



EMPATHY IN ACTION

NEWSLETTER

2025 JULY EDITION

Editorial | Empathy in Action – July 2025 Edition

Greetings from Virtual School Australia!

With immense joy and gratitude, we bring you the July edition of our Empathy in Action newsletter, reaching friends and supporters across the globe. Each contribution in this issue echoes our shared belief — that empathy is not just a feeling but a force that binds us together across cultures, borders, and lived experiences.

We extend heartfelt thanks to all our contributors. Your profound thoughts, poems, stories, and essays have woven together a rich tapestry of voices that uplift and inspire. In every piece, the common thread of empathy shines — helping us grow not only as individuals but as members of a global empathic community.

Thank you to all GEC poets for your powerful contributions. Our July Poets Meet on Saturday, 26th July is a tribute to the late Dr Abhaya. Join us across continents in this Round Robin of Reverie, where poetry becomes a banner of resistance and a voice for empathy, courage, and truth. A gift from Virtual School Australia and poets worldwide.

This month, we proudly celebrate the success of the Elaine Hobson Literary Festival 2025, Virtual School Australia's annual writing competition. More than a showcase of academic and creative talent, this festival offers students a powerful platform to reflect on extraordinary moments in their lives — experiences worth retelling not just to impress, but to inspire and stir reflection in others.

Congratulations to all the young writers who entered the competition. The quality of submissions this year was truly exceptional, making the judges' task delightfully difficult. What stood out was not just the technical brilliance of the writing, but the depth of thought, authenticity, and emotional intelligence behind each piece.

Writing about empathy offered these students more than an opportunity for recognition. It challenged them to ask meaningful questions, look beyond themselves, and write with emotional clarity and insight — to engage in that sacred act of seeing the world through another's eyes. This is the heartbeat of Virtual School Australia's mission.

We are delighted to feature a selection of these outstanding entries in this edition. We invite you to read, reflect, and share them with your families, peers, educators, and communities. These stories deserve to be heard — and in sharing them, we take one more step toward building a more understanding and compassionate world.



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Student Success Stories: New Authors on the Rise

We're thrilled to share the exciting news that two of our students, Tamana and Faheema, have achieved something truly extraordinary. With passion and persistence, they completed their debut manuscripts — a memoir and a romance novel — and published them through Virtual School Australia on Amazon. These books are not only beautifully written, but deeply moving testimonies of strength, love, and identity.

We will sincerely appreciate if you can support their efforts by purchasing, reading, and reviewing their books on Amazon. Your engagement helps affirm their voices and supports our vision to empower emerging writers from marginalised communities. Virtual School Australia remains committed to discovering, nurturing, and publishing new literary talent.

A Shared Honour: Premier's Award for Social Responsibility

We are deeply honoured to announce that Virtual School Australia received the 2025 South Australian Premier's Award for Social Responsibility. This recognition belongs not only to our leadership team but to every dedicated educator, volunteer, poet, artist, and supporter who walks beside us. From our global Poets Meets and Fringe Festival shows to our publishing projects and weekly lessons — you are the soul of this movement.

Upcoming: Global Poets Meet – 26 July 2025

Our July Global Poets Meet will bring together award-winning poets from around the world in a vibrant virtual gathering on 26th July. This is a free event, but spaces are limited. To secure your seat and experience the transformative power of poetry firsthand please register: <https://2025GECPoetsMeet.eventbrite.com.au>

As always, we thank you for walking this path with us — for reading, writing, reflecting, and helping build a world where empathy leads the way.

See you at the Poets Meet!
With gratitude,
Editorial Team
Virtual School Australia



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EMPATHY IN INSTRUCTION: DESIGNING FOR REAL STUDENTS, NOT JUST IDEAL ONES



Empathy in Instruction: Designing for Real Students, Not Just Ideal Ones

Empathy in teaching isn't about being soft—it's about being strategic. When we design instruction with empathy, we're tuning into how students actually experience learning, not just how we wish they did. That means recognizing that students come with different ways of processing, responding, and engaging—and that emotions play a huge role in how they learn. When students feel understood, they're more likely to stay motivated, participate actively, and believe in their own potential.

Empathy in education means creating space for all learners, especially those whose needs and strengths might not fit the standard mold. It's about shifting the focus from what students can't do to what they can. A student with ADHD might have a hard time sitting still, but they might also have extraordinary creative bursts. A student with dyslexia might struggle with text, but excel at visual reasoning or big-picture thinking. When we see these strengths, we change the story—from deficits to assets.

This is where Universal Design for Learning (UDL) comes in. UDL is a flexible framework that goes hand-in-hand with empathetic teaching. It encourages us to build lessons that offer multiple ways for students to take in information, express what they know, and stay engaged. For example, students with learning disabilities might benefit from hearing content read aloud while following along with visuals. Students with ADHD might need lessons broken into smaller chunks, with movement breaks and very clear instructions. Technology helps here, too. Tools like speech-to-text, audiobooks, interactive planners, and even GenAI can support students in playing to their strengths rather than constantly compensating for weaknesses. When we give students the right tools, we're not just helping them access content—we're showing them they belong.

EMPATHY IN INSTRUCTION: DESIGNING FOR REAL STUDENTS, NOT JUST IDEAL ONES

Let's bring this to life: Imagine a student named Alex, who's on the autism spectrum. During a noisy class transition, Alex gets overwhelmed. Instead of calling him out for "acting up," his teacher checks in: "Is the hallway noise bothering you?" Then, she offers him noise-canceling headphones. No fuss, no shame—just support. Later, she turns the moment into a quick learning opportunity: "Some of us experience sound differently. Giving Alex headphones is like offering someone a jacket when they're cold."

- That's empathy in action.
- It's recognizing emotions.
- Understanding what's behind the behavior.
- Offering a simple, respectful solution.
- And teaching everyone in the room what inclusion really looks like.

When we lead with empathy—whether we're teaching students with dyslexia, ADHD, autism, or other learning difference—we create classrooms where all students feel seen and capable. But it doesn't stop with teachers. Schools need to invest in ongoing training that helps educators understand neurodiversity and design learning environments that work for real students, and create classrooms that celebrate differences.

About Dr. Sharmila Roy

Dr. Sharmila Roy has served as the Program Chair of the Educational Therapy certificate program at UCSC Silicon Valley Extension for 9 years. She teaches classes on Educational Therapy, and is also a lecturer at San Jose State University, California. Dr. Roy has over 30 years' of experience as an educator, primarily in teacher training, classroom interventions and curriculum development. She has extensive experience working in K-7 classrooms and 1:1 with exceptional students, especially in the area of multi-sensory mathematics learning for students with learning differences and executive functional skills. She has developed special education services in the non-profit sector. Dr. Roy is committed to providing services with empathy and compassion.

EMPATHY IN ACTION: - RAJASHREE IMANDI



In a world where education is a basic right, thousands of girls in Afghanistan find themselves deprived of this opportunity due to ongoing restrictions and societal barriers. For many of them, dreams of a brighter future feel distant, but Virtual School Australia (VSA) is working to change that. With their initiative offering free online English classes and opportunities in performing arts, VSA is bringing hope, skills, and empowerment to Afghan girls, demonstrating the true meaning of empathy in action.

Since recent policy changes have severely limited educational opportunities for Afghan girls, VSA recognised the urgent need to step in. Education is not just about learning facts; it's about self-empowerment, independence, and the chance to shape one's own destiny. For Afghan girls, learning English is a powerful way to connect with a world beyond their borders, opening doors to global knowledge, opportunities, and communication. By providing these classes, VSA is supporting these girls' ambitions and giving them a voice in a world that might otherwise overlook them.

What makes this initiative exceptional is that it's founded on empathy and understanding. The teachers at VSA are aware of the unique challenges their students face. They work to create a supportive, safe, and engaging virtual learning environment where each student feels valued and encouraged. The curriculum is adapted to be culturally sensitive and empathetic, with volunteers bringing both compassion and expertise to their teaching. Empathy here means seeing the world through the students' eyes, understanding their struggles, and responding in a way that empowers them.

The classes don't just teach language skills, they foster a sense of community among the girls. By participating in the virtual classroom, girls can connect with peers who share similar goals and challenges. Together, they form a supportive network, exchanging ideas, offering encouragement, and building friendships. This shared space reminds each student that she is not alone in her journey and that there are others who believe in her potential.

Empowerment Through Performing Arts

Beyond academics, VSA's performing arts program has emerged as a transformative platform for Afghan girls. Through this initiative, students have participated in 10 Adelaide Fringe plays, including the groundbreaking digital performance 'My Doll's House', 'The Cry of the Hour' (3 Shows), and 3 Edinburgh Fringe shows, including the deeply impactful 'Battlefield Butterflies'.

These performances offered more than just artistic expression—they became a gateway to empowerment. Engaging in theatre allowed the students to explore their creativity, enhance their communication skills, and develop confidence.

EMPATHY IN ACTION: - RAJASHREE IMANDI



Performing on such prestigious international platforms not only enriched their artistic growth but also provided them with valuable opportunities to earn income, further reinforcing their independence and resilience.

These achievements reflect the immense potential of empathy when combined with innovative education. By giving Afghan girls a stage—both literally and figuratively—VSA is amplifying their voices, celebrating their talents, and helping them dream beyond barriers.

A Global Impact:

The impact of VSA's initiatives goes far beyond education and the arts. Through these programs, VSA sends a powerful message to each girl: that she is important, that her dreams are worth fighting for, and that there are people across the globe who believe in her capabilities. This is empathy in action—reaching out with understanding and providing resources that make a real difference in lives.

At its heart, VSA's mission is about resilience, hope, and empowerment. It demonstrates how even the smallest acts of empathy can create ripples of change that extend far beyond geographical or cultural barriers. The bravery of these girls, coupled with the compassion of VSA's volunteers, highlights the incredible potential of empathy to uplift and inspire.

Through every lesson and each virtual performance, VSA is making a profound statement: that education and the arts are not privileges, they are rights. By empowering young women and showcasing their talents to the world, VSA is building a just and inclusive future where every girl has the chance to shine.

"You think your pain and your heartbreak are unprecedented in the history of the world, but then you read. It was books that taught me that the things that tormented me most were the very things that connected me with all the people who were alive, or who had ever been alive." - James Baldwin





2025 ELAINE HOBSON LITERARY FESTIVAL

A Message from the Festival Founder & Convenor - Liz Bawden

The Elaine Hobson Literary Festival is Virtual School Australia's annual celebration of students' writings, created to inspire students to reflect on their experiences and explore the concept of empathy through narrative or analytical texts. Drawing on both personal stories and in-depth research, students produce thoughtful and original pieces that highlight the importance of this essential life skill.

Over the years, the competition has yielded many powerful short narratives, each meeting rigorous criteria. A blind marking process ensures fair and unbiased judging. We are delighted to announce the featured finalists of this year's Elaine Hobson Writing Competition. Each entry reflected a thoughtful engagement with the theme of empathy, and the overall standard was truly exceptional.

🏆 FEATURED FINALISTS:

“Outlier to Advocate” by Ada Aggrawal – KC Public School, Jammu, India

Although we missed seeing you at the conference, Ada, your submission stood out for its clarity, research, and profound insight into empathy. Congratulations on a truly outstanding piece of writing.

🥈 “Lost in Translation, Found in Empathy”

by Pia Marwah, Woodstock School.

Pia, your emotionally rich narrative, beautifully read at the presentation, captured the transformative power of empathy with great sensitivity. Congratulations on your well-deserved award.

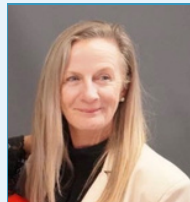
🥉 “For You, Nana” by Ilisha Avasthi, Dhirubhai Ambani International School

Ilisha, your moving story of intergenerational trauma was thoughtful and deeply authentic. The inclusion of an appendix showed care and awareness for your readers. Well done on a powerful composition.

🌟 A Final Word of Thanks

Congratulations not only to our winners but to all students who entered the competition. Your creativity, empathy, and effort were inspiring. We commend every one of you for sharing your voice and stories with such heart and honesty. It has become evident that the most successful entries consistently demonstrate genuine insight and are grounded in thorough research on the evolving role of empathy in today's world.

“You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view - until you climb into his skin and walk around in it.” - Harper Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird*



2026 ELAINE HOBSON LITERARY FESTIVAL

Submissions Now Open for the 2026 Elaine Hobson Memorial Literary Festival!

We're delighted to welcome writers from around the world to take part in the 2026 edition of the Elaine Hobson Memorial Literary Festival. Entries are now open. Share your voice, your vision, and your story with a global community of readers and change makers.

Don't miss out on the early bird registration—available till 15th August!

Virtual School Australia invites both Junior & Senior School student writers to present their perspectives of EMPATHY in writing for this Festival. If you love writing, this is for you!

Category 1: Persuasive Essay Writing

Category 2: Short Story Writing

All entrants will receive a Participation Certificate and written feedback. In addition, selective stories and essays will be published in the Empathy in Action Newsletter.

Shortlisted stories and essays will be invited to be shared at the 2026 VSA Global Empathy Conference. You can participate live or send a recording.

Results will be announced at the 8th Global Empathy Conference.

PERSUASIVE WRITING:

Through this writing task, we encourage participants to try and see the world from someone else's shoes and, in 600 words (maximum), write about how Empathy can improve relationships with friends and family members and make our world a better place. WORD LIMIT: 600 words (Max)

STORY WRITING:

- Your story must include Empathy that you have seen, heard or experienced.
- Your account must consist of some exemplary acts of Empathy in Action.

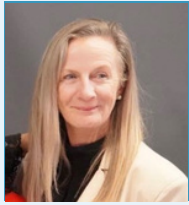
Feel free to interpret the above criteria in any creative way you like – the more original, the better! It can help your story stand out.

WORD LIMIT: 500 words (Max)

Once you register, you'll have access to all resources. These resources will assist entrants in developing further writing skills.

TO REGISTER VISIT: <https://2026EHLF.eventbrite.com.au>

If you have any queries, please write to admin@virtualschoolaustralia.com



2025 ELAINE HOBSON LITERARY FESTIVAL



🌟 Congratulations to all the participants of the 2025 Elaine Hobson Memorial Literary Festival! 🌟

We say thank you to each of you who poured your hearts into writing and bravely shared your short stories and persuasive pieces on empathy at the 7th Global Empathy Conference 2025. Your voices echoed with emotion, insight, and the spirit of change, reminding us once again of the incredible power of words to heal, connect, and inspire.

Every single participant is a winner in our eyes. The judging panel faced an incredibly tough challenge in selecting the top three entries because every submission radiated empathy, imagination, and a deep understanding of the human experience.

Whether your work made it to the podium or not, your message matters, and your courage to write and share is truly commendable. Keep writing, keep feeling, and keep making a difference through your words. Bravo to each and every one of you! 🖋️

“If you want to be a writer, you must do two things above all others: read a lot and write a lot. And if you’re to write about people, you must understand them—truly, and with heart.”

Stephen King

"Imagine having no friends. How do you manage, Arohi?" mocked Kavita, our popular classmate.

Arohi laughed flippantly while everyone sneered.

Arohi was different—intelligent, indiscriminately kind, and a rule follower. Rejecting 'cool' trends, she embraced her uniqueness. A practice that distinguished her as an outlier.

Moving to boarding school in the 5th grade, never knowing what to expect, I also struggled to fit in. Despite how much I tried, I couldn't seem to make friends. Then came Arohi. We supported each other, bonding over our outlier status and unique eccentricities. I admired her courage, and she helped me find mine.

Yet, with time, we drifted apart. The isolating COVID lockdowns changed me and returning to school, I found myself 'fitting in' with a new group – one that excluded Arohi.

When our paths did occasionally cross, I noticed how Arohi had remained unapologetically herself despite the constant ribbing she had to endure. Then, one unsuspecting afternoon, Kavita walked up to Arohi, saying, "You don't belong here. Why don't you just leave?"

Arohi turned towards me, searching for support. I smirked, shrugging to hide my confusion. Guilt nipped at my toes as she walked away. "Why rock the boat?" I recall thinking, trying to assuage my guilt. My desperation to be 'accepted' had turned me into one of her tormentors.

Soon, regret set in—how could I, having known the sting of being mocked, subject one of my friends to the same treatment?

The turning point came at our school's annual camp. Late that night, Arohi approached me, her clear eyes obscured by tears. "Can we talk?" she sobbed, struggling to voice the exhaustion of being ostracised. I sat frozen with memories of my own past loneliness—how it was Arohi who had helped me in those moments – the promises we made to always support each other.

"Empathy is about finding echoes of another person in yourself." – Mohsin Hamid. We wept together, breaking down the walls I had built between us—the subsequent heartfelt laughter dissolving my shame. Later, reading Barack Obama's words, "True empathy demands action, sacrifice, and a willingness to share in another's burden," I realised I needed to change. I resolved to act, to learn, to lead by example.

Researching empathy, I came across Germany's open-door policy during the 2015 Syrian crisis – a compelling example of how empathy-in-action united humanity and shaped global leadership. Chancellor Angela Merkel's 'Wir schaffen das!' (We can manage this!) Further moved me.

Empathy became integral to self-exploration. “We can manage this!” I promised Arohi. And we did.

Brené Brown said, “Empathy is a strange and powerful thing. There is no script. It’s simply listening, holding space, withholding judgment, emotionally connecting, and communicating a healing message: You’re not alone.”

Empowering Arohi and many others facing similar struggles, I supported them by establishing a hub of positivity – a club called The Ripple Effect – where small ripples of kindness create big waves of acceptance.

“Everyone is unique, and that makes us special. I asserted. My actions sparked change. It wasn’t easy to transform stubborn mindsets, but together, we let our “empathy-in-action” ripple throughout school, fostering a fast-growing, kinder community.

This journey metamorphosed my personality, strengthening my confidence, deepening self-acceptance, and imbuing my genuine purpose. When my ten-year-old sister cried about boarding school, I cried with her, sharing my experience. “You will find courage by always being yourself.” " I quoted Brown and Merkel like I did in The Ripple Effect when discussing wellness and community building. “You’re not alone. We can manage this— together.”

I saw small acts of kindness have a far-reaching impact, proving true empathy isn’t just felt—it’s lived.

Ada Agarwal
KC Public School
Jammu, India

The highlight I experienced while writing about empathy was learning how empathy can be seen all around, how it connects people across the globe. While researching and finding real-life examples and quotes I realised something essential, empathy isn’t simply a feeling, it’s an action. The most challenging part about writing about empathy was narrowing down vast and diverse opinions into impactful and clear points while integrating the essay with my personal view point. - Ada A



LOST IN TRANSLATION, FOUND IN EMPATHY

When my grandmother struggled to use a smartphone during the pandemic, her isolation was more than physical—it was a gap of understanding. That moment taught me that empathy is the bridge we need to connect across generations. Empathy allows a connection which transcends superficial grounds; built on true understanding, ardour, and emotion where one does not just feel for the other's experience but truly tries to break the fourth wall and live it. Generational gaps are growing due to differing values, technology, and life experiences. These gaps alienate communities, with older generations struggling to adapt and younger ones often unable to relate. The key to this is empathy. The power of empathy demonstrated in this essay conveys its ability to connect generations, fostering experiences and acceptance, while navigating the challenges posed by technology and political shifts globally.

Empathy is an ambiguous concept. It often feels intangible, as even the deepest effort to understand another's experience can fall short due to each individual's unique lens on life. However, true empathy is not about fully grasping another's pain; it is about making the effort to connect, offer kindness, and treat others as we wish to be treated. To foster empathy across generations, we must first acknowledge that these gaps are significant. Due to differing life experiences and societal influences, often the younger generation is unable to empathise with older generations. The generational gap has never been more apparent than in the context of technology. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed and exacerbated this divide. While younger generations embraced virtual tools, older individuals were often left isolated by their lack of technological proficiency. My own grandmother's inability to navigate technology prevented her from staying connected with her loved ones. Her loneliness would have persisted if I hadn't chosen to step into her shoes and teach her with patience. In doing so, I realised that empathy is not just an emotional connection—it is an action. It is the willingness to meet someone where they are and help them find their way forward.

Empathy also dismantles stereotypes. Older generations often view younger ones as entitled, while younger people see elders as out of touch. These perceptions perpetuate misunderstandings. Over 30% of teenagers avoid sharing emotions with family, fearing judgment. Similarly, 40% of American children lack strong emotional bonds with their parents. Empathy can challenge these stereotypes, fostering compassion and valuing unique perspectives.

My uncle's story exemplifies the power of empathy. As an openly gay man, he faced rejection but found acceptance through honest, empathetic dialogue with his family. My family's attempt to understand my uncle's struggles and his empathy towards their [this word here makes the sentence difficult to understand - it is not clear who 'their' refers to] journey of acceptance helped bridge the generational divide. His experience proves empathy can transcend deep-rooted barriers and create spaces for healing and growth. While complete understanding

LOST IN TRANSLATION, FOUND IN EMPATHY

is never guaranteed, the act of listening, empathising, and trying is what bridges generational gaps and fosters true acceptance.

Generational divides also manifest in technology and politics. Younger generations, fluent in digital spaces and progressive ideas, often clash with older ones who feel left behind. Empathy can transform these divides into opportunities for collaboration. By understanding each other's challenges, we can find common ground and build inclusive dialogues where generational differences become strengths.

Empathy is essential for bridging generational gaps, breaking stereotypes, and embracing differences as strengths. It allows us to foster understanding, challenge biases, and navigate a rapidly changing world. In a time of division, empathy remains our most powerful tool for connection and progress. By listening more, judging less, and building bridges across generations, we can create a future that values unity, resilience, and shared humanity.

Pia Marwah
Woodstock School
New Delhi, India

The highlight of this experience was being able to not only explore this important theme through a global lens but also gave me a chance to introspect on my own life and understanding of empathy. This experience allowed me to understand the importance and impact of empathy as well as encouraged me to incorporate it within my life more. The most challenging part for me was being able to write the essay in 600 words about an important theme. My ability to convey my thoughts succinctly posed as a challenge for me. Overall, this experience was extremely insightful and allowed me to go on a personal journey of exploration on the theme of empathy and what it means to me. - Pia M

FOR YOU, NANA

The bullets didn't break me, but the helplessness did!

After being relieved from Kargil, my days fared differently. It was unusual to start my morning with rotis(1) instead of rifles. My grandchildren, Mira and Mihir, argued with their mother, my daughter, refusing to drink their milk because she stirred in haldi(2) instead of Bournvita(3). My son-in-law tried unsuccessfully to feed them the spread of parathas(4), poha(5), and refreshments ranging from chai(6) to coffee.

This scene, you might say, is normal for a North Indian household—and yes, it is. But after living through the bullet-beaten hell that was the Kargil War(7), nothing seemed normal again. Screaming grandchildren reminded me of wounded soldiers, worn-out hostages and our nation's territory which I—along with many of my now-passed compatriots—fought tirelessly for. Watching my grandchildren spill haldi milk—something that could've eased my dying friend's suffering in the freezing cold of Kargil—set a storm of rage ablaze within me.

"What do you think you are doing? Listen to your mother and drink it! How ungrateful can you be!"

"Papa!" exclaimed my daughter as I stormed off. They wouldn't understand! I thought. They didn't live off cold chai and leftovers while fighting day and night for the nation. I was shocked that I could even think in this vile manner about my beloved family. But they didn't see the ghosts of my compatriots that I carried home...

... nightmares, sudden anger...

...flashes of gunfire that returned with the clatter of falling plates...

...they called them my "mood swings," my "episodes," but...

they were memories I couldn't forget.

I was scared, and the hardest part was knowing the people I loved most couldn't understand why.

Everyone is busy now. Two working parents, living paycheck-to-paycheck, doing their best to raise two children... they were fighting a war themselves. Sometimes, it felt like I was imposing on their lifestyle, condemning their chaos even though theirs was the company I missed most at war.

FOR YOU, NANA

As a soldier, I wasn't very present in my daughter's childhood, and I never had the pleasure of attending such mealtimes. Cold breakfasts on lookout duty are what I've known all my life. But, if they can't understand my trauma... how can I adapt to their lifestyle?

Later that night, as I sat alone in the verandah, Mira tiptoed out with a heavy blanket and draped it over me. "Mumma, me, and your friend didn't get warm milk," she said, gripping my hand. "So... I drank mine. Please tell me more about the army! I saw on the news that 200,000 troops were mobilized"

I stared at her. "Yes, Mira," I trembled. "I was one of them."

"I didn't win medals. But I carried friends down mountains where even the wind wouldn't go."

She picked up her mug of haldi milk. "For your friend... and for you, Nana(8)."

And just like that, the storm of helplessness inside me stilled for the first time in years.

Illisha Avasthi
Dhirubhai Ambani International,
Mumbai, India

I drew inspiration from the deep-rooted armed forces culture in my family (both my grandparents fought in the war for the Indian Air Force and Indian Army respectively). Furthermore, after learning more about mental health and traumatic aftereffects in school as a psychology student, I wanted to interpolate my learnings into creative writing to show the importance of intergenerational empathy. The highlight, for me, was to explore aspects of war aftereffects. While it was a challenging subject to write about (I had to keep the historical and cultural nuances of the war in mind), it was very rewarding in the end as it allowed me to explore an unusual form of empathy. Illisha A



BAD PEOPLE? NO, ONLY MISUNDERSTANDINGS

Imagine a world where every argument could be ended not with anger but with understanding, where every conflict was resolved by stepping into another's shoes. This is the transformative power of empathy—a simple yet profound human ability that I believe has the potential to strengthen our relationships and make our world a better place.

The person who best epitomizes the power of compassion and empathy in strengthening relationships in my life is my mother. Thus, I want to take a step back and explore the world from her shoes, that is, exercise cognitive empathy. (1) My mother has been extremely aspirational all her life. However, despite being a double master's degree holder, the pressure of settling down that haunts all those from conservative families got to her. The frustration that my mother would have felt during all her early years of marriage would have been crushing - she was single-handedly managing a joint household for 12 people. If that wasn't enough, one of her newest burdens was my brother and I. Despite all of this, my mother treated her new role as if it were her life's dream to be our mother. Through emotional empathy, i.e., feeling what my mother would be feeling, my understanding of what genuine compassion looks like and love is heightened, and my respect for her grows exponentially. This is because I admire her ability to put my brother and my interests first, as I am aware of the difficulties she faced in doing so. This is the transformative power of both cognitive and emotional empathy— if every time our parents, grandparents, best friends or siblings frustrated us, we reminded ourselves of their struggles and their unique story, conflict in our interpersonal relationships would drastically reduce. A study has found that empathetic tendencies account for 29.3% of conflict resolution skills in terms of significance. (2)

In another story, my best friend of 14 years made a point to surprise me on the night of my birthday, even though he was taking the SAT the next day. Most of my other friends dismissed the prospect of celebrations on my birthday for the same reason. Because of cognitive empathy, I bear no animosity towards my other friends for their decision not to come; the SAT is, after all, just a tiny bit important in terms of College Applications. However, compassionate empathy, (3) the tendency to feel strongly the feelings that someone else may be feeling and act accordingly, helped me understand just how inconvenient it was for my best friend to drop in that night and allowed me to fully appreciate his action. Needless to say, when the time to act came, and his birthday fell in the thick of my IB exams, I made it a point to show up for him, armed with cake and balloons. This exchange strengthened the bonds of our friendship and epitomizes our tendency to care for each other, even when it's inconvenient, a true testimony of the power of empathy.



BAD PEOPLE? NO, ONLY MISUNDERSTANDINGS

Through these anecdotes, the thesis of my argument is clear – empathy, in all its forms, facilitates an increase in appreciation for the actions of those around us, reduces tensions between our kinship and resolves conflicts as it forces us to understand where the other person is coming from. As noted by Tennessee Williams, "There are no 'good' or 'bad' people. Some are a little better or a little worse, but all are activated more by misunderstanding than malice.", (4) and it is my opinion that by reducing this misunderstanding and increasing tolerance and compassion, we make this world a better place.

Aditya Agarwal
The Cathedral and John Connon School,
Mumbai, India

The most challenging part was incorporating all parts of the rubric - from different types of empathy to weaving in research and use of satire - after I had worked on the framework of the essay. It was easy to get narrative with my personal experiences with empathy, and the constant refocusing required to stay within the 600 word limit while utilising important conventions from the rubric was also extremely challenging. - Aditya A

The highlight of writing about empathy was being able to step into the shoes of two very different characters: Ophelia, a cautious yet curious Martian writer, and Marcus, an outcast haunted by memories of Earth. Creating a bond between them allowed me to explore how empathy bridges misunderstandings, fear, and prejudice. It was powerful to see how simply listening to someone's story could begin to heal both the speaker and the listener.

Most Challenging Part: The most challenging part was striking a balance between the science fiction setting and the emotional depth of the theme. It was important to keep the futuristic world believable without losing the warmth and vulnerability needed to portray empathy authentically. Ensuring that Ophelia's growing compassion felt genuine without being overly sentimental required careful thought and rewriting. - Myra V (A Martian's Heartbeat)

THE EYES THAT UNDERSTOOD

Bhalu

Bhalu cowered as she heard the ringmaster spit venomously, "Once again". The whip glimmered in his hand, promising punishment. Lumbering over to the cheap plastic ball, trembling underneath the harsh lighting, she rose onto the ball, precariously balancing. Mere seconds later, she slipped onto the concrete floor and prepared to bear the unforgiving, familiar lashes of the whip.

This was her life. Instead of plodding through lush forests or fishing in silver-streaked streams, she had been crammed into a tiny cage as a cub, ripped apart from her mother. Bhalu fell into a deep slumber, her dreams providing a momentary flash of escape from the cruel sting of her ringmaster, as she bounded through dense thickets, emerald fields and an aching distant warmth.

Bhalu flinched as she was prodded awake. Showtime. Wearily, she stumbled to the ring. She glanced anxiously at her awestruck audience. Their awaiting faces were ablaze with excitement and wonder, completely oblivious to the bruises beneath Bhalu's thick, sooty coat and the pain embedded in her large hazel eyes. Today, however, she noticed a woman sitting in the front row with a furrowed brow and frustrated pout, a stark contrast to her usual blissfully unburdened audience. Shaking it off, Bhalu began enacting her numbingly repetitive tricks. After all, she had a performance to complete.

Lila

Lila glanced at the brochure in her hand. "100% Cruelty Free - The Circus of Laughter", it read, in mocking red letters.

Her hands balled into fists, quivering with rage as she looked at the bear in front of her. Its fur hung off its thin frame, like an oversized coat. Every step it took seemed to leave behind a trail of fear and exhaustion. Lila's heart clenched painfully for the awe-inspiring beast that had been reduced to an anxious heap of bones. Lila was back at the circus the next day.

And the next.

She resolutely continued visiting until she had collected piles of evidence, recordings, and documentation. Days of research turned into weeks. Finally, she found the perfect place for Bhalu. She had crafted an impeccable release plan.

THE EYES THAT UNDERSTOOD

Bhalu

Bhalu sensed something different that day. The sun shone brighter. A gentle breeze playfully teased her fur. However, a dark figure approached her cage, casting a stormy cloud over her newfound peace. Bhalu tensed, expecting the ringmaster. Instead, she found herself gazing into the warm eyes of the woman from her show. "You're free now" Lila whispered, her voice brimming with unshed tears and relief. She carefully undid the lock of Bhalu's cage.

The sweet scent of earth wafted through the atmosphere. Bhalu looked around, realising she wasn't at the circus anymore. She saw the bubbling creeks from her dreams, with silvery fish meandering through clear waters. She saw tall oak trees, stretching all the way to heaven. And then, Bhalu saw her. Greying fur, tired eyes, but unmistakably, her dear mother. Bhalu blinked gratefully at Lila, overwhelmed by her unexpected empathy.

At last, Bhalu was finally home.

Sia Bhagat
Bombay International School
Mumbai, India

The highlight was definitely creating original characters who could serve as vessels for the message I was trying to convey. Since I'm extremely passionate about animal rights, I really enjoyed writing a story that had a satisfying ending for a previously broken and caged animal, and demonstrated how human kindness and empathy can go a long way in helping suffering animals. - Sia B

WHERE THE SKIN ENDS, THE SOUL BEGINS

Kriti is a young, intelligent girl with extraordinary beauty; people use many superlatives to describe her. She is the daughter of a widowed woman, Vasundhara Ma'am, who taught me biology in eighth grade. She was always humble and poised, a great mentor and my favourite teacher. Kriti was pursuing her Bachelor of Education in Chandigarh, a vibrant city about three hours away from our town, Ludhiana. Once, Kriti invited me to see her performance in a play at her college. I could not refuse, as it was a fundraising program. She played the main character and enacted the scene with such passion, delivering her lines so naturally that the audience was spellbound, which was followed by a standing ovation. Vasundhara Ma'am once mentioned to my mom that there was an alliance for her daughter, and the boy hailed from a very affluent family, who was mesmerized by her beauty when he saw Kriti performing on stage. We attended Kriti's wedding, which was a grand affair in our town, and everyone around was talking about Kriti's fortune and luck.

During my summer vacation, I went for a summer school program to Dehradun for two months. After the vacation, when school reopened, I learned that Vasundhara Ma'am had left the school due to personal problems. I called Ma'am's number, which no longer existed; she had probably changed her old number. The next morning, I visited Vasundhara Ma'am's place with my mom. I rang the doorbell, and Vasundhara Ma'am opened the door and looked very drained, as if in some kind of deep stress. I greeted her, and Kriti came to meet me from the adjoining room. I noticed that her hands were full of white patches, which was Vitiligo. She told us everything: how she couldn't take the verbal onslaught of her mother-in-law, and her position had become lower than that of a servant in the house. Her husband couldn't muster the courage to support her at all. Kriti had gone through a lot of discrimination and hurtful remarks, and once even contemplated suicide when she reached the top of a hill to visit a temple. Leukoderma is a kind of stigma in our society, which further led to the cancellation of her younger sister's marriage due to the negative perception that the disease is inherited.

But God was in her favour, and Kriti received an offer letter from Mumbai to join as a lecturer and even take on the responsibility of directing plays in Sanskrit to train students to participate in intercollegiate events. The new city welcomed her with open arms, and Kriti looked more self-assured now. With teary eyes, I hugged Kriti and promised her that we would surely come to Mumbai to see the play directed by her. I realised there was a transformation in me as a human being—I became more empathetic towards people with Leukoderma or any other diseases that alter their physical appearance, as one is meant to be judged from within, not by their looks.

Aadishree Dada
Sat Paul Mittal School
Ludhiana, India

SEEING WITH THE HEART

My life is a whirlwind of adventure! I love running into the neighbour's garden and chasing the cat, watching her squeal in horror. I wait for old man Austin to walk down the lane with his cane – I can't resist – I take it right out of his hand. MostIt only takes a few days, and soon Phoebe is one of my people. When she stumbles, I steady her, I teach her how to jump and have fun, how to pick up my toys and play with me, and I guide her wherever she goes – to make her happy becomes my purpose. of all, I love barking loudly, waking up the neighbourhood.

Even though I am punished every day, I don't care!

"Clifford, do you not care about anybody?" Anne's voice interrupts as I paw at another pot, which tumbles down to the floor. She looks at the mess angrily. I lower my ears and tilt my head. "Clifford, I'm sending you back to the shelter!"

I bound away, leaving a muddy trail behind. I approach Robin as he gets out of the car. I jump on him, watching him stumble as he tries to balance three bags in his hands. He eyes the mud stains and shoves me away, angry and irritated.

I'm Clifford, the Golden Retriever. I am incorrigible. I'm naughty. I don't know how to be any other way.

All this changes when one day, Anne and Robin bring home a little girl.

I instantly know something is different. She is tiny and frail. Brown hair frames her heart-shaped face. Her eyes are covered with dark glasses. Anne is holding her arm as she assists her through the hallway.

"Clifford, this is Phoebe," Anne calls out. "She is your foster sister." Anne guides Phoebe's hand towards my head. I flinch. Who is this strange girl? But when her fingers caress my head, something about her touch makes me pause.

I bring a toy and drop it at her feet, urging her to play with me. But she doesn't react. I tilt my head, slightly confused. There is something wrong. When I move, she doesn't track my movements.

She can't see me!

I am still. Something about Phoebe feels... sad. I lie down at her feet. I feel a sudden calm, a burst of love, tenderness. And Phoebe takes my head in her lap. Instead of jumping, barking, and smashing things, I now only want to be around Phoebe. I want to protect her. I have feelings that I don't fully understand. In comforting her, I feel comforted.

It only takes a few days, and soon Phoebe is one of my people.

SEEING WITH THE HEART

When she stumbles, I steady her, I teach her how to jump and have fun, how to pick up my toys and play with me, and I guide her wherever she goes – to make her happy becomes my purpose. Everyone says, I helped Phoebe, I saved a blind girl. But I think it is the opposite. Phoebe saved me. She taught me to love and be compassionate. She gave me a reason to be better. She gave me a purpose in life. I wasn't the uncontrollable dog of the neighbourhood anymore. Now, I was Phoebe's gentle, kind, and compassionate dog. And for the first time, that was enough.

Ahaana Javeri
Ascend International School
Mumbai, India

The highlight of writing about Empathy was getting into my character's shoes, understanding them, and showing how their emotions transformed their relationships. Another highlight of writing this literary piece was creating powerful moments where the main character connects deeply with someone different from themselves. For me, the most challenging part was making the story emotional without making it overly dramatic. I had to make sure the message of the story was delivered naturally. - Ahana J

I realised there was a transformation in me as a human being—I became more empathetic towards people with Leukoderma or any other diseases that alter their physical appearance, as one is meant to be judged from within, not by their looks. Due to the word limit, I could not mention so many bitter experiences and hardships Kriti faced by different people in our society because she was neglected and disowned by them to be precise. But still I tried my best to pen down everything from her initial life to her present life showcasing her qualities, beauty, marriage, vitiligo, discrimination and empathy. - Aadishree D (Where The Skin Ends, The Soul Begins)

IN THEIR SHOES

A simple word. 6 letters. A word so seemingly straightforward, but in actuality, is the invisible thread that binds us all together, holding brevity and meaning... one that is deeply misunderstood. Empathy. It isn't gaudy or calling for attention, and it attains quite a juxtaposing idea to that of sympathy. Empathy acts like an unspoken whisper or a much needed hug, murmuring "I understand your struggle" through actions much deeper than words could ever be. When we use empathy, we aren't only making someone feel seen but are also healing the fragile wounds of a hurting person. It isn't just about handing out advice and listening to individuals' problems, it's also about sitting in silence and making sure your presence is understood even in times when our advice isn't enough, reminding someone that they're never alone. Empathy pulses through the rhythm of human interaction fostering deeper connections and encouraging someone to release the weight of their emotions.

A simple but meaningful act of empathy at times has helped me get to someone that was hurting unnoticed. We can't always identify people who have been through emotional challenges, which is why it's important to not just express empathy to those in distress but to anyone around us. That's what cements the gap between knowing someone at surface level and truly understanding them. At its heart, it's the ability to put yourself in someone else's shoes and walk down their lane of life. Not always to fix– but to feel. Even throughout literature, we repeatedly see this concept of empathy: Atticus Finch taught Scout to "put yourself in their place, to walk a mile in their shoes." Through these stories we're simply living others' lives from their point of view, but through empathy...we're understanding it.

When we create these small connections of empathy, it opens our eyes to the sea of individuals around us that keep their troubles concealed as well. Imagine stepping into a war and not realising the turmoil that is taking place around you... that's what it's like to remain oblivious to the emotional struggles of those who matter to you most.

I had personally begun to understand the depth of empathy as an adolescent mentor for my school programme. I truly went into it believing I would be helping 10-11 year olds that weren't facing "serious" problems, and handing out advice seemed as simple as handing out candy.

IN THEIR SHOES

This mindset however, was broken down when an 8th grader came to me seeking advice on how to 'deal with the pain of friends that no longer want you'. That instance changed the way I perceived problems for others and opened my eyes to the fact that despite her age, her struggles held the weight of an indeterminable depth simply because it impacted her wellbeing and mental health. In that moment, giving advice wasn't as simple as handing out candy, in fact I struggled even placing myself in her shoes. That's what made me realise the necessity of viewing empathy not only as something we apply to others but more so to ourselves, because that's when our actions begin to change the way we treat others as well.

In today's world, empathy is overlooked more than ever, especially through social media. It endangers people's mindset simply through the ability to make comments on others' lifestyles because of the internet, creating a barrier that delves into our thoughts. Empathy asks us to break this barrier and view others' struggles or injudicious comments differently.

Empathy isn't necessarily a solution but it is a beginning to ease others' pain rather than erase it.

Anaya Janwadkar
Jamnabai Narsee International School
Mumbai, India

Writing about empathy helped me reflect on some challenges I faced in fostering the attribute myself and the amount of time and maturity it took for me to understand the depth of empathy as a concept and behaviour. ii. it was challenging to convey this shift in my understanding but I eventually got to putting my experience down into words. - Anaya J

A MARTIAN'S HEARTBEAT

Somewhere far away, there resides an old man, accused of insanity. They say he is seen on occasion, pacing the rocks and staring out at the midnight sea, and the words that escape his mouth are far from sensible, for he speaks of a world unimaginable in our wildest dreams and constantly uses this foreign word "gravity". He claims there are millions of people 'left behind' somewhere, where terrible wars were fought for water and oxygen. Madman Marcus, they call him, with pale skin and a fire in his eyes, speaks so lovingly, longingly and wistfully of some made-up planet he claimed he lived on called Earth, you would almost think it is true.

While these stories of him were entertaining to hear from my CA (charging assistant) at my battery centre, a part of me that was thrown into an abyss in the depths of my soul always wondering if this was true if trees existed, lush and green and you could feel the wind from endless seas and what if this place really was destroyed and there are people left behind, struggling to survive in the mess we created?

As a writer, I tend to get lost in my imagination. My deepest apologies, I may have forgotten to introduce myself, my name is Ophelia Rose, and I live in City 09070103 on continent 11 on our big, red planet we call Mars.

The only, slight problem in my life (which is actually an enormous issue) is that the paper I work for, the 09 gazette, is bought over (illegally, of course) by the One-one party, who are slowly but surely controlling and watching every step, every breath and every turn we take, exploiting the data of our magazine and threatening us to write only what we are fed by the government. Which brings me to my latest assignment: confront Marcus. Convince him, by any means necessary, to stop speaking of Earth. To stop reminding people of what was. Of what might still be.

Here I am, with my pocket screen in my pocket, vision notes in my bag, and a heart full of sonder, not to get Madman Marcus to stop his soliloquies of nonsense but to hear them and give him a chance. Now you may think I am crazy, and that this dangerous, insane man who speaks nonsensical theories is the last person I should be 'hearing out' but I chose to be a writer and what kind of writer does not give a story a chance?

So, I have arrived at this beautiful oakwood door, painted sequoia-leaf green with no face ID recognition doorbell, no finger scan machine, just a simple old brass handle and I am just certain that this man has something to say and we must hear it before it is too late. Something tells me that behind that door is a voice not of madness, but of memory. Of empathy.

Myra Barot
Ecole Mondiale World School
Mumbai, India

What is Empathy by Nargis Asghar, Sediqa Nazari & Farida Mohammadi

What is Empathy by Nargis Asghar

Empathy means to put yourself in the other person's place and understand that apart from having a request, do it for you own heart, that after helping others or sharing pain with others, a good feeling will be transferred to you , a sense of humanity.

One of my friends had cancer and we did not leave her alone as much as we could, we took her out or prepared the food for her, we tried not to leave her alone, and after a while, thank god ,she got better day by day . EMPATHY means to feel helpfull in front of all creatures, not only humans but also for animals.

Empathy is the ability to understand and share the feelings, thoughts, and experiences of another person. It's about stepping into someone else's shoes and truly connecting with what they are going through. Whether it's joy, sorrow, anger, or uncertainty—empathy allows us to recognize and honour another person's emotional world.

One day, my friend Masoda was overwhelmed with grief and had lost hope in the future. I gently invited her to talk and share her sadness. I listened with care—without judging her—and gave her the space to express whatever she needed. When she finished, I let her know that I understood how difficult this moment must be. As I spoke, I softened my voice and made sure she felt that I truly understood her feelings. — Sediqa Nazari

Empathy Story: One day, on his way home, Ali saw a young boy sitting on the street, crying. Ali sat down beside him and gently asked, "What happened? Why are you upset?" The boy explained that he had lost his school bag and was afraid to go home because his father might punish him.

Ali listened with compassion and decided to help. They walked to the bus stop together, and Ali spoke to the bus driver, who kindly agreed to take the boy home without charge. As they said goodbye, the boy looked at Ali with eyes full of gratitude.

In my opinion, empathy means putting ourselves in someone else's place. For example, when a friend shares a problem with us, we should listen closely and try to understand their feelings. That way, they know we are true friends who care. Similarly, when a student is stressed during exam time, we should respond with kindness and support to help reduce their anxiety.

— Farida Mohammadi

Reflections on Empathy: Reflecting on my life, I realise that empathy has been a transformative force in my relationships, friendships, and experiences. I vividly recall moments when I listened to friends struggling with anxiety—offering them space, validating their feelings, and never passing judgment.

One person who stands out is my teacher. She was by my side during my darkest moments: when my two brothers were deported, I faced visa issues, battled depression, and was diagnosed with leishmaniasis. Throughout it all, she called the doctor regularly and checked on me every day, offering unwavering support and deep empathy. Her selflessness not only helped me heal but also strengthened our bond profoundly.

In my community, I've witnessed empathy in action—restaurants treating those in financial distress with dignity and respect, often offering free meals to those in need. Even the smallest gestures, like holding a door open for someone with their hands full or saying a kind word to a stranger having a hard day, have reminded me of empathy's quiet power.

These experiences have shown me that empathy isn't just a feeling—it's a choice. A choice to stand in someone else's shoes, to listen without judgment, and to understand. By choosing empathy, I've formed deeper connections, nurtured compassion, and helped create a ripple effect of kindness in my own life and in the lives of those around me.

Faheema Ahmadi

EMPATHY: A STEP TOWARD CHANGING THE LIVES OF MIGRANT WOMEN BY ZAKIA PEZHMAN

Have you ever considered the immense challenges faced by migrant women - fighting invisible battles against abuse, fear, and uncertainty in a foreign land? What if you could play a key role in altering their lives through something as simple, yet transformative, as empathy?

Empathy is far more than just a feeling; it's a potent catalyst for change. As a volunteer advocate in migrant communities on the GBV Project, I have seen firsthand how a single gesture of understanding can ignite resilience, offering women the strength and hope they need to overcome seemingly insurmountable hurdles. This is a story about how listening with compassion, providing support, and taking actionable steps can be the defining factor in someone's path to healing.

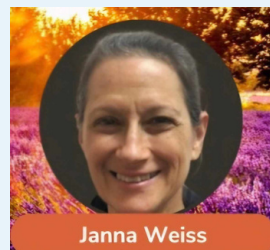
Throughout my journey, I've encountered many courageous women who speak of perseverance, dignity, and a relentless drive to move forward despite the many challenges they face. Although economic hardships and the weight of domestic responsibilities are often evident in their expressions, they often find it difficult to articulate their struggles. Sometimes, they can't fully put into words the pain they carry. Nevertheless, despite these obstacles, they continue to push forward, determined to better their lives.

Their strength and determination have become a constant source of motivation for me, helping me forget my own hardships. Each time I listen to their stories, I am filled with empathy and solidarity. My understanding of their struggles deepens because I realise that true empathy is not just about "feeling" for someone, but about stepping into their world, understanding their emotions, and then taking steps to provide assistance. The heart of empathy lies in truly "hearing" the other person—not simply to respond, but to grasp the full depth of their experience.

One of the most impactful moments I've had as a volunteer occurred during one of our workshops. After the session concluded, a participant, visibly shaken by her circumstances, stood up and shared her story of domestic violence in private. She spoke with sadness, yet a lingering love for her husband, explaining that the abuse stemmed from both her and her spouse's unemployment. She revealed that, due to the expiration of their visas and fear of the country's immigration regulations (Deportation), her husband cannot leave the house, and their immigration process is moving very slowly. This situation had caused his patience to wear thin, and the emotional and physical pressures she faced began to escalate.

THE EMPATHY CIRCLE ADVANTAGE IN A TIGHT SPOT

- JANNA WEISS



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Empathy Circles are also resilient “containers” for exploring conflict and discussing charged topics, like opposing sides of an ideological divide. No matter the topic, “Whatever is in your heart and mind,” is always an option; the Empathy Circle is a “free speech space.” Every unfolding moment of an Empathy Circle is fresh and unexpected.

After practising the Empathy Circle for one year, I found myself in a very challenging situation, I was meeting with people I had litigated against and won, and had two requests. After speaking for a while, I realised that I wanted to be heard, especially before the expected tirade. So I asked, “Would you be willing to reflect on what I just said?” The supervisor smiled and reflected on some of what I had said. After 45 minutes of back- and forth, the supervisor became extremely demanding, repeating, “I want you to agree to... I want you to agree to...” Without agreeing or disagreeing, I said, “Would you like me to reflect on what you just said?” When she said, “Okay,” I simply reflected what she had said. She felt heard, and my requests were granted. Thanks to many Empathy Circles, I was able to ask for reflection and reflect back — a useful skill in a tight spot.

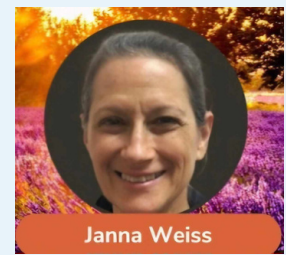
“When people talk, listen completely. Most people never listen.”
-Ernest Hemingway



Janna Weiss is an acupuncturist and herbalist, and teaches mind science in New York City. She holds a PhD from the University of Texas at Austin in Biological Sciences—Botany (ethnobotany). Janna is also a human rights activist, for peace, for Tibet, for the rights of people with psychosocial disabilities, and for the real rights of children and families. Janna is an Empathy Circle Facilitator.

THE EMPATHY CIRCLE ADVANTAGE IN A TIGHT SPOT

- JANNA WEISS



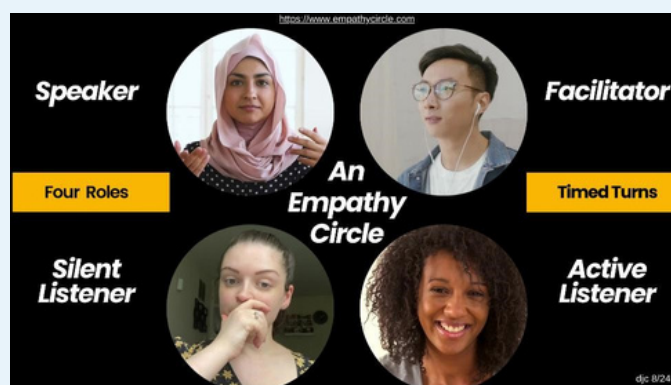
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I'll briefly share one experience in which I benefited greatly from the Empathy Circle active listening or reflective listening practice. First, a few words about the Empathy Circle.

The Empathy Circle was created by Edwin Rutsch, founder and director of the Empathy Center. Edwin introduced the Empathy Circle at the 6th and 7th Global Empathy Conference. Empathy Circles are usually small; 4-6 people are ideal. In an Empathy Circle participants take turns speaking and listening to each other. The Facilitator decides on the length of the turn in the circle and keeps the time. If fewer people are in the circle, then 5-minute turns work well. When the circle is large, 7-8 people, then 3-minute turns are good. The Facilitator is also a participant.

The Active Listener reflects the essence, paraphrases, or repeats what the Speaker says, without judgment, questions, or comments. When the Speaker speaks in short chunks, it's easier for the Active Listener to reflect. When the Speaker's turn is up, the Active Listener becomes the next Speaker; the Speaker chooses their Active Listener. The other participants are the fully attentive Silent Listeners until asked to be the Active Listener.

The content, quality, and mood of the suggested topics in an Empathy Circle vary a lot, ranging from playful, warm, and fuzzy, like "What brings you joy?" or "What unusual pet have you had?" to visionary, like "How can we create a Culture of Empathy?"





The face in the mirror
softens.
Not from kindness,
but from the patient work
of time's thumb
pressing along the edges.

The voice, too,
wears a new weather—
less rush,
more ache,
a hush of laughter
caught in the weave.

The bones remember joy
but carry weight differently now.

A thousand small losses
form a constellation
I can trace across my ribs.

I am the cracked stone
still warm
beneath the sun—
weathered,
but still singing
under breath.

This is how I arrive now:
with a slower step,
but arms wide open
to what is.
Nothing is wasted.
Everything returns
in its own slow way.

THE AWAKENING OF SHE WHO REMEMBER

- BY NANCY NDEKE



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THE AWAKENING OF SHE WHO REMEMBER

I am She.
Not named by wombs of men or myths of creed,
Not summoned by scrolls nor stitched in flags,
But rising,
Like sun-souled thunder from the marrow of forgotten stars,
Where silence burns and memory weeps.
I come from beyond the lens of eye,
From the breath between dreams and waking,
From the hymn of oceans unbound by shores,
A voice not heard, but known.
I speak not to soothe.
I speak to slice,
To sever the swaddles of bias passed
Like rusted heirlooms
From generation to congregation,
From dinner tables laced with shame
To thrones sealed in father's names.
Yes, I see you,
You builders of cages draped in gold.
You architects of 'womanhood'
Fashioned in fear
And fed to daughters with lullabies of lack.
You who kiss the maiden's brow
Only to bind her ankles with scriptures,
Declare her holy and then
Drag her through the fire of purity tests
You yourself never faced.
I carry the grief of centuries
Braided in my crown,
Womb-warm and thunder-heavy,
The ache of the midwife's call unheeded,
The rage of the girl stoned in daylight,
The sigh of the wife who withered while waiting-
Not for love, but permission.
You yearn for me.

CHASING A BUTTERFLY

- BY H. W. BRYCE



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Just a reminder CHASING A BUTTERFLY will make a great Gift for friends and family.

Through the close-up lens of his heart, Herb Bryce takes us on a journey into the hazy world of the Alzheimer's afflicted. He paints a loving and tender picture with words of his life and love, gently unravelling the pages from the spool of his soul. ~ Candice James, Poet Laureate Emerita, New Westminster, BC

www.hwbrycewrites.com

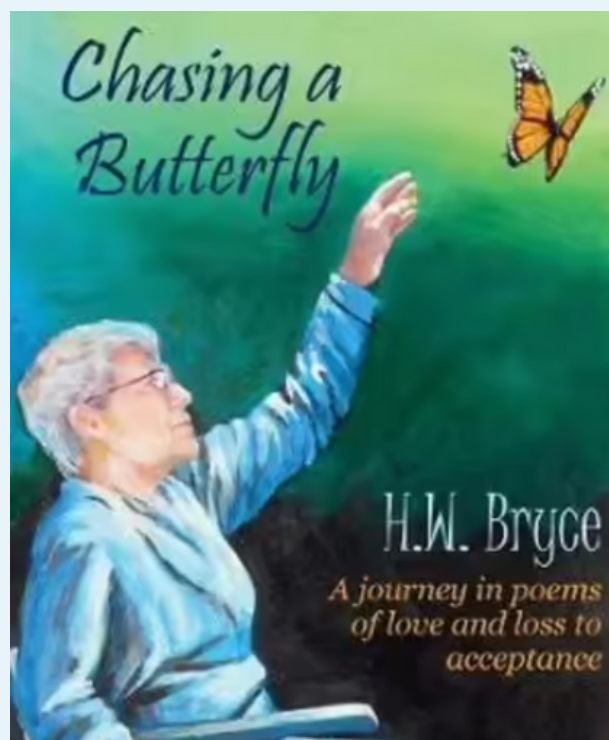
From out of the clouds into the clarity of knowledge and confidence. That is the story of this family caregiver to his late wife, Ann. From speechless tears to eloquence came this emotionally healing book, "Chasing a Butterfly: A journey in poems of love and loss to acceptance." From how we met: "Late for Dinner," to final farewell: "I'm Fine," H. W. Bryce has touched our souls around the world and found comfort.

Chasing a Butterfly is available through Amazon books. Just type into an Amazon books page and type in: chasing a butterfly by H. W. Bryce

Order through a book store.

BUT: If you order from Friesen Press, Canada, the poet might get a royalty.

<https://books.friesenpress.com/store/title/119734000015361954/H.-W.-Bryce-Chasing-a-Butterfly>



A CHECKERED TABLECLOTH BY POET GEORGE COLBURN



A jaundiced sky above the bar.
Two old men are idly talking:
“We have enough food, you know,
To solve the hungers of the world
But what we lack is a workable
Distribution system.”
The other shook his head and said,
“What we lack most is heart.
With enough of that, we can
Solve all distribution problems.”
The first fidgeted and spoke,
“The practically insurmountable
Problem of getting the food
Where it’s needed is a problem.”
But the other wasn’t finished yet.
“The problem is that you don’t feel
The oppression of an empty belly
That needs calming every minute
It has no food. Looking down
At a child’s swollen belly knowing
This soul has no chance to live
Because two old men are sitting
Talking but not doing what is needed
To build the road, fly the distance,
Expend whatever resources it takes
To wipe the abomination of hunger.
It needs to take your soul by the throat.
It needs to turn you outside yourself.”
The first quietly paid the bill and left.

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ABOUT THE POET:

George Colburn is an award-winning poet and a life-long resident of St. Paul, Minnesota. He was awarded the Veterans Voices Award in 2019 from the Minnesota Humanities Commission, the Order of Shakespeare Medal from Motivational Strips (worldwide poetry forum 7M+ members), has published four books, *Payday* (1973), *A Punctuated Echo* (2018), *Milking the Dragon* (2019), and *An Undeclared War: Poetry Born in Vietnam* (2020), and has published in numerous poetry anthologies and literary magazines, including the latest *Witness Writers Anthology 2022*, and reads his poetry at various venues throughout the Twin Cities.

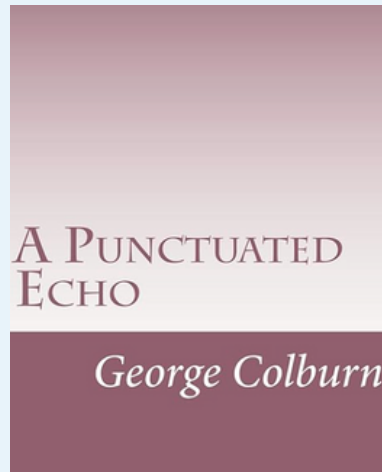
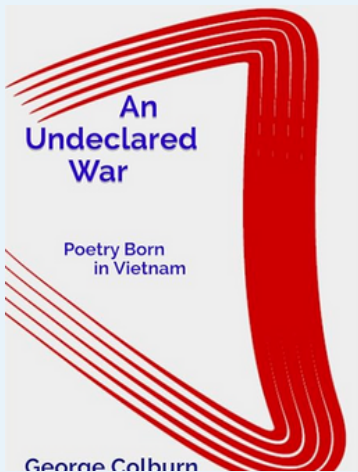
POET GEORGE COLBURN'S BOOKS



As the son of deaf parents, his work is strongly influenced by his experiences acting as an interpreter for his parents and the larger world and by his exposure to the deaf community. These experiences have engendered in him a love for language clarity, rhythm, and the craft of writing.

George Colburn's books are available on Amazon. The Video Poetry Network is on YouTube and this is the link:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC1e9Vzi96m75fAhFz8M7ugw>



A GLOBAL INVITATION - A POETS MEET A VOICE FOR HER SATURDAY, 26 JULY

 Global Invitation | GEC Poets Meet – July 2025
A Voice for Her: Words That Heal, Resist, and Empower

Dear Friends,

You are warmly invited to a moving international gathering of poets and change-makers at the GEC July Poets Meet — an online event hosted by the 2025 Global Empathy Conference Poets and Virtual School Australia.

This special session is a heartfelt offering of solidarity and resistance — a collective stand against all forms of violence inflicted upon women, both seen and unseen. Through poetry, we will lift up the stories of women around the world — their strength, their struggles, their silence, and their unwavering courage. This event is a tribute to Dr. Abhaya, whose life was tragically taken at her workplace in Kolkata, India on August 9th 2024. Justice is yet to be served, and we gather in her honour — to remember, to speak, and to act. Join us as we let poetry become our protest, our promise, and our path to empathy.

To ensure everyone joins us at the right time, we've updated the Time Zone to reflect our global community. Please take a moment to double-check your local time from the list below.

For Free Registration please

Poets Meet Time Zones – Saturday, 26th July:

- Vancouver (PDT) – 4:00 AM
- Los Angeles (PDT) – 4:00 AM
- Minneapolis / Chicago (CDT) – 6:00 AM
- New York (EDT) – 7:00 AM
- United Kingdom (BST) – 12:00 PM
- Kenya / Kampala (EAT) – 2:00 PM
- Pakistan (PKT) – 4:00 PM
- India (IST) – 4:30 PM
- Adelaide (ACST) – 8:30 PM
- Canberra (AEST) – 9:00 PM

Let us gather across continents in this Round Robin of Reverie, where poetry rises as a bridge of hearts and a banner of resistance—protesting all forms of violence, and echoing with the unwavering rhythm of empathy, courage, and truth.

The GEC Team

TO Register visit: <https://2025GECPoetsMeet.eventbrite.com.au>



EXCITING NEWS!!

2025 JULY EDITION

 Exciting News from Virtual School Australia!

Young Voices, Powerful Stories

We're delighted to share that Virtual School Australia (VSA) has just published two heartfelt books written by our brave and talented student authors! These stories—born out of resilience, imagination, and hope—are now available on Amazon at an affordable price.

Our mission?

 To reach 1,000 readers who believe in the power of youth storytelling.

 Here's how you can support:

1. Buy a copy on Amazon
2. Leave a short review to uplift these voices
3. Share this message with your family, friends, and networks

Your support doesn't just help sell books, it amplifies voices, fuels confidence, and tells young writers across the world that their words matter.

Let's help these stories find the homes and hearts they deserve.

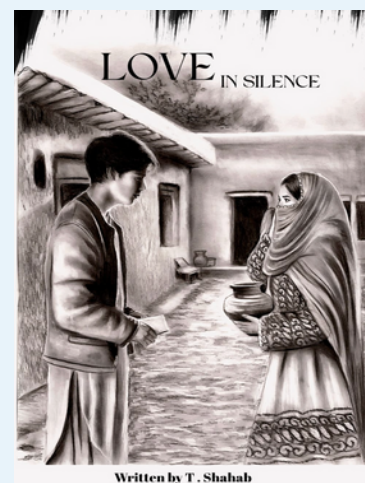
Thank you for being part of our journey.

With deep gratitude,
The VSA Family

Two book links:

<https://a.co/d/7rDJnoW>

<https://amzn.asia/d/8fLTkVA>



EMPATHY IN ACTION NEWSLETTER

S H A R E W I T H A F R I E N D :

2026 ELAINE HOBSON MEMORIAL FESTIVAL

WRITE AN EMPATHY
STORY / ESSAY

(FOR JUNIOR & SENIOR
SCHOOL STUDENTS)

IF SELECTED,
SHARE AT THE
8TH GLOBAL
EMPATHY
CONFERENCE
(2026)

SELECTED
STORIES &
ESSAYS
WILL BE
PUBLISHED

ALL ENTRIES
RECEIVE
FEEDBACK AND
CERTIFICATES

To Register Visit: <https://2026EHLF.eventbrite.com.au>

Interested to Contribute?



We invite you to join the conversation
THINGS YOU CAN DO:

1. Interview an unsung hero at home / in your neighbourhood
2. Write a Short Empathy Story or Essay (Fiction or Non-Fiction, we accept Both)
3. Report any extraordinary incident / event that you have seen. Try to keep it within 500 Words (max)
4. Have queries? Email: admin@virtualschoolaustralia.com.au
5. Forward this newsletter to a Friend.
6. Connect with us on LinkedIn
<https://www.linkedin.com/company/virtual-school-australia>
7. Connect with us: on FB <https://www.facebook.com/virtualschoolaus/>
8. Thanks for reading to the end of this Newsletter, We would love to hear some feedback from you.
9. Send your FEEDBACK: Let us know your thoughts. We will forward your messages to the Contributors.
10. Send your Write Up to admin@virtualschoolaustralia.com.au