

- Television set
- VCR
- Electricity
- Warm coat
- Refrigerator
- Meal at fast-food restaurant once a week
- High school education
- Post-high school education (college or vocational school)
- Stereo
- Radio
- Telephone
- Personal computer

If necessary, add other items you believe are essential.

## STEP 2

Discuss the following questions with your class or group.

- 1. Examine your list of essential items. Which ones are actually essential to survival, and which are essential to a “humane” existence—a level above bare survival?
- 2. Write an item-based definition of poverty: “A person suffers from poverty if he/she lacks these items: \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_.”
- 3. How absolute is your group's definition? If a person lacked only one of your essentials, is he/she still poor? If a person has several nonessentials but lacks some essentials, is he/she still poor?
- 4. Do you think your definition of poverty is better or worse than the two described in the introduction of this activity? Why? What drawbacks does your definition have?

## Evaluating Sources of Information

A critical thinker must always question sources of information. Historians, for example, distinguish between primary sources (“firsthand” or eyewitness account from personal letters, documents, speeches, etc.) and secondary sources (a “secondhand” account usually based upon a “firsthand” account and possibly appearing in a newspaper or encyclopedia). A published diary of a welfare mother is an example of a primary source. A book review of the mother's diary is an example of a secondary source.

Interpretation and/or point of view also play a role when dealing with primary and secondary sources. For example, the welfare mother might strongly believe that any form of welfare is degrading. Her personal experience affects her view of the welfare system. The secondary source, too, should be questioned as to interpretation or underlying motive. The book reviewer might have strong feelings regarding the necessity of welfare and criticize the diary because of his personal bias. It is up to the researcher to keep in mind the potential biases of his/her sources.