

Book Title: Basic Needs: A Year with Street Kids in a City School
Author: Julie Landsman
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This book is Landsman's narrative account of teaching troubled street youth in a Minneapolis special education program. The book is centered around one year of a teacher's life as she tries to educate students who deal with a number of profoundly difficult challenges while also nurturing her own marriage and raising her son. The book's chapters are organized according to the months of the year. At the end of the book, Landsman provides a compendium of effective teaching ideas and hints for readers to improve their teaching effectiveness and overall mental health.

For me the most interesting aspect of this book was the style in which it was written. The strengths of this book are the vivid descriptive details, effective and realistic dialogue, skillful character development, and inner workings of the mind of the author. Even the conversations that take place between the kids and adults have a quality to them that goes beyond many of the books I have read recently. When the kids bantered with each other in the classroom, I could definitely relate to the "hyperactive/all over the place discussions" that have occurred in my own classroom.

One of the key characters of the book is a teenage girl named Jackie who begins attending Landsman's class sometime in November. Jackie comes from a tough home, has been sexually abused, often sleeps on the streets, and has turned to prostitution to help find shelter and earn money. At the beginning of the book, Jackie is presented as the most challenging student in the class but by the book's end, she demonstrated significant progress in dealing with the shadows that haunted and tormented her.

I really enjoyed reading this book and after I finished, immediately gave it to a friend of mine who works with this same population of youth at a youth shelter. I know this book will give her some comfort and strength in doing a very difficult but necessary job.