

## Arkansas Foodbank's Food For Kids Programming

**One in four children face food insecurity in Arkansas, and in some of our rural counties, that rate is as high as one in three.** Children need nutritious food to grow and thrive, and they need it every day. Unfortunately, over 87,000 children in central and south Arkansas are food insecure, meaning they aren't sure when or where their next meal will come from.

At the Arkansas Foodbank, we are committed to exploring ways to create seamless access to nutritious food for children who face hunger. We are working to answer questions such as: If a child is food insecure, how often do they have nutritious snacks or meals when they are not in school? How can we make sure children have access to nutritious food at night, on weekends, holidays and during the summer? When parents are forced to choose between basic needs with a very limited amount of money, sometimes a meal doesn't make the cut.

As we researched the answers to our questions, four strategies emerged that clearly met the criteria: backpacks, school pantries, afterschool snack and meal programs, and summer feeding.

- **Backpack Program:** In 1994, Arkansas Rice Depot launched the Backpack program, sending hungry children home with backpacks filled with food every weekend. After the Foodbank's 2016 merger with Rice Depot, the Foodbank has continued the backpack program, serving 6,909 kids in 116 schools last year.
- **School Pantries:** School Pantries are readily accessible sources of food assistance for low-income children aged 0-18 and their families. School pantries operate much like other food pantries, with the exception that the pantry only serves school children and their families. Sites are either located on a school's campus or close by, have set distribution schedules and offer ongoing food assistance services. Last year our nine school pantries served 1,607 households including 6,608 individuals.
- **After School Snack & Meals Programs:** Afterschool snack and meal programs operate in local nonprofit organizations and churches. Many children come to these programs at the end of the school day and participate in tutoring, athletic and creative programs and are served a nutritious snack and/or meal. For many children in these programs, this is "supper" and will be the last food they have until breakfast at school the next morning.
- **Summer Feeding Program:** Summer feeding provides crucial nutrition during the time school is not in session and children lose access to free meals at the school cafeteria. Most sites provide breakfast, lunch and possibly a late-day meal. All sites are "open" meaning the children do not have to be enrolled in a program and can show up at meal time and be fed.

### The Impact:

The impact of childhood hunger is immediate and long-term. But with community-wide support and programs that seek to reach children in their respective places—whether at home during the weekend, after school or through the summer—together we can ensure children have access to healthy and nutritious food all year round. When children receive the food they need to grow and thrive as individuals, they perform better in school, have improved emotional and physical development and ultimately focus on themselves and their community—not their stomachs.

## Instructions

The supplies you need for this lesson are underlined throughout the curriculum.

### Arkansas Foodbank's "Why":

The Backpack Program began in 1994 when a school nurse called the Foodbank for help – kids were falling asleep in class, dizzy, and having trouble concentrating. She believed it was all due to hunger. Arkansas Foodbank responded. The Foodbank purchased kid-friendly food and sent it to that school, and now works with schools throughout Arkansas to provide food for thousands of children!

### Biblical "Why": Matthew 25:35

For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me...

## Materials Needed

Collect four backpacks and fill three with:

- Canned snack
- Peanut butter crackers
- Juice box/Capri-Sun
- Jane Does' report card (right)
- Jane Does' lunch bill (below)
- Band-aides
- Hygiene bag

Fill the remaining backpack with:

- John Doe's report card (right)
- John Doe's lunch bill (below)
- A box of band-aids

Lunch Account for Jane Doe

You have a lunch account balance of \$50.00.

Lunch Account for John Doe

You have insufficient funds in your lunch account. You are no longer able to charge meals.

Please see school counselor for help with this matter.

#### Report Card for Jane Doe

Reading.....	A
Writing.....	A
Math .....	B+
Science.....	B+
Social Studies.....	A
Attendance: Present every day.	

#### Report Card for John Doe

Reading.....	C
Writing.....	C
Math .....	C
Science.....	C
Social Studies.....	C
Attendance: Tardy 5 days. Absent 10 days.	

## Backpack contents explained:

1. **Canned snack (like Chef Boyardee):** A nutritious and easy snack for children to have as a meal and can be heated on a stove or microwave.
2. **Peanut butter crackers:** Provides protein and carbohydrate.
3. **Juice box or Capri-sun:** A quick hydration and sugar boost.
4. **A+ report card:** A reflection of nutritious food, safety, good rest, and support from loved ones. This helps children be the best student they can be with excellent grades!
5. **C- report card:** A reflection of when our bodies are hungry and distracted by thinking about where our next meal will come from, which prevents us from being able to process information and learn. We then receive poor grades.
6. **Lunch bill:** Lunch programs at school do not cover any extra food for dinner. When we don't have food at home, some children might save their food from the school lunch room to take home to eat in the evenings. But we have to pay for that extra food, and some families don't have the money for that food, making children hungry!
7. **Band-aides:** Symbolizes hurt and a need for aide. When we face hunger every day, our emotions become damaged. We feel angry, despair, lack of justice, withdrawn and self-conscious. Some children act out in hurtful ways at school or in their homes in private. Have you ever felt "Hangry"? You may find yourself hungry and you are unhappy until you eat something.
8. **Hygiene bag:** If a family is struggling to pay for food, then it's likely they have not been able to pay for hygiene products like soap, toothpaste, and more.

## Ideas on creating a visual for raising funds:

- Continue to fill your clear backpack.
- Fill a "thermometer" on paper – make sure to create a goal!
- Fill a clear jar with funds.

## Day 1: Hungry Neighbors

### PreK-2<sup>nd</sup> grade: Maddi's Fridge / Starting a Food & Fund Drive

1. Story time: Read Maddi's Fridge, a children's picture book with humor and warmth that raises awareness about poverty and hunger. Best friends Sofia and Maddi live in the same neighborhood, go to the same school, and play in the same park, but while Sofia's fridge at home is full of nutritious food, the fridge at Maddi's house is empty.
2. Read Matthew 25:35: "For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me..."
3. Say, "As Christians, Jesus taught us to feed those in need and Arkansas Foodbank has a wonderful program to help us serve the hunger needs of children our age. This week let's ask the grown-ups in our home, neighborhood, and church for spare change and backpack snacks. I have a clear backpack that we can fill with coins, dollar bills, and snacks every day. Each day we can see how close we can get to make the backpack overflow! We will also collect canned food items to help families have complete, yummy dinners. Will you help feed our hungry friends and neighbors?"
4. Each day this week, we will bring in items to help our hungry neighbors succeed!
  - a. Day 2: Collect non-perishable and canned food items. We will put a blessing on the top of cans and sort into boxes.
  - b. Day 3: Collect snacks to fill future backpacks. We will count and sort the snacks.
  - c. Day 4: Collect hygiene items and put together in zip-lock bags.
  - d. Day 5: Collect and count coins.

### 3<sup>rd</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> grade: Exploring Backpacks

1. Ask the audience, "What do these backpacks mean to you?" Answers might include school, homework, sports...
2. Ask the audience, "What are some things you do when you come home from school every day?" The answer we are looking for is "afterschool snack."
3. Open the backpacks, showing three full and one empty, saying "I have four backpacks that represent children in Arkansas. One of the backpacks *has no snacks* and three of the backpacks are *full of snacks*. These backpacks represent children the fact **that 1 in every 4 children** in Arkansas go home and don't have a snack because their refrigerators, snack cabinets, and pantries are empty."
4. Divide the audience into four groups and provide each with a backpack. Let them explore the contents and ask them to think about each item. \*\*Remind them not to eat the snacks! ©
5. Ask one student from each group to share what their item is. Offer corrections based on Materials Page of this packet.
6. Each day this week, we will bring in items to help our hungry neighbors succeed!
  - e. Day 2: Collect non-perishable and canned food items. We will write a blessing on the top of cans and sort into boxes.
  - f. Day 3: Collect snacks to fill future backpacks. We will count and sort the snacks.
  - g. Day 4: Collect hygiene items and put together in zip-lock bags.
  - h. Day 5: Collect and count coins.

## Congregational lesson: Exploring Backpacks

1. Ask for four volunteers, a mix of kids and adults, to help with the demonstration and assign one to each backpack.
2. Ask the volunteers, "What do these backpacks mean to you?" Answers might include school, homework, sports...
3. Ask the audience, "What are/were some things you do/did when you come home from school every day?" The answer we are looking for is "afterschool snack."
4. Ask the volunteers to unpack the backpacks, showing three full and one empty, saying, "We have four backpacks that represent children in Arkansas. One of the backpacks has *no snacks* and three of the backpacks are *full of snacks*. These backpacks represent children the fact **that 1 in every 4 children** in Arkansas go home and don't have a snack because their refrigerators, snack cabinets, and pantries are empty."
5. Ask one of the volunteers with a "full" backpack and the volunteer with the "empty" backpack to share what their backpack holds. Offer corrections based on this list from instructions page.
6. Read Matthew 25:35: For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me...
7. Say, "We are called to feed those in need, and our school children are in need. We can partner with the Arkansas Foodbank in the coming week to provide for our hungry neighbors. This week, we will hold a Food & Fund Drive!" Explain directions for the Food & Fund Drive (found in enclosed document).
8. "Can we gather as a congregation to feed our hungry friends and neighbors? Each day this week, we will bring in items to help our hungry neighbors succeed!"
  - a. Day 2: Collect non-perishable and canned food items. We will write a blessing on the top of cans and sort into boxes.
  - b. Day 3: Collect snacks to fill future backpacks. We will count and sort the snacks.
  - c. Day 4: Collect hygiene items and put together in zip-lock bags.
  - d. Day 5: Collect and count coins.

## Letter to send home on Day 1

Dear Grown-ups,

Today we learned that there are children in our state that do not have enough food in their homes even though their grown-ups work really hard to provide for them. We looked through four backpacks to learn that **1 in 4 Arkansas children go hungry**. We learned how hunger causes children to not learn to the best of their abilities. We also learned that Jesus taught us to feed all those that are hungry.

Even though we are young, we want to help the Foodbank serve as many kids in need as possible. Each day I would like to bring coins to fill the backpack so that they can buy rice to feed families. We are trying to raise \$\_\_\_\_\_ as a group. **Remember, \$1 can provide FIVE meals to our hungry neighbors!** I would also like you to take me to the store so that we can purchase snacks to donate for the Arkansas Foodbank Backpack program. **The food will go back to our congregation's pantry, or a pantry in our community!** Here are items for each day that we would like to donate as much as you are willing and able:

### DAY 2: Canned Food Items

#### BREAKFAST

+ Pop-Tarts  
+ Granola bars  
+ Individual boxes of cereal

#### MEALS

+ Beanie Weenees  
+ Vienna sausages  
+ Peanut butter in small containers  
+ Noodle cups  
  
+ Slim Jims

#### SNACKS

+ Gummy/Fruit snacks  
+ Cheese-It crackers  
+ Peanut butter crackers  
+ Chex Mix  
  
+ Cheese crackers  
+ Pretzels  
+ Small bags of peanuts  
+ Chips of all types

#### FRUIT

+ Fruit cups  
+ Raisins  
+ JELL-O cups with fruit

#### DRINKS

+ Juice boxes  
+ Capri Sun  
+ Gatorade/  
PowerAde  
+ Kool-Aid single mix  
+ Bottled water

### DAY 3: Snacks Drive

### Day 4: Hygiene Items Drive

- Travel size shampoo
- Conditioner
- Toothpaste
- Deodorant
- Bar soap

### Day 5: Fund Drive

**\$1 = 5 meals!**

Make collecting coins a game and gather as many as you can find! Silver coins are best. Checks written by a grown-up is even better. Your donation will be collected by the church, which will collect the coins, cash, and checks and write 1 check for the total amount to the Arkansas Foodbank.

**Thank you for helping me feed the hungry!**

## DAY 2: Food Drive – Non-perishables

Purchase several flats of cans for this activity in case enough are not collected since it is only the 2<sup>nd</sup> day.

### PreK-2<sup>nd</sup> grade:

1. Say, "When parents are working hard, but they have lots of expenses, their ability to provide filling meals can be very difficult. Canned food and other non-perishable food items can be given to families to help provide healthy meals."
2. Gather together and discuss why we give thanks before a meal. Using chart paper or board to brainstorm, come up with one or two short blessings that the children can say. Have "heart stickers" or a washable marker and let them draw hearts on the top only of the cans. Sort, box and label all the cans for delivery. Gather again and say a prayer of hope and thanksgiving for those who will receive this food.

### 3<sup>rd</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> grade and Congregational lesson:

1. Say, "When parents are working hard, but they have lots of expenses, their ability to provide filling meals can be very difficult. Canned food and other non-perishable food items can be given to families to help provide healthy meals."
2. Gather together and discuss why we give thanks before a meal. Using chart paper or board to brainstorm, come up with one or two short blessings that the children can write on top of the cans using a Sharpie. Sort, box and label all the food for delivery. Gather again and say a prayer of hope and thanksgiving for those who will receive the food.
  - a. Sort items in plastic grocery bags with one item from each category in a bag:
    1. Breakfast
    2. Meal
    3. Snack
    4. Fruit
    5. Drinks

## DAY 3: Food Drive – Snacks

### PreK-2<sup>nd</sup> grade:

1. Explain to the audience, “Not all parents have enough money to provide snacks for growing children. In fact, they may not always have enough money for a family meal. Do you remember Maddi from our story on Monday? The Arkansas Foodbank has a program in schools all over our state where they give a backpack to a student like Maddi every Friday so that she can take food home to eat over the weekend. When you get home from school or daycare, what kind of snacks do you like to eat?
  - a. List the snacks on chart paper so they can see them. Circle or add to the list other foods like cheese and crackers, Easy Mac, Chef Boyardee Ravioli, fruit snacks, etc.
2. Say, “This week, let’s continue to help feed kids like Maddi by bringing snacks like this into church for Arkansas Foodbank to put in the backpacks!”

### 3<sup>rd</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> grade and Congregational lesson:

1. Begin by having the children check over the snacks brought in to make sure they are unopened. Have the students sort the snacks by types and carefully pack in separate boxes and label. Let the students do all of this on their own as adults supervise. If there is time left over, ask the students to sit in a circle and take turns praying that food would be found to nurture the bodies that it feeds. Model for them how to pray out loud a food blessing and let them each take a turn.

## DAY 4: Hygiene Items Drive

### PreK-2<sup>nd</sup> grade, 3<sup>rd</sup>- 6<sup>th</sup> grade and Congregational lesson:

1. Students will arrive with their hygiene supplies that should be travel size soap, shampoo, conditioner, toothpaste, and deodorant. You may get items that you didn’t ask for but would still be useful.
2. Create an assembly line by handing down the zip-lock and fill one hygiene item in each bag with the last person in the line sealing and packing it in a box.
3. Check on your backpack – there’s one day to go! Can you fill the backpack and make it overflow?

## DAY 5: Coin/Fund Drive

\$1 can provide 5 meals to a hungry child!

**PreK-2<sup>nd</sup> grade:** The money can be used to buy meals and snacks after they use the ones we donate this week. Show them coins and that the big silver coins are worth the most.

**3<sup>rd</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> grade and Congregational lesson:** The money can be used to buy meals and snacks if we use this week to collect coins! What do you think we can we can collect from our family and friends? Count the money and determine the total raised this week.