BOOKS ABOUT HOMELESS YOUTH

These books -- for children, teens, and adults -- will help you understand the complicated situation of homeless youth in our community. Many works of fiction are included, as these are often the most effective pathway to gaining empathy for others and an understanding of difficult issues we may not be personally familiar with.

PICTURE BOOKS

December by Eve Bunting

A homeless family's luck changes after they help an old woman who has even less than they do at Christmas.

Fly Away Home by Eve Bunting

A homeless boy who lives in an airport with his father, moving from terminal to terminal and trying not to be noticed, is given hope when he sees a trapped bird find its freedom.

I Can Hear the Sun by Patricia Polacco

Stephanie Michelle, who cares for animals and listens to the sun, believes the homeless child, Fondo, when he tells her that the geese have invited him to fly away with them.

The Leaves in October by Karen Ackerman

After her mother leaves them, nine-year-old Livvy struggles to understand and forgive as her father loses his job and takes her and her younger brother to live in a shelter for homeless people.

A Shelter in Our Car by Monica Gunning

When her father died, Zettie and her mother left their warm and comfortable home in Jamaica for an uncertain future in the United States. Zettie's mother can't find a steady job so they are forced to live in their car. But her mother's unwavering love, support, and gutsy determination give Zettie the confidence that, together, she and her mother can meet all challenges. Monica Gunning's moving and authentic story about homelessness in an American city and Elaine Pedlar's strong and lively illustrations bring this moving story to life.

Someplace to Go by Maria Testa

Davey describes how he spends his time after school trying to keep safe and warm until he can meet his mother and older brother when the shelter opens at eight o'clock.
YOUNG ADULT FICTION

Almost a Hero by John Neufeld

Twelve-year-old Ben Derby spends his spring break volunteering at a Santa Barbara day care center for homeless children.

Almost Home by Joan Bauer

When twelve-year-old Sugar's grandfather dies and her gambling father takes off yet again, Sugar and her mother lose their home in Missouri. They head to Chicago for a fresh start, only to discover that fresh starts aren't so easy to come by for the homeless. Nevertheless, Sugar's mother has taught her to be grateful no matter what, so Sugar does her best. With the help of a rescue dog, Shush; a foster family; a supportive teacher; a love of poetry; and her own grace and good humor, Sugar comes to understand that while she can't control the hand life deals her, she can control how she responds.

The Beggar's Ride by Theresa Nelson

Twelve-year-old Clare flees an unhappy home life and tries to survive on the streets of Atlantic City with a small gang of homeless kids, each of whom has his own secret reason for distrusting society.

Bye, Bye, Bali Kai by Harriett Luger

This is a humorous, sympathetic look at a family who find themselves homeless and a young girl's spirited efforts to cope with this all-too-believable situation. "Luger avoids sentimentality and creates a sympathetic and involving story of a contemporary problem in very personal, very childlike terms." -- Kirkus Reviews

Chive by Shelley Barre

Nine-year-old Chive, homeless because his parents have lost their farm and are looking for work in the city, strikes up an unusual friendship with eleven-year-old Terry and competes with him in a skateboard competition.

The Double Life of Zoe Flynn by Janet Lee Carey

When Zoe's family has to live in their van for months after moving from California to Oregon so her father can find work, Zoe tries to keep her sixth-grade classmates from discovering that she is homeless.

Elsa, Star of the Shelter! by Jacqueline Wilson and Nick Sharrett

Noisy, brash, and a troublemaker, ten-year-old Elsa uses her loud voice to warn of a fire at the homeless shelter where she lives with her family.

Family Pose by Dean Hughes

Feeling unwanted, an eleven-year-old orphan runs away from his foster home and lives on the streets until he finds a new type of family at a hotel.
**How to Steal a Dog** by Barbara O’Connor

Half of me was thinking, Georgina, don't do this. Stealing a dog is just plain wrong. The other half of me was thinking, Georgina, you're in a bad fix and you got to do whatever it takes to get yourself out of it. Georgina Hayes is desperate. Ever since her father left and they were evicted from their apartment, her family has been living in their car. With her mama juggling two jobs and trying to make enough money to find a place to live, Georgina is stuck looking after her younger brother, Toby. And she has her heart set on improving their situation. When Georgina spots a missing-dog poster with a reward of five hundred dollars, the solution to all her problems suddenly seems within reach. All she has to do is "borrow" the right dog and its owners are sure to offer a reward. What happens next is the last thing she expected. With unmistakable sympathy, Barbara O’Connor tells the story of a young girl struggling to see what’s right when everything else seems wrong.

**The King of Dragons** by Carol Fenner

Eleven-year-old Ian and his father, a Vietnam veteran, have been homeless for several years. Now his father has found the perfect place for them, the vast, old, now unused city courthouse. As a historic monument, it is kept heated and has lots of bathrooms and a variety of exits, and entrances. Then Ian’s father fails to return one night, and Ian discovers that a local museum is going to put on a six-week exhibit of kites from around the world in one of the largest courtrooms. As the kites arrive and the exhibit is mounted, Ian is increasingly fascinated by what he sees when no one is there and what he overhears. The kites are beautiful -- extraordinary, imaginative, and varied. Because he reads all the books on kites that are there, Ian becomes quite an expert. At length he bluffs his way into being accepted as a very bright and knowledgeable boy who can, when the exhibit opens, take groups of schoolchildren around. Ian's precarious survival on his own, following all the precautions his father has taught him, makes absorbing reading in this highly unusual, realistic story of a closely knit, remarkably independent father and son by the author of the 1996 Newbery Honor winner, *Yolonda's Genius*.

**Money Hungry** by Sharon G. Flake

Thirteen-year-old Raspberry Hill is always scheming about ways to make money. She's starved for the green stuff, and will do just about anything legal to get it—wash cars, sell rotten candy, skip lunch, and clean houses. She is obsessed with making money, having money, smelling money, and touching money. Raspberry is determined that she and her momma will never be homeless again. When they are approved for a Section 8 move to a nice house in Pecan Landings, Raspberry thinks things are looking up. But after their apartment in the projects is robbed, and protest by the rich folks in Pecan Landings force them out of their new house, Raspberry must do everything in her power to keep her world from crumbling.

**Monkey Island** by Paula Fox

Forced to live on the streets of New York after his mother disappears from their hotel room, eleven-year-old Clay is befriended by two men who help him survive.

**Rich** by Nikki Grimes

Free is excited about a local poetry contest because of its cash prize, but when he and Dyamonde befriend a classmate who is homeless and living in a shelter, they rethink what it means to be rich or poor.
Sam and the Moon Queen by Alison Cragin Herzig

Sympathetic to a homeless girl's plight, Sam tries to help her find food for herself and medical aid for her dog.

Secret in St. Something by Barbara Brooks Wallace

Fleeing from a cruel step-father, eleven-year-old Robin takes his baby brother and finds shelter with street boys living in a church in a tenement area of New York City.

TEEN & ADULT FICTION

Almost Home by Jessica Blank

Why would anyone choose to live on the streets? There is Eeyore, just twelve years old when she runs away from her privileged home, harboring a secret she's too ashamed to tell anyone. Rusty is a sensitive gay teen who winds up alone when his older boyfriend ditches him in Hollywood. Squid has gone through too many foster homes to count. There's Scabius, a delusional punk from Utah who takes the "me against the world" motto to dangerous extremes. And Critter is a heroin dealer with movie star looks and a vulnerable heart. Laura should be home studying, but she can't face another one of her mom's boyfriends. And then there's Tracy, the damaged thread that ties them all together, irrevocably changing each life she touches. This unlikely band of characters forms their own dysfunctional family, complete with love and belonging, abuse and betrayal. Each will make their way home, wherever it may be.

Becoming Chloe by Catherine Ryan Hyde

Meet Jordy. He's on his own in New York City. Nobody to depend on; nobody depending on him. And it's been working fine. Until this girl comes along. She's 18 and blond and pretty-her world should be perfect. But she's seen things no one should ever see in their whole life-the kind of things that break a person. She doesn't seem broken, though. She seems . . . innocent. Like she doesn't know a whole lot. Only sometimes she does. The one thing she knows for sure is that the world is an ugly place. Now her life may depend on Jordy proving her wrong. So they hit the road to discover the truth-and there's no going back from what they find out. This deeply felt, redemptive novel reveals both the dark corners and hidden joys of life's journey-and the remarkable resilience of the human soul.

The Blue Mirror by Kathe Koja

Some guys are bad news Sixteen-year-old Maggy's life consists of trying to be invisible at school, taking care of her alcoholic mother, and spending all the time she can at the Blue Mirror, a downtown café. She can lose herself there for hours with a cappuccino and her sketchbook, in which she creates a paper world she calls "The Blue Mirror." But everything changes when she meets Cole, a charismatic runaway. Maggy is intrigued by Cole's risky life on the streets and by the girls who follow him, childlike Jouly and strange Marianne. And when Cole says that he loves her, Maggy comes alive. As Maggy becomes more entwined with Cole and she looks at him with all her heart, she sees something far more dangerous than she may be capable of handling.
**Boulevard** by William Guttentag

It's always sunny in California until you walk on the wrong side of Sunset Boulevard. And yet the bright lights still call to thousands, and every day new arrivals fill the ranks of Hollywood’s underworld of teenage runaways and hopeful stars turned hookers and strippers. Their stories are too wretched and too sad for society's attention, but when a high-profile lawyer is murdered at the Chateau Marmont, lackluster detective Jimmy McCann takes to the streets and finds himself enmeshed in this complex web of prostitution and drugs, learning that the killer, a young girl named Casey, is a victim in her own right. Delving into Casey’s troubled community of homeless runaways, characterized by abuse, rape, death and disease, but also by friendship, loyalty and love, Bill Guttentag has crafted a stunning literary crime novel based on real-life incidents that will resound with readers everywhere.

**Can’t Get There From Here** by Todd Strasser

Her street name is Maybe. She lives with a tribe of homeless teens -- runaways and throwaways, kids who have no place to go other than the cold city streets, and no family except for one another. Abused, abandoned, and forgotten, they struggle against the cold, hunger, and constant danger. With the frigid winds of January comes a new girl: Tears, a twelve-year-old whose mother doesn't believe her stepfather abuses her. As the other kids start to disappear -- victims of violence, addiction, and exposure -- Maybe tries to help Tears get off the streets...if it's not already too late. Todd Strasser, author of the powerful and disturbing *Give a Boy a Gun*, again focuses on an important social issue as he tells a thought-provoking, heart-wrenching story of young lives lost to the streets, and of a society that has forgotten how to care.

**Fat Kid Rules the World** by K.L. Going

Troy Billings at 6’1”, 296 pounds, is standing at the edge of a subway platform seriously contemplating suicide when he meets Curt MacCrae-a sage-like, semi-homeless punk guitar genius who also happens to be a drop-out legend at Troy’s school on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. "I saved your life. You owe me lunch," Curt tells Troy, and Troy can't imagine refusing; after all, think of the headline: FAT KID ARGUES WITH PIECE OF TWINE. But with Curt, Troy gets more than he bargained for and soon finds himself recruited as Curt's drummer. "We'll be called Rage/Tectonic. Sort of a punk rock, Clash sort of thing," Curt informs him. There's only one problem. Troy can't play the drums. Oh yes, and his father thinks Curt's a drug addict. And his brother thinks Troy's a loser. But with Curt, anything is possible. "You'll see," says Curt. "We're going to be HUGE." In an outstanding, funny, edgy debut, K. L. Going presents two unlikely friends who ultimately save each other.

**Joseph** by Shelia Moses

For Joseph Flood, life is tough. It's tough because of Mama's addiction to drugs and alcohol. It's tough because Daddy is away with the army fighting in Iraq. It's tough because it looks like there's no way out once you're living in a homeless shelter in a North Carolina ghetto neighborhood. And tough because Joseph is enrolled in yet another new school where he doesn't know anyone and has to keep what's going on in his life a secret.

**My Lost and Found Life** by Melodie Brasher

When her mother is accused of embezzling a million dollars and vanishes, spoiled, selfish Ashley must fend for herself by finding a job and a place to live.
Skate by Michael Harmon

There's not much keeping Ian Mc Dermott in Spokane, but at least it's home. He's been raising Sammy practically on his own ever since their mom disappeared again on one of her binges. They get by, finding just enough to eat and plenty of time to skateboard. But at Morrison High, Ian is getting the distinct, chilling feeling that the administration wants him and his board and his punked hair gone. Simply gone. And when his temper finally blows—he actually takes a swing at Coach Florence and knocks him cold—Ian knows he's got to grab Sammy and skate. Run. Their search for the one relative they can think of, their only hope, leads Ian and Sammy across the entire state of Washington in the cold and rain—and straight into a shocking discovery. Through it all, Ian knows exactly what he has to do: protect Sammy, and let no one split up their family of two. Michael Harmon tells a nuanced and unflinching story of wilderness survival, the fierce bond between brothers, and teen rage—and redemption.

Smack by Melvin Burgess

Winner of the Carnegie Medal and the Guardian Prize for fiction, two of England's most prestigious awards, Smack tells a penetrating story about heroin use, a topic that is becoming familiar in the news and one of importance to teens everywhere. The story begins with Tar, a fourteen-year-old, who runs away from home. He convinces his girlfriend, Gemma, to come with him, and it is not long before they are engulfed in a loose community of people living in abandoned buildings. Everything seems to be turning out so well: they have a roof over their heads, food to eat, and a brand-new group of friends. And when Tar and Gemma try their first hit of smack, they think life will keep on getting better. But before long, they find they've lost control. The search for the next hit becomes all-consuming—until a disaster forces Gemma to take matters into her own hands.

Sorta Like a Rock Star by Matthew Quick

Although seventeen-year-old Amber Appleton is homeless, living in a school bus with her unfit mother, she is a relentless optimist who visits the elderly at a nursing home, teaches English to Korean Catholic women with the use of rhythm and blues music, and befriends a solitary Vietnam veteran and his dog, but eventually she experiences one burden more than she can bear and slips into a deep depression.

Ten Mile River: A Novel by Paul Griffin

Best friends Ray and Jose are not your typical thirteen-year-olds. They've escaped foster care and juvenile detention centers to live on their own together in an abandoned building located near Manhattan Park called Ten-Mile River. With no use for school or families, street-smart Jose and bookish, introspective Ray have everything they need in each other. They are closer than brothers until they meet Trini. She's smart, beautiful, and confident, and they both fall for her immediately. As tension creeps into their relationship, Ray must struggle to find an identity separate from Jose and try to envision a future for himself beyond Jose and Ten-Mile River.

Tyrell by Coe Booth

Fifteen-year-old Tyrell, who is living in a Bronx homeless shelter with his spaced-out mother and his younger brother, tries to avoid temptation so he does not end up in jail like his father.

The Way it Works by William Kowalski

Walter Davis is young, handsome, intelligent, dynamic and personable. The product of a bi-racial marriage but abandoned by his father as a young child, he prides himself on three things: his drive to
succeed, his fine clothes and never having been late for anything in his life. Walter is also homeless. The medical expenses that came with his mother’s brief and unsuccessful battle against cancer have left him destitute. Still, ever the optimist, Walter believes that if he lives in his car for a few months, he will have the time he needs to find a good job in the business world and turn his life around. His situation gets more complicated when he finds himself attracted to a girl he meets at the mailing center where he keeps a post box. But trying to impress a girl when you have no fixed address proves difficult, and when he’s caught in a lie, she shuns his company. Walter’s struggles grow when his car is impounded and he can't afford to pay the fine. Only resilience, ingenuity and his drive to succeed can bring Walter back from the brink of despair.

**ADULT MEMOIR & OTHER NONFICTION**

**Almost Home: Helping Kids Move from Homelessness to Hope** by Kevin Ryan and Tina Kelley

Inside the lives of homeless teens--moving stories of pain and hope from Covenant House Almost Home tells the stories of six remarkable young people from across the United States and Canada as they confront life alone on the streets. Each eventually finds his or her way to Covenant House, the largest charity serving homeless and runaway youth in North America. From the son of a crack addict who fights his own descent into drug addiction to a teen mother reaching for a new life, their stories veer between devastating and inspiring as they each struggle to find a place called home. Includes striking photographs, stories of firsthand experiences mentoring and working with homeless and troubled youth, and practical suggestions on how to get involved. Discusses the root causes of homelessness among young people, and policy recommendations to address them. Provides action steps readers can take to fight youth homelessness and assist individual homeless young people.

**At Home on the Street: People, Poverty & a Hidden Culture of Homelessness** by Jason Wasserman & Jeffrey Michael Clair

In their compelling examination of what it means to be truly at home on the street, Jason Wasserman and Jeffrey Clair argue that programs and policies addressing homeless people too often serve only to alienate them. Wasserman and Clair delve into the complex realities of homelessness to paint a gripping picture of individuals - not cases or pathologies - living on the street and of their strategies for daily survival. By exploring the private spaces that those who are homeless create for themselves, as well as their prevailing social mores, the authors explain how well-intentioned policies and programs often only widen the gap between the indigent and mainstream society. The result is an unvarnished look at the culture of long-term homelessness and a fresh approach to reaching this resurgent population. In their compelling examination of what it means to be truly at home on the street, the authors argue that programs and policies designed to assist homeless people too often serve only to alienate them.

**Kids Without Homes** by Joan J. Johnson

The number of children growing up homeless puts an increasing burden for their welfare on American society. This in-depth look includes chapters on the consequences and costs—both physical and psychological—of poverty, the struggle to find shelter, and the future for America's homeless children. Illus. with black & white photographs.
Bring Them Back Alive: Helping Teens Get Out and Stay Out of Trouble by Jose M. De Oliveres

Jose de Olivares, the recent Acting Deputy National Director of the Job Corps program, offers his Streetwise Strategy—Practical steps for bringing disenfranchised teens off the streets and back into mainstream society. This important work is a necessary manual for teachers, parents and anyone concerned about the well-being and the future of America's youth.

Girlbomb: A Halfway Homeless Memoir by Janice Erlbaum

At fifteen, sick of her mom's spineless reactions to abusive men and afraid of her stepfather's unpredictable behavior—Janice Erlbaum walked out of her family's apartment and never returned. What followed that fateful decision is the heart of this amazing, fascinating, and disturbing memoir. From her first frightening night at a shelter, trying to sleep in a large room filled with yelling girls, Janice knew she was in over her head. She was beaten up, shaken down, and nearly stabbed by a pregnant girl. But it was still better than living at home. Just like that, she was halfway homeless, always one step away from being sent "upstate to Lockdown." As Janice slipped further into street life, she nevertheless continued to attend high school, harbor crushes, even play the lead in the spring production of Guys and Dolls. She also roamed the streets, clubs, bars, and parks of New York City with her two best girlfriends, on the prowl for hard drugs and boys on skateboards. Together they scored coke at Danceteria, smoked angel dust in East Village squats, commiserated over their crazy mothers, and slept with one another's boyfriends on a regular basis. Janice Erlbaum paints a wry, mesmerizing portrait of being underprivileged, underage, and underdressed in the 1980s, bouncing from shelters to group homes, from tenement squats to legendary nightclubs. A moving and tremendously entertaining ride through the seediest parts of New York City, Girlbomb provides an unflinching look at street life, survival sex, female friendships, and first loves.

Out of Sight Out of Mind: Homeless Children and Families in Small-Town America by Yvonne M. Vissing

"Homelessness in small towns and rural areas is on the rise. Drawing on interviews with and case studies of three hundred children and their families, with supporting statistics from federal, state, and private agencies, Vissing illustrates the impact this social problem has upon education, health, and the economy."

Ask Me Why I Hurt: The Kids Nobody Wants and the Doctor Who Heals Them by Randy Christensen, MD with Rene Denfeld

The unforgettable inspiring memoir of one extraordinary doctor who is saving lives in a most unconventional way Ask Me Why I Hurt is the touching and revealing first-person account of the remarkable work of Dr. Randy Christensen. Trained as a pediatrician, he works not in a typical hospital setting but, rather, in a 38-foot Winnebago that has been refitted as a doctor's office on wheels. His patients are the city's homeless adolescents and children. In the shadow of one affluent American city, Dr. Christensen has dedicated his life to caring for society's throwaway kids—the often-abused, unloved children who live on the streets without access to proper health care, all the while fending off constant threats from thugs, gangs, pimps, and other predators. With the Winnebago as his moveable medical center, Christensen and his team travel around the outskirts of Phoenix, attending to the children and teens who need him most. With tenderness and humor, Dr. Christensen chronicles everything from the struggles of the van's early beginnings, to the support system it became for the kids, and the ultimate recognition it has achieved over the years. Along with his immense professional challenges, he also describes the trials and joys he faces while raising a growing family with his wife Amy. By turns poignant, heartbreaking, and charming, Dr. Christensen's story is a gripping and rich memoir of his work and family, one of those rare books that stay with you long after you've turned the last page.
*Homeless Teens* by Gail B. Stewart

Discusses the numbers of homeless teenagers, their situation and behavior, and looks at the lives of four of them.

*Live Through This: A Mother’s Memoir of Runaway Daughters and Reclaimed Love* by Debra Gwartney

An intensely emotional and redemptive memoir about a mother’s mission to rescue her runaway daughters. After a miserably failed marriage, Debra Gwartney moves with her four young daughters to Eugene, Oregon, for a new job and what she hopes will be a new life for herself and her family. The two oldest, Amanda, 14, and Stephanie, 13, blame their mother for what happened, and one day the two run off together—to the streets of their own city, then San Francisco, then nowhere to be found. The harrowing subculture of the American runaway, with its random violence, its horrendously dangerous street drugs, and its patchwork of hidden shelters is captured by Gwartney with brilliant intensity in *Live Through This* as she sets out to find her girls. Though she thought she could hold her family together by love alone, Gwartney recognizes over the course of her search where she failed. It’s a testament to her strength—and to the resilience of her daughters—that after several years they are a family again, forged by both forgiveness and love.

*No Place to Be: Voices of Homeless Children* by Judith Berck

The stories and poems of actual homeless children—including fourteen-year-old Kareem, who lives in a city shelter—depict the reality of homelessness in America, illustrating what it means to be deprived of the things most people take for granted.

*Poverty and the Homeless: Current Controversies* ed. Mary E. Williams

Poverty and homelessness are sadly evident in America’s cities—and even in some of the nation's rural areas. Contributors examine the root causes of poverty and what should be done to help the poor and the homeless.

*Our Runaway and Homeless Youth: A Guide to Understanding* by Natasha Slesnick

In addition to describing the breadth of this problem, this book explains different types of runaway and homeless youths, and why they leave home by choice or are asked to leave, and explains some of the factors common to these children and their families, as well as what happens to the youths when they leave home. Direction and support are provided for parents from this clinical psychologist, who notes that there are few resources and programs across the nation designed specifically to help families with runaway youths. Told by a parent and three runaways themselves, the stories of four people trying to understand the causes and cope with the after-effects of running away serve to illustrate research results and issues presented here.

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