



**PENS** *Against* **POVERTY**

GUIDE FOR YEAR 7-10 STUDENTS & TEACHERS





## **About Pens Against Poverty**

The Pens Against Poverty Schools Writing Competition that encourages schools, teachers and students to become educated in the important issues of poverty and homelessness in our communities in Australia, while nurturing brave young voices through creative writing.

## **How To Use This Guide**

This Teaching Guide has been developed to support year 7-10 students with curriculum resources to empower their students to develop their creative writing skills and create a genuine awareness of poverty and social issues in Australia.

## Note from the National Director

I founded this competition in 2015, as a way to connect the young writers in my class with big ideas that matter.

Teaching the children of military, diplomats and public servants in Canberra, I knew I was teaching potential future leaders. I have also learned as a teacher, and parent, that you never underestimate the capacity of children and young people to grapple with complex and big ideas. Children and young people have a way of coming to subjects adults feel apprehensive about, in thoroughly fresh and brave ways that teach us something new. That is why it is exciting to read your entries each year.

This creative writing unit is designed to help you connect with those big ideas in a meaningful way, and to create your own unique way of expressing a response in story or poetry (or both!). We know what writers' block can feel like!

Maybe you will write to express your raw emotions about the confronting statistics?

Maybe you will channel your feelings into a persuasive poem?

Perhaps you will write imaginatively and with compassion from the position of a homeless person, recognising that anyone can be homeless, and no one gets used to it.

With writers contributing from all over the country, my hope is that this year, we will have many young people grappling with these important themes in original and deeply-felt ways. Our judges this year are all authors and share a passion for the aims of this competition. They look forward to reading your entries.

Good luck!  
Katherine Halcrow



Katherine Halcrow  
National Director, Pens Against Poverty

## The Basics

This unit is in preparation for Anti-Poverty Week in October, and the Pens Against Poverty Writing competition is a part of that. To familiarise, yourself with the competition, take a look at the Pens Against Poverty and local Anglicare websites.

The criteria. The judges will determine the winners based on the following criteria:

- Demonstrates empathy and humanity through creative writing.
- Creative treatment of the competition theme.
- Effective control of language to communicate meaning.

### What you need for this unit.

#### Creative Writing Journal

A creative writing journal is a key part of this unit. You can start drafting some initial ideas that could be used for your story or poem. In your journal, you can start to develop ideas, to be used toward your final polished piece of writing.

#### A pen or pencil

It's great to write, really write, not just on a laptop. Then you can go out into the bush, sit in the middle of the city, anywhere, and be inspired. So, get a pen. Get a nice one, that feels comfortable to use.

#### Headphones/ Music

I always get inspired by music. You will find the music that inspires you most and allows your thoughts to take flight and to shut out other distractions.

#### Internet Access

The local library is an excellent resource and is mainly free to use. Use it to access books, magazines and resources to help you understand more about poverty. Librarians are usually very helpful. Otherwise, you can also access the websites to the left.

### Website Links

Pens Against Poverty

[pensagainstopoverty.org](https://pensagainstopoverty.org)

Anglicare NSW South, NSW West & ACT

[www.anglicare.com.au](https://www.anglicare.com.au)

Anglicare WA

[www.anglicarewa.org.au](https://www.anglicarewa.org.au)

Anglicare Victoria

[www.anglicarevic.org.au](https://www.anglicarevic.org.au)

Anglicare Tasmania

[www.anglicare-tas.org.au](https://www.anglicare-tas.org.au)

Anglicare SA

[www.anglicaresa.com.au](https://www.anglicaresa.com.au)

St Barts (WA)

[stbarts.org.au](https://stbarts.org.au)

Samaritans (Newcastle/Hunter Region of NSW)

[www.samaritans.org.au](https://www.samaritans.org.au)

Ac.care (Mount Gambier Region of SA)

[www.accare.org.au](https://www.accare.org.au)

Anti-Poverty Week

[www.antipovertyweek.org.au](https://www.antipovertyweek.org.au)

Australian Council of Social Services (ACOSS)

[https://acoss.org.au/images/uploads/338\\_Poverty\\_Factsheet.pdf](https://acoss.org.au/images/uploads/338_Poverty_Factsheet.pdf)



*"First you need to feel something; you need to empathize with people and with the environment around you. Then the words will naturally come."*

**Pens Against Poverty judge, and award-winning author, Jackie French. Pictured above.**

## POVERTY IS...

1

### Research

First do some quick research and thinking.

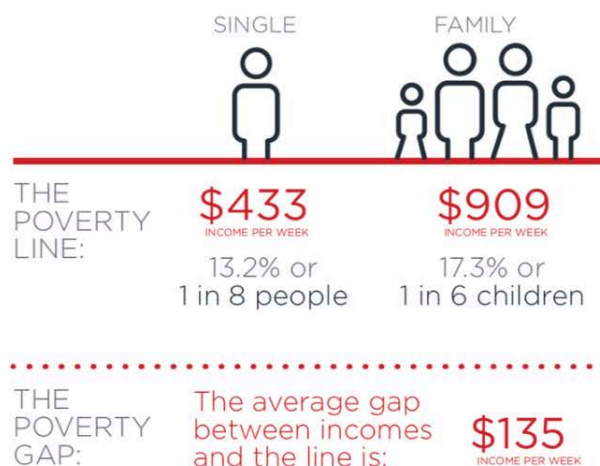
Visit the Australian Council of Social Services (ACOSS) website for some recent research and statistics about poverty in Australia. Visit >> [https://acoss.org.au/images/uploads/338\\_Poverty\\_Factsheet.pdf](https://acoss.org.au/images/uploads/338_Poverty_Factsheet.pdf)

Watch this SBS video describing the realities of poverty in Australia. Watch >> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=synx-wByGRA>



More than 3 million  
Australians live  
below the poverty  
line, including  
739,000 children.

Most of those  
affected are living  
in deep poverty, on  
average \$135 per  
week below the  
poverty line.



2

### Create a word map.

Before completing the next activities, give yourself 5-10 minutes to fill a blank page with every word you can think of words you think of when you think of 'poverty'. Don't overthink, just write everything that comes to mind.

### 3

**Answer the questions below:**

- 1) What is poverty? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 2) Who lives in poverty? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 3) What causes poverty? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 4) How can poverty be reduced? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### 4

**Word map part 2.**

Go back to your word map. Circle all the words you think reflect the stereotypes or incorrect assumptions you held about poverty before completing the activities.

Add to your word map new words that reflect your new impressions.

**Throughout the unit, keep coming back to your word map and add more, as your awareness about poverty broadens.**

## THE EXPERIENCE OF HOMELESSNESS

### 1

#### Research further to dig deeper.

What is it like to be homeless?

Using the library or online resources, find one of each that help you to understand homelessness (especially, in Australia):

1. A news report
2. A poem
3. A novel or short story
4. A video story or interview

To inspire you, and get you started we've included one of each. Find your own and then write down the references or web link to the ones you have found in the table below.

What's it like to be homeless?	Examples	Your own
A news report	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/oct/16/more-than-three-million-australians-living-in-poverty-across-report-reveals">https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/oct/16/more-than-three-million-australians-living-in-poverty-across-report-reveals</a>	
A poem	<a href="https://borgenproject.org/4-poems-about-poverty/">https://borgenproject.org/4-poems-about-poverty/</a>	
A novel or short story	<i>Somewhere around the Corner</i> by Jackie French	
A video or interview	From ABC, The Drum <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=InXUJt02vQM">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=InXUJt02vQM</a>	



## 2

### Step inside.

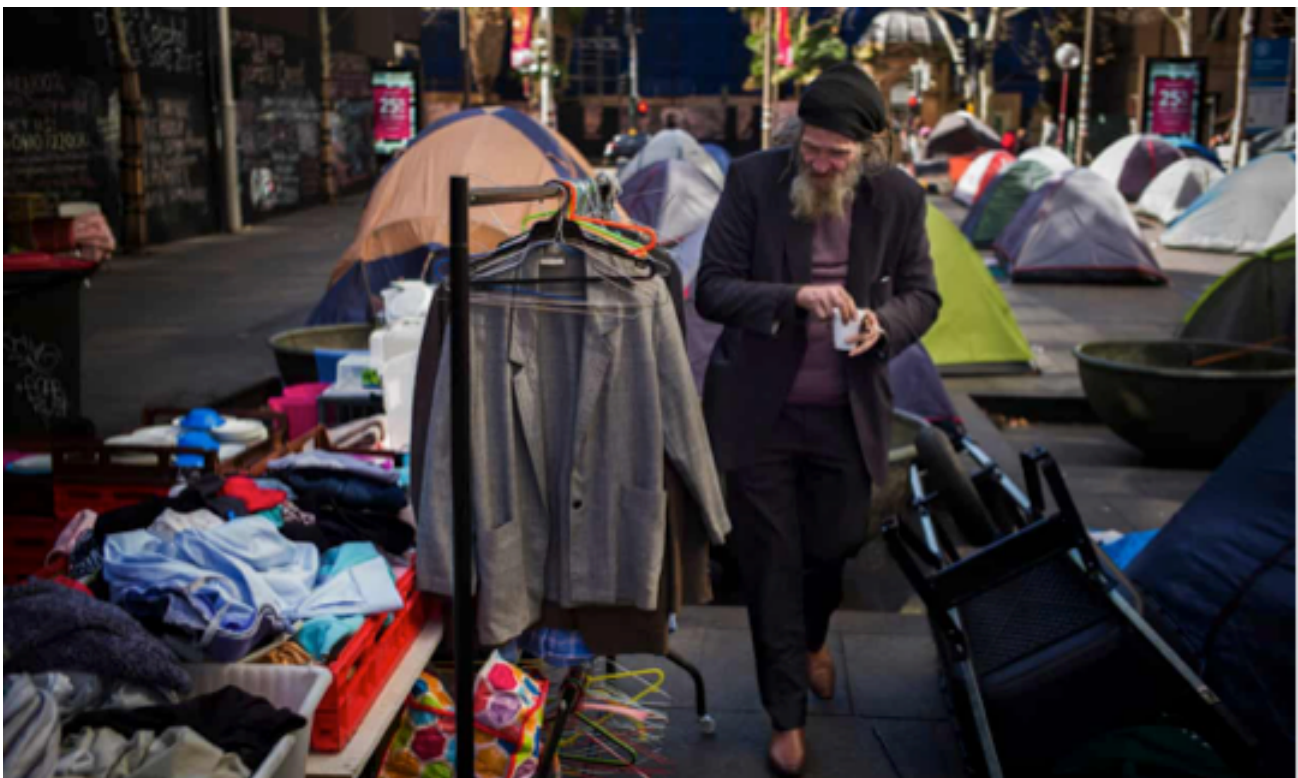
This is a short writing exercise to do after completing 'The experience of homelessness...'

Step inside the picture.

- What do you see?
- What can you hear?
- What do you smell?
- How do you feel?
- What are your concerns, hopes, dreams?

Image credit: 'More than 3 million Australians living in poverty' by Gareth Hutchins (The Guardian)

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/oct/16/more-than-three-million-australians-living-in-poverty-across-report-reveals>



## WRITING ABOUT POVERTY

1

Reflect on what you've learned so far.

Where would you place the following statements, from what you have learned so far. Place each statement on the continuum.

TRUE	Poverty affects very few people in Australia	SOMETIMES TRUE	UNTRUE
TRUE	Poverty means you have no food and no money	SOMETIMES TRUE	UNTRUE
TRUE	Poverty only affects people who have no job	SOMETIMES TRUE	UNTRUE
TRUE	All homeless people live outside on the streets	SOMETIMES TRUE	UNTRUE
TRUE	Homeless people are usually very old	SOMETIMES TRUE	UNTRUE
TRUE	Homeless people have always been homeless	SOMETIMES TRUE	UNTRUE
TRUE	No homeless people live in my suburb	SOMETIMES TRUE	UNTRUE
TRUE	Very few children in Australia are homeless (less than 1 in 100)	SOMETIMES TRUE	UNTRUE
TRUE	It is really obvious that someone is homeless	SOMETIMES TRUE	UNTRUE
TRUE	Homelessness is something no one can do anything about	SOMETIMES TRUE	UNTRUE

## 2

### Mission Statements

Mission statements help us set our direction and purpose. Read about the mission statement by the Pens Against Poverty host in your region.

If you need more ideas, check an organisation from another region or state.

### Write your own Mission Statement

Write your own mission statement for what you seek to do in writing about poverty for Pens Against Poverty.

#### Victoria

Anglicare Vic

#### Southern NSW & ACT

Anglicare NSW South, NSW West & ACT

#### Newcastle & Hunter Region of NSW

Samaritans

#### South Australia

AnglicareSA and Ac.care (Mount Gambier)

#### Tasmania

Anglicare Tas

#### Western Australia

Anglicare WA and St Barts

## 3

### Poetry Writing Exercise

Read poems about poverty here >> <https://borgenproject.org/4-poems-about-poverty/>

Each poem addresses poverty from a very different perspective, time, place and circumstance.

Choose one you like and respond to the poem with the following:

1. Who is the speaker in the poem? (Is it the poet or a character they have created? What makes you think that?)
2. Circle 5 or 10 key words throughout the poem that evoke an emotion?

3. Poetry tends to be a loaded form of writing, where every word carries connotations or connected ideas. Poets often use short lines, rhyme, rhythm, repetition and imagery to make it memorable and to connect with our emotions. With this in mind, what tools has the writer used in the poem?

**Experiment with similar strategies in your own poem about poverty.**

**Feel free to borrow the structure of the poem and experiment with it to make it your own.**

## IMAGINING STORIES DRAWN FROM REALITY

### The Next Steps

Writing is a form of action. When you write for Pens Against Poverty, there is the opportunity to bring together not only your knowledge and learning about poverty, but your empathy and imagination.

When you see something unjust in the world, you are activating your empathy. When you make the decision not to allow that sense of injustice to be a fleeting thought, you develop a principled mindset. When you decide it is important and you can't look away, you invest yourself. Each step toward further understanding is an action that can be transforming. You are more likely to listen, to learn, to look more

deeply for the answers. You become an inquirer. When you see the scale and enormity of the problem, but also the hope that there is much we can do, you become a powerful communicator.

In the words of author-judge, Jackie French,

*"First you need to feel something; you need to empathize with people and with the environment around you. Then the words will naturally come."*

If you are looking to write a short story for the competition, you could begin by looking at a picture book. Picture books are short and can provide you with a format for writing a short story.



### Creative Writing Experiment

Listen to *A Way Home* by Libby Hathorn and Gregory Rogers read >> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rjzP18bsSdQ>

#### Creative Writing Experiment 1: Building a Scene.

Analyse text from the story.

*'Past the windows and clean steps. Past a crumbling dark church. Past the sharp smell of food shops. And the cat in the coat sits tight.'*

Build similar phrases that build a street scene through the eyes of a homeless person.

#### Creative Writing Experiment 2: Building a Character

Focus on some of the lines in the book which build the two characters, the boy Shane and the cat.

How does the author help us to empathise with the feelings of the cat and the boy? The two characters

are developed in contrast. One seems brave while the other is palpably frightened.

Though the boy seems fearless, is he really?

When did you first guess that the boy might be homeless?

How do you imagine the characters feel at the end when they finally get home?

Both the boy and the cat are homeless. However, do you think the stray cat has found a home now with the boy?

Consider the way the cat is described.

*'He talks and talks until growls slide into silence'*

*'It's very dark down there for the cat in the coat.'*

*'There's a loud thump and a hard knock and a thud, thud, thud as the boy runs fast. They follow.'*

*'Such a tight little ball of fierce cat'*

The description tell us how the cat feels. It is doesn't say, 'The cat is afraid', but we know more vividly



that the cat is afraid and how afraid the cat is by the author's descriptive language.

What is the cat like? Describe the character of the cat, experimenting with phrases taken directly from the text used as a scaffold. What would be some other ways we could innovate on that. Let's experiment with some other ways we could show that the cat is afraid.

Example: *'The cat pulled back on its hind legs, ears flat, eyes wide and startled. Then hissed with impressive force.'* Try some others with suggestions from the class.

Create other variations of the text.

## 2

### **Creative Writing Exercise 4:**

It can be daunting writing for Pens Against Poverty

How do you write about something you may not necessarily have experienced yourself?

**Experiment with similar strategies in your own story about poverty. Feel free to borrow the structure of the story and experiment with it to make it your own.**

### Creative Writing Experiment 3: Building a Story

Create your own description of being homeless, on the street and trying to get to your own safe place.

As writers we can borrow from authors to help us achieve similar effects. If we were wanting to create empathy with a difficult topic like homelessness, how could we use some of these techniques to do it?

## HOPE

What is being done (and can be done) about homelessness and poverty?

Year 10 work experience

<https://www.abc.net.au/btn/classroom/anti-poverty-week/10529584>



Work with your local MP

<https://www.acoss.org.au/a-future-for-all-children/>

Volunteering

Check your local Anglicare or Pens Against Poverty for opportunities to volunteer. This may include opportunities like sorting donations.

Food or Clothing Drive

Contact your local Anglicare or Pens Against Poverty to find out if you can support them by running a food or second-hand clothing drive at your school.

Donations of non-perishable food items and toiletries enable charities to provide practical support to disadvantaged families or people sleeping rough. By donating quality second-hand clothing (to certain charities), it can be provided to people experiencing homelessness or sold in op-shops to provide extra funding to programs which help the community.

The problem of poverty can be daunting. But small actions by lots of people can make a real and lasting difference.

After watching the video above, write down some ways you think Australians can help to make change.

## 2022 PENS AGAINST POVERTY

Once you've reflected on all you have learnt about poverty in Australia, write your short story or poem and have your teacher submit your entry online at [www.pensgainstpoverty.org](http://www.pensgainstpoverty.org)

## 2022 PENS AGAINST POVERTY PARTNERS



To find out more about Pens Against Poverty, visit

**[WWW.PENSAGAINSTPOVERTY.ORG](http://WWW.PENSAGAINSTPOVERTY.ORG)**

**PENS** *Against* **POVERTY** 