

# the pad project.

## PEOS Book Discussion Guide

### **1. What is menstruation? Who menstruates?**

Merriam-Webster defines menstruation as “a cyclical discharging of blood, secretions, and tissue debris from the uterus.”<sup>1</sup> Not all women menstruate, and not all menstruators are women. Generally, the term “menstruators” is used to refer to all people who experience menstruation, including cisgender, transgender, nonbinary, and genderfluid individuals. Menstruation may also have meaning outside of its anatomical function. What does menstruation mean to you? What role has it played in your life?

### **2. When did you learn about menstruation? Who taught you?**

Maybe you learned about menstruation from a parent or guardian. Maybe you learned about it at school. Reflect on what you learned and how you learned it. If you’ve experienced menstruation, did you feel adequately prepared when you got your first period? Is there anything you wish you had known?

### **3. What is period poverty?**

Period poverty is an issue that is both global and local. According to the National Women’s Law Center, nearly 1 in 8 American women lived in poverty in 2018 and nearly 1 in 3 women of childbearing age were economically insecure.<sup>2</sup> Menstruators around the world, especially in low income communities, often face a lack of access to menstrual products. The combination of period poverty, stigmatization, and inadequate reproductive and sexual health education has major consequences for menstruators’ wellbeing. It can also prevent menstruators from staying in school. When did you first learn about period poverty?

### **4. What is the tampon tax?**

The tax on menstrual health products, or “tampon tax,” targets Americans who menstruate and amounts to a financial barrier for menstruators who are unhoused, incarcerated, or are simply struggling to make ends meet. Tampons, pads, and other menstrual hygiene products are not accessible to economically insecure menstruators via food stamps, health insurance, or

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<sup>1</sup> *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, s.v. “menstruation,” accessed January 3, 2021, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/menstruation>.

<sup>2</sup> “NWLC Resources on Poverty, Income, and Health Insurance in 2018,” National Women’s Law Center, September 10, 2019, <https://nwlc.org/resources/nwlc-resources-on-poverty-income-and-health-insurance-in-2018/>.

Medicaid coverage.<sup>3</sup> 30 states still tax menstrual products as “luxury goods.” Are menstrual products taxed in your community?

### **5. How might period poverty impact menstruators in your community?**

Period poverty can affect anyone. The inability to access or afford menstrual products can make it more difficult for menstruators to attend school, go to work, and maintain their reproductive health. How might period poverty be impacting people in your community?

### **6. What do you think the local, state, or federal government’s role should be in addressing period poverty?**

In 2020, Scotland became the first country to make pads and tampons free for anyone in need. Scotland will require all schools and universities to stock these menstrual products in their bathrooms, and the government will create a nationwide program to make sure pads and tampons are available for anyone who needs them.<sup>4</sup>

In California, students in low income communities often have difficulty obtaining menstrual hygiene products, but thanks to a bill proposed by Assemblymember Cristina Garcia from California’s 58th Assembly District, students are now able to get menstrual products in schools. California Assembly Bill No. 10 (AB-10), which was signed into law by the Governor in October 2017, requires all Title 1 schools, those schools that meet a 40% student poverty threshold, to provide free menstrual products in 50% of the school’s bathrooms.<sup>5</sup>

What is your local or national government doing to combat period poverty? How else do you think your government could address this issue?

### **7. What can you do to combat period poverty in your community?**

There are many ways you can work to get rid of period poverty in your community. You can host a menstrual hygiene product donation drive for local shelters or nonprofits. You can also advocate for more equitable menstrual health legislation by writing and signing petitions, writing to lawmakers, attending rallies, and educating your community. How do you think you could best fight period poverty where you live?

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<sup>3</sup> Linda Carroll, “Even in the U.S., poor women often can’t afford tampons, pads,” Reuters, January 10, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-menstruation-usa/even-in-the-u-s-poor-women-often-cant-afford-tampons-pads-idUSKCN1P42TX>.

<sup>4</sup> Elana Lyn Gross, “Scotland Will Be The First Country To Make Period Products Free,” Forbes, Nov 24, 2020, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/elanagross/2020/11/24/scotland-will-be-the-first-country-to-make-period-products-free/?sh=708c14755577>.

<sup>5</sup> Cristina Garcia, “AB-10 Feminine hygiene products: public school restrooms.,” California Legislative Information, October 13, 2017, [https://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill\\_id=201720180AB10](https://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill_id=201720180AB10).

## **8. What is menstrual equity?**

Menstrual equity can be defined as equal access to both menstrual hygiene products and sexual and reproductive health education, and providing this access can directly improve the lives of girls, women, and all menstruators around the world. While this is a positive global impact in and of itself, there are other concrete ways to measure the impact of menstrual equity. The combination of period poverty, stigmatization, and inadequate reproductive and sexual health education can prevent girls from staying in school, therefore ending their education. If girls receive seven full years of education, they will marry an average of four years later and have 2.2 fewer children.<sup>6</sup> If they attend just one additional year of secondary school, their lifetime wages could increase by up to twenty-five percent, consequently raising their countries' GDPs by billions of dollars.<sup>7</sup> If India enrolled just one percent more girls in school, their GDP would rise by 5.5 billion dollars.<sup>8</sup> It's simple: educating women and girls has a concrete economic and social impact on individuals, communities, and nations. When did you learn about the concept of menstrual equity? What impact do you think menstrual equity could have on your community?

## **9. What is menstrual stigma? How have you experienced menstrual stigma?**

Menstrual stigma likely results from a combination of disinformation or lack of awareness, cultural and religious beliefs, popular media representations that portray menstruation as dirty or shameful, and patriarchal social norms. If you have experienced menstruation, have you ever felt shame or embarrassment about it? Can you think of any ways that menstrual stigma has impacted you?

## **10. How would you like to see the conversation around menstruation change?**

Maybe you think menstruation should be a cause for celebration instead of shame. Maybe you think there should be more media representation of menstruation. How do you think you can diminish menstrual stigma and promote menstrual equity in your community and around the world?

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<sup>6</sup> "A Recommendation for Poverty Alleviation: Adolescent Girls, the UN Millennium Development Goals and the Post-2015 Development Agenda," World Health Organization, March 2013, [https://www.who.int/pmnch/media/press\\_materials/pr/2013/adolescent\\_girls\\_post2015.pdf](https://www.who.int/pmnch/media/press_materials/pr/2013/adolescent_girls_post2015.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> Jo Bourne, "Why Educating Girls Makes Economic Sense," Global Partnership for Education, March 6, 2014, <https://www.globalpartnership.org/blog/why-educating-girls-makes-economic-sense>.

<sup>8</sup> "Infographic: An Educated Girl has a Ripple Effect," USAID, Last updated November 10, 2014, <https://www.usaid.gov/girl/infographic-ripple-effect>.

## Additional Questions for In-Depth Discussion

### Personal Experience

1. Have you talked to family members or guardians about their experiences with menstruation? Did they use different products? Did they experience menstrual stigma, and if so, what were some of the taboos? Did they have customs surrounding menstruation, religious or otherwise?
2. How do you feel about talking to cisgender<sup>9</sup> male friends and family members about menstruation? Do you think it's important to include non-menstruators in the conversation about menstruation?

### Global Responsibility

1. The term "menstruator" is commonly used in the U.S. to refer to those who experience menstruation. However, internationally, the beneficiaries of the fight for menstrual equity are cisgender women and girls. In your community and in communities around the world, how do you think advocates for menstrual equity should approach issues related to gender identity in their work?  
[For transgender men, pain of menstruation is more than just physical](#) from NBC News
2. Because of the trash created by disposable menstrual products, many menstruators are now turning towards reusable products, like menstrual cups and washable pads. However, many communities around the world do not have access to safe methods of cleaning and storing reusable menstrual products, putting menstruators at risk of infection. How do you think individuals, communities, governments, and other organizations should balance environmental responsibility with menstrual health?  
[Pads and tampons can harm the environment. What's the alternative?](#) from Global News

### Human Rights

1. In the U.S., menstruators in prison often lack access to an adequate supply of menstrual products, and over the last few years, more individuals and organizations have been advocating for menstrual equity in prison. In your opinion, what is the responsibility of prisons, as well as state and federal governments, to provide menstrual products to incarcerated menstruators?  
[Why I'm Fighting for Menstrual Equity in Prison](#) from ACLU  
[A new law promised Maryland's female inmates free tampons. They're still paying.](#) from The Washington Post

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<sup>9</sup> "Cisgender" refers to someone whose gender identity corresponds with their birth sex.

2. Menstruators experiencing homelessness often face financial barriers to purchasing disposable menstrual products and lack the facilities to safely change, clean, and store reusable menstrual products. What do you think should be done to ensure access to menstrual products for menstruators experiencing homelessness?

[How Periods Perpetuate Homelessness](#) from Teen Vogue

[Get With the Flow: Power Pump Girls Inc fight period poverty and stigma](#) from LSU Reveille

## **Moving Forward**

1. Over the years, the popularity of various menstrual products has changed, and new and/or improved products (e.g. menstrual cups, period underwear, etc.) have been added to the market. What do you think is next in the field of menstrual products? What advances would you like to see?

[Period-proof swimwear for teenagers has landed](#) from Yahoo

[This User-Friendly Menstrual Cup Is What Happens When Design Is Inclusive](#) from Vice

2. In recent years, menstruation has become more visible in tv and film, with scenes often depicting someone getting their first period or wanting to know if they're pregnant. While these scenes are important, are there other ways menstruation could be depicted on screen? What scene about periods would you want to see?

[2020 Was the Year of Period Blood on TV](#) from Rolling Stone

3. The idea of "menstrual leave," the ability to take time off work during menstruation, is a highly debated menstrual equity topic. Some people think menstrual leave reinforces stereotypes of menstruators being unable to work during their periods. Other people think menstrual leave will validate the experiences of menstruators who have severe symptoms during their periods. What do you think about menstrual leave? Do you think employers should provide it as an option?

[Do women in India need period leave? Will it ostracise women in the work space?](#) from India Today

[Should women be entitled to period leave? These countries think so](#) from CNN

## **Resources: How to Get Involved**

### **The Pad Project**

"A period should end a sentence, not a girl's education." The Pad Project was started in 2013 by a youth-driven community of students and educators convinced that menstruation matters for everyone. What began as a documentary film project highlighting a single village has expanded to an organization with global reach. Through innovation, education, and advocacy, The Pad Project aims to help move towards a world where menstruators feel empowered in their bodies, achieve economic independence, understand their reproductive and sexual health options, and

harness the power to shape their lives. Visit <https://thepadproject.org/> to learn more about The Pad Project and how to get involved.

### **Girls Learn International**

Girls Learn International (GLI) was founded in July of 2003 by Lisa Alter and her two daughters, Arielle Alter Confino and Jordana Alter Confino. GLI was founded on the principles that humanitarianism has no minimum age requirement and that global youth, in particular girls, have a crucial role to play in leading the movement to affect change for girls and women all over the world. Visit <https://girlslearn.org/> to learn more about GLI and how to get involved.

### **Feminist Majority Foundation**

The Feminist Majority Foundation (FMF), which was founded in 1987, is a cutting edge organization dedicated to women's equality, reproductive health, and non-violence. In all spheres, FMF utilizes research and action to empower women economically, socially, and politically. FMF believes that feminists of all genders are the majority, but this majority must be empowered. Visit <https://feminist.org/> to learn more about FMF and how to get involved.