

## Commissioner's Book Club: Discussion guide

# Shy cat and the Stuff-The-Bus challenge

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## Introduction

B.C.'s Human Rights Commissioner's Book Club offers monthly book selections that use stories to help readers connect with human rights issues and build connection with the characters they encounter. We hope to bring together a province-wide community of readers to deepen their understanding of human rights and those who are most affected by human rights issues. This guide has been prepared to assist parents, teachers, librarians and other trusted adults explore themes of human rights, food insecurity, friendship, community care and social action and the courage to advocate for ourselves and others.

The friendship between Mila and Kit in *Shy Cat and The Stuff-The-Bus Challenge* creates a window for younger readers into the realities of food insecurity. The story uses a child's perspective to show that while school food drives may help in the moment, they don't address the root causes of food insecurity like poverty and broader inequities such as ableism and racism. Readers learn about complex concepts in ways that are approachable and relatable.

## Definitions:

**Food insecurity** means not always knowing if you will have enough food or being unsure when you'll get your next meal. Food insecurity is not a personal choice. It happens because our food systems—which includes how food is grown, shared and sold—aren't always fair. That unfairness can lead to unequal access to food in our communities.

## Discussion questions

1. What did you think of the story? Did you learn something new?
2. Have you heard of the term 'food insecurity' before reading this book? What do you think it means? What do you know about it?
3. What happens in the story that makes Mila realize that Kit is experiencing food insecurity?
4. How does food insecurity affect Kit and his mom?
5. What is the Stuff-The-Bus challenge? What is the purpose or goal of the challenge?
6. Has your family, sports team, community group or school participated in an event like the Stuff-The-Bus challenge? What was it like?
7. In the story, Mila misunderstands some of Kit's behaviour around food. She thinks Kit is being rude, but her mom says, "Sometime rude is just hungry." What does her mom mean?
8. Why did Kit react so strongly to the rusted and dented can in the Stuff-The-Bus food drop off box? Were there other things that happened during the Stuff-The-Bus challenge that bothered him? Why?
9. Why weren't the bag apples accepted as a food donation? Why is having access to fresh food, including fruits and vegetables, an important part of being food secure?
10. In the story, Mila's mama says that she is lucky she has never experienced hunger. Mila thinks lucky is not the right word to describe it. How does Mila describe the fact that some people have enough food while others don't? Do you agree with her perspective?
11. Mila is curious about the differences between something being unfair and something being unlucky. What is something that you have noticed that is unlucky? What is something you have noticed that is unfair? What do you think is the difference between something being unlucky or being unfair?
12. In the story, Kit and his mom learn about community gardens and are able to obtain a plot. Do you have community gardens in your community? What are some benefits (pros) and some drawbacks (cons) of community gardens when it comes to helping people have enough healthy food?
13. Sometimes, when we hear about food insecurity in the news, it can seem like an adult problem. This story shows us how it is a problem for children too. How do you think food insecurity might affect children differently than adults?
14. In the story, we learn about some causes of food insecurity, like the high cost of food and jobs that don't pay enough to cover the costs of living. What did you learn about these and other causes food insecurity?

15. In the story Kit is often hungry. We learn that being hungry is part of food insecurity, but there are other things that Kit experiences that are part of being food insecure. What are they?
16. Food insecurity can affect anybody. However, it is more likely to affect some people than others because of inequality in our society. Which groups do we learn about in the story? Are there other groups who are affected more who weren't represented in the story?
17. How do events like the Stuff-The-Bus challenge or food drives help people who do not have enough food? Do you think they are successful in addressing food insecurity? Do you think they are enough to solve food insecurity?
18. Can you think of ways, other than food banks and food drives, to address food insecurity? Try to think of some solutions that might help prevent food insecurity in the first place.
19. What do you know about community initiatives to address food insecurity where you live? Where can people go to get food or meals? Are there groups who are trying to address food insecurity in other ways?
20. In the story, Mila asks, "Why doesn't somebody do something so everybody in the world has enough to eat?!" Do you think access to food is a human right? Do you think governments should be responsible for making sure no one goes hungry? Why or why not?
21. After reading this story and learning about food insecurity, what do you think should be done to create food security in your community, in your province and in your country? List as many potential solutions as possible.

## Activities

### Food security poster challenge

Create a poster that explains the difference between food security and food insecurity.

Be sure to include:

- clear definitions of both terms
- words and feelings associated with each (for example: safe, worried, healthy or unsure)
- creative design elements such as colour, font and images that help communicate your message

Consider sharing your posters with:

- your school community
- community leaders

- local organizations that work to address food insecurity

## Connecting with leaders: Letter writing challenge

Leaders are people who make decisions for a group of people. Making sure those leaders know your perspective, ideas and concerns is an important part of a healthy democracy.

One of the ways that people can help address problems in their community is by sharing their thoughts, ideas and concerns with leaders. One common way to do this is to write to those leaders or to request a meeting with them.

Who are the leaders in your community?

- a) Make a list of all the communities you are part of. Think of smaller communities like your school, sports or community organizations or your synagogue, mosque, church or gurdwara. Then think of bigger ones such as your neighbourhood, city or town, and provincial community.
- b) Identify the leaders in each of those communities and write their names on the list. If you don't know who they are, you may have to do some research! For example, who is the mayor of your city or town? Who is the Premier of the Province? Which elected official, known as a Member of the Legislative Assembly or MLA, represents your community at the Provincial Legislature?

Sharing your ideas and concerns with leaders

- a) Decide which leader(s) you will write to. You can share your letter with as many as you would like!
- b) Write a letter explaining what you have learned about food insecurity after reading *Shy Cat* and the *Stuff-The-Bus Challenge*. Be sure to include:
  - i. an introduction to yourself
  - ii. what you have learned about the causes of food insecurity
  - iii. what you have learned about addressing or preventing food insecurity
  - iv. questions you may have about that they know about food insecurity and what they are doing to address it
  - v. what you would like them to do about food insecurity
- c) Send your letter(s) and wait for a response. When responses arrive, share them with the class and discuss them as a group.

## The right to food:

The right to food is included in many international agreements. Canada has signed on to these agreements, meaning that it recognizes food as a human right. Even though Canada recognizes that everyone has a right to food, the laws in our country don't protect

that right yet. For the right to food to be protected and enforced in Canada, it would need to become part of the country's laws.

Choose one of the documents below and find out what it says about the right to food. Then create a short presentation that introduces the document and what it says about the right to food. These presentations can be in-person speeches, posters, short videos, skits or short plays. Use your imagination!

### **Documents:**

For more information and links to human rights learning resources about the document, please visit the Human Rights Resources section of this document.

1. **Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)** is an international agreement that lists the basic rights and freedoms everyone in the world should have. UDHR Article 25 states that everyone has the right to a standard of living that includes food, housing and health. This means people should have what they need to live safely and stay healthy.
2. **The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)** is an international agreement that explains the rights that all children should have so they can grow up safe, healthy and respected. UNCRC Articles 24 and 27 state that children have the right to adequate, nutritious food so they can grow, develop and stay healthy. Governments must support families in providing this.

### **What to include in your presentation:**

#### 1. Introduce the document

- What is the document?
- When was it created?
- What is its purpose or goal?

#### 2. Focus on the right to food

- What does the document say about food?
- Who has the right to food?
- Who is responsible for making sure people have access to food?
- Why is this important?

### **After all presentations: Class discussion**

As a class, listen to all presentations and then discuss:

- What ideas were similar across the documents? What was different?
- Which document do you think said it best? Which was easiest to understand? Why?

- What surprised you about what the documents said?
- Why do you think food is described as a right instead of just a need?
- Do you think the right to food should be included in Canadian laws? Why or why not?
- Who is responsible for making sure people have enough food?
  - What role do governments play?
  - What role do communities or organizations play?
  - Can individuals, like us, make a difference? How?

## Human rights resources

### Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)

The **Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)** is an international agreement that lists the basic rights and freedoms everyone in the world should have.

The United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) is mandated to help protect human rights around the world. They have many educational resources about the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#), including an illustrated version: [Illustrated Universal Declaration of Human Rights | OHCHR](#)

### UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

The **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)** is an international agreement that explains the rights that all children should have so they can grow up safe, healthy, and respected.

**UNICEF**, the United Nations agency for children, has a child-friendly version of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). It is available here: [www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention/convention-text-childrens-version](http://www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention/convention-text-childrens-version)

**The Society for Children and Youth of BC** has many educational resources available about child rights, including a poster of a simplified United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child. They are available here: [www.scyofbc.org/resources](http://www.scyofbc.org/resources)