

EmpathyLab

Read stories. Build empathy. Make a better world.



Read For Empathy Guide

30 books to build children's empathy

#ReadforEmpathy

How does
empathy work?

Picture books

Novels, poetry,
graphic novels

Top tips

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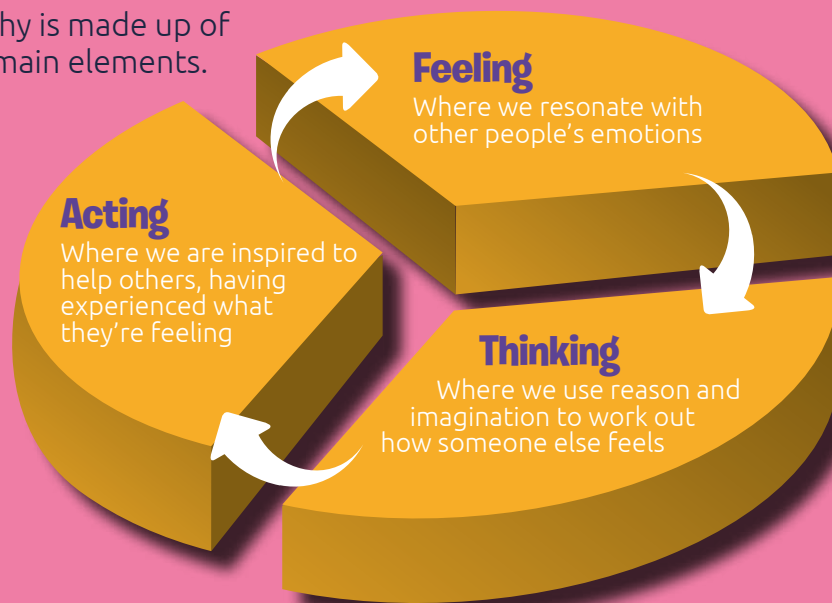
Empathy is a human super-power which helps us all understand each other better. It is also an essential social and emotional skill, crucial if children are to thrive.

We're not born with a fixed quantity of empathy – it's a skill we can learn. Excitingly, new 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.

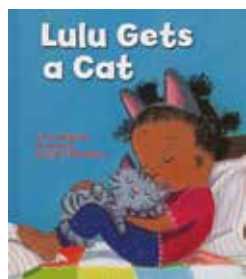


The Read For Empathy Guide

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, like 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.

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.

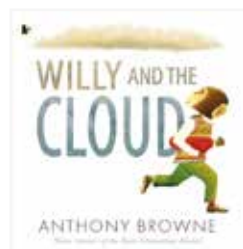


Lulu Gets a Cat **Anna McQuinn**

Illustrator Rosalind Beardshaw

Understanding pets' feelings and needs can help children develop their empathy muscles. Lulu learns how to make her new cat feel at home in this gently delightful book.

Alanna Books



Willy and the Cloud* **Anthony Browne**

Explaining dark moods to a child can be challenging. Browne uses the image of a personal cloud hanging over the central character in this multi-layered, powerful and moving book.

Walker Books



Grandad's Island* **Benji Davies**

A sensitive exploration of the emotions involved in bereavement, and healing. Davies subtly conveys a positive message about letting go whilst always carrying the loved one in your heart.

Simon & Schuster

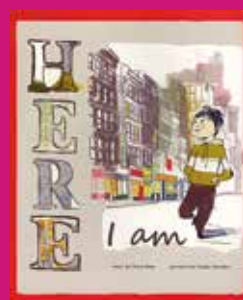


King of the Sky* **Nicola Davies**

Illustrator Laura Carlin

A lonely boy in a new country meets an old man, and they start to share a passion for racing pigeons. Superb book, exploring inter-generational understanding and what helps people to feel less alone.

Walker Books

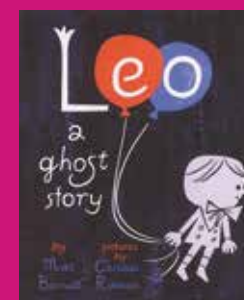


Here I Am* **Patti Kim**

Illustrator Sonia Sánchez

A powerful wordless picture book about the chaotic feelings of a boy coming to a new country, and how these emotions gradually ease as he experiences kindness.

Curious Fox

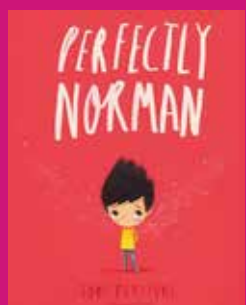


Leo: a Ghost Story* **Mac Barnett**

Illustrator Christian Robinson

A lonely ghost is glad when a family moves into his house, but he is rejected and forced to roam the streets before finally finding a true friend. An unusual story about difference and the value of having an open heart and mind.

Chronicle Books



Perfectly Norman **Tom Percival**

In this beautifully illustrated story Norman suddenly finds himself with a pair of wings, and struggles to accept himself until other children reveal that they also have wings!

Bloomsbury Children's Books



The Parrot and the Merchant **Marjan Vafaian**

A Persian merchant loves keeping colourful birds in cages, but her favourite talking parrot longs to escape. A lovely story based on a Rumi fable, which sparks empathic reflection on how our actions affect other creatures.

Tiny Owl



In My Heart: A Book of Feelings **Jo Witek**

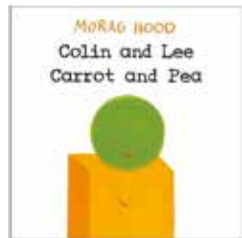
Illustrator Christine Roussey

In order to understand other people's feelings, children need to be able to identify and articulate their own. An intriguingly designed book with illuminating descriptions of how different emotions feel, physically.

Abrams Appleseed

Picture books

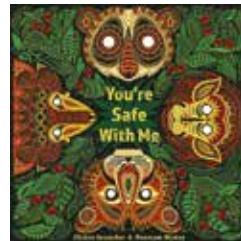
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Colin and Lee, Carrot and Pea Morag Hood

Colin is a carrot struggling to fit in with the peas' games. Sparsely witty illustrations celebrate their growing realisation that their differences don't have to divide them.

Two Hoots



You're Safe With Me Chitra Soundar

Illustrator Poonam Mistry

The forest creatures are afraid of the thunder and strong winds, but reassured by a mother figure. Great for exploring relationships, and different perspectives.

Lantana



Can I Join Your Club? John Kelly

Illustrator Steph Laberis

Duck really needs some new friends but none of the other animals will let him join their club. So he starts one of his own and he welcomes everyone in. A story that shows the importance of being open to making real connections, not judgments.

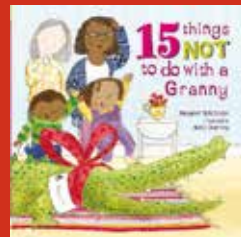
Little Tiger Press



My Name is Not Refugee* Kate Milner

A boy describes his experience of having to leave his town, asking very direct questions of the reader that invite reflection about how we would cope in his situation. Ends with the powerful message that Refugee is just a label – not a name.

Barrington Stoke



15 Things Not to Do with a Granny Margaret McAllister

Illustrator Holly Sterling

A granny is a wonderful person to have in your life, but never make assumptions about what grannies do! A book which will make everyone laugh whilst getting children thinking about their own family members, and what they really need.

Frances Lincoln

Novels, poetry, graphic novels

Thirteen superb stories, a poetry book and two graphic novels 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.

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



Me and Mister P
Maria Farrer
Illustrator **Daniel Rieley**

Arthur is struggling with conflicting feelings of jealousy, guilt and love, caused by his brother's learning difficulties. Then Mr P (a polar bear) stumbles through the front door... and helps Arthur cope with his emotions.

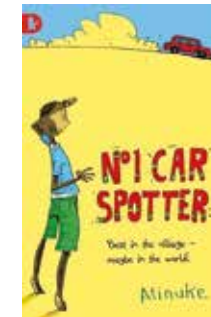
Oxford University Press



The Road to Ever After*
Moira Young

A magical adventure about an unlikely friendship between thirteen-year-old Davy, who is homeless, and the elderly Miss Flint. Deeply touching, this is an example of how great writing creates characters children will care about – ones that expand their emotional understanding.

Macmillan Children's Books



The No. 1 Car Spotter Fights the Factory
Atinuke

Illustrator **Warwick Johnson Cadwell**

An African village is overcome with problems caused by a corrupt developer, but the brilliant Oluwalase Babatunde Benson (the No. 1 Car Spotter) saves the day. Lovely insights into different emotions and life challenges.

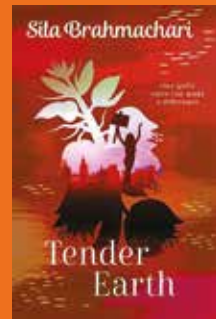
Walker Books



The Wild Robot
Peter Brown

What does it mean to be human? That's the question raised by this tale of a shipwrecked robot. The robot (Roz) is inadvertently activated and gradually learns to feel, to care and to love. The ability to feel empathy is at the heart of Roz's journey.

Piccadilly Press



Tender Earth*
Sita Brahmachari

Empathy can motivate people to try to make a difference. In this sensitive coming-of-age story, readers experience Laila's growing determination to make a stand against racism in her community. Even small acts of empathy can change lives.

Macmillan Children's Books



Ballerina Dreams
Michaela and Elaine DePrince

Illustrator **Ella Okstad**

Don't be misled by the cover – this is a gritty true story of how a Sierra Leone orphan overcame racism as she followed her ballerina dreams. It opens children's eyes to very different life experiences, and has a message of hope – Michaela is now a principal ballerina.

Faber & Faber



Sky Dancer*
Gill Lewis

A great example of how books can help children see different people's perspectives. The characters hold diametrically opposed views about whether to shoot or protect endangered hen harriers on a grouse moor. A superb, uplifting book.

Oxford University Press



Smart**
Kim Slater

The assumptions we make about people can inhibit our feelings of empathy. Kieran, the central character here, makes no such judgments and his genuine compassion makes a huge difference to his community.

Macmillan Children's Books



Sputnik's Guide to Life on Earth*
Frank Cottrell Boyce

Illustrator **Steven Lenton**

Sputnik is an alien tasked with writing a guidebook to Earth, who struggles to understand how humans work. With his new, shy friend Prez, he learns about the planet's very best things. Exuberant, witty writing with a strong emotional core.

Macmillan Children's Books

Novels, poetry, graphic novels

Thirteen superb stories, a poetry book and two graphic novels 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.

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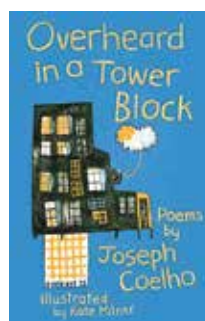


The Song from Somewhere Else* **A.F. Harrold**

Illustrator Levi Pinfold

Francesca (Frank) is bullied but finds courage through an unlikely friendship. A magical story with an ethereal quality, yet firmly rooted in gritty reality.

Bloomsbury Children's Books



Overheard in a Tower Block** **Joseph Coelho**

Illustrator Kate Milner

A powerful poetry collection about growing up. The agonies of missing an absent dad, the grief of a mother and the stresses of city life touch our emotions through Coelho's potent yet approachable voice.

Otter-Barry Books



El Deafo* **Cece Bell**

A moving semi-autobiographical graphic novel told from the viewpoint of a young deaf girl. Thought bubbles and dialogue draw us into Cece's world, making it easy to identify with her self-consciousness and frustration, and with her friends' confused feelings as they struggle to do the 'right thing'.

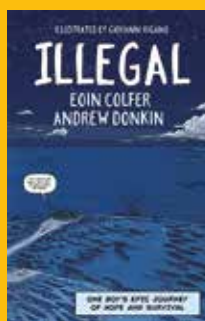
Amulet Books



Charlie and Me* **Mark Lowery**

Martin takes his big-brother responsibilities very seriously, and understands Charlie (who has health and behavioural issues) like no one else does. A deeply affecting, story, of an epic journey from Preston to Cornwall with an extraordinary twist.

Piccadilly Press



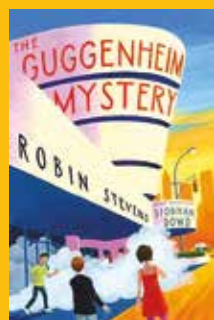
Illegal**

Eoin Colfer and Andrew Donkin

Illustrator Giovanni Rigano

A young boy makes a terrifying journey from Africa to Europe. Upsetting, important graphic novel with illuminating insights into the experiences of refugees and migrants and their resilience.

Hodder Children's Books



The Guggenheim Mystery **Robin Stevens**

This gloriously inventive art-theft whodunit is narrated by Ted Sparks, who is living with autism and has unusual powers of detection (read *The London Eye Mystery* to meet him for the first time). A lovely depiction of how Ted's family value him for who he is.

Puffin



The Island at the End of Everything** **Kiran Millwood Hargrave**

Amihan is separated from her mother, who has leprosy, and sent to live in an orphanage on a distant island. A gripping read, with beautifully drawn characters to help children expand their emotional understanding.

Chicken House Books

Top tips

Wordless picture books

Look out for wordless picture books. They're a powerful way to help children dig deeper into feelings and experiences that build empathy.

Empathy in action

Research shows that empathy is a big factor in inspiring us to take action for social justice. Look for books with themes which inspire children to become social activists.

Focus on characters

Try focusing on the characters more than the plots. Ask gentle questions about the characters' feelings.

Take reflective time

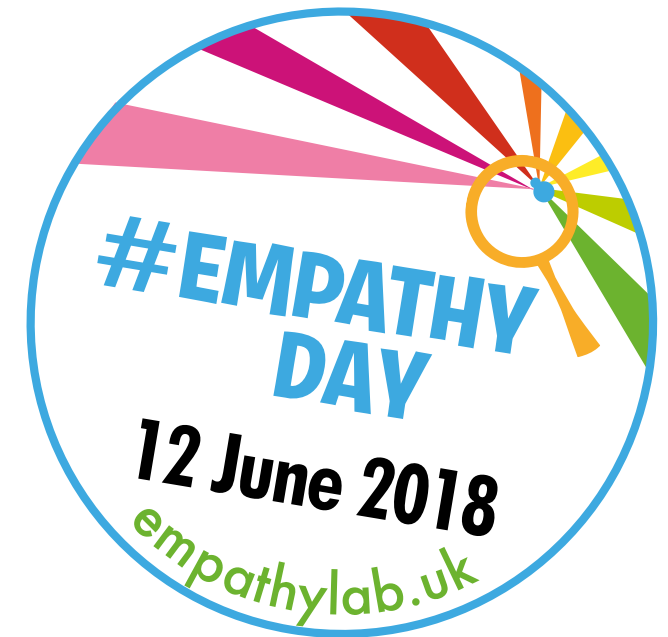
Try to give children reflective time – listen carefully as they explore what they've learnt from the book, about themselves and other people.

Ask great questions

Ask questions which 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 Digger is feeling... maybe a bit lost and alone?'*

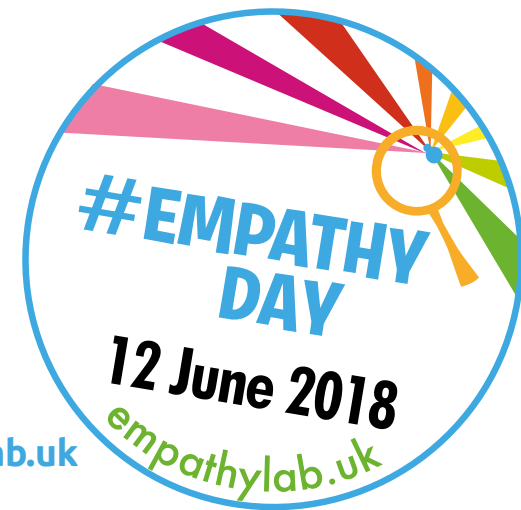


Join in with Empathy Day

To find out how to join in with Empathy Day on 12 June 2018 go to www.empathylab.uk  [@EmpathyLabUK](https://twitter.com/EmpathyLabUK).

Be sure to share your **#ReadForEmpathy** recommendations on Empathy Day!

If you would like to support EmpathyLab's work contact miranda@empathylab.uk



How to order the Read For Empathy books

Order the Read For Empathy book collection online at www.peters.co.uk/empathy and enjoy 20% off.

If you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact us on **0121 666 6646** or email empathy@peters.co.uk

Thank you to the people who have helped with this Guide

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