

# Broke *in* America

## Seeing, Understanding, *and* Ending US Poverty

### Classroom Study Guide

For academic sales or to arrange author interactions with your class, contact Lindsay@benbellabooks.com.

1. What did you read in *Broke in America* that reminded you of your own community or school?
2. “One in four US American one-year-olds are not getting enough iron. The odds of suffering Iron Deficiency Anemia (IDA) – a dangerous condition that impedes brain development -- increase significantly when a family lives with food insecurity.” *Broke in America*, page 39.

Did it surprise you to learn this?

What are the educational implications of this fact?

What are the economic implications?

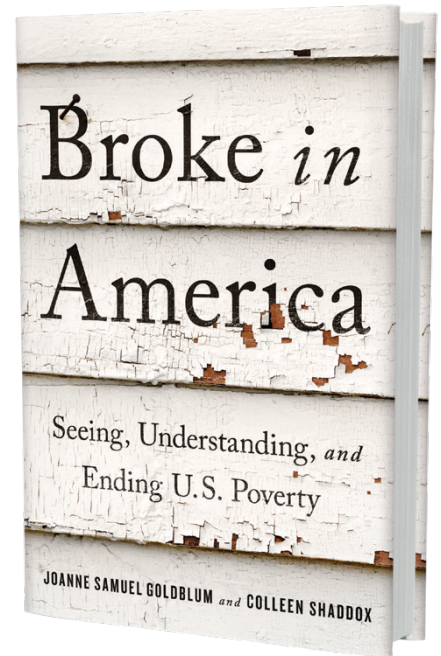
3. In Chapter 13, High Poverty Schools, the authors say that students in poverty can struggle academically because they have to devote too much of their time to earning wages. As a policy recommendation, they say that it should never be legal to pay a teen less than minimum wage – because lower wages only add to the hours that they must work.

Do you think students spend too much time working for wages?

How does that affect participation in resume-building activities?

What other policy changes could avert this problem?

4. In the 2016 election, more than half the eligible voters who did not participate made less than \$30,000. (page 177) Can democracy and poverty co-exist?
5. The authors call racism and poverty “each other’s evil twins.” They lay out a number of racist structures that have denied people of color wealth since before the nation’s founding, beginning with slavery and tracing things all the way to redlining, which they show is still happening in the U.S. What’s your reaction to that? They support reparations to help address this historic disadvantage. Why do you or don’t you agree with that remedy?
6. What is the most surprising thing that you read in this book?
7. The authors say that the U.S. can end poverty. Do you think this will happen? Why or why not?



8. “When people are dealing with food insecurity, they’re not going to mobilize over something that’s a ‘maybe,’” says Monica Huertes on page 87, discussing how difficult it is to organize her neighborhood to fight a liquefied natural gas plant. The people most likely to be harmed by energy production pollution are also the most likely to experience shut offs. Is this acceptable? Evaluate the solutions that the book presents to this problem.
9. Before the pandemic, almost 40% of Americans could not meet their basic needs. Do you think that’s sustainable for our society? How do you think preexisting poverty affected COVID 19’s impact on the US? Are there changes we could make to become more resilient?
10. What is the main point that the authors are trying to make?
11. Do you believe they made their case? What project will you take on as a result of studying poverty?

### Projects related to *Broke in America*:

1. Are period supplies freely available in your school? If not, can you organize a collection drive – or make a proposal to the administration that these products to be placed in rest rooms?
2. *Broke in America* talks about many barriers that keep low-income people from participating in the political process. Can you run a voter registration drive in your school? Can you run a voter registration drive in a community center or other space that serves low-income people?
3. Individuals or teams can research the barriers to one basic need in your school or community and make recommendations about how to increase access. **(If you do this project, one of the authors will do a Zoom discussion with your class about how you can act on your plan.)**
4. Is your school newspaper or radio station covering what the experience of being a student is like for people in poverty? If not, you can propose they do a series – or do the series yourself.
5. Take a story in the news in your community and dissect it to find out how poverty is part of the narrative (a part that may or may not be reported).