

*Every ONE can help!*

*Suggestions for Social Justice Activities Associated with Themes in*

*THE BRIDGE HOME by Padma Venkatraman*

The Bridge Home is about children in India who experience poverty, hunger, homelessness and loss; children who are under constant threat of violence and abuse; and yet children who remain loving and hopeful, who retain the ability to glimpse humor in the grimmest of situations, and who, are, above all, immensely courageous and capable of intense compassion. I hope that reading the book will not only allow you to feel empathetic toward children who suffer as a result of socioeconomic under privilege; I hope the book might inspire you to take action, as well. Here are some suggestions for activism that you might try to undertake with guidance from others (especially other adults, if you are a young reader), while honoring and respecting others, and in the spirit of peace, nonviolence, tolerance and acceptance:

Raise awareness of children's rights or child labor or domestic violence or hunger or homeless by conducting a peaceful march or sit-in.

Draw posters to raise awareness of the above issues.

Write to a local politician or newspaper about local conflicts or social justice issues and suggest ways that you think could be resolved peacefully.

Write stories and poems inspired by social justice issues.

Reach out to local organizations that help your community or to a national or international organization that is concerned with child welfare, animal rights, or some other aspect of social justice or peace. Find out what they require and conduct a drive to raise money or food or clothing or whatever they might need.

In addition to my suggestions above, earlier this year, I received a beautiful message with a wonderful list of suggestions w.r.t taking action to combat hunger and homelessness, from Sarah Azibo (@writebyhand), agent at the Booking Biz. I'm sharing them, with her kind permission. She lives in the United States, so the list below is directly applicable to readers in the U.S., but I'd love to hear how readers in other parts of the world might modify these ideas to suit the needs of children in other nations (@padmatv on twitter, venkatraman.padma on ig/fb) - and I'm sure she'd love to hear from you, too!

*Sarah Azibo said, "My experience has shown me that every effort needs the support of a community, not one individual alone, so these ideas are rooted in that belief. This is my passion – helping kids overcome and thrive beyond the obstacles placed in their path, just as you showed Viji to have done."*

1 – Food drive for backpack programs – Many schools have started backpack programs (and have opened food banks) to help combat childhood hunger. They solicit donations of food from community members and volunteers (parents) pack the food for kids to take home in their backpacks. Host a food drive for the nearest backpack program or hunger relief organization. At the very least, this raises awareness, and at most, it helps feed someone. Backpack drives are important because so many kids lose all their possessions and need something to call their own, to carry with them. Consider packing backpacks not just with food but also books as well as journals & sketchbooks children can personalize and use to express themselves.

2 – Advocates for kids -- Commit to being an advocate for kids facing food insecurity by educating yourselves about the global crisis and taking a step to combat the problem.

3 – Raise awareness for organizations that address children in need - Promote Action Against Hunger (Global), Share Our Strength “No Kid Hungry” campaign (<https://www.shareourstrength.org/> shareourstrength.org) USA), or another organization found here (<https://www.raptim.org/25-organizations-dedicated-to-fight-hunger/>). People can donate should they wish to or have the means. They can also speak up for kids, voice support for the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP) by contacting their elected officials to protect the program.

4 - The above actions all contribute to nourishing the bodies of kids in need. As for their minds and spirits...In addition to coordinating with the Food Bank of the Rockies to provide them with after school snacks and meals for dinner, consider volunteering to address their emotional needs. Perhaps you could join or implement a mentor program, tutoring program or take the time to do games, sports and crafts.