

4. “The Journal of Jenny September”

This activity examines stereotyping and ignorance of the rights and feelings of others.



Materials Needed:

Book *“The Journal of Jenny September”* by Isaacsen-Bright

As a “read aloud”, share the story *“The Journal of Jenny September”* by Isaacsen-Bright.

This 158-page novel is an excellent “read aloud” to share with your students. It examines the stereotypes that society inflicts on the homeless while challenging preconceived notions of the homeless.

Jenny’s teacher asked her students to keep a daily journal, but never expected the truly extraordinary document that 12-year-old Jenny turned in. At the beginning of the year, Jenny’s mother leaves, and Jenny and her father are soon homeless. Father and daughter go through several stages of homelessness. First, they live in a Volkswagen, spending the nights in parking lots until the police catch them. Next, they find refuge in a self-storage unit and live there until they are discovered. Then, a bus becomes their home. At each stage, Jenny writes of the difficulties and problems involved in the downward drift.

Through it all, Jenny manages to keep up with her schoolwork. One of the warm, safe havens for her is the library, where she can do her homework.

Jenny makes friends at the beginning of the school year with a girl from a privileged home. This friendship dies as poverty and homelessness overtake Jenny. A black male classmate befriends Jenny. This classmate is homeless and parentless. The classmate knows that Jenny is homeless even though she is trying to hide it from her classmates. He introduces Jenny and her father to life under a bridge amid the flowerbeds of a park and a babbling brook.

In a very humiliating incident, her former friend and her circle discover that Jenny is homeless because they can see her under the bridge from a store in the mall.

Jenny and her father fight their way through the problems during the course of the year. He manages to find work, consolidate and pay bills. The novel ends on a note of promise. The audience will never look at homelessness quite the same way again.