

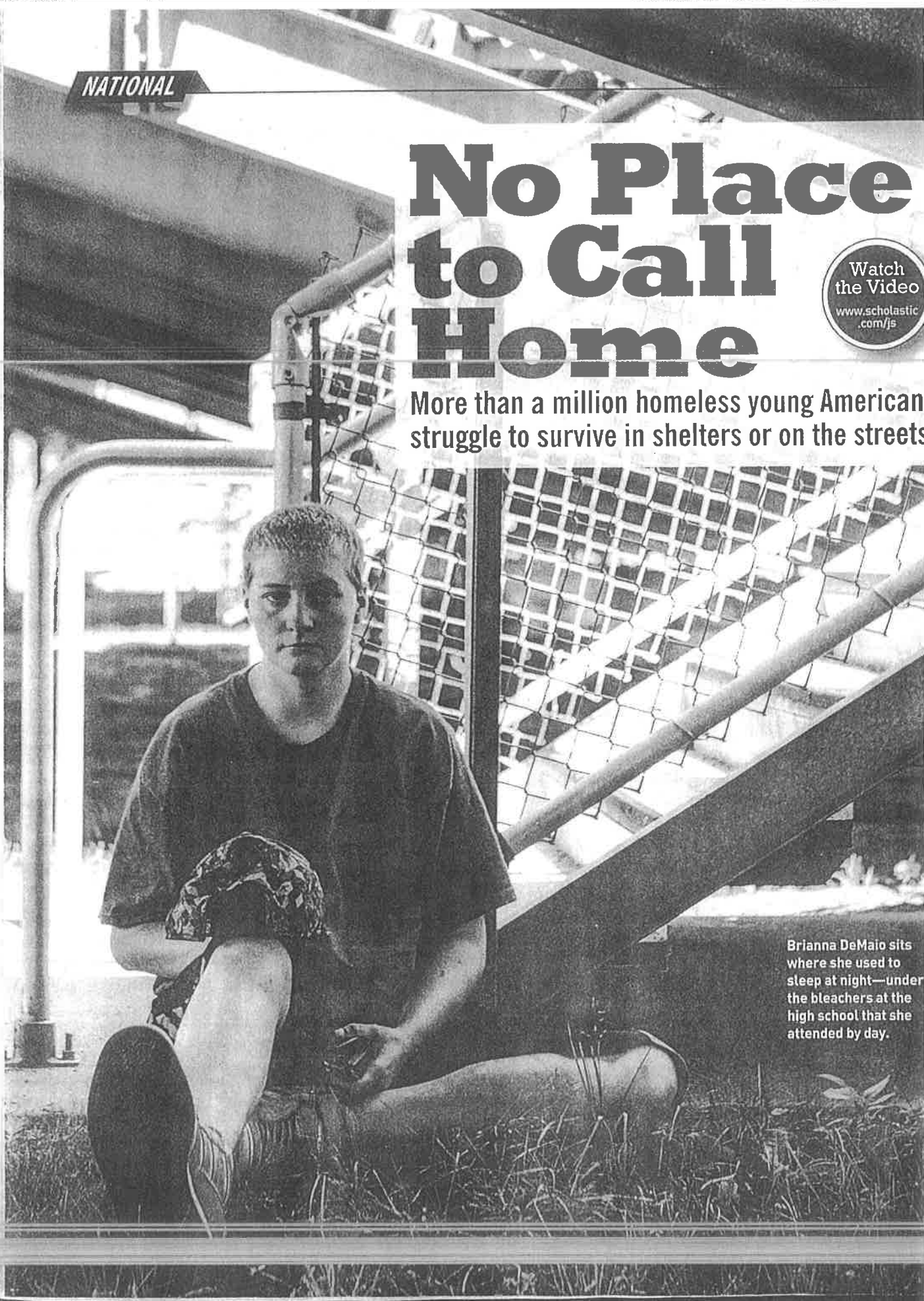
NATIONAL

No Place to Call Home

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More than a million homeless young Americans struggle to survive in shelters or on the streets

Brianna DeMaio sits where she used to sleep at night—under the bleachers at the high school that she attended by day.



Some nights, Brianna DeMaio, 18, isn't able to crash on a friend's couch or find a bed at a shelter. When that happens, she has to sleep in a shed, under a bridge, or in a park, huddled inside a tube slide in a playground. In the winter, she tries to ward off frostbite by wearing gloves and doubling up on socks.

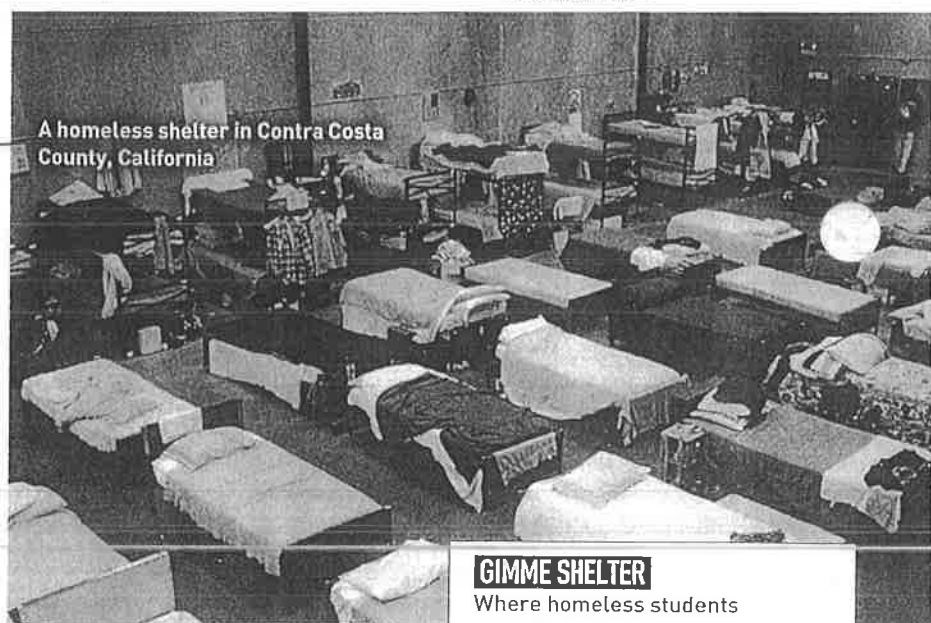
"I Was Scared"

Brianna has been homeless since she was 12. That's when she, her mother, and her older sister were evicted from their house in Portland, Maine. Brianna's mother struggled with alcohol abuse and couldn't keep up with the bills. After the family lost the house, Brianna's sister went to live with friends, and her mother moved in with her boyfriend. Brianna was left to survive on her own.

During the day, she kept going to school as often as she could. She didn't tell anyone about her situation. At night, she spent much of her time on the street, often struggling to find enough food. Sometimes she ate at a shelter. Other times, she stole food and soda from stores.

But nothing was worse than sleeping outside. Brianna still remembers the first night she spent in a park, wrapped in a couple of blankets in the middle of winter.

"I was scared out of my wits," she says. "I didn't know what was going to happen. . . . I never thought it would get that bad for me."



A homeless shelter in Contra Costa County, California

Who's Homeless?

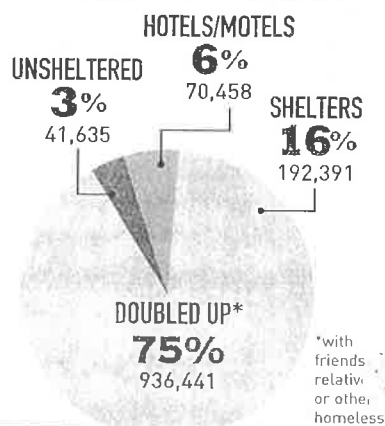
Brianna is one of the more than 1 million young people who are homeless in the United States. Many have ended up on the streets because their parents lost their jobs and can't pay the rent or mortgage. Some have run away from poverty, abuse, violence, or alcohol and drug problems. Others are too old to be in foster care, or have been rejected by their families because they admitted to being gay.

At night, they sleep in parks, alleys, cars, or abandoned buildings, and on subways and buses. The lucky ones couch surf with friends or relatives, or find cots in emergency shelters filled with dozens, and sometimes hundreds, of other homeless people. During the day, many homeless youth go to school or college, or try to find jobs.

The overall number of homeless Americans is declining, but the number of homeless young people in the U.S. is at an all-time high.

GIMME SHELTER

Where homeless students spend the night



SOURCE: National Center for Homeless Education, for school year 2012-2013

According to the Department of Education, about 1.2 million students in grades K-12 are homeless (see map, p. 10). That's up 72 percent since 2007.

That number doesn't include thousands of other homeless youth who aren't in school or college. Some estimates put the number of homeless youth at 2 million.

The primary culprit in the surge of homelessness is the severe recession that began in 2007. The economy has improved, but 10 million people are still looking for jobs and 15 percent of Americans are living in poverty.

continued on p. 10

Words to Know

- recession (n): a period of temporary economic decline
- commodity (n): anything that is bought or sold; something that is useful or valued

Another factor is a shrinking safety net, including cuts in federal affordable-housing programs. That has caused many families barely making ends meet to slide into homelessness.

"There are some myths out there about homeless youth and about, 'Oh, they are incorrigible kids; they just don't follow the rules,'" says Marian Carney, who runs a youth shelter in Lewiston, Maine. But in reality, Carney says, "their lives are very complicated. They're full of trauma."

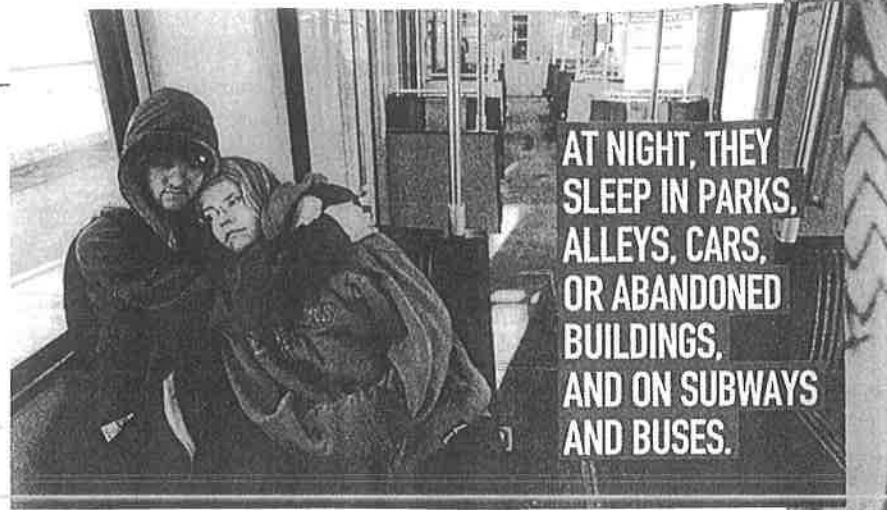
Regardless of how young people become homeless, they face a lot of the same problems. Many are struggling with malnutrition, abuse, addiction, and depression. Every day, they have the incredible stress of finding food and shelter for the night. For many homeless kids, hiding their situation from others causes even more stress.

"They're really hoping to remain invisible," says Jody Waits, one of the directors of Youth Care, a homeless shelter in Seattle. "They're embarrassed."

"They Don't Know What It's Like"

That was true of Malachi Armstrong. He became homeless at 16 when his grandmother kicked him out of her house in Philadelphia after she caught him alone with a girl. For almost two years, Malachi hopped from couch to couch. At times he stayed with friends whose homes were so dirty he didn't dare take a shower. Some nights he slept on park benches, with a bag of chips for dinner, if he ate anything at all.

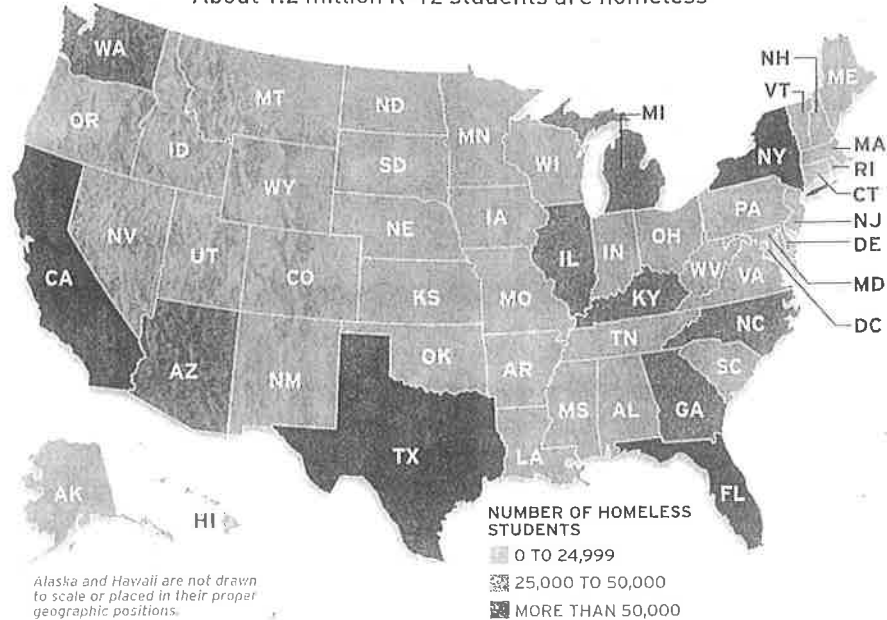
During the day, Malachi went to school. He made up excuses for



AT NIGHT, THEY SLEEP IN PARKS, ALLEYS, CARS, OR ABANDONED BUILDINGS, AND ON SUBWAYS AND BUSES.

WITHOUT A HOME

About 1.2 million K-12 students are homeless



SOURCE: U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, 2011-2012

falling asleep in class, like boasting to his classmates that he'd been been out late with friends. It took him almost two years to open up to his teachers and seek help at a local shelter. But even then, the sense of isolation wouldn't go away.

"They know what it means to be homeless, but they don't know what it's like to *be* homeless," says Malachi, who's now 22 and studying to get his truck driver's license in Kentucky.

"We Stand Up for Each Other"

Apple* had a different experience. Homeless on and off for seven years, she found a lot of support in the homeless community itself and felt less isolated than Malachi.

Apple went into California's foster care system at age 14. After being moved into four different group homes in three years, she ran away. She lived on the streets, sleeping in parks, on the beach,

*Apple is her nickname. She requested that her

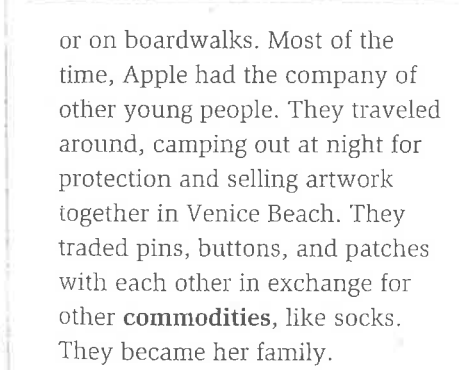
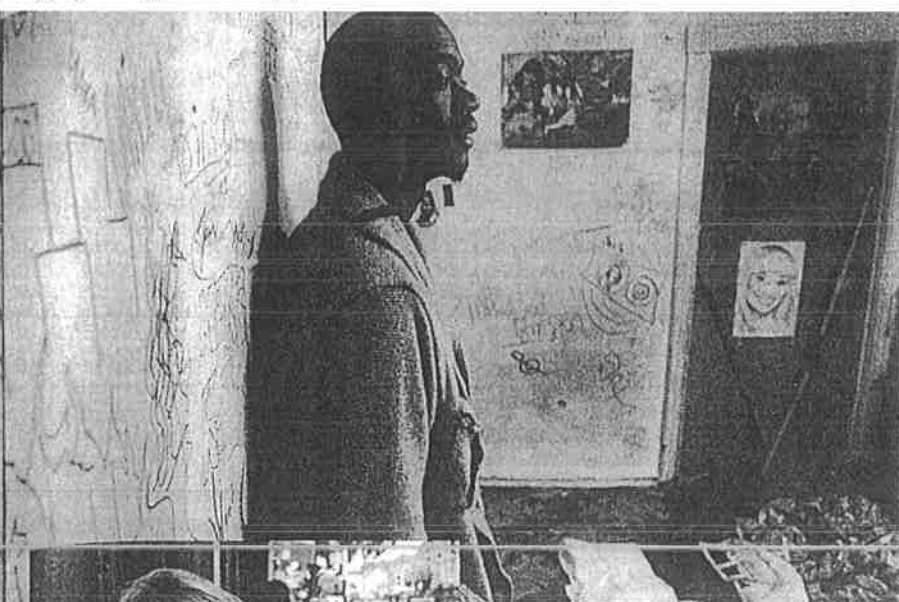
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or on boardwalks. Most of the time, Apple had the company of other young people. They traveled around, camping out at night for protection and selling artwork together in Venice Beach. They traded pins, buttons, and patches with each other in exchange for other **commodities**, like socks. They became her family.

"With the homeless youth community, there's kind of this unconscious understanding," says Apple, now 21. She currently lives in an apartment in San Francisco and studies biology at a local community college. "We support each other more than people would think. We stand up for each other. We defend each other."

In big cities, the homeless can find other kinds of support as well. Soup kitchens offer hot meals, and youth programs provide job

Top left: A young couple takes a train to and from homeless services in Denver. Above: Malachi, in what used to be his bedroom in Philadelphia. At left: Apple, on the streets of San Francisco.

training or help addicts get off drugs. Public transportation can make such services easier to get to.

But according to the Department of Housing and Urban Development, two in five homeless youth live in smaller cities or suburban and rural areas. There, social programs are often few and far between.

A Long Struggle

The U.S. has been struggling with homelessness for a long time. In the 1930s, during the Great Depression, more than 250,000 homeless kids—known as "boxcar children"—rode freight trains across America in search of work. The situation improved as the economy recovered in the 1940s with President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal and World War II.

Today, homeless advocates say not enough resources are devoted to rescuing young Americans from homelessness. (Nationwide, only 4,000 shelter beds are available to homeless youth who don't live with their families.) Too much money, they say, is spent criminalizing

homelessness with laws that ban sleeping in public spaces and even in cars. They call for investing in affordable housing instead.

But the tide may be turning. In 2010, President Barack Obama's administration issued a plan to end youth homelessness by 2020, pledging to invest \$5 billion in 2014 alone. Federal agencies that address homelessness are starting to cooperate more. Recently, legislation was introduced in Congress to require colleges to help homeless students find housing during breaks.

"I Can Do Better"

In Maine, Brianna found housing at a shelter for a couple of months in the summer. But she eventually left and is on the streets again.

She's working on getting a copy of her birth certificate and applying for jobs. In the meantime, she's slowly reconnecting with her mother, chatting with her online every now and then.

"What motivates me every day is thinking about my past and trying to achieve more and succeed," Brianna says. "I know that I can do better."

—Alessandra Potenza

HOW YOU CAN HELP

Want to make a difference in the lives of homeless youth? You can:

DONATE money, clothing, food, hygiene products, first-aid kits, or backpacks filled with school supplies to a reputable youth aid agency such as Covenant House.

VOLUNTEER your time—perhaps together with your family or a school or church group—at a local food pantry, soup kitchen, or youth homeless shelter.

USING TEXT EVIDENCE

Citing Text Evidence

| |
|-----------------|
| KEY STANDARD |
| RH.6-8.1 |

Complete the graphic organizer below after reading "No Place to Call Home" on pp. 8-11 of *JS*. In the first column is a statement or inference that can be drawn from the text. In the second column, cite at least one piece of text-based evidence that supports the statement. In the third column, explain how the evidence supports the statement. The first one has been done for you.

| Statement | Evidence | Explanation |
|---|---|--|
| Example: Brianna DeMaio was not to blame for her homelessness. | "Brianna's sister went to live with friends, and her mother moved in with her boyfriend. Brianna was left to survive on her own." | Because Brianna was only 12 years old at the time, she couldn't have known how to get into the foster-care system or get help from her school or her community. Her family basically abandoned her, so her homelessness was not her fault. |
| 1. Life can be difficult for homeless youth. | | |
| 2. Some homeless youth are embarrassed by their situations. | | |
| 3. We should be concerned about the number of homeless youth in America. | | |
| 4. There are many reasons that young people in America are homeless. | | |
| 5. Homeless youth can overcome their situations and become successful adults. | | |

Get Writing! Use the information in the graphic organizer to write a personal-response essay to the article.

