

Lesson 14

The Hunger Gap

[Lesson Duration: 55 minutes, plus 15 optional minutes]

National Education
Standards Alignment

Social Studies

Health



Lesson Overview

Students will consider how to define and measure **hunger** and **food insecurity**, examine community food availability maps, and explore interventions designed to improve food security.



Learning Objectives

- Define hunger and food insecurity and explain how they are different.
- Analyze and interpret community food availability maps.
- Describe criteria for defining a **food desert**.
- Analyze interventions for reducing hunger and food insecurity.



Essential Questions

- How do hunger and food insecurity affect people?
- How can we reduce hunger and food insecurity?
- Who should be responsible for addressing hunger and food insecurity?



Materials

- Student handouts
- Presentation slides
- *Hunger and Food Insecurity* primer
- FoodSpan Infographic



Resources

- *Hunger and Food Insecurity* primer (www.foodsystemprimer.org/food-and-nutrition/hunger-and-food-insecurity/)
- *Food Environments* primer (www.foodsystemprimer.org/food-and-nutrition/food-environments/)



Teacher Note:
The Take a Stand and Why Do We Eat What We Eat? activities in Lesson 12 can help students start thinking about contributors to hunger and food insecurity.

Warm-up: Hunger vs. Food Insecurity

[10 minutes]

Students will reflect on the meaning of food insecurity as a broader concept than hunger. Ask students to offer definitions of **hunger**. *How do you feel when you are hungry? What causes hunger?* After a few responses, explain that when we refer to hunger in this lesson we are referring to the pain, discomfort, weakness, or illness caused by a long-term lack of food.¹

Ask students what they think the term **food security** means. Have them write a brief definition. Point out that one meaning of security is freedom from anxiety. Have volunteers share and compare their definitions. Display the **Food Security Definition** and **Household Food Security slides**. Compare students' definitions with the slides, and discuss.

“You do not solve the hunger problem by feeding people. ... The problems of hunger and malnutrition can be solved only by ensuring that people can live in dignity by having decent opportunities to provide for themselves.”

– George Kent,
Freedom from Want



Photo credit: Michael Milli, CLF.



Photo credit: Michael Milli, CLF.



Teacher Note: Hunger and food insecurity can be sensitive topics, and some of your students may themselves experience these conditions. Use caution in situations where students may feel uncomfortable discussing their personal experiences.

Main Activity: Community Food Security and Food Desert Mapping

Social Studies
[20 minutes]

Explain that food security can be measured at the household, community, and national levels. **Community food security** deals with the features of a community that might affect people’s ability to get enough healthy food. Have students brainstorm what some of these features might be.

The term “food desert” is used to describe a community with low access to healthy food. Ask: *What images does the term “food desert” make you picture? What criteria might we use to determine whether a community is a food desert?* Display the **Food Deserts slide** and discuss why those criteria might be relevant to community food security.

Students will now analyze maps that demonstrate food availability in three Baltimore neighborhoods. Divide the class into small groups and give each group a copy of the question sheet and one of the three maps from the **Community Food Availability Maps Handout**. Ask each group to analyze their neighborhood’s **food environment**, respond to the questions, and present to the class. Display the **Community Food Availability Maps slides** while students present. As a class, discuss each presentation and the differences among the neighborhoods.

The following points may help inform the discussion:

- Compared to smaller stores, supermarkets tend to offer a wider variety of healthy options, at the lowest prices. Despite these advantages, research shows that simply having access to a supermarket does not necessarily improve diets. Additional interventions, such as offering cooking demonstrations and promotional discounts on fruits and vegetables, might be needed to help people to shop and eat healthier.²
- Even if supermarkets are part of the solution, getting them into places where they are lacking—such as low-income urban areas—can be challenging. Supermarkets require a lot of land, and urban land is often scarce and expensive. Some store owners have expressed security concerns, and may think they won’t get enough business from lower-income shoppers.²
- Most people, even those living in food-insecure households, travel to a supermarket to get most of their groceries—even if it means borrowing someone else’s car, sharing a ride, or taking public transit.³ Part of the problem is that those trips may be difficult and infrequent for people living in food deserts, while an abundance of unhealthy food is within easy reach.



Teacher Note: *The Community Food Mapping extension (at the end of this lesson) can be a helpful follow-up to this activity.*

Main Activity: Food Insecurity Causes, Effects, and Interventions

Social Studies, Health
[20 minutes]

Show students the **Hunger Quote slide** or write this quote on the board: “To many people, hunger means not just symptoms that can be diagnosed by a physician, it bespeaks the existence of a social, not a medical problem.”⁴ Discuss: *What is the main idea? Do you agree? What does this suggest about how to address hunger and food insecurity?* Students should begin thinking about system-level causes of and responses to these problems.

Divide the class into three groups and distribute the **Hunger and Food Insecurity primer**. Using the primer, the first group will list causes of food insecurity, the second will list potential effects, and the third will list interventions. If groups need assistance, provide ideas from the following lists:

Causes of food insecurity:

- Poverty (i.e., lack of money to buy healthy food)
- Lack of grocery stores offering healthy options
- Lack of transportation to grocery stores

Potential effects of food insecurity:

- People experiencing hunger and food insecurity are likely to choose foods with the most calories per dollar, which are often not the healthiest options (e.g., fast food)
- Low fruit and vegetable intake
- Obesity
- Diabetes
- Nutrient deficiencies
- Children may be more likely to experience anxiety, depression, poorer academic performance, absences from school, and other physical and behavioral issues

Interventions to address food insecurity:

- Encourage eligible citizens to register for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC)
- Increase universal breakfast programs in classrooms and community eligibility provisions, which allow schools to offer free lunch for all students
- Encourage corner stores to stock more healthy foods, and support those that already do
- Attract supermarkets to underserved areas or improve transportation to existing ones
- Increase the minimum wage and create employment opportunities
- Establish alternative venues for healthy food purchasing, e.g., mobile markets and farmers’ markets

Ask each group to share their list with the class.

Discuss: *If you were a policy maker, which interventions would you prioritize? Who should be responsible for addressing hunger and food insecurity?*

Optional Activity: Measuring Food Security

Social Studies, Health
[15 minutes]

Students will analyze a tool that is used with individuals to measure their level of food security. Have students read the **Measuring Household Food Security Handout**, a USDA survey used to measure food security among youth ages 12 and older. Discuss: *What questions would you add or change to better measure food security, either at the household or community level? This might include questions about transportation, availability of healthy foods, and knowledge about healthy eating.*

Wrap-up: Food Insecurity and Me [5 minutes]

Have students write a journal entry in response to the prompt: *What feelings do the issues of hunger and food insecurity bring up for you?* If time allows and students feel comfortable, have them share their responses.



Teacher Note: Food policy interventions to address hunger and food insecurity are also explored in Lesson 15.



Share Your Knowledge: How do hunger and food insecurity affect people? How can we reduce hunger and food insecurity? Have students tweet their reflections and tag **#hunger**, **#foodsecurity**, and **#foodspan** to join the conversation.

Extensions:

Revisiting the Infographic (Social Studies)

Distribute copies of the **FoodSpan Infographic** (students may already have their own from previous lessons). Ask students to identify parts that represent hunger and food insecurity. Ask: *Do these accurately and fully represent what we learned about hunger and food insecurity? If not, what could we add to make the infographic more accurate?* Working individually or as a class, have students draw their own versions, create a collage, or add images to the existing infographic. Share photos of students' work on social media and tag #foodspan.

Film: Food Frontiers (Health, Social Studies)

The Center for a Livable Future's original short film, *Food Frontiers* (36 minutes, www.foodspan.org/films/food-frontiers.html), showcases six projects from around the U.S. that are increasing access to healthy food in varied and innovative ways. A discussion guide is provided.

Community Food Mapping (Social Studies)

Have students create maps of their own communities, noting all food sources (e.g., grocery stores, restaurants, farmers' markets, community gardens) and the distances between them and where people live. Students may additionally include information about sidewalks, bus routes, income levels, or any other features or data that may affect access to (or availability of) healthy food. Based on this information, have students write a paper or give a presentation about the food environment in their community. Students should make note of any additional information they would need in order to better measure and improve community food security.

History of Hunger Interventions (Social Studies, ELA)

Students will use the **Hunger and Food Insecurity primer** as a starting point to research the history of interventions to address hunger. Students will write a report comparing the effectiveness of different types of interventions, from soup kitchens to federal food and nutrition assistance programs. Based on this information, students will work in groups to design a program to improve food security at the local, state, or national level.

The Challenges of Eating Healthy on a Budget (Social Studies, Health)

Students will watch the documentary film *A Place at the Table* (<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1736049/>) to explore the challenges of eating a healthy diet on a limited budget. After they watch and discuss the film, challenge students to plan a week of healthy meals using only the benefits provided by SNAP (food stamps), which amount to a little over \$4 per person per day.⁵ Encourage students to share their reflections on social media using #foodspan and #foodsecurity.

1. Andrews M, Nord M, Bickel G, Carlson S. *Household food security in the United States, 1999*. USDA ERS, 2000.

2. Refer to the *Food Environments primer* for references. www.foodsystemprimer.org/food-and-nutrition/food-environments/

3. Ver Ploeg M, Mancino L, et al. *Where Do Americans Usually Shop for Food and How Do They Travel To Get There? Initial Findings from the National Household Food Acquisition and Purchase Survey*. USDA ERS, 2015.

4. President's Task Force on Food Assistance. *Report of the President's Task Force on Food Assistance*. Washington, DC; 1984.

5. USDA FNS. *Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)*. 2016. <http://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-snap>