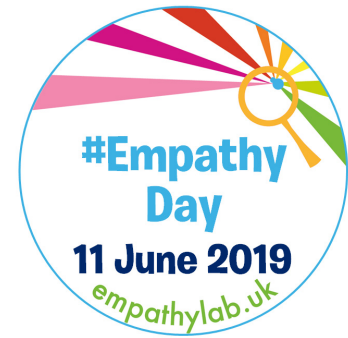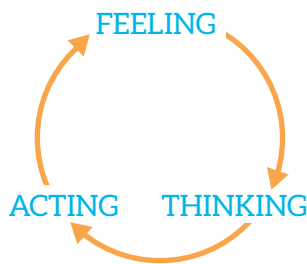# EMPATHY DAY

11 June 2019

Author and illustrator briefing

WHAT is empathy?

- The ability to feel and understand other people's emotions and perspectives.

- A core life skill; vital for successful relationships, collaboration and learning.

- Empathy is not sympathy. Sympathy means to *feel pity or sorrow for another person* ('feel **for**'). Empathy means to understand and share the feelings of another, ('feel **with**').

HOW does it work?

FEELING
ACTING   THINKING

FEELING > when we resonate with other people's emotions

THINKING > where we use reason and imagination to work out how someone else feels

ACTING > where we are inspired to help others, having experienced what they're feeling

WHAT is Empathy Day?

Empathy Day is an annual event. It was founded by EmpathyLab in 2017 to help children drive a new empathy movement, inspired by research showing that humans are not born with a fixed quantity of empathy – it's a skill we can learn.

Excitingly, scientists say that stories are a powerful tool to develop empathy, because in identifying with book characters, we learn to see things from other points of view. That's why EmpathyLab creates story-based tools that develop strong empathy skills, and – with your support – helps children put these into action.

WHY we need a new empathy movement

- Our public discourse is increasingly divisive

- Hate crimes are at their highest level since records began

- Our online lives can limit our experience of face-to-face human warmth

- Social media's algorithms drive us into silos, talking only to people like us

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HOW authors and illustrators can help

On Empathy Day we want everybody to:
Read: because stories and book characters build our real-life empathy
Connect: make new connections with people, inspired by sharing stories
Do: put empathy into action, in your home and your community

To achieve these goals we're so grateful to be able to harness the support and unique influence of our children's storymakers. Here are some ways you could help:

ANY TIME before 11 June 2019:

- **Promote the day on social media:** links are
  www.empathylab.uk #EmpathyDay @EmpathyLabUK
  Example post:

  > Hate crimes are at their highest ever level. I'm joining in #EmpathyDay 11 June to highlight empathy's importance in our divided world. Find out more www.empathylab.uk @EmpathyLabUK.

- **Inspire your followers to get involved:** e.g.

  > Please be sure to join in #EmpathyDay on 11 June – we need empathy's power to heal divisions. Ideas here: www.empathy.lab.uk @EmpathyLabUK

- **Include our Empathy Day PowerPoint resource in your event.**

- **Encourage schools and libraries to take part:** if you're working with a school or library, do encourage them to register for updates and free toolkits at www.empathylab.uk.

ON Empathy Day:

- **Share your recommended #ReadForEmpathy books:** these could include your own! Use social media as creatively as possible (e.g. a selfie with your chosen book) to share ideas for books which you have found to be empathy boosting. Please use the hashtags #EmpathyDay #ReadforEmpathy.

- **Give your events an Empathy Day twist:** give an empathy twist to any event you are already doing on 11 June.

- **Talk about empathy** and how you create the characters which inspire readers' empathy.

- **Share your recommended #ReadforEmpathy ideas** and create a shared list/photo with the group you're working with.

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- **You could use the ideas in the toolkits at**
  https://www.empathylab.uk/2019-empathy-day-resources – from making empathy glasses to creating a giant Empathy Wall.

- **Encourage everyone to make Empathy Resolutions** to put empathy into action.

EXAMPLE SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS –
adapt for your own choice of #ReadforEmpathy book:

Science now shows that reading makes us more empathetic. On #EmpathyDay 11 June, my recommended #ReadForEmpathy book is xxxx

The racism in *Noughts and Crosses* made me feel a complicated mixture of fury and sadness. #ReadforEmpathy #EmpathyDay

The world needs more #empathy! Read #*DayWarCame* to understand how refugee children feel. #EmpathyDay #ReadforEmpathy @EmpathyLabUK

THANK YOU for your support!
Together we can be a force for social change.

ANY QUERIES?
Please contact Miranda McKearney OBE: miranda@empathylab.uk

REFERENCES

Hate crimes in the UK rose by 29% in 2016/17 – the largest annual increase since records began.
(https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/hate-crime-statistics)

**We are not born with a fixed quantity of empathy, it is a skill we can learn.
98% of us are capable of improving our ability to empathise.**
(Simon Baron-Cohen, *Zero Degrees of Empathy* 2011)

Scientific evidence shows that reading and identifying with book characters makes us more empathetic in real life.
(Keith Oatley, *Fiction: Simulation of Social Worlds, Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 2016)

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