the safety of this makeshift camp.

Maria pulled herself off the ground and rolled up her mat. Today she would make the long walk to the refugee center for her family's food rations. The sides of the hut were open and Maria saw her mother preparing the last of the dried maize.

"Hurry up, girl," she told her. "You must be back to help with the garden before the sun is too intense." She handed Maria a small clay bowl, refusing her daughter's insistence that they share it.

"You will need the energy for the journey," her mother said.

Maria finished the cold gruel, then, placing the empty food sack around her narrow shoulders, she set out on the dark, dusty road. From the top of a hill she surveyed the gloomy camp. Hundreds of simple mud-pole huts had been constructed hastily to protect the refugees from the blistering sun. Here and there the desolation of the place was broken by the orange glow of a camp fire. This is not home, Maria reminded herself and walked on in silence.

Back in Mozambique before the drought, there had always been warm goat's milk for breakfast. She smiled now, remembering the smallest goat and how soft the white fur had been against her cheek. Maria thought back on the day the small animal had arrived, carried in the spindly arms of a hungry traveler seeking work. Maria's father had traded maize, beans and fruit from the baobab tree for the goat, knowing that one day it would provide milk for his children. Maria had watched the man's bony fingers tear greedily at the fruit as he told how he had rescued the kid after it had fallen into the Limpopo River down south.

"She's a good luck charm!" he had said, whistling his praise. "I saved her life and now she's saving mine!" From then on, Maria had called the goat Popo. She had tied a tiny bell around the goat's neck and had only to follow the tinkling sound to find the curious creature teasing the neighbor's scrawny cow or munching someone else's grain.

Those had been good days! Ever since she could walk Maria had helped her parents work the land - turning over the dark soil, planting seeds, pulling up stubborn weeds, watering the green shoots, then raking in the harvest. The magical seeds had always fascinated Maria. So tiny! Yet they carried inside them the mysterious secret for LIFE! Flowers, maize, pumpkins, even the large baobab tree began in the dark, miniature world of a seed.

Maria yearned desperately for her homeland. She imagined an invisible thread - one end wrapped around her heart - the other tied to the baobab tree that once shaded her yard. The further away she had gone the tighter the knot had grown. The land was in Maria's blood and she felt it. Hadn't it fed her, quenched her thirst, Taught her about creation? Hadn't she slept every night of her life with her ear to its heartbeat?

She had been strong then, too, racing her brother in the fields. Sometimes Joao would shove her into the shallow brook and she would pretend to drown, kicking, splashing and waving her arms wildly. He would simply laugh and push her under again.

Maria had gone to the village school for one year and had learned Portuguese more quickly than her brother. It was later decided that she should stay home to help care for her baby brother, Fabio, tend the goats and help till the land. It was essential that Joao remain in school because an education would be necessary to find a good job which would bring more money and food for the family. Sometimes Maria would wrap Fabio onto her back with a long, brightly colored cloth as she collected wild apples or firewood. In the evenings she would help prepare the family's meal over a small stone fire in the yard. Her mouth watered now, and she sat down on the road, closed her eyes and recalled the warm taste of pumpkin leaves, maize and tomatoes.

Maria looked around her at the brittle bodies of the other refugees on the road. Jutting bones, faces permanently marked with hunger and worry --- they saddened her deeply. She examined her own weakened arms and legs. No longer could she run, nor did she **want** to. The desire for play had long been drained from her. Now, she worked full days, after which there was only the desire for food and sleep. If Joao could see her now, she thought, and the heavy loads she carried, he would be proud. How often had he repeated their grandmother's advice to "Become like the grass, girl, so you bend in the wind, not break."

It had been a sad day before the drought when armed rebels had stormed Maria's village, rounding up all the young men to fight their war. Joao, twelve, had been among those taken. He was just a boy, sweet and strong, and Maria wondered now if he was alive and if he thought of her and missed their homeland as much as she did.

A few years before the drought the land had begun to weaken and could produce only a few crops. Maria and her mother would gather up most of the maize and the plumpest vegetables and take them to the market to sell. The money received was set aside for the rent on the land. On the way home they would collect throwaways on the roadside, even spoiled food for the family's meal. The way her father explained it the land was punishing them for all the blood that had been spilled on it since the war had begun up north over six years earlier. Other farmers said the land was tired and needed fertilizer or a rest between plantings, but there was no money or time for either. Somehow the villagers had always pulled through --- until the sky decided to punish them for making the land work so hard. At least, this was her father's explanation for the drought. When the crops were half-grown the sky refused to rain. Every night the neighbors gathered in Maria's yard and prayed, and every morning they searched the heavens for

signs of mercy. It seemed to Maria that the skies howled their bright blue laughter at her desperate people. How do you fight the sky? she had asked herself.

To supplement the rent money, her father dug up the baobab tree before it withered and sold it in the marketplace. Day by day it seemed the world grew thirstier. The angry sun choked the crops; their leaves crumpled and their feeble roots released their hold on the earth. Maria gathered them up --- some were boiled for the family's dinner, the rest were fed to the goats.

The brook dried up first, then the river six miles away. Lizards, fish and flamingoes lay gasping in the green mud. The air was so dry it hurt to breathe. Birds fell out of the sky. Several of the elderly perished from the heat. The school was closed down. The endless "fever" cracked open the earth and sucked out all the sweetness from the soil, the people's bodies and spirits. Now, sweetness was found only in distant dreams.

For awhile Maria had secretly shared half her daily meal with Fabio. He had been sick all the time then, crying and twisting in his sleep, and finally sitting limply against the wall of the hut. Maria had noticed when she sang to him that the light had disappeared from his eyes and they no longer followed her when she walked. Like many of the babies in the village, Fabio had lost his eyesight. Nothing could be done. The village doctor and his family, along with many other villagers, had fled at the first signs of drought. Maria kissed her brother's blank eyes.

Her own condition worsened. Her long, dark, braided hair grew thin and lifeless, her skin cracked like the earth's and her flesh melted away. The pink dress that she still wore today hung loosely on her frail body.

Maria's mother had measured out the remaining maize --- enough left for six more days. Even if the rains had come then --- it would have been too late. She shook out a small portion for the family meal and buried the rest in the yard where it would be safe from thieves. That week the family ate all the maize, then they ate the seeds that had been set aside for planting. This meant there would be no harvest again the following season. Popo was traded in the market for a bag of flour. His bones had poked up like horns. Maria cried secretly and hugged him one last time. She whispered her thanks for saving her family. She untied the little bell and placed it around her own neck. In the village square, her father had told her, he'd seen, unbelievably, well-fed people who had bought up most of the food and livestock at the start of the drought and were selling it now to hungry villagers at very high prices. The few families who remained, like Maria's, had traded everything of value they had owned for food. They had nothing left.

The sounds of war grew closer. Maria heard that food trucks sent from other countries had been forced to turn back. Some were attacked by rebels and food was stolen. Late one night a man in uniform came to collect the long over-due rent on the land. Maria's father had not known if the man was a government soldier or one of the rebels. She had heard her father offer the man the small sum from the sale of the baobab tree and her mother's white tablecloth, a gift on their wedding day.

"It is far short," said the man. "You cannot live on the land without full payment. That is the contract." Maria heard her father plead with the man to wait until after the drought broke, he could make up the rest of the rent with a good harvest. With the fighting so near where would his family go?

"You have no seeds," the man replied. "You are weak and have no sons to help you. How will you plant?"

In the full moonlight Maria could see that the man had been eating well. She covered her mouth tightly with her palm to keep from shouting her rage at him. "He must come from the sky," she thought. The cruel sky. How else to explain one so uncaring?

At the refugee center Maria waited in a long line. The crowd was told by a relief worker that rations would be cut today. Soldiers at the border had demanded several bags of food for themselves before allowing the trucks entry to the camp. Who can blame them? Maria thought. Their small country has been invaded by thousands of starving people. We have cut down most of their trees; we are drinking from their rivers and living off their land. How long before it all runs out? They too, must feed their families. She looked at the disappointed faces in line and marveled at what they had all survived.

Maria had never understood the rivalry between the government forces and the rebels. All she knew was that their violence had destroyed her village. Rebels had poisoned the village water source, crushed the market and clinic and set fire to several homes. That awful night when the sky had exploded in red flames and black smoke Maria's father had gathered his family together. Maria was to take only what she was wearing and her sleeping mat. Her mother's hands had trembled as they reached quickly for a blanket in which she wrapped the remaining grain from the sale of Popo, the family's birth certificates so they could identify themselves to the authorities at the border and a family photograph taken by a traveler in exchange for their hospitality.

The villagers could not use the main roads for escape out of fear of land mines or robbery. At night they hid in bushes avoiding strangers --- one could never tell who was carrying a weapon. When Popo's food ran out, they survived on a stew of boiled roots. The food was not appropriate for little Fabio who developed a bright rash. Maria could not believe so many people had once lived in her country. The road at the border was filled with them. Is there no one left in Mozambique? she had wondered. Small children with swollen bellies, tearful and lost, wandered through the crowds. It is a long way, Maria had thought, but it is especially long when you are three and your mother is dead. She and her mother held onto as many small hands as they could and tried to convince others on the road to do the same. Most were too weak, had too many children of their own and no more food or water to share.

Maria's legs grew stiff. She watched bodies collapse in the dust to die, far from home. When she stumbled and fell, her mother reached for her, pulled her on gently, and whispered, "Don't give up, your spirit is strong as the granite hills that surround our village." Maria had forced her feet forward.

Finally, at the edge of the camp she had fallen into her father's arms. Bodies were strewn for as far as she could see, some groaning,

some simply staring into space. Their bright red, pink and orange clothes had more life in them than the human eyes and limbs. Relief workers rushed to help the new arrivals, offering food, water and medicine. Maria and Fabio were given a special mixture to relieve their dehydrated bodies.

For weeks Maria and her people could only sit and wait for food. The rations were meager and on some days the trucks never came. There were fights over the smallest morsel of food then. "Fome! Fome!" (hunger) the people cried out. The trees, the rocks and the sky echoed their pleas.

The smell of sickness and human waste thickened the air. Some refugees, mad with thirst, drank from the cholera-infested stream that ran through the camp. Within days they had perished. Maria recalled now the saints she had observed among the crowd of starving bodies. An old man who could barely stand, had taken a few sips of his porridge, then had passed it on to others. Another, a young woman, had picked up an older woman who lay curled in the dirt. The young woman had placed her gently in her wheelbarrow, dampened her parched lips with her remaining drops of water, then wheeled her, stumbling, to the long line at the medical tent.

"Someday," Maria told herself. "I too shall have their strength of body and spirit. I will find a way to make my people well again."

Maria arrived back at the family's hut surprised to find her father there and although exhausted, his eyes flickered with excitement and his hands moved quickly as he told how families were indeed returning to rebuild their villages in Mozambique! A treaty had been signed with the rebels although gunfire continued in some areas. The drought had lifted.

"When our family is strong enough to make the journey, we too, shall return." he announced eagerly and placed his arms around Maria's mother.

"What about the damage from the war?" Maria asked, breathless. "Will we get our land back? No seeds have been planted. How will we eat?"

Caring people from other countries were sending food, seeds, tools, and materials for rebuilding, her father explained. He was hopeful that the soldiers would return their land. Pulling Maria close, he told of how schoolchildren faraway had sent two healthy goats to provide milk for families in one of the villages. "When the first baby goat is weaned, it is to be given to another family and so on until the entire village has shared in the good fortune."

Maria twirled around the poles of the hut, the little bell jingling and her head full of yellow maize, fat pumpkins, red tomatoes, papayas, soft, white baby goats and warm milk! Home! She longed for the hard work to begin.

"Oh, there will be more droughts," her father warned. "It is foolish to believe our land will not punish us for leaving it. We must work day and night to rebuild homes, roads, schools and clinics. The relief workers have explained that planting trees will give our land back its life-giving power. Their roots will keep dry soil from blowing away. Drilling wells and building storage huts will help the villagers stock up on food and water for emergencies. Until we and

our land are strong again, we must rely on the generosity of those caring people faraway."

"And the rebels?" Maria asked. Her father lowered his eyes.

"Words must replace weapons. How will we ever convince them?" Maria wondered about the caring people. "How is it **they** can help **us**?" she asked. "Aren't they burdened with worries of their own?"

Her father only said the people who sent help had more, **much** more, than they needed. They wished to share it with the people of Mozambique and help them regain their vitality. "The question is, **will** they?" he said, stroking her mother's gray head.

That night Maria felt her land call to her. She knew someday it, like her, could be healthy again. She thought of the people she'd never met who wanted to help and imagined the string that tied her to her land reaching across the seas and continents to the hearts of those caring people. Then, she dozed off to sleep, rubbing the small charm around her neck and dreaming of playful, white goats on the green savannah.

Before dawn, Maria awoke on the damp ground of the mudpole hut to begin the day's work.

Sources for this story include a personal interview with Miss Cassa at the Mozambique Embassy, Washington D.C.; *The State of the World's Refugees*, The United Nations, 1993; *A Complicated War: The Harrowing of Mozambique*, by William Finnegan, University of California Press, 1992; and *Nectar in a Sieve* by Kamala Markandaya, J. Day Co., 1954.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. List each factor you feel contributed in some way to the famine.
2. Was there food in Maria's country during the famine? Why couldn't hungry families get it?
3. What resources would Maria's family have needed in order to prepare for and withstand the drought? How could they have obtained these?
4. What did the land mean to Maria and her family? What was needed to improve its growing power? Why didn't the farmers have access to these resources?
5. Why was it necessary to set up a refugee camp in another country? What were the **immediate needs** of the refugees?
6. What are the **long-term needs** of refugees? Make a list of these.
7. How did Maria and her people survive so many losses? What do you think will happen to her and her family?
8. War is the major cause of flight and famine today. The images we see on television of starvation are most often the results of violence which forces people to flee their land. Make a list of the many ways war leads to famine.
9. How can we help families such as Maria's begin to regain their strength and become self-reliant?

WRITING EXERCISES

1. Choose one scene from the story and imagine your way into Maria's mind and body. Write an interior monologue from Maria's point of view.
2. Write an ending to this story. Do Maria and her family ever return home?
3. Many people believe that overpopulation and too little food cause famine. Write a letter to another class explaining why this is not true. Tell them what does cause famine.
4. Write an essay explaining why five years of drought in California resulted in no deaths, while five years of drought in Ethiopia killed a million people in 1989. Explain what is needed to prepare for drought, why people such as Maria don't have them and people in the U.S. do.
5. Write a poem about Maria. Use words or phrases from the story.

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES:

1. A daily ration in a refugee camp consists of:

500 grams of dried maize
 20 grams of oil
 75 grams of corn-soya milk
 25 grams of sugar

This ration is given to each refugee everyday he or she remains in the camp. It must last the entire day.

MATH: If there are 454 grams in 1 lb. and 28 grams in an ounce, how much food (in lbs. and ounces) was Maria given each day? (Using the rations listed above.)

2. Show students what the refugee rations might look like and invite them to taste them. Bring in a pound of cornmeal, an ounce of oil, 2-3/4 ounces of milk and an ounce of sugar. What would it be like to eat this amount of food everyday?
3. Make ORT - ORAL REHYDRATION THERAPY.
 Prolonged diarrhea is the biggest killer of children under five years of age. It causes children's bodies to lose precious bodily fluids. ORT is an easily prepared and inexpensive mixture that saves the lives of 2.5 million children each year. Programs have been set up in many countries to help teach mothers how to prevent diarrhea by using ORT.

TO MAKE ORT SIMPLY MIX: 2 tsp. sugar
 1/2 tsp. salt
 1 cup of water

MATH: This life-saving mixture costs 10¢ per packet. How many packets of ORT could the class purchase if each student saved the price of a movie ticket?

4. Research Maria's country of Mozambique to find out more about its people and customs. Why do people in Maria's African village speak Portuguese and bear Portuguese names?
5. Find news items about famine or hunger. Do they explain the true causes of famine or offer any solutions? Tape a television report on famine and critique it with your class. Discuss ways in which the media could educate people about famine and how the world could prevent it.
6. Read *Zlata's Diary* by Zlata Filipovic, Viking Penguin Press, N.Y. 1994. This is the personal diary kept by a thirteen year-old girl during the war in Sarajevo.
7. Watch and discuss the video *The Four Seasons: Winter, Winter, Winter* (1993) about how parents cope during the war in Sarajevo. See Resource Guide to order.
8. Listen to and discuss *Study War No More*, a song by the Weavers.
9. Listen to and discuss *Trouble in the Fields* a song by Maura O'Connell about the impact of famine on human lives.

MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

1. Speak out about the true causes of famine. Be critical of news reports on hunger.
2. Help students organize a fund-raiser in your school or community. Some ideas on how to do this can be found in the Resource Guide. The money raised could go toward the purchase of a heifer or goat that will provide milk for a family such as Maria's. Chickens, sheep, pigs, even honeybees can be purchased and sent to a hungry village to provide a **continual** source of food. For example, \$10 buys a share of rabbits, \$20 a flock of chicks or share of a llama. For more information contact:

HEIFER PROJECT INTERNATIONAL
Box 808
Little Rock, AR 72203
(501) 376-6836

3. The **CARE FOR THE EARTH CAMPAIGN** helps families such as Maria s plant trees on their land to regenerate and protect precious soil.

Trees are a valuable life-giving resource worldwide. They release oxygen into the air and absorb carbon dioxide, restore nitrogen to depleted soil, shield crops and soil from too much sun, and bind the soil together to prevent erosion by wind or heavy rains. Trees provide lumber, fuel, nutritious fruits and nuts. Their roots and bark are used in making medicines.

Every hour 500,000 trees are cut down for firewood, shelters or to create fresh farmland. Many of these trees are not replaced. Scientists warn that this rapid destruction seriously upsets the ecological balance of the planet, and turns food producing regions into vast deserts. Families are hit hardest. Without trees valuable topsoil is blown or washed away and the degraded land cannot produce enough food.

CARE FOR THE EARTH helped children at the Ojwando Primary School in Kenya plant 5,000 trees in their village and schoolyard. No longer do those malnourished children have to walk three miles each afternoon for essential firewood for cooking and heating. The tree nursery provides an accessible source of fuel (only the limbs are used). The roots have improved the soil quality of the school's vegetable garden. Some of the trees even provide fresh papayas and passion fruit which protect and strengthen young children's bodies. \$10 plants 30 trees in an area of ecological need. For more information contact:

CARE FOR THE EARTH CAMPAIGN
151 Ellis Street
Atlanta, Georgia 30303
(404) 681-2552

PART 2:

CHRONIC HUNGER

MATERIALS: *Really Mister, He's Nine*

PROCEDURE:

1. Tell students that only 10% of the hunger deaths each year are the result of famine. The other 90% are the result of chronic hunger. What does "chronic" mean? Have any of the students ever seen a news report about chronic hunger?
2. Read *Really Mister, He's Nine* with students. Allow them time to express their reactions to the story either through writing or discussion.
3. Discussion questions and math activities follow the story. Whenever possible, compare and contrast Lee's hunger with Maria's from the previous story --- the forces behind their hunger, how the hunger affects the children's minds and bodies, media attention to their hunger, their immediate needs, and some ways in which the causes of their hunger could be eliminated.

Really Mister, He's Nine

[The account you are about to read was prepared by doctors traveling across the U.S. investigating hunger. They visited every corner of the country and talked with the local people who were working to end hunger. With the hungry people's permission, the doctors went into their homes, looked inside their kitchens, cupboards and refrigerators, examined their emaciated bodies and talked to them about the amount and kinds of food they eat every day.

Most of the people they met were elderly, children, and women and men who could not find jobs. This is the story of the end of their journey. They have reached the "breadbasket of America" to see if hunger could actually exist in one of the most fertile regions of the world where much of our food is grown. In nearby St. Louis a man who helps collect food for the hungry told the doctors: "People come to the city hospital emergency room and collapse on the floor. Not because they are sick, but because they are hungry. Why should something so important as food be dependent on charity? We don't tell people they can't have air or water, or that they'll have them only twenty days a month. Why do we do it with food?"

In Caruthersville, Missouri the doctors continue their research:]

"The sun was hot as we left the town, and our reprieve was to be the shade afforded by Effie Alsop's front porch. Her wrinkled white face showed the wear of her eighty-six years. She lead us inside, where we began to chat.

"Mrs. Alsop," I asked, "could you tell us what you've been eating?"

"I haven't had nothing yet today."

With some persistence, one of my colleagues learned that she had not eaten for twenty-four hours. We asked again if she was hungry. "I get hungry when I got food in the house. But, when I don't have none I don't seem to get hungry. Isn't that funny, doctor?"

Effie Alsop's husband, also in his eighties, took me into the kitchen. I looked into the cupboard and the refrigerator, finding some dried white beans in a glass jar and several pieces of bread in the refrigerator.

"How often do you eat fruits and vegetables?" I queried. Mr. Alsop simply shook his head, dismissing a question whose answer was obvious.

"Do you and your wife ever go a day without eating?" I followed.

"Yes sir, I'd say at least several days a month."

After speaking with the Alsops, my team split up to make house calls. In a nearby community I visited Mrs. Spain, whose younger black face contrasted sharply with Effie Alsop's wrinkles.

"I've got five children," she said proudly, showing off two well-groomed youngsters. "Yolanda here is two and Natasha is five. The others are in school.

"My husband is out lookin' for work," she reported. "But there's nothin' aroun'. It's a full-time job just lookin' for work aroun' here." Mr. Spain had lost his job several months before.

The family lived on \$269 a month. There would have been nine to feed, but two of their daughters had died in a fire the previous year.

I asked permission to look into the refrigerator, where I found eight hot dogs, four peppers, a carton of milk, and some eggs.

"Do you ever run out of milk for the children?" I asked.

"All the time," she responded.

Something prompted me to push a little further. "What would you do, if you ran out of food altogether?" Her quick response told me she had already asked herself the same question. "I'd march them to the grocery store, sit them down on the floor and give them food. At least they couldn't arrest me for stealing."

Out on the sidewalk I saw a cute little boy who responded with a smile as I playfully tugged on his ear. Judging from his size, he looked about six years old.

"What's your name?" I asked.

"Lee."

"How old are you?"

"Nine."

Knowing that young children sometimes inflate their age, I laughed and turned to his older sister.

"How old is your brother, really?"

"Really mister, he's nine."

I tried as inconspicuously as possible to signal Naomi Kistin to come over, wanting to rely on her pediatric eye to determine whether Lee could possibly be nine years old.

Naomi took a look at Lee and brought him into his mother's house. I spoke with the mother while Naomi examined Lee in the living room. "The doctor at the clinic said he's anemic," Lee's mother confessed. "I know what he should be eatin', but I can't buy it," she added. "My husband's been trying to find work, but there's nothin' around here for him."

Lee's father, Robert, a man of thirty-five, joined the conversation. "We can't get no help 'cause I live here with my family. They could get help if I left, but we want to keep the family together."

"What do you want?" I asked.

"A job, a steady job. Just the opportunity to prove myself," he said.

As we walked to the car, Naomi said that little Lee seemed to be suffering from growth failure. The actual unemployment rate in the area, we had been told, was around 30 percent of the able-bodied work force, so it seemed unlikely that Robert would find work to bring home more food for his undersized son.

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Is Lee's hunger serious? How does it compare with Maria's hunger? (In both cases stunted growth has resulted from lack of nutrients, and in both cases food is available in the area but the children do not have access to it.)
2. How is it that children living in the "breadbasket of America" are so hungry? Why can't they get the food they need?
3. Why do you think no one knew about Lee's dangerous condition? Which kind of hunger is more likely to be shown on television news reports --- famine or chronic hunger? Why? How might this affect the problem?
4. What do you think will happen to Lee? How could his hunger be eliminated?
5. There are chronically hungry people like Lee in nearly every country on earth. The real cause of chronic hunger is poverty --- the causes of poverty are the same from Mozambique to Missouri. Other than unemployment, what might be some causes of poverty? (Causes include: inadequate wages, high food prices, discrimination, political disenfranchisement, environmental degradation, lack of access to resources such as healthy food, credit, health care and job training programs.)
6. Are there hungry children in your class, school or community? How can your class help them?

ACTIVITIES

1. **MATH:** To measure hunger in a child, doctors compare the height and weight of a hungry child with the height and weight of a well-fed child the same age. Compare the average height of the students in your class with the average height of a child the same age in India.

The average height of a 12-year-old in India is 135 centimeters. The average height of a 14-year-old is 140 centimeters. There are 2.5 centimeters in one inch. (Work in small groups to find the group's average first.)

2. **MATH:** Immunizations are life-savers for chronically undernourished children who could easily die if they contract a disease. Many children are not immunized because their mothers are not aware of the need for shots or because immunizations are not available to them. \$10 immunizes a child against measles, polio, whooping cough, tetanus, TB and diphtheria. If the cost of one U.S. army tank is \$1.7 million, how many children could be immunized if the U.S. government gave up one tank?

3. Watch and discuss *Famine & Chronic Persistent Hunger: A Life and Death Distinction* (1989), an 11-minute video with teacher's manual. See Resource Guide to order.
4. Watch *Hunger In America*, a 58 min. video about hungry families in the U.S. See Resource Guide to order.

MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

1. Have students investigate chronic hunger in your community. What is causing it? Are there enough jobs? Are workers paid adequate wages? Is fresh produce available in all areas? Are food prices too high? Are job-training programs available? Students can interview hungry people, hunger activists, business people, and elected officials, to get their opinions on the forces behind local hunger. Students will also need to research ways your community is helping end hunger. When the interviews, research and analysis are completed, have students write letters to local newspapers, businesses, community leaders and elected officials to inform the community of their discoveries and what needs to be done. (See Lesson 23 for guidelines.)
2. Help feed hungry people in your area by holding a Supermarket Food Drive. Students can get their families and friends involved in this one. Have students contact the manager of a local supermarket to ask if he/she will help feed hungry people. The idea is to get shoppers to purchase one or more food items that will be set aside for delivery to a local food pantry. Have students contact a local food pantry for a list of the kinds of foods needed. Consider holding your drive when food pantry stocks are low. (During holidays stocks are usually high and the hungry are on many people's minds.) Students can create posters advertising this important event and hand out fliers in the market parking lot explaining: (1) how the food drive works, (2) what kinds of foods are needed, and (3) who will be receiving the food. Be sure students get to go along to deliver the food to the pantry. Write a group letter to the supermarket manager thanking him/her and the shoppers and describing the outcome of the drive.

WHERE DOES OUR MONEY GO?

Of course, **giving** money won't end people's hunger --- it can only satisfy it temporarily. We cannot "buy" social justice which is what chronically hungry people need in order to become self-reliant. However, money **can** provide life's essentials for needy people until obstacles to achieving social justice are eliminated. The world certainly has the money to do this --- we simply spend it on other things. UNICEF estimates that \$34 billion extra dollars a year could secure basic necessities such as food, clean water, health care and education for all the world's needy children. To help students place this figure in perspective, have them compare it with the amount of money we spend on other things:

\$ NEEDED		\$ SPENT	
Estimated extra cost of meeting worldwide need for:		Estimates of amounts spent worldwide on:	
	BILLIONS Per Year		BILLIONS Per Year
Basic Child Health and Nutrition	\$ 13	Golf	\$ 40
Primary Education	6	Wine	85
Safe Water and Sanitation	9	Beer	160
Family Planning	6	Cigarettes	400
TOTAL		Advertising	250
	\$ 34	Military	800

(A B-1 Bomber costs \$400 million and lasts 4 years. For this same amount lunches could be provided for 250,000 hungry people everyday for ten years.)

Source: *The Children's Defense Fund: CDF Reports, 1995.*