EmpathyLab
Read stories. Build empathy. Make a better world.

2019 Read for Empathy Guide
30 books to build empathy - for children aged 4-11
#ReadForEmpathy

How does empathy work?
Picture books
Novels, poetry, graphic novels
Top tips
Empathy is a human super-power which helps us all understand each other better. It is also an essential social and emotional skill, crucial if children 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. So when you read with children you can build their empathy skills at the same time.

How does empathy work?

Empathy is made up of three main elements.

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

The 2019 Read for Empathy Guide

An expert panel has chosen these thirty fantastic books for 4–11 year olds, excellent for building children’s empathy. They offer powerful insights into other people’s feelings, and develop understanding of different ways of life and issues people face, such as being bereaved, or becoming a refugee. We hope they will inspire children to turn feelings of empathy into action – in their homes, schools and communities.

The guide is brought to you by EmpathyLab, in partnership with book supplier Peters. You can use it all year round, and it will be especially useful in the run up to Empathy Day on 11 June 2019. Please join in! Register for updates at [www.empathylab.uk](http://www.empathylab.uk).
Picture books and poetry

Picture books can powerfully inspire empathy through their special interplay of words and illustrations. This selection is perfect for 4–11 year olds, and we’ve used this symbol* where they are best suited to older children. We believe no child is ever too old for a great picture book.

**Joy**
**Corinne Averiss**
**Illustrator Isabelle Follath**
Fern is troubled by how sad her granny seems and is working out how to capture and pass on 'joy'. Great for helping children see how to step into someone else’s shoes.

**The Last Chip**
**Duncan Beedie**
A hungry pigeon is denied food by bigger, bullying birds. Lovely, unexpected ending when a homeless person comes to the rescue. A delightful, non-didactic book, great for perspective-taking and insight into others’ lives.

**Is it a Mermaid?**
**Candy Gourlay**
**Illustrator Francesca Chessa**
Two children try hard to be tactful when a sea cow becomes convinced it’s really a mermaid. Hilarious, tender, deep. Perfect for talking about different perspectives.

**Cyril and Pat**
**Emily Gravett**
Can a rat and squirrel be friends? The park’s creatures think not. Cyril and Pat’s closeness wobbles, but connection prevails. Combats divisions caused by prejudice about being different.

**Sweep**
**Louise Greig**
**Illustrator Júlia Sardà**
Ed is swept up in a very angry mood and just can’t let it go. A creative, playful story encouraging the recognition and processing of emotions.

**Elmer**
**David McKee**
Elmer is struggling to be like all the other elephants, until they show him it’s his difference that they love. Great for helping children see how to step into someone else’s shoes.

**Odd Dog Out**
**Rob Biddulph**
A scarf-wearing dachshund feels uncomfortably different. A fun book for helping children explore the absurdity of ‘in’ and ‘out’ groups.

**If All the World Were...**
**Joseph Coelho**
**Illustrator Allison Colpoys**
A hugely imaginative exploration of a girl’s feelings as she comes to terms with her grandad’s death. A gentle springboard to help children understand their own and others’ experience of loss.

**The Day War Came**
**Nicola Davies**
**Illustrator Rebecca Cobb**
War closes doors to refugee children. Davies’s wonderful storytelling opens up powerful insights into how it feels to be escaping from conflict zones. Provokes solidarity, action and tears.

**Keep an eye on [www.empathylab.uk](http://www.empathylab.uk) for extra resources**
Along Came a Different
Tom McLaughlin
The reds, blues and yellows can’t get along. A zany, light-hearted look at how to deal with discrimination. Very cleverly builds children’s ability to see different perspectives, a skill fundamental to empathy.
Bloomsbury Children’s Books

Peace and Me*
Ali Winter
Illustrator Mickaël El Fathi
Beautifully illustrated non-fiction book about Nobel Peace Prize Laureates who used empathy to imagine how life could be different in their communities and acted dynamically to improve things.
Lantana Publishing

Me and My Fear*
Francesca Sanna
A thought-provoking visual personification of a girl’s feeling of fear, which magnifies when she’s in a strange country. Helps children understand how profoundly fear can lead to isolation and anger.
Flying Eye Books

Ruby’s Worry
Tom Percival
Sensitively illustrated book about untamed worries taking on monstrous proportions. Gives children a language and metaphor to talk about their own and other people’s anxieties.
Bloomsbury Children’s Books

How to be a Lion*
Ed Vere
A gentle lion is friends with a duck, and no one approves. A magical book, delving into how we can all be truly ourselves, and, from that basis, relate well to others.
Puffin

A Great Big Cuddle
Michael Rosen
Illustrator Chris Riddell
Lovely collection of poems inspiring reflection on emotions and our need for affection, compassion and above all empathic connection.
Walker Books

'If other people, who maybe aren’t so nice, read some of these books, they would change the way that they acted. They would think more and maybe understand more.'
Romy, age 10
Novels and graphic novels

Fourteen superb stories and a graphic novel to help children immerse themselves in other people’s lives. Perfect for 7–11 year olds, with this symbol* showing those suitable for the top of this age range.

The symbol** denotes books which are demanding, often emotional reads, suitable for emotionally mature readers. Please read them to decide which children they are appropriate for.

**EMPATHY CLASSIC**

The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane
Kate DiCamillo
Edward is a rabbit with a cold heart which gradually melts as he experiences the kindness of strangers and realises what it means to feel loved. Extraordinary writing.
*Walker Books*

Not As We Know It
Tom Avery
Illustrator Kate McKendrick Grove
Jamie is facing the loss of Ned, his sick twin, in a whirlwind of love, jealousy, fear, acceptance. Unusual, honest book with magical qualities and a merman playing a starring role.
*Andersen Press*

Jelly*
Jo Cotterill
Jelly is funny and loud, but hurting inside, especially about her weight. We see the real person through her poetry, learning and caring as we read.
*Piccadilly Press*

The Tale of Angelino Brown
David Almond
Illustrator Alex T. Smith
Angelino is a tiny giggling boy angel who overcomes evil plotters. About how caring for each other makes people happy. A deceptively easy read with a heart of gold.
*Walker Books*

The Bubble Boy**
Stewart Foster
Joe must live in a bubble in hospital; Amir plots to spring him. Illuminating insights into the feelings of children with incurable illnesses, a great cast of characters and hilarious, hopeful moments.
*Simon & Schuster*

Ella on the Outside
Cath Howe
Ella has no friends and her dad is in prison. Gradually, painfully, she finds a friend in Molly. Immensely readable way of understanding the feelings of children in troubled circumstances.
*Nosy Crow*

Love from Anna Hibiscus!
Atinuke
Illustrator Lauren Toby
Young Anna is a life force, intent on making a difference in her African community. Sensitive handling of unthinking attitudes to inequality and full of insights into lives lived very differently. Seriously lovely stories.
*Walker Books*

Keep an eye on [www.empathylab.uk](http://www.empathylab.uk) for extra resources
### Novels and graphic novels continued

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<td>Beyond the Bright Sea</td>
<td>Lauren Wolk</td>
<td>A child rejected by fears of disease, longing to find her family. A man who needs to love. Powerful historical novel, with feisty characters whose clear voices open up our experience of fear and family love.</td>
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<td>Boy in the Tower</td>
<td>Polly Ho-Yen</td>
<td>Tough, rollicking sci-fi adventure as a tiny, surviving tower-block community battles the murderous Bluchers. Strong central character who engages and expands the reader’s emotions. Really sticks in the mind.</td>
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<td>The White Fox</td>
<td>Jackie Morris</td>
<td>Sol is disconnected from his Inuit roots after his mother dies. Then a white fox is lost in Seattle’s dockland, and together they find their way back home. Mysterious, lyrical, with beautifully drawn feelings.</td>
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<td>The Boy at the Back of the Class</td>
<td>Onjali Q. Raúf</td>
<td>Three charming, warm-hearted children go on a crazy adventure as they try to reunite refugee Ahmet with his family. Powerfully shows how empathy can inspire action.</td>
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<td>The Light Jar</td>
<td>Lisa Thompson</td>
<td>Nate and his mum escape domestic abuse but then she disappears. Exciting story which builds understanding of human psychology as Nate’s imaginary friend comes to his aid.</td>
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<td>The Fox Girl and the White Gazelle**</td>
<td>Victoria Williamson</td>
<td>Two lonely, alienated girls – a Syrian refugee and an angry young carer – unexpectedly make friends when faced by the challenge of saving local foxes. Lots of emotional insights.</td>
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**Empathy is a quality of character that can change the world**

Barack Obama
Top tips

**Family sharing** Sharing books as a family builds empathy, especially when you choose books which help children understand different lives. Try watching https://vimeo.com/267653786

**Empathy in action** Research shows that empathy plays a big role in our hunger for social justice. Look for books with themes that inspire children to become social activists.

**Focus on characters** Try focusing on the characters more than the plot. Ask gentle questions about the characters’ feelings.

**Take reflective time** Try to give children reflective time – listen carefully as they explore what they’ve learnt from the book, about themselves and other people.

**Ask great questions** Ask questions that open up a deep dialogue and treat children as equals – ‘Which character interested you most?’ ‘How do you think the character felt?’

**Help recognise feelings** Help children recognise and name feelings. As you talk, pick up on new words and share what they mean, e.g. “I’m wondering how Cyril felt when he had to play alone without Pat?” (*Cyril and Pat*, by Emily Gravett)

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**EMPATHY DAY, 11 JUNE 2019 – READ STORIES. BUILD EMPATHY. MAKE A BETTER WORLD.**

Empathy Day is all about helping us understand each other better, the day to take new steps on our empathy journey...  
- Have a new conversation about harnessing empathy's power to build a better world  
- Step out of our bubble and make new connections with each other  
- Celebrate a dynamic new wave of empathy work, in our schools and libraries

On Empathy Day we want everyone 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

Go to www.empathylab.uk @EmpathyLabUK to find out more, and be sure to share your #ReadForEmpathy recommendations on the day!

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**How to get involved**

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<td><em>Join the Empathy Conversation</em></td>
<td><em>Put empathy into action</em></td>
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<td><em>Find and share empathy-boosting books – use #ReadForEmpathy</em></td>
<td><em>Snap up tickets to The Empathy Conversation, Waterstone's Piccadilly, 203-206 Piccadilly, London W1V 9LW, 7 p.m. on Empathy Day, 11 June 2019</em></td>
<td><em>Make an Empathy Resolution – special cards available in March</em></td>
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<td><em>Use our Read For Empathy Guides for young people: <a href="http://www.empathylab.uk/read-for-empathy-guide">http://www.empathylab.uk/read-for-empathy-guide</a></em></td>
<td><em>Use #EmpathyDay to share which social issues need more empathy</em></td>
<td><em>Teachers: sign up; use our training, booklists, Empathy Day packs</em></td>
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<td><em>Check out your library’s empathy books and activities</em></td>
<td><em>Meet someone different at libraries’ Empathy Conversation events</em></td>
<td><em>Librarians: sign up; pilot the Empathy Conversation events</em></td>
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<td><em>Follow the special author blog tour; listen to their podcasts at <a href="http://www.empathylab.uk">www.empathylab.uk</a></em></td>
<td><em>Make a giant workplace Empathy Wall – share ideas for changing things</em></td>
<td><em>Buy the complete Read For Empathy book collection for 26% off: <a href="http://www.peters.co.uk/empathy2019">www.peters.co.uk/empathy2019</a></em></td>
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Empathy is a beacon of hope in a divided world: join our 2019 programme

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

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

How to order the books in this guide

Order the Read For Empathy book collection at www.peters.co.uk/empathy2019 and enjoy 26% off plus a free display poster.

If you have any queries do not hesitate to contact us 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
• Print: Penguin Random House