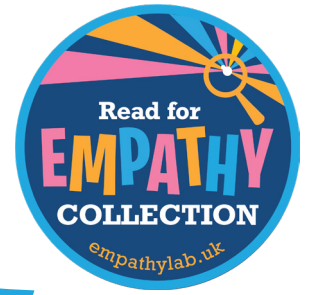


2025
Read for

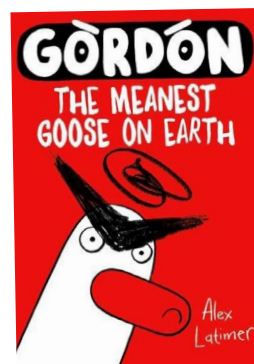
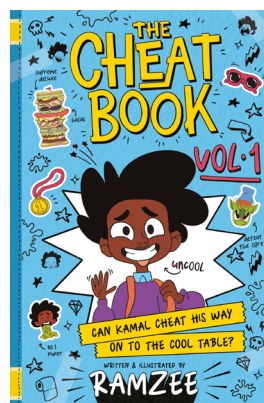
EMPATHY



Jump into
someone
else's story

Collection

A guide to
empathy-building
books for children
aged 3-11



40 titles selected by experts



Jump into someone else's story

EmpathyLab's mission is to raise an empathy-educated generation, inspired to build a better world for everyone

What is empathy and why is it important?

Empathy is our ability to experience and understand someone else's feelings. In this increasingly divided world, and in the wake of the pandemic, children need this crucial life skill in order to thrive. Empathy improves their wellbeing, active citizenship and reading for pleasure. It has the power to create stronger, kinder communities.

Empathy and reading

Research shows that empathy is a learnable skill, and that books play a key role in developing it. When children identify with book characters, they learn to see things from other people's points of view. As they read, they are building their empathy skills, including perspective-taking, listening, naming and sharing emotions and social action.

Using the Read for Empathy books

An expert panel has selected these forty brilliant books for children aged 3–11. They have been specifically chosen for their power to boost empathy skills and an understanding of other people's feelings and life experiences. We would love you to use them to inspire children to turn their feelings of empathy into action – making a difference in their homes, schools and communities.

What you can do next

Our programmes, including the **Empathy Day Festival** in June and Empathy Action Month in November provide powerful focal points for using the books all year round to ensure every day is an empathy day (see page 9).

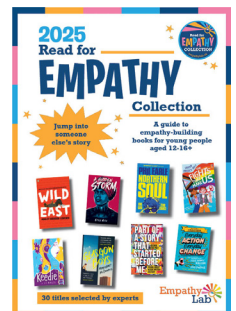
Join our mission to reach and benefit ONE MILLION children a year by 2026!

How does empathy work?

Empathy is made up of three elements.



A Read for Empathy collection guide for 12–16+-year-olds is also available at www.empathylab.uk/RFE



'If you are interested in how you can foster children's well-being and resilience, there is good evidence that empathy should be a key priority. EmpathyLab's strategy of integrating work on empathy with literacy and reading for pleasure is efficient, and hugely potent.'

Professor Robin Banerjee, University of Sussex, Psychology Department



Emotions

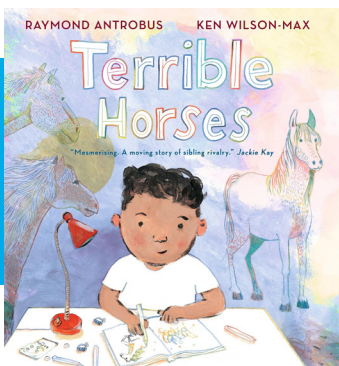
If you can't understand your own feelings, it's hard to relate to other people's. Being able to recognise, name and share your emotions is a key empathy skill. This selection of wonderful picture books that provide a springboard for helping children expand their understanding of, and vocabulary for, emotions.



April's Garden

Isla McGuckin & Catalina Echeverri

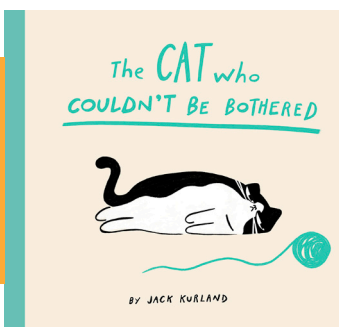
April and her mother face poverty. Forced to move somewhere depressing, April is sad and very angry. But she's encouraged to hope, and when they finally move to a better home, the seeds she planted start to grow. A powerful exploration of emotions. **Graffeg**



Terrible Horses

Raymond Antrobus & Ken Wilson-Max

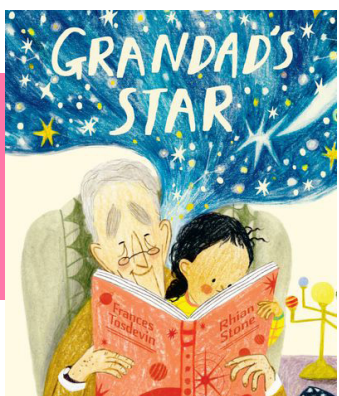
It's unusual to find picture books exploring sibling rivalry – this one is very moving, with a beautiful resolution. A younger brother explores turbulent feelings about his sister through creating a story about trampling horses and a sad pony. **Walker**



The CAT who COULDN'T BE BOTHERED

Jack Kurland

A seemingly stand-offish cat won't join in with anything, despite his friends' avid encouragement. Then Greg reveals that actually he's feeling sad, which makes him want to do absolutely nothing. Much sharing of emotion ensues. Absolutely wonderful. **Frances Lincoln**



Grandad's Star

Frances Tosdevin & Rhian Stone

Many children will experience the sadness of a grandparent slipping away as Alzheimer's takes hold. This lovely picture book helps explore this through the relationship between a grandchild and her expert Grandad who teaches her about space and the stars. **Rocket Bird**

Troll

Frances Stickley & Stefano Martinuz

Everyone's scared of Troll, who revels in being mean. Then a little rabbit asks: 'you seem so cross. Is something wrong?' which triggers real change. Troll practices saying kinder things, including to himself. About understanding yourself before you can be kind. **Magic Cat**



The Grand Hotel of Feelings

Lidia Branković

A manager welcomes and cares for all the feelings guests who pass through the hotel. Emotions are cleverly explored and personified, from anxiety to anger, sadness to shame. The ending focuses on gratitude and joy. **Cicada**



Picture books

Best of All Smriti Halls & Chaaya Prabhat

A wonderful celebration of the heritage, family stories and life experiences that make every child special. A joyous explosion of colour and life and a future just waiting to be seized.

Two Hoots

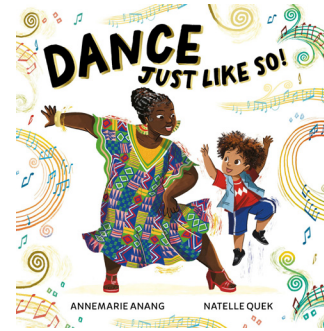


Dance Just Like So!

Annemarie Anang & Natelle Quek

There's nothing Kwesi loves more than dancing with his magnificent, trophy-winning Gran and their neighbours. Then she has a nasty fall and everything goes silent. But they find a way, and Kwesi's joy returns.

Five Quills

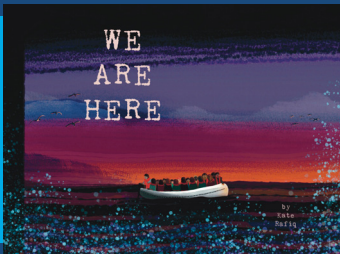


We Are Here

Kate Rafiq

A small boy and his mother in an inflatable boat reflect on the journey they have made and wonder what the future holds. A story endorsed by Refugee Rescue highlights the courage of a mother protecting her child as they are forced to leave their homeland.

Dune



Flower Block

Lanisha Butterfield & Hoang Giang

Jeremiah plants sunflowers, his deceased father's favourite flower. On waking, his tower block is magically bursting with abundant plants. Neighbours join in his hunt to find how far they've grown, even grumpy Mr Crisp. A wonderful celebration of community and connection.

Puffin

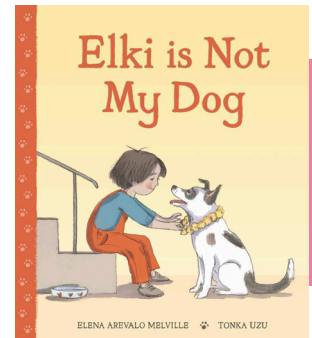


Elki is Not My Dog

Elena Arevalo Melville & Tonka Uzu

A community is connected by a stray dog. Elki is always outside the flats until one day she isn't. The children find her hurt and afraid and everyone rallies round to help. This charming story will generate rich discussion about empathy, compassion, homelessness and love.

Scallywag

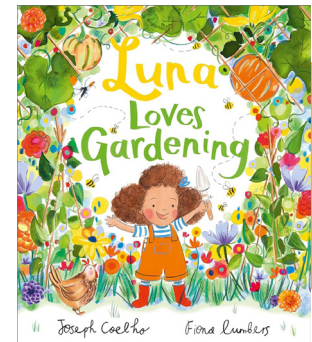


Luna Loves Gardening

Joseph Coelho & Fiona Lumbers

Lulu loves the community garden and, as she swaps seeds with fellow gardeners, she learns about the foods and cultures of other countries and the importance of nature. A vibrant story about a loving family and the importance of empathy for the environment.

Andersen



Grandpa Kuma

Michelle Maiden

It's hard to find children's books about the Japanese community; this is a treasure. Grandpa comes to stay and he's big and cuddly. He and his grandchild can't understand each other, but together they find a way to communicate and play... and play.

Wacky Bee

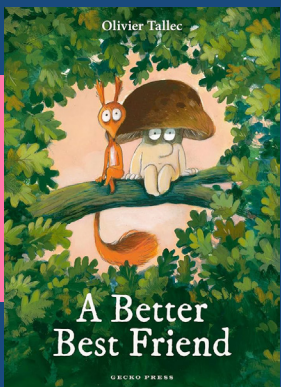


A Better Best Friend

Olivier Tallec

One day Squirrel finds a best friend, but then encounters someone who might be a better best friend, and then another. It's all very confusing – who would make the best 'best friend'? We love this picture book about navigating complicated feelings around friendship.

Gecko

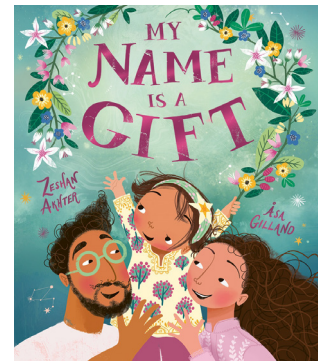


Picture books

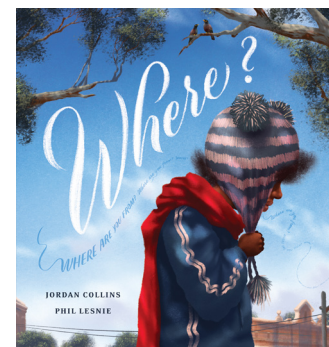
Illustration from *My Name is a Gift*
© Ása Gilland, 2024



My Name is a Gift
Zeshan Akhter & Ása Gilland
Sitará's name is precious to her, gifted by her father in Muslim family tradition. But people keep muddling it up, making her sad. A lovely, meditative book exploring the importance of being called by your true name.
Templar



Where?
Jordan Collins & Phil Lesnie
'Where are you from?' can be a hugely dispiriting question when – as the author says – it really means 'Why don't you look like me?' A powerful, visually stunning book that reminds us of our shared humanity, and shared cosmic origins.
Allen & Unwin



Poetry

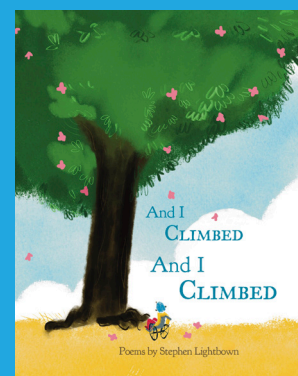


Find Peace in a Poem
Jason Reynolds, Michael Rosen, Sophia Thakur and 17 more; Illustrated by Annalise Barber, Mariana Roldán, Masha Manapov, Nabila Adani
Wonderful poems from 20 different writers, with superb illustrations. They reflect on finding calm, strength and balance, sharing insights into how the writers and others experience this state, with wise guidance for young readers.
Little Tiger

...And I Hear Dragons
Editor Hanan Issa
Illustrated by Eric Heyman
A glorious Welsh poetry anthology all about dragons. Excellent for building children's perspective-taking ability while imagining the feelings of a dragon. Powerfully uses dragons as a metaphor for exploring the reader's own dragon-like emotions. Stirring stuff!
Firefly



And I Climbed
Stephen Lightbown
Illustrated by Shih-Yu Lin
A superb collection from a disabled author, about a boy in a wheelchair, having fallen from a tree. Written from many perspectives – his own, his mother's, the tree's... The poems' profundity and depth leave the reader changed, with new insights and deepened empathy.
Troika



Who Let the Words Out?
Joshua Seigal
An exuberant, very accessible poetry collection, with a beguiling mix of humour and piercing insights. Poems explore everything from feelings about parents to suddenly seeing your teacher as a person. We especially love *Gifted*, about playground difficulties.
Bloomsbury Education

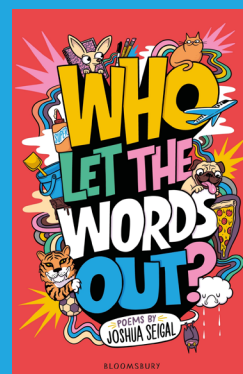


Illustration from *Find Peace in a Poem* © Nabila Adani, 2024

Early readers



Destiny Ink: Sleepover Surprise

Adeola Sokunbi

Usually ebullient Destiny is having a big wobble about her first sleepover. Then a little monster appears, scared about his own sleepover, and in helping him, Destiny helps herself. Lively, easy read, with a helpful exploration of feelings experienced by so many children.

Nosy Crow

Sidney and Carrie Have a Party

Lisa Thompson

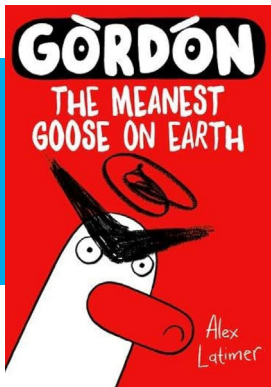
Illustrated by Jess Rose

Sidney and Carrie are best friends planning a joint birthday party. Each thinks the other will want exactly the same thing that they do. But of course, they don't! A lovely story about perspective-taking and learning to compromise.

Barrington Stoke



Early graphics



Gordon the Meanest Goose on Earth

Alex Latimer

A seriously mean goose delights in intimidation. But Gordon is transformed when a charming piglet gives him a flower, wondering if Gordon is nasty because he's never experienced kindness. Funny, easy-to-read illustrated story, but very thought-provoking.

Oxford University Press

Bumble & Snug and the Jealous Giants

Mark Bradley

Bumble and Snug are competing in the Bugbop Ball World Cup. The Giants' team usually wins, so when another team triumphs, the Giants don't react well. A lovely story about jealousy and the empathy of those who know how to make the giants feel better.

Hodder



Graphic novels



Rune: The Tale of a Thousand Faces

Carlos Sánchez

Follow orphans Chiri and Dai to a land of danger where they must defeat the Shadow King. Chiri is deaf and her sign language hand movements create a powerful magic. Beautifully illustrated story challenging stereotypes and highlighting the strength in celebrating differences.

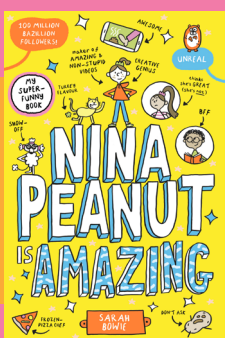
Flying Eye

Nina Peanut is Amazing

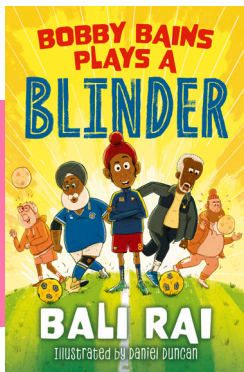
Sarah Bowie

Exploring the rollercoaster stage of friendship and rivalry, particularly between girls, and how it feels to have a solid family behind you, even if they don't totally understand you or what you're going through.

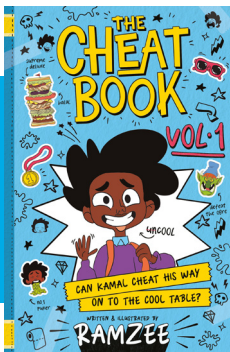
Scholastic



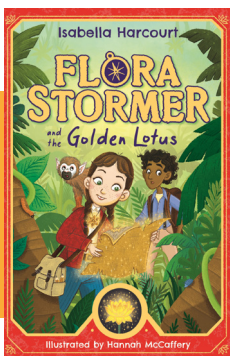
Novels



Bobby Bains Plays a Blinder
Bali Rai
Illustrated by Daniel Duncan
Bobby is a Sikh, and football-mad. Motivated by his religion's belief in helping people, he reaches out to lonely Trevor, using a common love of football and reggae to spark a friendship between him and Bobby's grandfather. A lovely story showing empathy in action!
Barrington Stoke



The Cheat Book
Ramzee
Kamal, a Somali refugee, uses The Cheat Book as his guide to how to fit in. A hilarious, easy read with graphics and speech bubbles, but with a profound underlying message about the importance of our shared humanity.
Hodder



Flora Stormer and the Golden Lotus
Isabella Harcourt, illustrated by Hannah McCaffery
Flora's father is dangerously ill. Determined to help him get better, she goes on a crazy rainforest expedition to find the golden lotus with healing powers. A romping adventure story with a brave character overcoming the challenges posed by having Tourette's syndrome.
Orchard

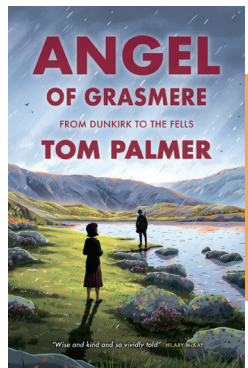
One Chance Dance

Efua Traoré
Three years have passed since Jomi's loving mother left for Lagos. We viscerally experience his struggles as, accompanied by a homeless bushbaby, he tries to find her. After many tribulations, they're reunited. Strong characterisation, insights into extreme poverty and a really satisfying ending.
Chicken House



Angel of Grasmere

Tom Palmer
Tarn is grieving for her brother, killed at Dunkirk during WWII. Meanwhile, in her Lake District village, mysterious acts of kindness keep happening. Powerful historical fiction with a superb plot twist and characters who help us understand the experience of living through a threatened invasion.
Barrington Stoke



The Wrong Shoes

Tom Percival
Will's dad is injured and can't work. There's no money. Will hides his situation from school and his mum and her partner, until he reaches crisis point. Thankfully, help is at hand. Acutely insightful about the challenging life of a child affected by poverty.
Simon & Schuster



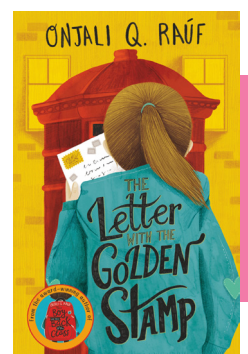
The Last Dragon

Polly Ho-Yen
Illustrated by Charis Loke
A rollicking fantasy adventure in which Yara becomes the custodian of the last-ever dragon's egg. Her sister is gravely ill and Yara's emotions are wonderfully well drawn, especially her anger and how to use it. Hugely engaging.
Knights Of



The Letter with the Golden Stamp

Onjali Q. Raúf
Audrey is a young carer looking after her sick mother and her younger siblings. The family experience poverty, and Audrey, terrified of the family being torn apart, finds ways to hide her situation. A compelling story of courage and hope.
Orion



Novels

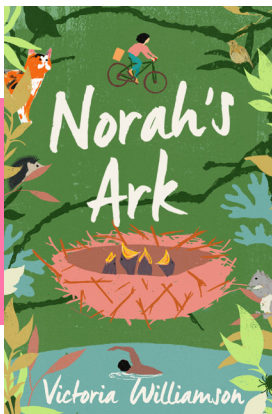
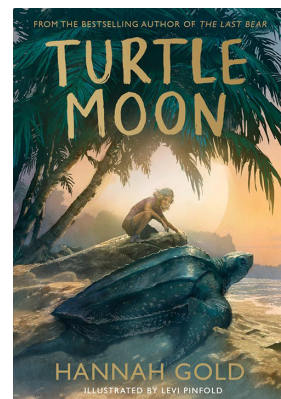


Turtle Moon

Hannah Gold

Illustrated by Levi Pinfold

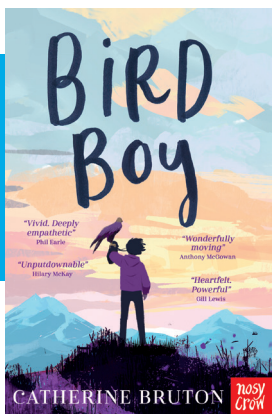
A stunning read set in a vividly depicted Costa Rican landscape. A book about love, valuing humanity and accepting sorrow. It explores how nature can heal us, but we must protect it.
HarperCollins



Norah's Ark

Victoria Williamson

Norah and Adam couldn't have more different lives, but they are both facing big challenges. They join forces to save a nest of baby birds, and in doing so, they change each other's lives. Moving and inspiring.
Neem Tree



Bird Boy

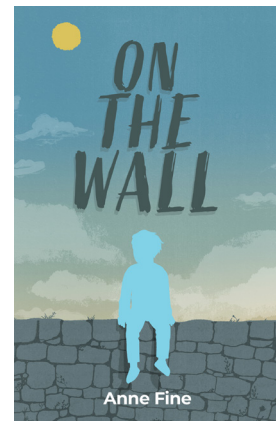
Catherine Bruton

Deeply traumatised by the death of his bipolar mother, Will reluctantly goes to his uncle's Lake District home. Passionate about birds, he finds a hidden osprey family and in secrecy cares for an abandoned chick. A wonderful story about how human connection can be healing.
Nosy Crow

On the Wall

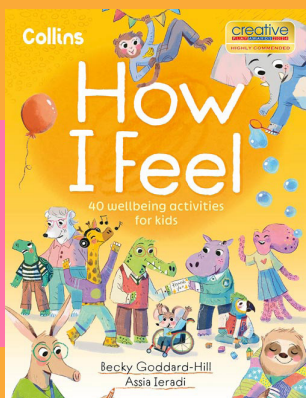
Anne Fine

Finley is remarkable. In his first year of secondary school, he spends many hours happily sitting on a wall, seemingly needing no one, and yet pupils and teachers alike find they need him. A story of stillness, listening and contentment.
Old Barn



Illustrations from Me and My Hair © Jessica Gibson, 2024

Non-fiction



How I Feel

Becky Goddard-Hill

Illustrated by Assia Ieradi

Simple, imaginative ideas to help children explore and understand their emotions and talk about feelings. Building a language for emotions is a key empathy skill and this compassionate, accessible book would be great for an adult and child to share together.
Collins

Me and My Hair

Kimberley Kinloch

Illustrated by Jessica Gibson

This book explores how important hair is to identity. It looks particularly at Black hair and hairstyles and the discrimination that some people face. A really thought-provoking but celebratory read.
Usborne



Find out how to **order the books** in this guide on page 12

TOP TIPS on reading for empathy

- 1. Diverse stories** share books that allow children to see their own life experiences reflected, but also introduce them to books set in other countries and with characters of different races, religions and experiences. Inspire them to imagine life for people in different situations from their own.
- 2. Talk about characters** focus on the characters and their feelings, more than the plot. Remember, there are no right or wrong answers! Wonder together about what the characters are thinking or feeling and what they might do next.
- 3. Help recognise feelings** use lots of different emotion words when discussing stories. This will help children understand people's feelings and why they behave in certain ways. Our emotion maps from top illustrators are a great resource:
www.empathylab.uk/Rfe-illustrators-gallery
- 4. Listen 100%** listening is a crucial part of empathy. Listen carefully as children explore what they feel about characters. Use our listening resources:
www.empathylab.uk/the-listening-switch
- 5. Don't forget the pictures** illustrations are especially good for 'reading' other people – what do the pictures tell us about how the character feels?
- 6. Put empathy into action** could a book help inspire children to take action to help others? Find a range of rich social action resources here:
www.empathylab.uk/empathy-action-month



From our expert judges

'This collection allows young people to get close to characters, to get close to issues and to be provoked to think. Provoked to care. And to then do something about it.'

**Professor Teresa Cremin,
Open University**

'These books are active tools that are used in empathy-related education in order to build a better functioning society.'

**Shaheen Mogradia, Bolton Central
Library & Museum Service**

'The empathy collection is a really powerful way in to help our children develop empathy skills with each other, but also with those in other situations across the world. I think we have both a professional and a moral duty to do that.'

Jon Biddle, Moorlands Primary Academy

'We say we want children reading to see themselves reflected in the books but also to experience the wide range of diverse voices in our own society and those beyond it. This collection does that.'

Sarah Mears, EmpathyLab & Libraries Connected

What we offer schools, libraries and families

Use our year-round programmes, resources, training, booklists and national events to inspire families and young people to build empathy awareness, skills and action.



February
70 expertly-chosen books to build empathy

November
Focus on putting empathy into action



June

A large graphic with "EMPATHY" in colorful letters, "DAY" below it, and "FESTIVAL" in a white starburst shape. Below "DAY" it says "2 - 12 June 2025".

12 June 2025
EMPATHY DAY
empathylab.uk

A ten-day festival to celebrate and grow empathy. Empathy Day on 12 June

Schools' training programme to build an empathy ethos into your school



Training for those living and working with young people – and businesses



SAVE THE DATE!

Major conference 27 November 2025
The latest empathy research
and how to use it to benefit young people

Find out more about our conference, programmes and training at www.empathylab.uk or email info@empathylab.uk



The inaugural Empathy Day Festival 2-12 June 2025

Take part in our ten-day festival to JUMP INTO SOMEONE ELSE'S STORY. Inspiring activity menu: **daily author/illustrator inspiration sessions**, updated **Empathy Challenge**, **CPD webinars** with key organisations, family weekend in **bookshops and libraries**, **nationwide assembly** with Children's Laureate, **Frank Cottrell-Boyce** plus two Welsh assemblies.

- Inspire children and young people to become **Empathy Activists** by learning what empathy is, developing their empathy skills and putting empathy into action
- Discover the **unique power of books** to develop real-life empathy
- Get involved *however* you want and *whenever* you want – use our **flexible framework** to inspire widespread **community participation**
- Showcase the work of the children and young people in your setting



Supported using public funding by
ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND

EMPATHY CHALLENGE

Use these nine creative activities to help develop key empathy skills in your setting in the run up to/on Empathy Day

READ

Empathy Bookshelf

Which books deserve a space on our empathy bookshelves? Join in a mass sharing of ideas. Share photos/videos

Empathy Characters

NEW

Empathising with characters is powerful. In pairs/groups, use our emotions guide to consider a character's feelings. What would like to say to them?

Empathy Artists

NEW

Use our 500-word Empathy Shorts to spark creative work to imagine someone else's life experiences. Creative writing, poetry, artwork, drama...

CONNECT

Empathy Chat

NEW

Get to know someone better by having a good chat. Use our prompts to ease into a rich conversation

Empathy Reflections

NEW

People love feeling truly understood. Use our five point guide to practice key empathy skills - listening and reflecting back what you've heard

Empathy Emotions Map

Use leading illustrator's examples to make individual or group emotions maps, tracking changing feelings across a day. Great way to understand and share feelings

ACT

Empathy Superpower Glasses

Practice seeing through others' eyes. Decorate and don our superpower glasses, designed by a leading illustrator

Empathy Post

NEW

Use our illustrated cards to send a message of empathy to someone you know, maybe include an empathy reading recommendation just for them

Empathy Resolution

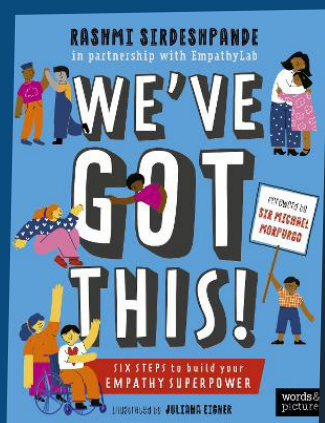
Become an empathy activist! Make a resolution to put empathy into action in your home or community. Use our special bunting!

Register for your **FREE** resources

Empathy Day toolkits released 20 March 2025, full of ideas and resources to get involved
<https://www.surveyhero.com/c/EmpathyDayFestival2025>

How to order the books in this guide

- Find your **local independent bookshop**
www.booksellers.org.uk
- Order online via **EmpathyLab's Bookshop.org** page
uk.bookshop.org/shop/empathy-lab
- Contact your **usual book supplier**
- Borrow the books from your **local library**



Written by
Rashmi
Sirdeshpande, in
partnership with
EmpathyLab
Quarto, £9.99



**Help us build a more
empathetic society!**

Encourage more people to take part in the Empathy Day Festival. Alert at **at least ONE** more person about our work by asking them to sign up to our newsletter (below)

'Practical action plans for building your empathy step by step... a must-read for anyone who strives to be a better person'

Nizrana Farook, author

- Build empathy skills in six simple steps
- Inspiring activities, incredible science and amazing author inspiration



**Stay up-to-date with all things EmpathyLab
Be the first to hear about events and training
by signing up to our mailing list**

www.empathylab.uk

