

Food Experience Journal

Step 1: Write down your experiences with hunger.

- When have you gone hungry?
 - What did it feel like? Did it last a few minutes, hours, days, or weeks?
 - Did being hungry affect your mood?
 - Did it make you sleepy?
 - How did it affect your schoolwork?

Step 2: Begin a two week Food Experience Journal.

Every day, write about your own experiences with food for the day. Write about what you ate and how you felt.

- Did you like what you ate?
- Did you choose not to eat all of your food?
- What didn't you eat?
- At any point after you ate, were you still hungry?

Step 3: After you have written about your experiences with food, write about what you've observed about the food habits of people around you (please do not use their names to protect their privacy).

- Do you have family members or friends who only take and eat the amount of food they need?
- Do you have family members or friends who waste food on their plates?
- Is there a lot of discarded food in the school cafeteria?

Step 4: At the end of the two weeks, review your journal and think about what your experiences with food and feeling hungry have been like.

- Did you always have enough food?
- Did you ever feel uncomfortably full after a meal?
- What healthy foods are common in your diet?
- What less healthy foods are common in your diet?
- How much food did you waste?
- How much food did others around you waste?
- Did you observe others over stuffing themselves at a meal?

Step 5: Reflect on and compare your experiences with what you read in the box on the next page.

(sources: <http://www.foodbankofeastalabama.com/about hunger.html>;
<http://www.bread.org/learn/hunger-basics/hunger-facts-domestic.html>):

Who's Hungry in Alabama?

Today in America, 23 million people are hungry. But it's not just a national problem. Hunger exists right here in Alabama. Food insecurity is closely linked to poverty. People suffer from hunger and food insecurity when they do not have the money to purchase nutritionally adequate food. More than 15 percent of Alabama residents live in poverty. In some counties in our service area, the number rises to almost 30 percent – one out of every three residents.

Consider these facts:

- 13% of Alabama's population is "food insecure" meaning they have uncertain or limited access to enough food for a healthy life.
- One out of every five children in our area lives in poverty.
- Recent research indicates that when young children experience even mild under-nutrition during critical periods of growth their physical growth may be reduced and their brain development affected.
- Over 12% of Alabama citizens receive food stamps. The benefit level equates to 79 cents per meal.
- One out of every four of Alabama's seniors lives below the poverty level.

Hunger persists in the U.S.

- 35.5 million people—including 12.6 million children—live in households that experience hunger or the risk of hunger. This represents more than one in ten households in the United States (10.9 percent).¹
- 4.0 percent of U.S. households experience hunger. Some people in these households frequently skip meals or eat too little, sometimes going without food for a whole day. 11.1 million people, including 430 thousand children, live in these homes.
- 6.9 percent of U.S. households are at risk of hunger. Members of these households have lower quality diets or must resort to seeking emergency food because they cannot always afford the food they need. 24.4 million people, including 12.2 million children, live in these homes.
- Research shows that preschool and school-aged children who experience severe hunger have higher levels of chronic illness, anxiety and depression, and behavior problems than children with no hunger.

- Use your reflections to write a short paper on why hunger is a problem and why everyone should care. Think about what you experienced in terms of having enough good food to eat and what you observed in terms of your own and others experiences with food. How might your experiences compare with those of a person who does not have enough food to eat or with times when you have not had enough food to eat? Share your thoughts with your parents, classmates, and with any community groups to which you belong. See if you can get others involved in helping to reduce the problem of hunger in your own community.