

Read for Empathy collection 2023

Books to build empathy – for young people aged 12–16

#ReadForEmpathy

How does
empathy work?

Graphic and
Verse Novels

Poetry

Non-Fiction

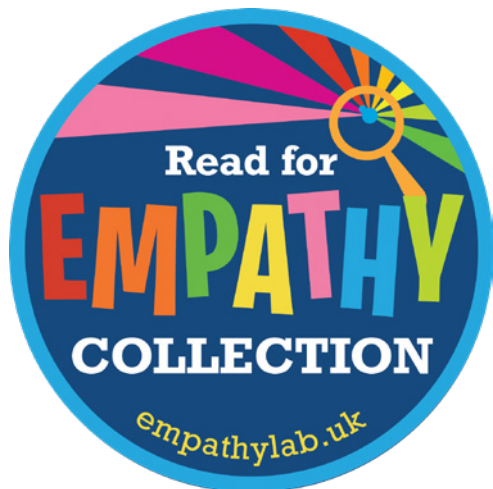
Novels

Top tips



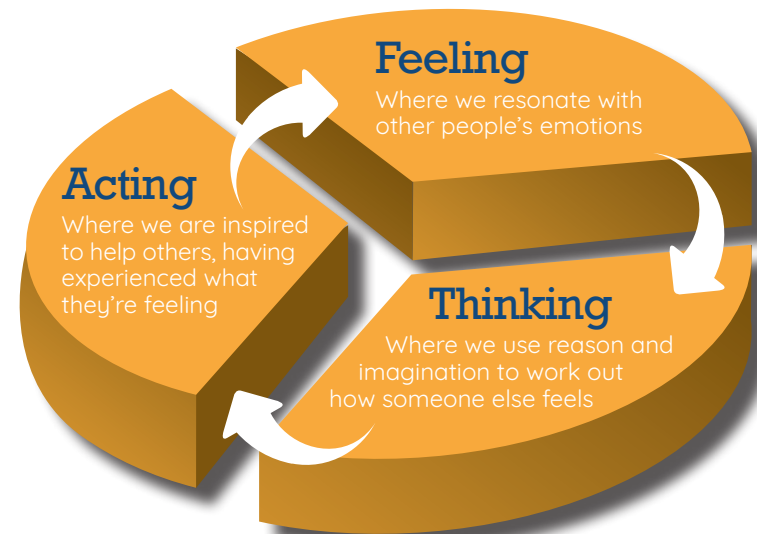
Empathy is our ability to understand and experience someone else's feelings. It builds stronger, kinder communities. It's a crucial life skill that young people need to learn, thrive and make a positive difference.

We're not born with a fixed quantity of empathy – it's a skill we can all learn. Excitingly, research shows that books are a powerful tool to develop it. When young people identify with book characters, they learn to see things from others' points of view. As they read, they are building their empathy skills.



How does empathy work?

Empathy is made up of three main elements.



The 2023 Read for Empathy collection

This guide is for people living and working with 12–16-year-olds. You'll find twenty-five fantastic empathy-boosting books – chosen by an expert panel – to help young people gain insights into other people's feelings, perspectives and ways of life.

If ever we needed a world with more empathy, it's now. Please use the books to inspire everyone to put empathy into action – in homes, schools and communities.

The Guide is brought to you by EmpathyLab, in partnership with book supplier Peters. We also have a Guide with books for 3–11-year-olds and a previous Welsh collection for 4–16-year-olds. You can use these all year round, and they will be especially useful in the run-up to Empathy Day on 8 June 2023. Please join in!

Register for resources and updates at www.empathylab.uk and follow @EmpathyLabUK

Graphic & Verse Novels, Poetry & Short Stories

Twenty-five powerful books, including novels, non-fiction, verse novels, poetry and graphic novels. All chosen to help young people aged 12–16 develop real-life empathy.

* Indicates titles that are suitable for older readers and books with themes that may need to be introduced with caution.

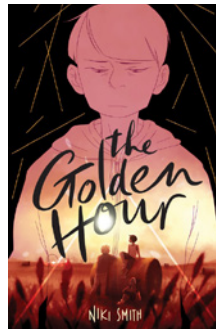
Graphic & Verse Novels



The Girl from the Sea Molly Knox Ostertag

A coming-of-age romance with themes of family, environment and LGBTQ+ issues. Beautifully written and illustrated, this is a wonderful, reassuring graphic novel for anyone exploring identity and for those wanting to understand what it means to feel different within a community.

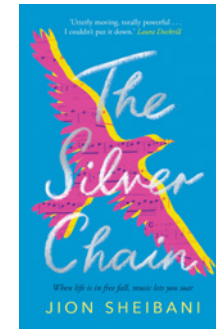
Graphix



The Golden Hour* Niki Smith

An arresting graphic novel, examining a boy's struggle with PTSD after witnessing harrowing gun violence. The text and illustrations sensitively convey Manuel's anxiety, self-discovery and resilience. It offers insight into managing trauma and the quiet friendship and support needed for healing.

Little, Brown



The Silver Chain Jion Sheibani

Azadeh struggles with her mum's mental illness, supporting her father and making space for music in this beautiful verse novel. We get a deep sense of Azadeh's turmoil and distress as she tries to maintain an external impression of normality.

Hot Key Books

Poetry & Short Stories



Let's Chase Stars Together: Poems to lose yourself in Matt Goodfellow

A poignant and playful poetry collection exploring friendship, family, the pain of a young person living with fighting parents, school experiences and fitting in. The poems explore aspects of growing up, with a balance of humour, tenderness and optimism.

Bloomsbury



These Are the Words: Fearless verse to find your voice Nikita Gill

A profound poetry collection that meditates on life, celebrates the good experiences and offers wisdom for the difficult days. A thoughtful and inclusive collection that rewards rereading many times for solace, joy and peace. So soothing.

Macmillan Children's Books



Happy Here: 10 stories from Black authors and illustrators Introduced by Sharna Jackson

A lovely, vibrant short-story collection, some in verse, celebrating the experiences and lives of young Black people and their families. Because, as Sharna Jackson says in the introduction, 'All children deserve to see themselves being bold and brave in stories.'

Knights Of

“The only way problems are solved politically and historically in this world is through understanding and empathy. I know no better pathway to understanding than books.”

Michael Morpurgo, author

Non-Fiction, Novels

Non-Fiction

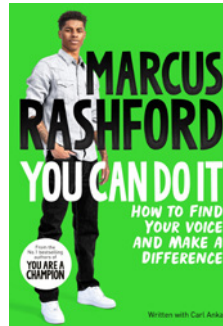


Queer Up: An uplifting guide to LGBTQ+ love, life and mental health*

Alexis Caught

A warm, funny and supportive read for anyone part of or wanting to find out more about the LGBTQ+ community, and all good allies. It includes personal experiences which give authenticity. A book that urges everyone to accept and value themselves.

Walker Books



You Can Do It: How to find your voice and make a difference

Marcus Rashford written with Carl Anka

A life-affirming book with a focus on our human connection to each other. It examines teamwork, equality, social justice and standing up for what you believe in. It is a dynamic read, never patronising and always inspiring.

Macmillan Children's Books



What Do You See When You Look at a Tree?

Emma Carlisle

A fascinating picture book with all-age appeal looking at the biology of trees, how they improve our lives and how they support each other. This book encourages empathy for the environment and inspires us to learn from trees.

Big Picture Press

Novels



When Shadows Fall*

Sita Brahmachari

Illustrator Natalie Sirett

Grief, mental health and the importance of nature are interwoven in this complex and very emotional book. The central character, Kai, is in a maelstrom of family trauma that very nearly overwhelms him. Loyal friendship provides comfort and some healing.

Little Tiger



When Our Worlds Collided*

Danielle Jawando

Racism, prejudice and injustice run through this compelling story, which starts when three teenagers from different backgrounds witness a stabbing. Told from the three perspectives, these teenagers show courage and kindness and somehow maintain their empathy in a very hostile world.

Simon & Schuster

“I really truly believe that increased empathy will change the world, maybe even save the world. Reading and writing and creating are one of the best ways to harness our empathy superpower.”

Holly Bourne, author

Novels

Novels continued



Nisha's War Dan Smith

An unputdownable historical ghost story. It's 1942, and Nisha and her Indian mother seek refuge with her cold English grandmother. Nisha faces hostility and racism, but also begins to connect with her grandmother as together they address their experiences of trauma.

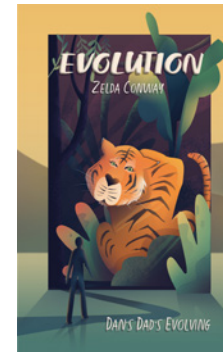
Chicken House



Fight Back* A. M. Dassu

Aaliyah experiences racism following a terrorist attack. She and her friends decide to demonstrate how a diverse and inclusive community can stand together. The story explores how tribal thinking shatters lives, and the powerful leadership role young people can play in challenging hate.

Scholastic



Evolution Zelda Conway

Dan's life is rocked when his parents split up and he discovers that his Dad is transsexual. Dan is forced to confront deep-set opinions and see the world from another's perspective. A short novel carefully and reassuringly addressing sensitive issues.

ZunTold



Run for your Life* Jane Mitchell

An astonishing, moving book highlighting appalling acts of brutality against women and girls and the inhuman bureaucracy often faced by refugees. Thankfully, this is also a story of human resilience and the powerful impact of empathy.

Little Island Books



The Secret Sunshine Project Benjamin Dean

Illustrator Sandhya Prabhat

A celebration of family, friendship, courage, identity and love. The story opens with a grieving family, but, through Bea's understanding for her older sister, ends with a joyous celebration of Pride that brings a community together and transcends hate.

Simon & Schuster

“Here's the cool thing – when you read, you imagine what someone else thinks, feels, does, is. We become more empathetic and ultimately that makes us become more human.”

Kwame Alexander, author

Novels

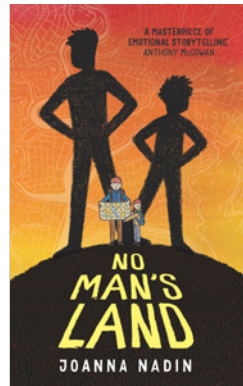
Novels continued



When I See Blue Lily Bailey

Ben has OCD. His first-person narration is so powerful that we acutely feel his agony as he is dominated by voices in his head. Building a deeply empathetic friendship with April develops his self-esteem in this warm, funny, sensitive novel.

Orion Children's Books



No Man's Land Joanna Nadin

In a time of conflict Adam and Sam are sent to safety, but Adam is unhappy as his world view is challenged and he risks being radicalised. A thought-provoking exploration of the impact of war on families, friendship, communities and countries.

UCLan Publishing



Our Sister, Again Sophie Cameron

When Isla's sister dies, the family will do anything to get her back, including participating in an artificial intelligence experiment. A fascinating and wonderful novel examining grief but also the nature of life and what it means to be human.

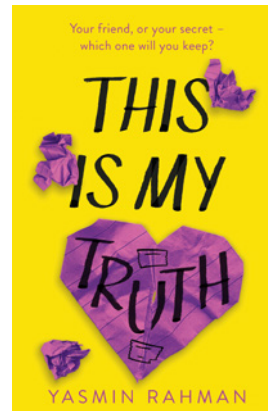
Simon & Schuster



Read Between the Lies Malcolm Duffy

Two boys in a newly blended family seemingly have nothing in common, until they discover they both have dyslexia. Brilliantly depicted characters give insight into the challenges of this condition. This is a must-read with a heart-stopping denouement.

Zephyr



This Is My Truth* Yasmin Rahman

An unflinching exploration of how domestic violence affects a family through fear and shame. While Amani's story is centre stage, her friend Huda's hidden emotions are also revealed. An insightful story showing how hard it can be to seek help, and the devastating impact of secrets.

Hot Key Books

“Our students are seeing how reading is so much more than just understanding words on a page. Using books to build empathy helps young people share their love of stories, learn about different people and be transported to different places.”

Sarah Higgs, teacher

Novels

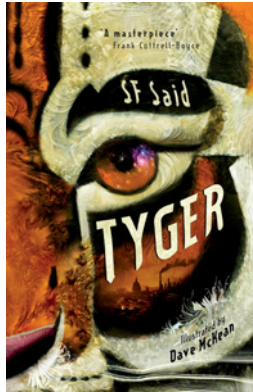
Novels continued



The Light in Everything Katya Balen

Tom and Zofia, two young people coping differently with trauma, are thrown together when their parents fall in love. Pain, anger, fear and shame are sensitively depicted in this beautifully crafted story about diving into the unknown with trust and love.

Bloomsbury



Tyger S. F. Said

Illustrator Dave McKean

Tyger is a superb, startling allegory, set in a dystopian future which has forsaken empathy. Communities are segregated, enslaved and live in fear. Young teenagers Adam and Zadie meet an extraordinary, magical tyger and together they unleash forces that overcome oppression.

David Fickling Books



Needle* Patrice Lawrence

Patrice Lawrence really helps readers get under the skin of her characters, and in this book we meet Charlene, a traumatised teenager. We understand why she is so angry, but we also see how she appears to those on the outside. Unflinching and very moving.

Barrington Stoke



The Dream House Laura Dockrill

Illustrator Gwen Millward

This is the story of the relationship between a bereaved child who can't express his feelings, and his understanding, supportive godfather, Sparky. Gently paced, using the natural world as a place of stillness and reflection, it offers quiet healing and hope.

Piccadilly Press

Keep an eye on empathylab.uk for extra resources

“EmpathyLab gives us unique tools to help children bring about social change. If we all work together, I'm confident we can highlight injustice and build empathy, and hope to see a better, more compassionate world.”

A. M. Dassu, author

Five Top Tips

Put empathy into action Research shows that empathy plays a big role in our desire to make the world a better place. Seek out books with themes that inspire young people to become empathy activists.

Talk about characters Instead of discussing what might happen next, focus on the characters and their feelings. What are they afraid of? What might they do next? Which was most interesting? This builds understanding of other people.

Share diverse books Challenge young people to read a book that jolts them into understanding lives very different from their own, such as stories set in other countries or with characters of different races, religions and experiences.

Listen well Try to listen deeply, with 100% attention, as young people talk about their experience of a book. Join Adisa and A. M. Dassu for the Empathy Mirror exercise, which is all about using body language to work out how others are feeling: <https://bit.ly/3114T6f>

Build human connections Sharing stories connects us to each other in new ways. Read the books yourself as a springboard for deep conversations to help you better understand a young person.

EMPATHY DAY Thursday 8 June 2023

- Join in: our **FIVE Mission Empathy activities** will help you develop your empathy superpower and change the world
- Look out for the free **Family Activity Pack** and toolkits for schools and libraries
- Get ready for **Empathy Day Live!** – a superb free online festival led by amazing authors and illustrators



MISSION EMPATHY How to Get Involved

From March, find tips and templates at empathylab.uk to help children, families and classes complete these empathy-boosting activities, in the run-up to Empathy Day. We'd love to see young people's responses – please share your work and activities on social media using [@EmpathyLabUK](https://twitter.com/EmpathyLabUK) [#EmpathyDay](https://twitter.com/EmpathyLabUK)

Join us for Empathy Action Month in November

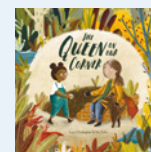
Make every day an Empathy Day by revisiting your Empathy Resolutions and putting empathy into action throughout November. Look out for free new resources and inspiring reading ideas at empathylab.uk



Using picture books creatively

Picture books work for all age groups, and have an important empathy-building role. We've paired two books from this collection with picture books exploring similar themes, drawn from our Read for Empathy Guide for children aged 3-11.

Seeing the real person



The Queen on Our Corner
Lucy Christopher & Nia Tudor



Needle
Patrice Lawrence

Coming through trauma



Saving the Butterfly
Helen Cooper & Gill Smith



Nisha's War
Dan Smith



Develop your superpower. Change the world.

Complete your mission by trying all FIVE activities



1. Empathy Power Reads

This isn't reading as you know it, this is reading for empathy.



- JOIN our crowd-sourced book recommendation activity
- CHOOSE and READ an empathy-boosting book – use the brilliant Empathy Collection for inspiration
- SHARE and DISCUSS your chosen book
- WEAR a pair of empathy superpower glasses to help you see the story from the character's point-of-view
- STRIKE a power pose with your book and share it safely on social media

2. Empathy 360°

See the world through the eyes of others.



- SWITCH ON your empathy superpower
- LOOK right around you – just stand still or go on an empathy walk
- NOTICE how the world might seem to someone you encounter
- REFLECT on your new 360° perspective
- DECIDE what YOU can do to make a difference

3. Empathy Exchange

Step out of your normal bubble & connect with someone you don't know well.



- MAKE TIME to get to know someone better
- USE our conversation prompts to help you
- HAVE a friendly, open conversation
- LISTEN with 100% of your attention
- CHECK you've understood what they have told you

4. Empathy Emotions Map

Empathy is about understanding, naming and sharing feelings.



- GET creative as a class!
- MAKE a mind map – as a class or individuals – when children record their emotions throughout the day by writing and drawing on the map
- WORK TOGETHER to make a list of emotions to start you off e.g. excited, anxious, inspired, nervous, proud, valued
- VISIT our Illustration Gallery for inspiration – see maps by your favourite illustrators
- SHARE and DISCUSS the maps – safely – no names

5. Make an Empathy Resolution

How can YOU change things for the better through empathy?



- THINK about what would make your home, school, community a happier, more caring place – where would more empathy help?
- DECIDE what you will do to make a difference
- WATCH how your favourite authors and illustrators plan to use empathy to change things for the better
- MAKE and SHARE your resolution with your class, friends and family
- START acting on your resolution now!

 **FROM MARCH** Download everything you need at empathylab.uk 

Empathy is a beacon of hope.

Join our 2023 programme

EmpathyLab offers training and Empathy Day toolkits for families, schools, libraries and early years providers. Join us in our mission to reach over 1 million children a year by 2026. Find out more and register for resources at empathylab.uk. Training enquiries to info@empathylab.uk.

How to order the books in this Guide

To buy the Read for Empathy book collection, please contact your local independent bookshop or Peters, to explore how you can develop empathy through the power of books or via the Empathy Lab page at bookshop.org

- Independent booksellers: find your local shop here booksellers.org.uk/bookshopsearch or order online via bookshop.org
- Peters: peters.co.uk/empathycollection2023. If you have any queries do not hesitate to contact Peters on **0121 666 6646** or email empathy@peters.co.uk
- You can also borrow the books from your local library

Thank you to everyone who has helped with this Guide

- Selection Panel: Jon Biddle, Richard Charlesworth, Kevin Cobane, Teresa Cremin, Scott Evans, Paul Harris, Miranda McKearney, Sarah Mears, Shaheen Mogradia, Sarah Smith, Sonia Thompson, Dawn Woods
- Our partners at Peters and the Centre for Literacy in Primary Education
- Publicity: Kirsten Grant, Deborah Goodman PR
- Leaflet editing: Talya Baker

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