



GET READY FOR EMPATHY DAY ON 13 JUNE 2017

Spreading the power of empathy in our divided world and stories as a tool to develop it

Empathy Day on 13 June 2017 is a platform to emphasise the importance of empathy in our divided world, and raise awareness of the power of stories to develop it.

A new *Read for Empathy* guide for adults living and working with children aged 4-11 will be published on 13 June. It features 21 “must-reads” endorsed by *The Sunday Times*’ children’s book reviewer Nicolette Jones and is available free from www.empathylab.uk.

The Day is being launched by EmpathyLab, a new organisation with a mission to use stories to help us understand each other better, led by Miranda McKearney OBE, founder of The Reading Agency.

Miranda McKearney OBE, Founder: *“We’re establishing an Empathy Day to shine a bright light on the importance of empathy in our divided world - new approaches to building this core life skill are badly needed with the recent dramatic rise in hate crimes.*

Helping children learn about empathy through books lays strong foundations for resisting prejudice and intolerance. Neuroscience research shows that the emotions we feel for characters wires our brains to have the same sort of sensitivity towards real people. Our Read for Empathy guide for 4-11 year olds has great new book ideas, and we’re delighted to enjoy the support of high profile authors and illustrators including Neil Gaiman, Chris Riddell, Jacqueline Wilson and Cressida Cowell.

Authors are key figures in a drive for a more tolerant society because they are natural masters of empathy. On the Day authors will visit schools and take to social media in a #ReadforEmpathy drive.

About empathy

Our understanding of the complex mechanisms underpinning empathy is changing all the time, and psychologists, neuroscientists, sociologists and philosophers have different interpretations. Most agree on three elements: *emotional/affective empathy* where we literally resonate with someone else’s feelings; *cognitive empathy* or perspective-taking where we apply reason to working out how someone else feels and *empathic concern*, which is a powerful motivator for helping others, a force for social change.

Robin Banerjee, Professor of Developmental Psychology, University of Sussex: *“Empathy is a pivotal factor in children’s wellbeing – my research identifies its relevance to behaviour, mental health, and achievement at school. Work to support it is relevant to all children, but especially those who are vulnerable. EmpathyLab’s strategy of focusing on the literacy domain as a context for supporting its development is particularly powerful and resonates with the findings from cutting-edge psychological research. I’m looking forward to seeing the reaction to the Day.”*

Activities on 13 June 2017

Parents: a free *Read for Empathy* guide gives parents book recommendations and research-based tips for talking about books in ways which build children's ability to understand others. Downloadable from www.empathylab.uk.

Schools: pilot schools will hold Empathy Award ceremonies to celebrate children's choices of book characters showing exceptional empathy (e.g. Miss Honey from *Matilda* or Hiccup from *How to Train Your Dragon*). Any school can get involved by creating book displays and joining in the social media campaign.

Authors and illustrators: author partners will be recommending the books which helped them understand other people better, using the hashtags #ReadforEmpathy and #EmpathyDay. Former Children's Laureate Chris Riddell has contributed a special illustration to be shared across social media. Authors running 13 June sessions in schools include BBC Radio 1's Gemma Cairney, Cathy Cassidy, Jo Cotterill, Elizabeth Laird, Alan MacDonald, Ross Montgomery, Tamsyn Murray and CBBC presenter Katie Thisleton.

Libraries: a selection of libraries from Sheffield to Devon will run empathy-focused book promotions and activities. The Day is supported by The Society of Chief Librarians.

Author supporters

Dame Jacqueline Wilson: *"To be a successful human being, you need to be in touch with other people's feelings. I'm fascinated by EmpathyLab, by its ideas, and by the way it's drawing together the world of words with the fields of neuroscience and wellbeing. I'm delighted to see the launch of Empathy Day and it's marvellous that schools will be holding special Empathy Award ceremonies on June 13."*

Neil Gaiman: *"In reading, you get to feel things, visit places and worlds you would never otherwise know. You learn that everyone else out there is a me, as well. Empathy is a tool for building people into groups, for allowing us to function as more than self-obsessed individuals."*

Cressida Cowell: *"Of all the many gifts that books and reading can give us, empathy is one of the most valuable. Reading forces you to look at the world through someone else's eyes, and feel what it is to be them. Empathy is a skill, and books are the best, and most fun, way to learn it. I applaud EmpathyLab for fulfilling a much-needed role and hope teachers and parents will get involved on 13 June."*

Get involved at www.empathylab.uk