EmpathyLab

Read stories. Build empathy. Make a better world.

2020 Read For Empathy Guide
Books to build empathy - for children aged 4–11
#ReadForEmpathy

How does empathy work?

Picture books

Novels, poetry, graphic novels

Top tips
Empathy is our ability to understand and share someone else’s feelings. It is an essential life skill, crucial if children and communities are to thrive.

We’re not born with a fixed quantity of empathy – it’s a skill we can learn. Excitingly, research shows that books are a powerful tool to develop it, because in identifying with book characters, children learn to see things from other points of view. As they read, they are building their empathy skills.

**How does empathy work?**

Empathy is made up of three main elements.

- **Acting**: Where we are inspired to help others, having experienced what they’re feeling.
- **Feeling**: Where we resonate with other people’s emotions.
- **Thinking**: Where we use reason and imagination to work out how someone else feels.

**The 2020 Read for Empathy collection**

An expert panel has chosen thirty-three fantastic books for children aged 4–11. Each one does a specific empathy-building job, such as developing new perspectives or recognition of emotions. They offer powerful insights into different ways of life and what it might feel like to be a refugee, or homeless. Please use them to inspire children to turn feelings of empathy into action – in their homes, schools and communities.

This guide is brought to you by EmpathyLab, in partnership with specialist children’s book supplier Peters. You can use it all year round, and it will be especially useful in the run up to Empathy Day on 9 June 2020. Please join in! Register for updates at [www.empathylab.uk](http://www.empathylab.uk) and follow @EmpathyLabUK.
Picture books and poetry

Fourteen superb picture books and two poetry collections, perfect for reading and discussing with children aged 4–11. We have used this symbol* where they are best suited to older children. We believe no child is ever too old for a great picture book.

**Julian Is a Mermaid**  
*Jessica Love*  
Pure joy! A story about the power of acceptance, as Julian's grandmother affirms his right to be different. Creates a space to talk about what characters are really thinking, but not saying.  
*Walker Books*

**The Truth About Old People**  
*Elina Ellis*  
A celebration of empathy for the elderly. A superbly comic book which challenges stereotypes and encourages young people to shift their perceptions of older people.  
*Two Hoots*

**The Rabbit Listened**  
*Cori Doerrfeld*  
Being able to listen really well is a key aspect of empathy. This lovely book perfectly explains how not to listen, and how nourishing it can be when someone tunes in 100%. Finally Taylor feels understood, after his tower of bricks is knocked down.  
*Scallywag Press*

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Pure joy! A story about the power of acceptance, as Julian's grandmother affirms his right to be different. Creates a space to talk about what characters are really thinking, but not saying.  
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**Lubna and Pebble**  
*Wendy Meddour*  
Illustrator Daniel Égnéus  
A deep, emotional story about life in a refugee camp, and how human connection can bring comfort, even in extreme circumstances.  
*Oxford University Press*

**Super Duper You**  
*Sophy Henn*  
A brother writes funny, quirky messages to his younger sister about what makes her unique, and multi-faceted. Brilliant for sparking close, creative observation of other people and how they work.  
*Puffin*

**Polonius the Pit Pony**  
*Richard O'Neill*  
Illustrator Feronia Parker Thomas  
A sweet story about a brave little pony who saves the day when fog threatens the livelihood of a Traveller Family. A rare, positive chance to understand this community.  
*Child's Play*

**It's a No-Money Day**  
*Kate Milner*  
It is a painful reality that families are having to use food banks and cope with poverty. This book deals with the subject sensitively and without stigma.  
*Barrington Stoke*

**When Sadness Comes to Call**  
*Eva Eland*  
Being able to recognise, name and share emotions is a key empathy skill. This lovely book personifies sadness, and gently walks the reader through how it feels. A reminder that sadness is not to be feared.  
*Andersen Press*

**All About Feelings**  
*Felicity Brooks and Frankie Allen*  
Illustrator Mar Ferrero  
A great starting point to talk about feelings, why we have them and how we express them. Informative, well-illustrated non-fiction book with useful prompts for activities and reflection. Especially useful for supporting children finding it difficult to understand emotions.  
*Usborne Publishing*

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**I Do Not Like Books Anymore!**
*Daisy Hirst*

So many children experience frustration with learning to read. A hilarious book, in which despairing Natalie finally gets there. Added bonus of superbly illustrated facial expressions, useful for helping children recognise emotions.

*Walker Books*

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**Mum’s Jumper**
*Jayde Perkin*

A wonderful, tear-jerking book about grief and eventual recovery, with a message that lingers. Helps both adults and children understand the experience of any child who has lost a parent.

*Book Island*

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**Hopscotch in the Sky**
*Lucinda Jacob*

Illustrator Lauren O’Neill

A magical poetic journey through the seasons of the year. With wonderful insights into the depths of a child’s experience of school, the natural world, friendship and family.

*Little Island*

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**The Steves**
*Morag Hood*

Two absurdly competitive puffins (both called Steve) vie to be the best. Having endlessly put each other down, they finally get some perspective and realise how silly they’re being towards each other. Great for discussion.

*Two Hoots*

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**The Noisy Classroom**
*Ieva Flamingo*

Illustrator Vivianna Maria Stanislavskaja

Translators Žanete Vēvere Pasqualini, Sara Smith, Richard O’Brien

These poems from Latvia explore the feelings of children in the noisiest class in the school. Beautifully explores struggles with homework, the impact of technology and just trying to fit in. Includes great poetry prompts at the back to inspire empathy-focused writing.

*The Emma Press*

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**Ravi’s Roar**
*Tom Percival*

Ravi’s anger makes him feel like a roaring tiger. This beautifully illustrated book offers a creative way to explore how unaddressed anger can build up and the impact this can have on relationships and social dynamics.

*Bloomsbury Children’s Books*

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**No Longer Alone**
*Joseph Coelho*

Illustrator Robyn Wilson-Owen

Sensitive exploration of the whirlwind of emotions that can come with grief. Highlights the healing power of a good listener and the importance of allowing space and time. Touching, subtle, heartwarming.

*Egmont Books*
Novels and graphic novels

Fifteen superb stories and two graphic novels to help children immerse themselves in other people’s lives. Perfect for 7–11 year olds. This symbol* denotes books which are demanding reads, suitable for emotionally mature readers. Please read them in order to decide which children they are appropriate for.

GRAPHIC NOVELS

Remy Lai Pie in the Sky
Terrific graphic novel about Jingwen, and the issues he faces in moving to a new country where he doesn’t speak the language.

Me and Mrs Moon
Helen Bate
A child struggles to cope with her feelings as she faces the challenge of caring for a much-loved neighbour in the early stages of Alzheimer’s. Love and hope shine through this book which has an unusual graphic/comic format.

The Last Human
Lee Bacon
A page-turner, in which robots have eliminated humans (or think they have) because they were destroying Earth. But there’s one remaining – a girl called Emma – who slowly connects with robot XR-035. Great stimulus for discussing what makes us human and how to read and express emotions.

Planet Omar: Accidental Trouble Magnet
Zanib Mian
Illustrator Nasaya Mafaridik
Great to see a bold, engaging Muslim character featuring in this hilarious but poignant exploration of Omar’s world. Seeing things through his eyes brings real insight into the ridiculous, hurtful and almost casual prejudice some people face, and the impact it has.

The Closest Thing to Flying
Gill Lewis
When she discovers a diary written a hundred years ago, Samira finds the friend she desperately needs. An amazing story treating oppression as a truly universal issue, with hard-hitting insights into victims’ experiences of people-trafficking and domestic violence. Gorgeous writing.

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Keep an eye on www.empathy whole.uk for extra resources
Captain Rosalie*  
Timothée de Fombelle  
Illustrator Isabelle Arsenault  
Translator Sam Gordon  
A heart-wrenching book about five-year-old Rosalie whose father is on the front line in the First World War, and whose mother is trying to protect her from the sadness of its impact. A love letter to what has been lost, and a celebration of life.  
Walker Books

Charlie Changes Into a Chicken  
Sam Copeland  
Illustrator Sarah Horne  
Every time Charlie is stressed or worried, he changes into an animal, with hugely inconvenient consequences. Highly enjoyable, laugh-out-loud read – an easy way to open up an exploration of what anxiety feels like.  
Puffin

Owen and the Soldier  
Lisa Thompson  
Illustrator Mike Lowery  
Owen and his mum are alone and struggling. Then he finds a stone soldier, part of an old war memorial, to share his feelings with, and has to find the courage to fight for the soldier's survival. A small book, but big with skilful storytelling.  
Barrington Stoke

The Afterwards*  
A.F. Harrold  
Illustrator Emily Gravett  
Ember and Ness are best friends and then Ness dies, suddenly and shockingly. In a dark, wonderfully written comic fantasy, we live Ember's grief and her desperate steps to get Ness back from the Afterworld. Thoughtful and evocative.  
Bloomsbury Children’s Books

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No Ballet Shoes in Syria  
Catherine Bruton  
Aya has recently arrived, traumatised, from Syria. Gradually, through ballet and friendship, she begins to see she might be able to feel at home in Britain. The strong central character shows us a fresh perspective on the refugee crisis, focusing on the problems faced once people arrive.  
Nosy Crow

Cloud Boy  
Marcia Williams  
An emotional read in an engaging diary format. Beautifully depicts what happens to best friends Harry and Angie (‘almost twins’) when Harry’s headaches won’t go away. Interspersed with a relative’s letters from Changi prison in the Second World War. A love letter to what has been lost, and a celebration of life.  
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Bloomsbury Children’s Books

Flight  
Vanessa Harbour  
A nail-biting adventure about children who manage to save Lipizzaner horses in the Second World War. Gripping, and excellent for exploring and understanding relationships (and history), with strong characters.  
Firefly Press

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The Great Telephone Mix-Up  
Sally Nicholls  
Illustrator Sheena Dempsey  
A clever early reader about the effect on a village when the telephone service gets scrambled. Everyone is suddenly forced to get closer – taking messages, understanding each other’s needs. Great for a social action perspective and how empathy connects people.  
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Top tips

**Help recognise feelings** You can help children understand their own and other people’s feelings by using lots of different emotion words when discussing stories.

**Talk about characters** Instead of discussing what might happen next, focus on the characters – what are they afraid of? What might they do next? Which was most interesting? This builds understanding of what drives other people.

**Don’t forget the pictures** Illustrations are especially good for ‘reading’ other people – can you tell from the picture how the character feels?

**Share diverse books** Try to connect children to stories 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.

**Listen** Sometimes we need time to process our thoughts. Listen carefully as children explore what they’ve learnt about other people. Ask in the days following too – new ideas can emerge over time.

**Take it further** Has a book made children see the world differently? Do they feel inspired to do something to help others? Can you act on this as a community, or a family?

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**Empathy Day 9 June 2020 – Get involved!**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Read</th>
<th>Connect</th>
<th>Act</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Find and start an empathy-boosting book</td>
<td>Practice listening 100%, especially to someone you don’t know well. Use our Empathy Switch exercise</td>
<td>Put empathy into action. Make an Empathy Resolution – special cards available in March 2020</td>
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<td>For great ideas, use #ReadforEmpathy and our Guides <a href="http://www.empathylab.uk/read-for-empathy-guide">www.empathylab.uk/read-for-empathy-guide</a></td>
<td>Link up – share your favourite empathy reads using #ReadForEmpathy</td>
<td>Teachers, librarians, community leaders: be empathy evangelists! Come on our training; use our Empathy Day toolkits</td>
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<td>Check out your local library’s empathy books and activities</td>
<td>Watch The Empathy Conversation with Children’s Laureate Cressida Cowell. Happening 9 June</td>
<td>Talk to everyone about the importance of empathy. Sign up for updates at <a href="http://www.empathylab.uk">www.empathylab.uk</a></td>
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Go to www.empathylab.uk @EmpathyLabUK to find out more, and be sure to share your #ReadForEmpathy recommendations on the day!
EmpathyLab

Read stories. Build empathy. Make a better world.

Empathy is a beacon of hope. Join our 2020 programme

EmpathyLab offers training and Empathy Day toolkits for schools, libraries and early years providers interested in building young people’s empathy, literacy and social activism.

To find out more, go to www.empathylab.uk
For training enquiries contact miranda@empathylab.uk

How to order the books in this Guide

To buy the Read For Empathy book collection, please contact your local independent bookshop or Peters, and explore how you can develop empathy through the power of books. Primary schools buying the collection also receive a free EmpathyLab resource containing four assembly outlines.

• Independent booksellers: find your local shop here www.booksellers.org.uk/bookshopsearch to see if they are involved in Empathy Day
• Peters: Visit www.peters.co.uk/empathy2020. If you have any queries do not hesitate to contact Peters on 0121 666 6646 or email empathy@peters.co.uk

Thank you to everyone who has helped with this Guide

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• Leaflet editing: Talya Baker
• Read For Empathy illustrators: Tom Percival; Tom McLaughlin; Emily Gravett; Isabelle Follath; Rob Biddulph
• Print: Penguin Random House