

A Day in the Life of the Working Poor

The novel we are reading focuses on characters who, for the most part, live at the poverty level. In order to gain a deeper understanding of experiences presented by the author, it is necessary to gain some understanding of the challenges and frustrations presented by poverty. You will be given a situation in the following assignment that forces you to deal with the same issues a destitute person faces in contemporary society.

Directions: You will work with a partner for part of the class period to develop a plan for dealing with this average day in the life of someone living on the edge of poverty. Together, you and your partner will write a detailed plan for how your family will solve the problem it is presented.

Scenario: You are married with two children, a 4-year-old daughter and an 8-year-old son. You work as a laborer in the Salinas Valley of California, where you pick seasonal fruits and vegetables for \$9 an hour. You have an after-tax income of \$14,000 a year. After paying rent and utilities on the modest apartment that you live in, you have just \$20 a day to take care of your family's needs. You and your spouse try to save a little money, but something always comes up and drains the piggy bank. You have no savings and live paycheck-to-paycheck, just like everyone you know. Your husband/wife cannot work because of a back injury, but at least you don't have to pay for childcare for your daughter.

Part #1 – Today's Problem to Solve: You arrive home from work and begin to make plans for the following day. You need to buy food for all three meals for the entire family tomorrow. Your 4-year-old daughter has a fever and needs medicine. You need to have money for the bus fare to and from work tomorrow. (Your job is six miles away from your home.) In addition, your 8-year-old son accidentally tore the side out of his tennis shoe on the way home from school. Both children have only one pair of shoes and the weather is turning cold. What will you spend your money on? You have \$20.50 in your wallet and nothing in the bank. Together, you and your partner need to make a list of how you will spend your money and meet the needs of your family. Don't just create a shopping list. Instead, explain the menu for each meal (with a price for each item) and record other expenses. Write the grand total clearly at the top of the page.



Price List:

Apples: 75 cents each
Bananas: 75 cents each
Lettuce: 65 cents/head
Carrots: \$1.50/two-lb. bag
Bread: \$1.99/loaf
Butter: \$3.50/one-lb. package
Canned beans: 85 cents each (Need 3 for a main course)
Canned soup: \$1.50 each (Need 3 for a main course)
Cereal: \$3.50/box
Chicken: \$3.29/pound (Need 2 lbs. for a main course)
Eggs: \$2/dozen
Hamburger: \$2.49/lb. (Need 2 lbs. for a main course)
Milk: \$2.35/half-gallon
Yogurt: 89 cents/individual 8 oz. cup
Cheese: \$2.99/one-lb. package
Ice Cream: \$3.50/one-gallon carton
Rice: \$1.00/lb.
Tunafish: \$1.50/can
Salad dressing: \$1.60/bottle
Peanut butter: \$2.90/jar
Jam: \$1.75/jar
Bus fare: \$1.25, each way
Duct tape: \$3.00/roll
Masking tape: \$2.00/roll
Medicine: \$5 per package
Shoes: \$10 (cheapest available)

Part #2 – Quickwrite: On a separate piece of paper, reflect on the choices you made. What was the most difficult choice? Why? If you were the 8-year-old and opened your lunch box today to discover the meal your parents had made for you, would you be satisfied? Think about and comment upon the burden placed on the working parent, who must work in a field all day laboring mightily, only to come home and realize he/she cannot fully meet the needs of his/her loved ones. Finally, describe how this family could improve its situation. Brainstorm ideas that might help lift the couple's wages/living conditions. Would you be willing to do the things you've suggested this family do? Why or why not?

This Quickwrite needs to be at least two-thirds of a handwritten page.