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In her memoir *The Glass Castle*, Jeannette Walls tells the story of her non-traditional childhood. As part of this experience, she recounts many times when she and her family experienced a lack of food security. Consider both the times when the family experiences devastating hunger, as well as the moments when they connect with food. Then, in a well-developed essay, discuss the narrator's memories of food and hunger, and analyze how those moments contribute to the tone and the meaning of the text.

Struggles with Hunger in Jeannette Walls' *The Glass Castle*

In *The Glass Castle* by Jeannette Walls, the narrator and her siblings were no doubt subjected to a traumatic childhood under the care of their parents, Rex and Rosemary. Amongst the struggles and insecurities the family faced, the most troubling was the lack of food for the young children that could not provide for themselves. The most shocking, dreadful scenes often arose when Jeannette, Brian, or Lori could not access food and had to take actions that should not have been expected of them. The children made poor decisions under the pressure of severe hunger and the pattern of such decisions helps shed light on a major argument of the memoir. The author's intent is to show that children become ashamed and depressed when faced with being hungry, and are often provoked into committing questionable acts to acquire food. Walls displays how her parents are putting them in danger through hunger when the children begin to commit humiliating and sometimes animalistic actions even when they are apart from their parents.

The Glass Castle suggests throughout various settings that people that make poor decisions that lead to homelessness and food insecurity are not solely punished, but so are the dependents of the neglectful adults. Ridiculous, potentially dangerous activities that would normally be put into question by the desperately acquired maturity of the children are not considered even for a second in scenes where the children are faced with hunger. Walls recounts that “one afternoon when Brian and [herself] had come home to an empty fridge...[they] pushed open the lid and dived inside the dumpster” (110) to find cans or bottles to scap for food money. The language used by Walls and the image provided by the word “dived” gives the reader a picture of how little hesitation the children had when diving into a possibly dangerous assortment of garbage. Using garbage cans for food begins to get more literal and unsanitary later in the book when Jeannette often searches in the school trash for leftover food, explaining that “there was, at times, more food in the wastebasket than [she] could eat” (173). In a grateful voice, Jeannette describes the surplus of food that she would collect from the school’s trash bin. This tone exhibits how pitiful the children's' situation truly is and the standards they must abandon to survive.

Emotional damages also arise when the Walls children feel the intensity of the hunger. The children are constantly lying, taking quickly what is available without question, and feeling greatly ashamed. Thus, the culture of poverty theory relating to homelessness and hunger is shown to be a real factor that perpetuates poverty in their case. Jeannette is especially affected, as her usual thankful and optimistic characteristics are muddled by the emotional strain of her hunger in multiple scenes throughout the memoir. For example, Jeannette is told by her teacher one day that “her records indicated that someone had already paid” (110) for her school lunch.



And while she recognizes that “it seemed awfully coincidental” (110), Jeannette does not inquire to see who has done so to thank them, as she would typically do. Walls uses this vignette to again emphasize how hunger affects personality and typical thought processes. From this unusual behavior by Jeannette, along with many other scenes, it can be inferred that she is not making moral or instinctual decisions in general. In conclusion, it is clear that Jeannette’s mental health, and the mental health of her siblings, is at risk when they do not have food readily available.

Jeannette Walls’ *The Glass Castle* is a thought provoking commentary on an American family in poverty, with a stress on the importance of food security for the welfare of children. The book recounts numerous times when the family faces severe hunger, highlighting both the emotional and physical danger that the children are subjected to. It can be inferred from her writing that Walls would not eagerly support the reform of systemic solutions to poverty, but she rather takes the position that individual choices cause homelessness, hunger, etc. This opinion becomes clear when Walls mentions her mother’s valuable land that she never decided to sell, along with the many other foolish, condemning choices that both of her parents made. However, the tone of Walls memoir does suggest that all people should have empathy because every person is raised in a different childhood situation. In closing, Walls invokes the support of personally responsible citizens rather than placing blame in the institutions that are often criticized for contributing to mass poverty. Change needs to happen to protect children from harsh encounters, but the change does not necessarily come from supporting the family, as a whole, with welfare.

