Assembly 1: Introduction to empathy

Aim:

- To introduce the word and concept of “empathy” and the role of stories in developing our empathy.

Preparation and resources:

- ‘washing line’ letters spelling out empathy
- Super Duper You by Sophy Henn [if you don’t have this book, then you could use another story that illustrates a similar point, helping children think about how a character is feeling, why and what other characters could do about it]
- An excerpt from The Boy at the Back of the Class by Onjali Q. Raúf
- Visualiser if available to share the picture book with the children as you read

Today we are going to tell you about some very important work that this school is going to be doing in the next few weeks/ this term/ year.

We are going to be developing a brand new skill! In fact, I’d call it a kind of super human power, because this skill means each of us individually and, more importantly, together, can achieve extraordinary things! Let’s find out what that super human power will be.

Ask some children to come and help you turn the letters on the washing line around and together read what they say (empathy).

Get the whole school to repeat the words a couple of times (encouraging children to become familiar with the word).

Can anyone tell us what the word means? Take answers and congratulate them for what they know.

(SLIDE 2): Mark Ruffalo and Murray from Sesame Street have been discussing this too (Show the Sesame Street film about empathy.)

Empathy is a special superpower, because when you have empathy it means you can understand how other people are feeling and you can know how to help them and make the places we live and learn in much better and happier. There are three parts to empathy. (SLIDE 3)

- Recognising how others are feeling
- Thinking and working out why people might be feeling the way they are
Doing something about what we have discovered.

We are going to spend time building this super power. And we have something very special to help us. Stories! (SLIDES 4 AND 5)

Can anyone guess why stories are good to help people develop empathy?

Take answers and praise the responses.

Because when you read about characters in stories you almost step into their shoes and you can start to understand how they are feeling and that helps you understand how people in real life might be feeling.

A: Read the book Super Duper You to the class (SLIDE 6). Then ask the children some questions

“I want you to imagine yourself into the character of the boy. W he says “sometimes you’re polka-dotty when everyone’s in stripes” what is he thinking about the little girl? This book shows the love the brother has for his sister. But what does the sister think of the brother? Ask each child to imagine they are the little girl. What would she say to her brother?

B: Alternatively if you have older children in assembly read following excerpt from The Boy at the Back of the Class pg 11 to pg 12 (SLIDE 7) (From “After whispering for a few more seconds with Mrs Khan” to the end of the chapter “Especially for a boy who looked as scared and as sad as the one now sitting in the back of our class”).

Explain to the children that the boy is called Ahmet and he is a refugee who has escaped war in his own country. Ask the children to step into Ahmet’s shoes. How do you think he is feeling? What does he need from his classmates? Then imagine you are the classmates. What could you do to show empathy to Ahmet?

Consider the children in the school. Are any of them refugees? How might they react to the story? Discuss with class teachers how they might follow up on the assembly in their classes. Are there any children who are refugees in their class? How can their stories be valued and understood?

So do you see how when we are reading stories we can practice developing our empathy skills. We can think about how characters are feeling and what has happened to make them feel that way and what characters in the book (or us in real life) might do about it. What’s more, stories can introduce us to experiences, people, ways of seeing things that we might not otherwise meet in our own lives.

If time, finish reading the story. [There may not be time to finish the story in the assembly, in which case this could be finished in classes].

Encourage children to start to ‘explore’ as classes and as individuals

➢ to look at other people in pictures, at home and in the classroom to work out how they feel
➢ to look out for stories that help them understand how someone else is feeling
and why.

Whole school actions following assembly

➢ Teachers should be prepared after this assembly to share examples of stories that have helped them understand someone else (how they feel, why they feel that) and how it changed them/ their thoughts/ attitudes/ behaviours; and to begin exploring books in class that are good ‘empathy books’. Use EmpathyLab booklists.

➢ Classes could create their own collections. There could be a prominent school display where classes add book covers/ titles that they want to recommend for being good ‘empathy books’.

➢ Share Book Talking questions
Assembly 2: Perspective taking

Aim:
- To help children to understand what perspective taking is and to practice seeing things from another person’s point of view as part of developing our empathy skills

Preparation and resources:
- Prior to this assembly, take a picture of children sitting in their class rows at a previous assembly. As the children come in project the photograph on a big screen rotated by 180 degrees so it is upside down. It will make children laugh and intrigue them. (SLIDE 9)
- *Daft Bat* by Jeanne Willis *if you don’t have this book, then you could use another story that illustrates a similar point, helping children see that there are different perspectives to many situations*
- Alternatively an old but brilliant wordless picture book called *Mirror* by Jeannie Baker which shows a day in the life of two families – one in Australia and one in Morocco
- Visualiser to share the book with the children as you read

NB continue to have the Empathy washing line at the front whenever you do a specific empathy assembly as it will help signify that the assembly will be about empathy

Link to previous assembly:
- How have you been getting on with using your empathy eyes? Have you been looking out for how people are feeling and why? And have you read any stories that have helped you understand how people feel in different situations?
- Briefly check in with the collections/recommendations being developed since last assembly. Depending on how your school has done this, this could involve a couple of brief recommendations (shared by children or teachers) or you could highlight the school display (if not in the assembly room, share a photo of it).

Show them the picture of old woman/ young girl (SLIDE 10). Ask what they see. When you get different views, ask the school who is right? Show how both are right. Explain that sometimes people see things differently.

Share the book *Daft Bat* (SLIDE 11) by Jeanne Willis and Tony Ross

Check children know the meaning of daft.

Go back to the page where the animals tell Owl why they think Bat is daft. Ask the children if they have ever seen things differently to other people or if other people have seen things differently to them. Ask if they have ever thought those people were mad (or wrong). Ask them to think how easy it is to presume that the way you see things is the RIGHT way, when actually it might just be OUR way. Often there is more than one way of seeing things - it depends which angle or position you are looking at things from.
Refer back to the original image you had displayed (of assembly upside down). *This is what the world must look like to Bat. It’s different to what we see but that doesn’t make it wrong or right.*

If you are showing the picture book *Mirror* – you can explain that *this book gives us perspectives on life in very different parts of the world and shows us what is similar as well as what is different.*

Tell the children that looking at the world from different perspectives is part of the superpower ‘empathy’.

*Everyone sees the world differently; there isn’t a right way but it is much better and exciting when you can understand someone else’s perspective because you can avoid falling out or getting into trouble and sometimes see things in a better way.*

*We are all empathy super heroes in our own way and we can all use our special Empathy Eyes to look at other people in pictures, at home and in the classroom and try to work out each other’s perspectives. What can they see or hear? Is that the same or different from ourselves?*  

*Daft Bat had a different perspective than the other animals. Our experience and memories also give us a different perspective. For example, if you are in Year 6 or in reception you will see things differently won’t you? Or if you have always lived here or if you have just moved here then you might see things differently too.*

*So today and this week I want you to practice - before you make a judgement (maybe you catch yourself thinking someone else’s point of view is wrong) you stop and take some time to think about what it might look like from their perspective. What might they see/ know that you don’t? What experience might they have had/ what beliefs might they have that make them feel/ think/ see differently? What can we learn from that? Might being curious help avoid conflict, resentment, misunderstanding?*  

*You might try this with friends on the playground, with your teacher, with parent, carers, siblings at home.*
Assembly 3: From empathy into action

Aim:

- To explore how our empathy skills can be turned into positive action.

Preparation:

- As a staff, consider the ideas about how we can turn empathy into compassion and how this leads to social action. You might like to consider the differences between empathy/compassion and sympathy or feeling sorry for someone.
- Read the book *The Storm Whale by Benji Davies*. *If you do not have this book, use another story that addresses a social issue, in which children can practice understanding how people might feel in that situation and how others can help or make a difference.*
- Visualiser to share the book with the children as you read

The Assembly

Read the story *(SLIDE 13)*,

Ask the children to use their special superpower, empathy, to imagine how Noi is thinking and feeling.

Pause at the page that says “Every day, Noi’s dad left early for a long day’s work on his fishing boat”.

Show the children the illustration of Noi looking out of the window watching his dad leave. *What does the picture tell us about how Noi is feeling?*

Then return to the story and read through to the end.

Noi does his best to look after the whale, but in the end, he knows he has to say goodbye. It is difficult but it is the right thing to do. Show the double page spread when Noi and his dad are in the boat watching the whale swim away.

Ask each child to reflect silently on the page – *what is Noi thinking?*

You’ve used empathy to think about Noi and what he is thinking and feeling but there is another aspect of empathy and that is turning your empathy into action. *Empathy helps us to understand the world but it doesn’t help anyone else unless we DO something.*

*So what could we do to support people who are lonely.* Have a discussion – drawing together what the children have understood about feeling lonely.

*Think about who might be feeling lonely in the school or in the community.*

Share ideas about what our school could do to make a difference to lonely people and decide how to take the ideas forward.
Summarise what the group have explored: *We have read the story The Storm Whale and this allowed us to use our super power, empathy. There are lots of ways of acting on empathy.* Use the ideas that have been generated by the children. For example:

- Helping someone we know
- Smiling and being friendly
- Telling a teacher if someone is worried or lonely

Explain that as part of our work before and on Empathy Day, we will be making pledges about things we can do to make life happier and easier for others.

**Possible whole school actions following assembly**

- Discuss the story and refugees and consider what we can do as a result of the empathy that you felt for Noi. The classes might draw up a charter for how they are going to welcome children into their class or what they might do if they see someone sad and lonely in the playground.
Assembly 4: Empathy Day

Aim:
➢ To celebrate Empathy Day and share examples of what has been achieved so far and what could come next for individuals or the community.

Preparation:
• Gather examples of work that different classes have been doing as part of their empathy work prior to Empathy Day
• As a staff team,
  o Plan activities to be carried out on Empathy Day and beyond
  o Generate ideas for other things children could do beyond the classroom (read, connect, do)

The Assembly
Introduce Empathy Day, explaining that today is a national day of celebration dedicated to the skill of empathy. This means that across the UK, individuals and communities (schools, libraries and other groups) are marking this day with a celebration of empathy. A bit like a birthday, when we celebrate a specific person’s life. (SLIDE 15)

(SLIDE 16) Empathy Day is all about placing a focus on empathy and helping us understand each other better.

It is also a day to:
1. Celebrate the empathy building steps we’ve taken so far
2. Plan the next steps on our empathy journey

Celebrating the empathy steps we’ve been taking so far: (SLIDE 17)
➢ Share examples of what different classes have been doing as part of their empathy work prior to Empathy Day

Planning the next steps on our empathy journey: (SLIDE 18)
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
• Act: put empathy into action, in your home and your community

Depending on the amount of work your school has done on social action, you may need to elaborate a bit further on the ‘doing’ part – how can you make a difference, what can you actually do? How is this part of the empathy skill?

Share the activities* that will be taking place for Empathy Day (AND beyond as appropriate) across the school/ in different classes (these might be organised into the three categories of Read, Connect, Do if appropriate or in another format of your choosing) (SLIDE 19 – to be completed by individual schools).

You could share examples of activities taking place in other schools on Empathy Day to
create a sense of solidarity/ shared activity; you could even buddy with one other school in particular and video link with them.

Share other ways in which children can read, connect and do beyond today (SLIDE 20 to be completed by individual schools). For example:

Read:

- Find and share empathy-boosting books – create a library/ dedicated booklist
- Complete a reading challenge, using the EmpathyLab Read For Empathy Guides for young people
- Follow the special author blog tour; listen to their podcasts at www.empathylab.uk

Connect:

- Make a giant Empathy Wall at home – sharing ideas for changing things.

Do:

- Make Empathy Resolutions