

## Initial Reflections on Poverty – Personal & Political

This week we will be examining poverty in our community, focusing on hunger. To begin this exploration, please take 10 minutes to write some initial thoughts and feelings about poverty and social class. In addition, find some part of the writing you would be willing to share aloud. Clearly, this can be a difficult, even sensitive topic, but that is why it critical to write honestly.

Please respond to one or more of the following:

- Describe in detail a time or times when you became aware of social class; this could be from elementary school, family reunions, or some interaction on the quad yesterday.
- How does social class play out in life at Ithaca High? Put another way, is social class a major factor in how people feel about each other at Ithaca High and/or does social class influence how well one does at Ithaca High? If possible, include personal experiences, not only a sociological overview.
- Describe a time when hunger or a lack of hunger – or related economic issues – touched you.
- Use one or more of the following quotations to reflect on poverty and social class. You may include personal experiences, political musings, or both.
  - A. To a man with an empty stomach food is God. – Gandhi
  - B. Poverty is the parent of revolution and crime.—Aristotle
  - C. Anyone who has struggled with poverty knows how extremely expensive it is to be poor. -- James Baldwin
  - D. To be a poor man is hard, but to be a poor race in a land of dollars is the very bottom of hardships. -- W.E.B. Dubois
  - E. When I gave food to the poor, they called me a saint. When I asked why the poor were hungry, they called me a communist. - Dom Helder Camara
  - F. Compassion is defined not by how many people are on the government dole but by how many people no longer need government assistance. -- Rush Limbaugh
  - G. I would hurl words into this darkness and wait for an echo, and if an echo sounded, no matter how faintly, I would send other words to tell, to march, to fight, to create a sense of hunger for life that gnaws in us all. -- Richard Wright
  - H. The test of our progress is not whether we add more to the abundance of those who have much; it is whether we provide enough for those who have too little. -- Franklin D. Roosevelt
  - I. Hunger has always been more or less at my elbow when I played, but now I began to wake up at night to find hunger standing at my bedside, staring at my gauntly.-- Richard Wright
  - J. We are not concerned with the very poor. They are unthinkable, and only to be approached by the statistician or the poet. -- E.M. Forster
  - K. Money, it turned out, was exactly like sex. You thought of nothing else if you didn't have it and thought of other things if you did. – James Baldwin
  - L. Poverty doesn't give you strength or teach you lessons about perseverance. No, poverty only teaches you how to be poor. – Sherman Alexie
  - M. It is altogether curious, your first contact with poverty. You have thought so much about poverty--it is the thing you have feared all your life, the thing you knew would happen to you sooner or later; and it, is all so utterly and prosaically different. You thought it would be quite simple; it is extraordinarily complicated. You thought it would be

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terrible; it is merely squalid and boring. It is the peculiar LOWNESS of poverty that you discover first; the shifts that it puts you to, the complicated meanness, the crust-wiping. – George Orwell

- N. For every talent that poverty has stimulated it has blighted a hundred.-- John W. Gardner
- O. There is an inverse relationship between reliance on the state and self-reliance. -- William F. Buckley, Jr.
- P. Clothes make the poor invisible. America has the best-dressed poverty the world has ever known. -- Michael Harrington
- Q. The poverty of our century is unlike that of any other. It is not, as poverty was before, the result of natural scarcity, but of a set of priorities imposed upon the rest of the world by the rich. Consequently, the modern poor are not pitied...but written off as trash. The twentieth-century consumer economy has produced the first culture for which a beggar is a reminder of nothing. -- John Berger
- R. A hunger man is not a free man. Adlai Stevenson
- S. Hunger steals the memory. – Louise Erdrich
- T. Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired, signifies in the final sense a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed. - Dwight D. Eisenhower
- U. Charity is commendable; everyone should be charitable. But justice aims to create a social order in which, if individuals choose not to be charitable, people still don't go hungry, unschooled or sick without care. Charity depends on the vicissitudes of whim and personal wealth; justice depends on commitment instead of circumstance. Faith-based charity provides crumbs from the table; faith-based justice offers a place at the table. -- Bill Moyers
- V. The most dangerous creation of any society is the man who has nothing to lose. -- James Baldwin

W. *Shiftless*

The people who were better than us were comfortable.

They lived in painted houses with flush toilets.

Drove cars whose year and make were recognizable.

The ones worse off were sorry and didn't work.

Their strange cars sat on blocks in dusty yards.

The years go by and everything and everyone gets replaced.

But this much is still true-I never liked work.

My goal was always to be shiftless.

I saw the merit in that.

I liked the idea of sitting in a chair in front of your house for hours,

doing nothing but wearing a hat and drinking cola.

What's wrong with that?

Drawing on a cigarette from time to time.

Spitting.

Making things out of wood with a knife.

Where's the harm there?

Now and then calling the dogs to hunt rabbits.

Try it sometime. Once in a while hailing a fat, blond kid like me and saying, "Don't I know you?" Not, "What are you going to be when you grow up?"

-- Raymond Carver, poet and short story writer