

READ★PRAY★WONDER★PLAY

A GUIDE TO SHARING STORIES WITH CHILDREN

The Coat

By Séverine Vidal & Louis Thomas

Told from the perspective of a young child, this book addresses the issue of homelessness (or houselessness or housing insecurity) and our response to it. Depending on where your family lives, seeing unhoused (or unsheltered) individuals or families may be something that happens daily, occasionally, or something that your children have only seen depicted in movies or books, without having any personal experiences. As you consider what the children you read with know about homelessness, prepare yourself for questions and conversation around this issue as presented in *The Coat*. Even if the children you are reading this book with are too young to understand the issue that the story centers around, the book's other themes of waiting, generosity, compassion, and joy offer the chance to connect these aspects of the story with their lived experiences.



★ ★ WONDER TOGETHER ★ ★

- Can you relate to Elise's experience of wanting an item that belonged to an older sibling? Together, share stories of a special item each person has wanted, including why the item was so special, if you ever received that item, and if you did, what happened to it when you no longer wanted or needed it.
- The experience of seeing the woman and her child sitting on the steps in the cold stayed with Elise to the point that she was unable to stop thinking about them. What sad or concerning situations have you experienced that stayed with you?
- Were you surprised that Elise gave her red coat away? Why or why not? What would you have done if you were Elise?

★ ★ EXPLORE THE STORY ★ ★

- The story is about a child who sees a need in her community and takes one small action to address it. Use this book as a starting point for conversations about how your family might notice need in the world and find a faithful way to respond to that need.
- Have children draw or paint pictures of people helping someone in need. Or invite children to create pictures of a child or family who doesn't have their own house yet are still surrounded by love and respect for their worthiness. What could this look like?
- *With Older Children:* Although this book does not use terms such as "homeless," "unhoused," or "unsheltered" to describe the woman and little girl that Elise sees on the steps, these are all terms used to describe people in this situation. Reflect together on, and perhaps research the origins of these and other terms related to housing insecurity.

PRAY

God of unending love, help us to be mindful of the places in our world where there is need. May we be inspired to use our energy to help others, bringing your love to the world through the things that we do and the ways that we share. Amen.



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★ ★ DIG DEEPER ★ ★

This book, filled with whimsical illustrations and a feel-good ending, is at its core a story about generosity and joy. As we dig deeper into its message, difficult questions come up—questions about both inequity in the world and our own willingness to make sacrifices to serve the common good. Some starting points to go deeper include:

- Explore the story of The Widow's Mite (Mark 12:41–44 and/or Luke 21:1–4), and reflect on the difference between the common act of sharing things we have no use for with the sacrificial act of sharing those things that we treasure. Many of us are used to giving away things that are no longer wanted (such as outgrown, out of style, or even stained or damaged clothes and household items). While there is value in passing these things on to others who might need them, it's a whole different story when we make the choice to share our treasured items (as both Elise and the woman in the gospels did) with others. Consider together how you might respond if you saw a great need for something that was important to you.
- Research the practice of creating and distributing “blessing bags” and see if this idea would translate to your community. When creating these bags, intentionally fill them with items that are of similar or greater quality to what your own family has.
- Join in the observation of Hunger and Homelessness Awareness Week, which occurs the week before Thanksgiving, and is sponsored by the National Coalition for the Homeless and the National Student Campaign Against Hunger and Homelessness. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)'s Hunger and Homelessness Sunday coincides with this observation. To get involved, check with your church leadership to ask about your congregation's or denomination's plans, or visit <https://hhweek.org> to learn about the wider initiative.

MORE TO READ & DO

CLICK THE LINKS BELOW TO LEARN MORE

ADDITIONAL DOWNLOADABLE RESOURCES FOR *THE COAT*

- Download the [Discussion and Activity Guide](#)
- Download the [Reading Guide for Faith Communities](#)

ADDITIONAL BOOKS ABOUT CARING FOR YOUR COMMUNITY

- [Saving Delicia: A Story about Small Seeds and Big Dreams](#), by Laura Gehl & Patricia Metola
- [Who Is My Neighbor?](#) by Amy-Jill Levine & Sandy Eisenberg Sasso & Denise Turu
- [Crocodile's Crossing: A Search for Home](#), by Yoei Slegers
- [Brian the Brave](#), by Paul Stewart & Jane Porter
- [Three Lines in a Circle: The Exciting Life of the Peace Symbol](#), by Michael G. Long & Carlos Vélez
- [Walking toward Peace: The True Story of a Brave Woman Called Peace Pilgrim](#), by Kathleen Krull & Annie Bowler

Guide written by Becky D'Angelo-Veitch and created in partnership with PC(USA)'s initiative “[Around the Table](https://www.pcusa.org/aroundthetable)” ([pcusa.org/aroundthetable](https://www.pcusa.org/aroundthetable)).



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