

Volunteers: Jon,\* Mary, Meghan, Libby, Phoebe

Students: Hyunju, Jing, Rainbow, Kathy, Xi Lin, Yoko

We began by having Meghan read aloud the letter, *No Free Lunch*, from the EEN. The students understood the story explained in the letter and knew the words, especially cafeteria because their children have one in school.

We next talked about one of the words in the story, "line." I drew a line on the board and they all knew that meaning. I explained that the word comes from an old word meaning, "thread," which seems appropriate. We then talked about many other uses of the word, "line," from fishing line to water line, lines in a play, a battle line, property line, line of clothing, line of work, line of sight, and many others. I gave them a handout with many uses of "line" listed so they could have it as a reference.

Next Mary read us a short article about New York public schools offering free lunches to all students and discussed why some low-income students might not get a free lunch. Then Rainbow and Jing read us a very short article that defined poverty and told of some of the issues that go along with it.

I had sent them a list of questions to think about for our discussion of poverty and homelessness which would follow the break.

At some point after the break I mentioned that Phoebe had been a Jeopardy champion, a fact which interested them greatly and they asked her a lot of questions, mostly about what she had won. Many of them love the TV show so this was very interesting to them.

Our discussion about poverty and homelessness was lively and they came up with many ideas of why a person might be homeless or poor or jobless. This was after we explained that most people who are jobless in America are so because of a good reason, not because they are simply lazy, as was mentioned by one student at the beginning. Phoebe explained that a single factory or plant closing in a small town can eliminate not just the livelihood of the people who work there but also of the people who own stores where those workers used to shop. Mary said her town had lost about 4,000 people after a factory closed. I think the students began to understand that the job situation here is different from their countries. We talked about reasons a person might not be able to work, such as physical or mental illness, age, addiction, disability, etc. They didn't know that there are not enough homeless shelters in American cities or that the shelters are dangerous places in many cases.

Hyunju said that in Korea there was a documentary showing that some beggars are really wealthy, so she wouldn't give money to a beggar. Also, she and Xi Lin told us that gangs in their countries run the begging population and force adults and children to beg and give them the money.

She also told us there is a popular TV show in Korea, a documentary about two Korean families now very wealthy and living in America. One is a Korean woman married to a Korean baseball player and the other is a Korean actress now married to a wealthy American. We talked about the cost of living in a city like New York, where the apartments these people in the documentary live in are very small for the price. They said they thought people in NY were all wealthy and didn't know why 75% of the children in school would need a free lunch. Phoebe explained that the rich people in NY send their children to private schools and the poorer ones who live in the poorer areas go to public school.

We talked about government healthcare and they all are well informed about that in their countries. In China and Korea each worker pays about 1/3 of the premium and their company pays the rest. Rainbow's company, Alcoa, bought additional insurance to pay the employees' deductibles so healthcare cost them nothing. Yoko said there is also government healthcare in Japan.

Jing told us something we didn't know about moving from place to place in China. You cannot move from where you were born unless you have a job in that new town. Sometimes poor people from the country would move to the city thinking things would be better but they end up begging. The government offers to pay their way back to their home but many of them don't want to go.

I then asked if anyone had ever donated to a food bank and some had. I told them that many people who went to a food bank where I'd volunteered were elderly. We said these people cannot always afford their medications, rent and also nutritious food. Libby said this is true at the foodbank where she helps. I think this was also surprising to the students.

All in all, it was an interesting discussion and I believe the students learned something about homelessness and poverty in America and discovered maybe things were not as they thought.