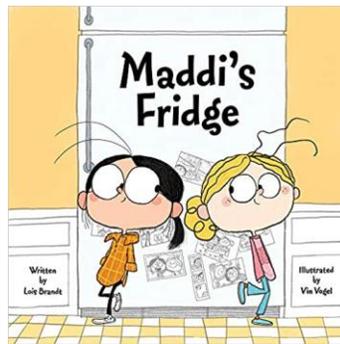


## Second Reaction: The Impact of an Empty Fridge in 2021

Brandt, Lois. *Maddi's Fridge*. Illustrated by Vin Vogel. Brooklyn, NY: Flashlight Press, 2014. Print.

Glenna Fulitano



I did not know what to expect when I opened up *Maddi's Fridge*. The cover led me to believe it was just another best friend story about two girls. When I opened it up and read it, there was so much more. *Maddi's Fridge* made me realize that poverty is not a thing of the past, of foreign countries, or of societies' cast offs. Poverty is a thing of the world. It is found in neighborhoods near and far; where you would expect it and where you would not. Poverty does not define who someone is. It describes a part of their identity but only a part. The Covid-19 Pandemic has been looming over our heads for almost a year and it has made a large impact in the way that people live. People lost their jobs, families were forced to stay home, students were not allowed in schools; all of these things have given way for poverty and hunger to take over many families who did not expect it. No one can predict that they will lose what they have and be forced to live off of nothing. *Maddi's Fridge* is not a rare occurrence or an exaggeration. For many people this is the new norm or the inevitable.

For many children this may be very confusing at first. There are questions about why mom and dad do not go to work anymore, or why they cannot just go shopping, similar to the question that Sophia has in the story, "Why doesn't your mom go to the store?" Sophia asked. (Brandt unpagged). To children like Sophia, food just comes from the store. There is not a true

concept that food is bought from a store with money. Throughout the story Sophia learns the value of what she has and her ability to give help to someone who might not know where to look for it. For a student it can be a large load to hold the secret that your family is struggling. *Maddi's Fridge* shows students that they do not have to go through it alone. Hardship is lonely for anyone, and it is important to teach students through stories like this that it is okay to tell someone and to get help. As an educator, seeing this exact thing happen to families around them, it can be important to spark a conversation through something as simple as a story book.

Engaging readers in this book starts with their interest in the park. They can relate to the characters who also like to play at the park. To keep them engaged offer open-ended questions to get them thinking about how their own family fits into this. When Sophia looks in her fridge she notices that she has, “milk and eggs and tortillas and cheese and lettuce and jam and salsa and tofu and even half a can of dog food” where Maddi only had, “some bread and a small carton of milk” (Brandt unpagged). I asked my students to think about what they had in their fridge. This topic can not only help the students acknowledge their own family situation but can help them keep an eye out like Sophia did to help someone in their community.

My students enjoyed the pictures and the names of the characters. They were very relatable, especially to one girl named Madison who liked how close Maddi's name was to hers. By creating easily relatable characters and activities like eating dinner and packing a lunch for school the students could place themselves into the story.

*Maddi's Fridge* can also be a great resource as a teacher to help make sense of their students' lives outside of school. Are they taking home their carton of milk because they want it for later, or because they have a sibling who needs it more like Maddi? Being aware of students' living situations can help us, as teachers, be more empathetic to their needs in the classroom. If they cannot focus in class, is it may be because they have not eaten since lunch yesterday? Being aware of those around us gives the opportunity to see that we are never alone in our struggles. It can help us and our students grow and learn about the effects of poverty on someone's everyday life. In these times it is important for students to remember that there is someone just around the corner who can help them in a time of need.

## **About the Author**

Glenna Fulitano (She/Her) is an Elementary Education major at the University Nebraska-Lincoln. She is a member of the Cornhusker Marching Band Flagline, and enjoys baking and crafting. Glenna is in her last semester on campus at the University of Nebraska and will be student teaching in the spring with hopes to start her career next fall!