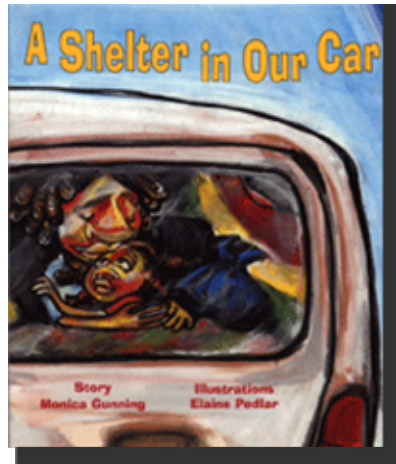


READING COMMUNITIES: CBP TEACHER'S GUIDES

A Shelter in Our Car

Written by **Monica Gunning**

Illustrated by **Elaine Pedlar**



WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT?

A Shelter in Our Car tells the story of a mother and daughter who have left their home in Jamaica for an uncertain and sometimes frightening life in the United States. With Papa gone, Mama can't find a steady job that will sustain her and Zettie, and so the two are forced to live in their car. As the story unfolds, Zettie faces the many challenges of being homeless, but her mother's love and support give her the determination to overcome them.

Together, author Monica Gunning and illustrator Elaine Pedlar offer a moving and authentic story about homelessness in an American city and about the real lives of the people it affects. According to the National Alliance to End Homelessness, about 3 million people in the United States lack homes at some time during the year. Almost half of these people are school-age children. The causes of homelessness vary widely, from the high cost of housing, to low wages or unemployment, to mental or physical illness. Regardless of the reasons for their situation, homeless children and adults frequently find themselves struggling to survive and to meet their basic needs for food, shelter, clothing, and education.

A Shelter in Our Car brings to life in vivid detail the struggles that homeless families face on a daily basis. As children get to know Zettie and her mother, they will also identify the many characteristics of a home: physical shelter from the elements, safety, and caring relationships between family and community members. Most of the activities described in this guide are designed to expose children to the realities of homelessness in the United States. However, you may have children in your classroom who are currently homeless or who have been homeless in the past. In either situation, be sure to lead these activities in a manner that is sensitive to the needs and emotions of your students and that demonstrates respect, rather than pity, for people without homes.

Monica Gunning was inspired to write *A Shelter in Our Car* while volunteering with her church to feed the homeless. The experience left her with a renewed understanding of people in that situation. “I realized some were victims of circumstances, like the death of a parent or loss of a job,” she says. “Children need to know that homelessness can happen to anyone.” With guidance and input from the Homeless Children’s Network in San Francisco, Monica was able to create an authentic and compassionate story about the lives of people often ignored by society.

COMMUNITY: Afro-Caribbean-American, homeless

THEMATIC UNITS

Human Needs: food and shelter; homelessness; poverty

Being Home: characteristics of a “home”; impacts of immigration; family life and routines

Family Structures: parent-child relationships; single-parent families; family interdependence

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Monica Gunning was born in Jamaica, West Indies, and immigrated to the United States to work and further her education. After graduating from the City University in New York and from Mount Saint Mary’s College in Los Angeles, she became a teacher in the Los Angeles Unified School District. The author of two critically acclaimed books of poetry for children, *Not a Copper Penny in Me House* and *Under the Breadfruit Tree*, she has also published extensively in magazines and anthologies. Ms. Gunning is the proud mother of two sons, Michael, and Mark, and has four grandchildren. Monica lives in Laguna Niguel in southern California where she is currently working on her fourth book, *America, My New Home*.

ABOUT THE ARTIST



Elaine Pedlar was born in Rockaway Beach, Queens, New York, and is the youngest girl of seven children. She graduated from Parsons School of Design in 1987 and, since then, has been a fashion designer. Illustrating books for children has been her constant dream, however, and *A Shelter in Our Car* was her first opportunity to make it come true. Single and living in a loft in Brooklyn, she has nine nieces and nephews that she loves dearly.

GETTING THE CLASSROOM READY

Understanding Homelessness



Map of your city; statistics about homelessness in your city and in the nation; books and other resources on homelessness (see [Resources](#))

- Create a display in a part of your classroom dedicated to the topic of homelessness. Using a map of your city as a backdrop, feature statistics about homeless people living in your city and across the country. Leave room to post additional information as your class learns more.
- Gather a resource library in a corner of your classroom where students can go to learn more about homelessness. Bring in fiction and non-fiction books for students to check out and print out relevant information and activities from the Internet. See the ***Resources*** section of this guide for book titles and websites.
- Post photographs of different types of shelters that people use in the United States. Include familiar structures, such as houses or apartment buildings, as well as structures that might be less familiar, such as hogans, shacks, cardboard boxes, street corners, doorways, lean-to's, or igloos. Label each picture with the shelter's name and, if possible, its location. Use these pictures to discuss with students the importance of shelter and the characteristics of a successful shelter.

GETTING READY FOR READING

What Do We Know? What Do We Want to Know?

*In preparation for reading **A Shelter in Our Car**, students create a Know-Want-Learn (KWL) chart recording what they know and what they would like to know about homelessness.*



20 minutes



Whole class; partners

CA Language Arts Standard 2.2: Students ask questions and support answers by connecting prior knowledge with literal information found in, and inferred from, the text.



Flipchart and markers

1. Create a KWL chart about homelessness. (What do you know about homelessness? What do you want to know? What have you learned?) Ask class to share what they know about homelessness. Record responses in the first column.
2. Read out loud the dictionary definition of homeless: “Without a home of any kind. People without a home of any kind.”
3. Ask students to discuss this definition with a partner. What does the word homelessness make students think or feel? What questions do they have about people without homes? Encourage them to base their questions on what they already know – from their lives or from books.
4. Have pairs share their responses with the whole class and record their questions under the second column of the KWL chart. Possible questions include: Who is homeless? Why are people homeless? What does it feel like to be homeless? What happens to homeless children?
5. Tell students that this is the beginning of a unit on homelessness, and that the class will explore many of these questions during the units. Ask them to remind you, as you find answers to their questions, to record answers to the questions in the KWL chart.

EXPLORING THE BOOK

Diving In



45 minutes



Large group

Introduce the book to students in a large group. Focus this first reading on reading comprehension strategies that will support students in understanding and taking pleasure in the story. Ask students to practice *predicting* the book’s plot and *inferring* what they need to know to make sense of the story.

- Read the title and ask the group if they know what the word “shelter” means. Through discussion, come to a shared understanding of the meaning of “shelter” in this context – a safe place that protects people from the outside world. Ask the group to brainstorm reasons why people need shelter, such as bad weather, physical safety, privacy, or protection from other people.
- Read the book aloud to students, modeling fluent reading and reading with expression. Be sure to give students opportunities to examine the illustrations that support the text. Pause after each designated section to check for comprehension, asking questions which prompt students to make predictions and inferences:
 - p. 7: *Why are Zettie and Mama in the United States? Why did they leave Jamaica?*
 - p. 14: *Why does Zettie want Mama to drop her off at the corner instead of in front of the school?*
 - p. 16: *What do you think? Why can’t Zettie’s mother “do some other kind of work?”*
 - p. 19: *What do you know about Benjie? How do you know?*
 - p. 25: *What will happen next? What will Zettie do? What would you do?*
 - p. 30: *Why does Mama say, “How would you like to sleep in a bed all summer instead of in our car?”*
- Once you have finished reading the story, ask students to predict what will happen next. Ask them to explain how they used what they know about Zettie and Mama to make their predictions.

FIRST TIME AROUND: VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT

A Shelter in Our...

Students will practice classifying words based on categories of human needs, such as food, shelter, and clothing. As they do so, they will generate and organize vocabulary banks.



40 minutes



Whole class and small groups

CA Reading Standard 1.5: Students demonstrate knowledge of levels of specificity among grade appropriate words and explain the importance of these relations



Chart paper and markers; pencils or pens and paper

1. Remind the class that for Zettie and Mama, their shelter is a car, but that most people have other types of shelters. Ask students to find the word for the shelter their family lives in. Take examples.
2. Ask students to brainstorm all the different types of shelters that people might live in. Record these words in a list. If you have posted photographs of different types of shelters in your classroom, have students use them for additional ideas.
3. Tell the class that shelter is just one of the things that human beings need to survive. Ask students to brainstorm other categories of things people need, such as food, clothing, or warmth. Draw a diagram that shows how these words are related to each other, classifying by levels of specificity:



4. Break the class up into small groups. Assign one need to each group and ask students to come up with *types* of things that belong in that category. Tell them to write their list of ideas down.
5. Bring students back together as a whole class. Ask groups to share their lists and record them on the flipchart. Ask the class why these things are important to *all* people. How do you know if something is necessary to live? What things do they have in their lives that they could live without, such as televisions or computers? What would life be like without those things? How would that be different from life without the items on their lists?

SECOND TIME AROUND: READING COMPREHENSION

To Make a Long Story Short...

Using a story organizer, students will identify key story elements. They will then create story summaries based on the information they have identified.



40 minutes



Small groups or pairs

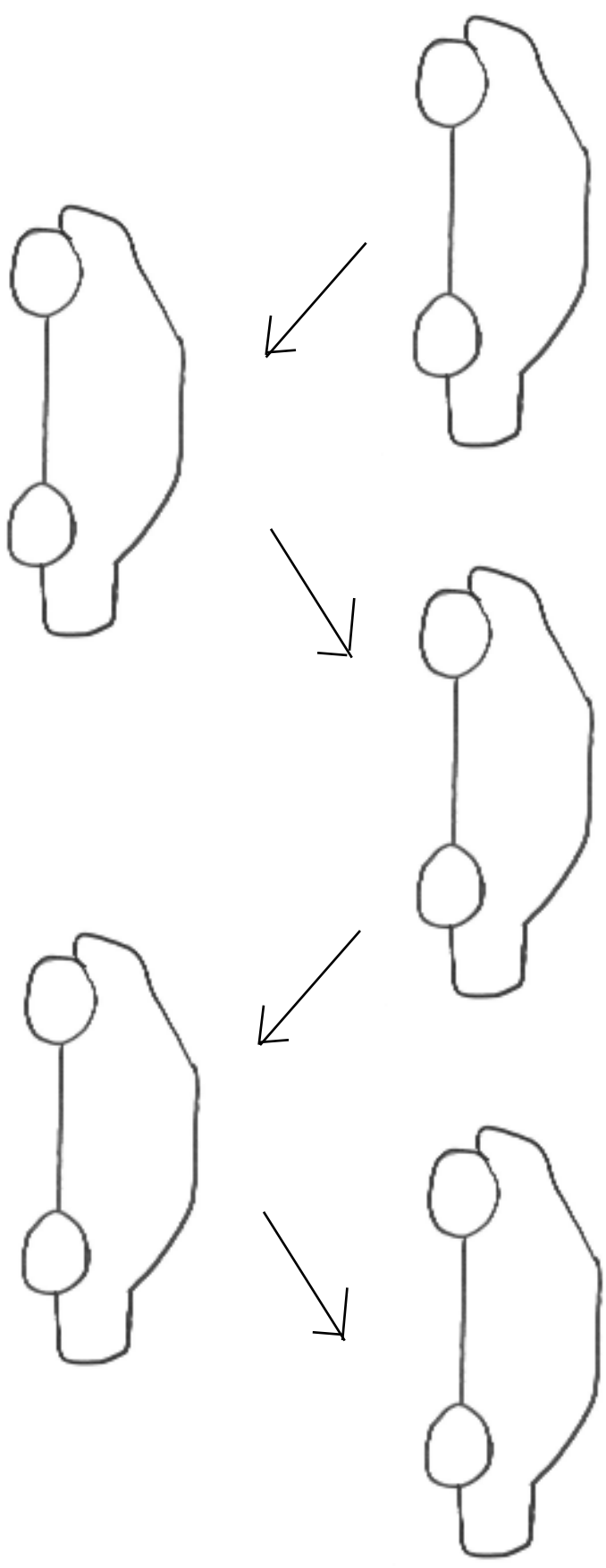
CA Reading Standard 2.6: Students extract appropriate and significant information from the text, including problems and solutions.



Copies of Story Map; overhead transparency of story organizer; copies of *A Shelter in Our Car*

1. As a group, look at the story map on the overhead projector. Remind students that every story has a beginning, a middle, and an end. Ask students how they would describe the beginning of *A Shelter in Our Car*. Together, take notes on the first space of the story map.
2. Next, have students work in pairs to fill in the rest of the story map.
3. When students have finished, have them share their responses with the entire class. Follow along on the story organizer on the overhead projector as students share their answers.
4. Ask students to identify the beginning, middle and end of this story, using the information on the story organizer. Ask students to identify other important features of all stories, such as characters. Together, come to agreement on who are the characters in *A Shelter in Our Car*.
5. Finally, ask students to write a one-paragraph summary of the book with their partners. Remind them to include all the key pieces of information that you just discussed.

A Shelter in Our Car
Story Map



AFTERWORDS: LITERARY RESPONSE AND ANALYSIS

Showing and Telling

Students practice making inferences about the characters based on their words and actions.



30 minutes



Individual

CA Reading Standard 3.3: Students will determine what characters are like by what they say or do and by how the author or illustrator portrays them.



Chart paper or blackboard; Character Analysis worksheet; overhead transparency of Character Analysis worksheet; pens and pencils

1. Ask students for words that describe somebody they all know (such as the principal, a custodian, or another teacher). Remind students that the words we use to describe are called adjectives. List the adjectives that students brainstorm on a piece of chart paper or the blackboard. Then, ask students how they know these words are true. As students share their responses, record them under the headings “words” or “actions.”
2. Tell students that, just like real people, we can figure things out about a person in a book by looking at what they say – their words – and what they do – their actions. Point to the character of the policeman in *A Shelter in Our Car*. What words would students use to describe him? What does he say or do to make them use those words to describe him? Again, record responses under “words” and “actions.”
3. Place the transparency of the Character Analysis Worksheet on the overhead projector. As a class, fill out the boxes using the lists students brainstormed about a school character and the policeman from the book.
4. Finally, distribute the Character Analysis Worksheet and ask students to fill out three boxes each for Mama and Zettie. Tell them that they can either draw or write in the boxes to show what the characters say and do.

A Shelter in Our Car - Character Analysis Worksheet

Character: _____	
Words	Actions
page _____	page _____
_____ adjectives	

Character: _____	
Words	Actions
page _____	page _____
_____ adjectives	

Character: _____	
Words	Actions
page _____	page _____
_____ adjectives	

Character: _____	
Words	Actions
page _____	page _____
_____ adjectives	

Character: _____	
Words	Actions
page _____	page _____
_____ adjectives	

Character: _____	
Words	Actions
page _____	page _____
_____ adjectives	

SOCIAL STUDIES

Changemakers

Through group research, students identify one problem facing homeless people and an action they can take to address it. The class plans and follows through on this project, enlisting the help of additional community members as needed.



1 hour initially



Small and large groups

CA Social Sciences Standard 3.4: Students discuss the importance of public virtue and the role of citizens, including how to participate in a classroom, in the community, and in civic life.



Speaker on homelessness.

Flipchart and markers; books on homelessness; computers with Internet access (optional)

1. Discuss with students what they have learned about homelessness. What challenges do Zettie and Mama face? What could help make their lives easier? Brainstorm a list of things that Zettie and Mama need, such as free food, clothing, affordable housing, steady employment, or understanding from other students and families. Record the list on a flipchart.
2. Ask the class to pick *one issue* they would like to change to help children like Zettie. Is it accessing food or clothing? Or is it a policy addressing issues such as housing or employment? Explain to students that they will come up with a project that they can undertake as a group.
3. In order to plan their project, the students will need to gather information. As a large group, identify the questions they need to answer. Then, break students into groups to research aspects of the problem they have identified. Using the websites and books listed under **Resources** for information, have each group of students identify the answer to their question.

4. Next, have the groups share their research findings. Ask them what they can do to address the issue they have learned about. Brainstorm ideas and then select one project that the class can realistically take on.
5. As a group, come up with an action plan to achieve your goal. Set a deadline for each step of your process. If appropriate, ask students to request help from other community members (see “Writing For Change” in the Language Arts section of this guide).

OTHER SOCIAL STUDIES ACTIVITIES

- *Classroom visitor:* Invite someone to come and talk with your class about the issue of homelessness. It would be preferable to have someone who has been homeless, a homeless advocate, or someone who works directly with people who are homeless. Before the visitor comes to the class, prepare for the speaker by having students talk about appropriate and inappropriate questions to ask. Figure out what type of information they want to gather. After the visit, make sure that students do follow up with thank you letters, etc.
- *Current Events:* Over the course of several months (or the year) track the ways that the issue of homelessness gets covered in the local paper. As a class, clip, read, and discuss these articles.

LANGUAGE ARTS

Letters for Change

As a group, the class chooses a project they would like to undertake to fight homelessness. They identify the people they will need to ask for help and write letters to those community members, explaining the nature of their project and how that person can contribute.



30 minutes a day
over two weeks



Whole class; small groups; and pairs

CA Writing Standard 2.3: Students write personal and formal letters, showing awareness of the knowledge and interests of the audience and establishing a purpose and context.



Flipchart and markers; paper and pens or pencils, envelopes and stamps

Plan

- Through the Social Studies activity plan described above, identify a class project to address homelessness. Then, have the class identify who could help them with their project. Make a list of possible resources, such as other students, teachers, family members, community organizations, or elected officials. Next to each potential resource, record how that person could help.
- Divide up the students into groups based on whom they will write to. Have each group brainstorm what they might say to convince someone to help him/her make this change. Why does it matter that many people don't have enough to eat or anywhere to live? What facts could the students use to convince their reader? Are there stories they could tell to make their points?
- Have groups share their lists with the whole class. Record the arguments they will use to persuade their audience on a flip chart.
- In a mini-lesson, model the conventions of letter writing for students. Explain elements such as the date, receiver addresses, salutation, body, closing, and signature.

Draft

- Break students up into pairs to write their letters. Remind students to think about *who* their reader is, *what* they want their audience to do, and *why* they want them to take this action.
- Encourage students to share with their audience what they have learned about homelessness, as a way to convince them to take action. Tell students to refer to the brainstormed lists when they are deciding what to write.

Revise

- Ask pairs to trade letters and give each other feedback. Tell students reading each other's work to pretend they had never heard about this project before. Does the letter explain clearly what the project is, why the class has chosen the project, and how the reader can help? If not, what do the authors need to change in their revision?

Edit

- With the class, review the elements of a model letter. Ask students to check for these elements in each other's letters as they proofread for spelling and grammar.

Publish

- Ask students to prepare final versions of their letters, addressing and stamping the envelopes themselves, and mail them
- As a follow-up, have students write thank-you letters to community members who helped them with their project.

OTHER WRITING ACTIVITIES

- *Book Review:* As a group, read reviews of books your class has read. Identify the important elements of a review, such as summary and response. Ask the class to write reviews of *A Shelter in Our Car*.
- *Being Brave:* On page 10, Mama tells Zettie to be brave when she's afraid of the ice-cold water. Ask students to point out other instances when Zettie is brave. Then, have them share situations when they themselves were brave and use those stories as the basis for personal narratives.
- *Found Poems:* Ask students to read an article about homelessness, such as one of those on the National Coalition for the Homeless website. Then, ask them to write poems about what they learned, using only words found in the article.

ART

Your Perfect Place

Students imagine and draw a place that would provide Zettie with shelter.



Two 45-minute sessions



Individual and whole class



8 1/2 x 11 copy paper; colored pencils or pastels; butcher paper; tape

1. Ask students to close their eyes and imagine what Zettie's perfect home would look like. Remind them of all the attributes of a good shelter: it protects people from the elements; it is comfortable; it has what people need to survive. Walk them through their imaginary shelter, having them think about what they see, hear, smell, and touch in this home.
2. Next, tell students that they have the opportunity to create this ideal shelter for Zettie through art. Tell them to draw what they saw, heard, smelt, and touched in their imaginations. Encourage them to think about how they could symbolize something like "warmth" in their pictures.
3. Encourage students to share their artwork with the class, explaining what they've chosen to draw. As the share, remind students that their homes are located in communities. Ask the group to brainstorm what they would find in their perfect community and make a list of students' ideas.
4. Dedicate a wall of your classroom to this art project and post students' work there on top of butcher paper, with considerable space in between each piece of work. The next day, read students the list they created describing the perfect community. Ask the to class to draw in the community they described, connecting each individual shelter to the greater whole.

OTHER ART ACTIVITIES

- Ask students to create self-portraits or portraits of their families in the style of the illustrations for *A Shelter in Our Car*. Encourage them to use unusual color

combinations and exaggerated facial expressions to express their emotions as Elaine Pedlar does. Use chalk pastels and construction paper.

MATH

Greater or lesser?

Using statistical data on homelessness, students practice comparing fractions and decimal numbers.



30 minutes



Large group and pairs

CA Mathematics Standard 3.4: Students know and understand that fractions and decimals are two different representations of the same concept.



Statistics and data on the homeless for your city and the nation; pencils and paper; overhead projector or flipchart and markers

1. To prepare for the lesson, translate the statistics on homelessness to simple fractions. Create a table comparing the data for your city, or nearby city, and for the nation and display on a flipchart or the overhead projector.
2. Working in pairs, have students identify which numbers are greater, those measuring homelessness in your city or those measuring homelessness in the nation. Ask them to circle the larger of the two fractions.
3. Then, tell students that decimals are an alternative way to represent something that is a part of a greater whole. Next to each fraction, write the equivalent decimal. Ask students to go back to their pairs and see if they have changed their minds about which numbers are greater.
4. Have students share their findings. As students respond, make sure they describe the strategies they used to decide which of the two numbers was larger. Tell them to include whether they changed their responses once they saw the decimal numbers.
5. As a class, identify the larger number in each comparison. If necessary, ask the class to represent the fraction, counting out students. Clarify that the decimals and the fraction are describing the same amount.

6. Include a discussion about the moral acceptability of these numbers. Ask class if fractions are a good way of representing people's distress? Why or why not? Do number show the whole picture?

OTHER MATH ACTIVITIES

- *Public Opinion:* As a class, design a survey about homelessness and possible solutions to the problem. Have students poll other students, family members, or other community members with questions such as "Why do you think people are homeless?" or "What would you do to help a homeless person?" Encourage students to come up with their own questions that the class would like to ask. Gather and categorize your data and create a bar graph representing the opinions of different groups. As a class, discuss your findings.
- *Spending Wisely:* Tell students that Zettie and Mama have to survive on as little money as possible. Give the class a price list for items that Zettie and Mama might buy and ask them to help figure out how to spend as little money as possible. Alternatively, ask students to figure out as many combinations of items as possible for under \$10 a day, or under \$50 a week.

SCIENCE

Getting Through the Day

Students identify the ways that Zettie and Mama find and use the energy they need to survive.



20 minutes



Whole class and individual

CA Science Standard 1.b: Students know that sources for stored energy take many forms, such as food, fuel, or batteries.



Flipchart and markers or blackboard and chalk

1. Tell students that energy is something that people use all the time, without even thinking about it. Ask students to point out things in their classroom that use energy. Then, encourage them to brainstorm the things *they* do that use up energy. Ask students where all this energy comes from.
2. As a class, make a list of energy sources and their uses (e.g., lights use electric power while people use food).
3. Have students go back to *A Shelter in Our Car*. Ask each student to find one example of a type of energy use or source in the book (e.g., cars use gasoline; flashlights use batteries; Zettie and Mama eat spaghetti.) Record these uses under the sources you have already listed.

OTHER SCIENCE ACTIVITIES

- *Nutrition:* Discuss the elements of a balanced diet with your students. Ask them to analyze what Zettie and Mama eat to see if they're eating healthily, discuss reasons why they weren't eating well, and make recommendations based on what they've learned. As students design their menus, ask them to calculate the cost of the items and think about how much money a family needs to live healthily.

- *Finding Shelter*: Describe the different types of shelters that animals use, such as bears' dens or birds' nests. Analyze each type of shelter to see how the animals successfully adapt to their environment.

RESOURCES

Related Titles from Children's Book Press

My Very Own Room. Written by Amada Irma Perez and illustrated by Maya Christina Gonzalez.

Books from Other Publishers

Bunting, Eve. *December*. Harcourt Brace, 1997.

Bunting, Eve. *Fly Away Home*. Clarion Books, 1993.

Chalofsky, Margie et al. *Changing Places: A Kid's View of Shelter Living*. Gryphon House, Inc., 1992.

Chinn, Karen. *Sam and the Lucky Money*. Lee & Low Books, 1995.

Cumpiano, Ina. *Y Tu, Donde Vives?* Hampton-Brown Books, 1992.

Da Costa Nuñez, Ralph. *Our Wish*. Homes for the Homeless, 1997.

Fox, Paula. *Monkey Island*. Orchard Books, 1991.

Forst, Jonathon. *Gowanus Dog*. Frances Foster Books, 1999.

Groth, B.L. *Home is Where We Live: Life at a Shelter Through a Young Girl's Eyes*. Cornerstone Press, 1995.

Hamilton, Virginia. *The Planet of Junior Brown*. MacMillan, 1986.

Hubbard, Jim. *Shooting Back: A Photographic View of Life by Homeless Children*. Chronicle Books, 1991.

McGovern, Ann. *The Lady in the Box*. Turtle Books, 1997.

Rosen, Michael J. *Home*. HarperTrophy, 1996.

Testa, Maria. *Someplace to Go*. Albert Whitman and Company, 1996.

Web sites:

National Alliance to End Homelessness has many resources online, including statistics, lesson plans, and reference lists: www.endhomelessness.org

National Coalition for the Homeless has useful factsheets and information on homeless policy: www.nationalhomeless.org

Department of Housing and Urban Development includes facts and information aimed at children: www.hud.gov/kids/hthsplsh.html

Drawbridge is a San Francisco Bay Area organization that teaches art to homeless children. The website features art by homeless children: www.drawbridge.org

CONTRIBUTORS

Miguel De Loza is a fifth grade bilingual Language Arts, and Social Studies teacher at Garfield Charter School in Menlo Park, CA. Building on the strengths of students' cultures, backgrounds, abilities and experiences, Garfield Charter School cultivates the values of respect, responsibility and community involvement. The school's mission is to continue to provide a replicable, sustainable, equitable model for quality education in Spanish and English.

Alexandra Freidus, former Director of Community Partnerships at Children's Book Press, teaches integrated Language Arts and Social Studies to secondary students at Berkeley High School. Alexandra was a consultant for this Teacher's Guide.

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Christina Velasco is a fourth and fifth grade teacher at Fairmount Elementary School's Spanish immersion program. She is a Bay Area Writing Project teacher consultant and is teaching a writing course for educators at UC Berkeley this summer.

TIPS FROM THE PROS

Please share your own ideas for how to use *A Shelter in Our Car* in the classroom. We'll be pleased to post your work on the web site for other teachers to use. Email us your lesson plans at communityprograms@childrensbookpress.org.