Read for Empathy Guide
21 books to build children’s empathy

#ReadforEmpathy

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Why read for empathy?

**The world needs more empathy:** to help us all understand and connect to each other better. New approaches are badly needed, with the recent rise in hate crimes.

**Without empathy children won’t thrive:** psychologists say it is an essential life skill.

**Use stories to build it:** as you read with your child, you can build their emotional skills at the same time, because scientific evidence shows that reading builds real-life empathy. In identifying with book characters, children learn to see things from other points of view.

The Read for Empathy book selection

- 21 fantastic books for 4 -11 year olds, chosen to help build children’s empathy as they read.
- Books which give children insights into other ways of life and issues of the day, like refugees or mental illness. With strong characters who help children understand how other people feel.
- Recommended by children, teachers and librarians.

### Picture books

A mixture of books for 4 -11 year olds. No child is ever too old for a great picture book, and we’ve used this symbol * where they are best suited to older children.

**Something Else**  
*Kathryn Cave and Chris Riddell*  
Superbly illustrated book for exploring, and celebrating, being different. Tiny Something Else really pulls at your heartstrings.

**Puffin Books**

**Mirror**  
*Jeannie Baker*  
A wordless picture book, using collages to explore the contrasts and similarities between family life in Morocco and Australia. There is more that unites us than divides us.  

**Walker Books**

**They All Saw a Cat**  
*Brendan Wenzel*  
Lots of creatures – a mouse, bat, and fish - experience the same cat, but very differently. Brilliant book for learning how to see things from other perspectives, a key empathy skill.

**Chronicle Books**

**The Lonely Beast**  
*Chris Judge*  
Loneliness, compassion and valuing difference are key themes of this story. How would it feel to be the beast alone in a world of humans who reject you?

**Andersen Press**

**Ossiri and the Bala Mengro**  
*Richard O’Neill, Katharine Quarmby, illust. Hannah Tolson*  
Stories can tackle prejudice by helping children understand how other people live. Ossiri is a Traveller girl whose funny, imaginative story brings illuminating insights into Travelling culture.

**Child’s Play**
**Picture books**

**A Bottle of Happiness**
Pippa Goodhart and Ehsan Abdollahi
Two neighbouring communities see the world through very different eyes. But they learn, through the Bottle of Happiness, to adapt to each other’s point of view. Fantastic illustrations. **Tiny Owl Publishing**

**Welcome**
Barroux
Three polar bears adrift on a melting ice sheet urgently need a new home, but they are turned away everywhere they go. Why? Lots to discuss in this deceptively simple picture book. **Egmont**

**The Journey**
Francesca Sanna
A deeply emotional read. The power comes through the illustrations which give the reader the sense of menace and fear experienced by a vulnerable family risking all to seek sanctuary. **Flying Eye Books**

**The Wooden Camel**
Wanuri Kahiu, illust. Manuela Adreani
Everyone has dreams, and this story of a Turkana boy who longs to be a camel racer will resonate with children everywhere. Readers will empathise with the kind-hearted siblings desperate to find a way to make their youngest brother happy. **Lantana Publishing**

**Novels and poetry**

11 superb stories and one poetry book 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 that age range.

**You’re Amazing, Anna Hibiscus!**
Atinuke, illust. Lauren Tobin
Anna Hibiscus, small, delightful and bolshy, is growing up in Africa and dealing with strong feelings. Her grandfather won’t wake up, and her twin brothers are horribly boisterous. **Walker Books**

**Werewolf Club Rules**
Joseph Coelho, illust. John O’Leary
This hilarious, vivid poetry collection has some wonderful poems about relationships and families, great for exploring feelings. Look out especially for those about the dad and the grandmother. **Frances Lincoln**

**All About Ella**
Sally Nicholls, illust. Hannah Coulson
Everyone worries about Sam who is very poorly. His sister Ella feels forgotten. A funny, beautifully written novel for younger readers, exploring a sibling’s complicated feelings when there is a sick child in the family. **Barrington Stoke**

**How to Train Your Dragon**
Cressida Cowell
An unlikely leader talks to the dragons instead of bullying them. This book series won the Philosophy Now Award for its meditations on moral themes, tied into an adventure in which surprising people help each other. **Hodder Children’s Books**

**Welcome to Nowhere**
Elizabeth Laird
Omar is just a normal boy who loves mobile phones, but his life is turned upside down by war in Syria. Laird’s vivid and authentic writing makes it easy to empathise with his refugee camp experiences. **Macmillan Children’s Books**
One Dog and his Boy*  
Eva Ibbotson  
A book which perfectly exemplifies how a skilfully developed character helps children experience all sorts of different emotions. On his huge adventure, Hal finds his perfect dog, and reshapes his family in the process.  
Scholastic

The Goldfish Boy*  
Lisa Thompson  
An intriguing mystery about a missing toddler, seen through the eyes of Matthew, who suffers from Obsessive Compulsive Disorder. Real emotional insight wrapped into a romping read.  
Scholastic

A Library of Lemons*  
Jo Cotterill  
A sensitively written story about sadness and strength. Calypso has to rescue her grieving dad, whilst herself trying to recover from losing her mum. Lots of opportunities to imagine characters’ feelings and motivations.  
Piccadilly Press

Cloudbusting*  
Malorie Blackman illust. Helen van Vliet  
It’s hard to step into the shoes of a bully, but this extraordinary book, written in verse, gives new insights, whilst being a terrific read.  
Corgi Yearling

Coming to England*  
Floella Benjamin, illust. Michael Frith  
Floella tells her own story including her experience of racism and rejection. She helps children really understand how hard it would be to leave a much loved home and come to an unwelcoming country.  
Macmillan Children’s Books

Mr Stink  
David Walliams, illust. Quentin Blake  
Children often see and wonder about homelessness. This funny, touching book gives them a great way to understand how it might feel.  
Harper Collins

The Unforgotten Coat  
Frank Cottrell Boyce  
Julie, from Bootle, remembers two nomadic Mongolian brothers who helped her see the world through very different eyes. A story showing that having an open heart can lead to life-changing understanding and friendships.  
Walker Books

EmpathyLab aims to harness the power of stories to bring about an empathy revolution in homes, schools and communities.  
www.empathylab.uk  
@EmpathyLabUK

A very big thank you to the Hachette Children’s Group, a division of Hachette UK, for supporting this Guide’s design.

“Now, more than ever, we need to harness the power of books to change the way we think and feel, and to connect us to each other. We couldn’t be more delighted to be supporting EmpathyLab.”

Hilary Murray Hill - CEO, Hachette Children’s Group