

Read for Empathy Collection 2024

A guide to empathy-building books
For children aged 3–11

Why empathy?

Understanding
and sharing
emotions

Picture books,
Early readers,
Poetry, Non-fiction

Novels and
Graphic novels

Top tips

@EmpathyLabUK

www.empathylab.uk

#ReadForEmpathy



EmpathyLab's mission is to raise an empathy-educated generation, inspired to build a better world for everyone

Empathy and reading

Empathy is our ability to experience and understand someone else's feelings. It creates stronger, kinder communities. Children won't thrive without this crucial life skill, and developing it improves their wellbeing, reading for pleasure and active citizenship.

Excitingly, research shows that empathy is a learnable skill, and that books play a key role in developing it. When children identify with book characters, they learn to see things from other people's point of view. As they read, they are building their empathy skills.

How does empathy work?

Empathy is made up of three main elements.



Using the Read for Empathy books

An expert panel has selected these forty fantastic books for children aged 3–11. They are chosen for their power to improve key empathy skills, and also offer rich insights into other people's feelings and life experiences.

Key empathy skills

Perspective-taking

Naming & sharing emotions

Empathic listening

Social action

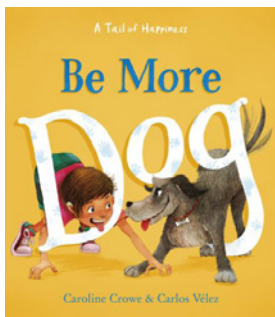
Please use them to inspire children to turn feelings of empathy into action – in their homes, schools and communities.

Our programmes offer powerful focal points for using the books all year round to help everyone learn more about empathy. Please join us for **Empathy Day** on **6 June**, and **Empathy Action Month** throughout **November**.

For our secondary Guide (for 12–16-year-olds) and a Guide with books in Welsh (for 4–16-year-olds), visit www.empathylab.uk/RFE-2024

Emotions

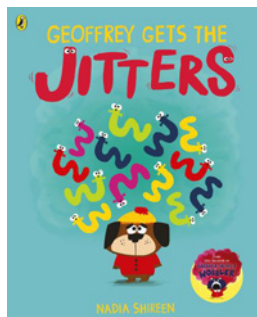
Being able to recognise, name and share your emotions is a key empathy skill. These eight wonderful picture books provide a springboard for helping children expand their understanding of, and vocabulary for, emotions.



Be More Dog Caroline Crowe & Carlos Velez

A really clever, fun book about a dog, Sam, whose superpower is happiness. The boy in the story feels sad and worried when his dad leaves for work, but it really helps to play with Sam and learn from his exuberance and joy.

Floris Books



Geoffrey Gets the Jitters Nadia Shireen

Anxiety plagues so many children, and this beautifully dynamic book helps explore how to express, understand and overcome worries. Geoffrey meets his jitters who tell him what they hate and what makes them disappear. Hilarious and profound.

Puffin



Blue Sarah Christou

A gentle, tenderly illustrated picture book, personifying the feeling of being blue. The turning point comes for the main character when she starts talking about her feelings, sharing them with a friend, at home, at school, even at the hairdressers.

Faber



I Will Swim Next Time Emily Joof & Matilda Ruta

Water feels really scary to the child in this magnificently illustrated story. So scary that sea swimming is out of the question. Gradually, an understanding mum encourages progress, until the joyful ending when 'water is my special place to be'.

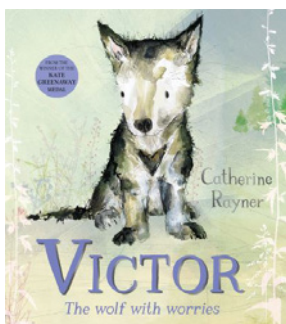
Floris Books



When I Feel Surprised Illustrator Paula Bowles

A really helpful board book for the very young in which a charming pink creature explores what surprises them. Sometimes even unwelcome surprises can turn into loads of fun, while others are straightforwardly lovely, like giving presents.

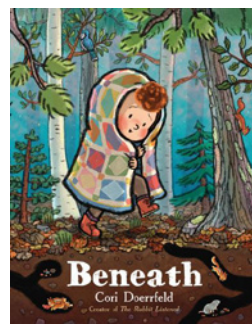
Child's Play



Victor, the Wolf with Worries Catherine Rayner

Victor is worried he's not wolfish enough. Best friend Pablo encourages him to share his feelings, even when he's scared to. As the worries recede Victor starts to feel fierce and brave now he knows how to handle his emotions.

Macmillan Children's Books



Beneath Cori Doerrfeld

Finn is struggling with horrible moods, and grandfather takes him on an exploration, looking at what happens beneath the surface of things. The natural world metaphors help Finn see that connecting to people can help, if you look beneath first appearances.

Scallywag Press



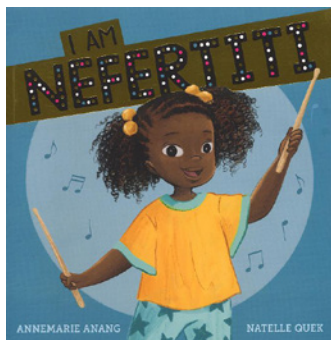
The Spaces In Between Jaspreet Kaur & Manjit Thapp

Living in a city can spark a whole range of tricky emotions from panic to shyness. This thoughtful non-fiction text explores the spaces in between, which can help. It's full of ideas for spaces offering calm and interest and positive human connection.

Big Picture Press

Picture books

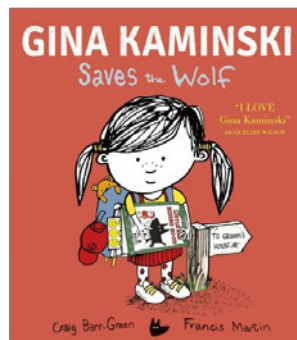
Six superb picture books, perfect for empathy-building reading and discussion with children aged 3-11. We believe no child is ever too old for a great picture book.



I Am Nefertiti **Annemarie Anang & Natelle Quek**

Nefertiti's joining a band as a drummer. But Miss Potts shortens her name without checking, and it makes Nefertiti feel small. Once her full name is used she grows again – the music can begin. A wonderful book about being seen for who you really are.

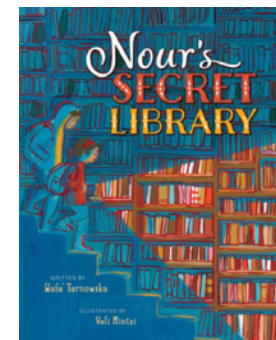
Five Quills



Gina Kaminski Saves the Wolf **Craig Barr-Green & Francis Martin**

Gina beautifully describes the difficulties of school when you're autistic. She also has a great analysis of Little Red Riding Hood's mistakes, and decides to reenact the story and save the wolf. Hilarious, and also full of insight.

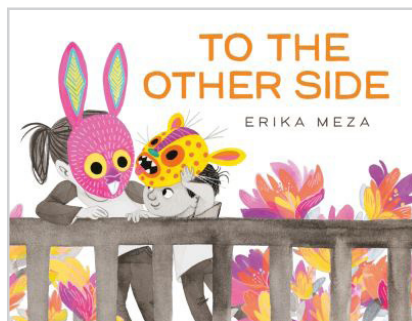
Little Tiger



Nour's Secret Library **Wafa' Tarnowska & Vali Mintzi**

Based on real-life events, this powerful picture book tells the story of Nour and her cousin in war-torn Syria. They rescue books, creating a secret library for all to use. A story of courage and hope, bringing insights into the strength of our human spirit.

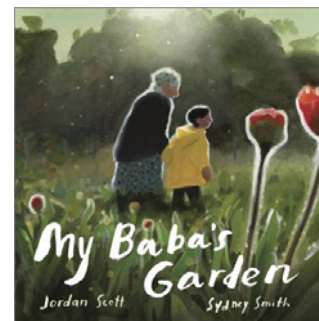
Barefoot Books



To the Other Side **Erika Meza**

A powerful exploration, for older children, of the refugee experience. A sister plays a game with her younger sibling, to get them through the toughest possible journey. There is a lovely resolution when they reach safety and find friends.

Hodder Children's Books



My Baba's Garden **Jordan Scott & Sydney Smith**

A boy's grandmother lives in a chicken coop and has experienced wartime hunger and trauma. Together they grow things and collect worms, and when she has to move in with the family, he cares for her as he has been cared for.

Walker Books



Grandpa and the Kingfisher **Anna Wilson & Sarah Massini**

A child and grandfather are close and spend the year watching kingfishers raise a family. When spring comes, grandfather is no longer alive. A gentle exploration of the cycle of life and death and the enduring power of nature.

Nosy Crow



Illustration © Natelle Quek

Early readers and graphics

Early readers

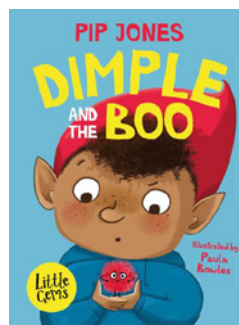


The Girl Who Became a Fish **Polly Ho-Yen**

Illustrator Sojung Kim-McCarthy

Little Ita has moved to a new town. She's afraid of so much, including the river. Gradually she is drawn to the magic that happens when her hands enter the water, and the change in her feelings... A gentle story, great for understanding emotions.

Knights Of



Dimple and the Boo **Pip Jones**

Illustrator Paula Bowles

Dimple the gnome is finding life hard. Only the Boo seems to understand but is SO unruly! A deceptively simple little book, whose central character is dealing with anger and upset in a way many small children will relate to.

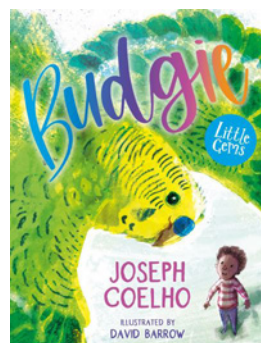
Barrington Stoke



Bear and Bird: The Picnic and Other Stories **Jarvis**

Bear and Bird go on a picnic, talk to a flower and paint masterpieces. A funny, upbeat exploration of the misunderstandings friendship can bring. A great short read-aloud book, with potential for discussions about jealousy and competitiveness.

Walker Books



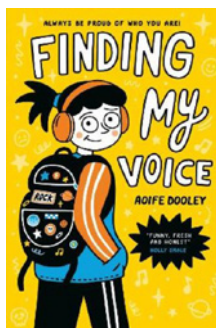
Budgie **Joseph Coelho**

Illustrator David Barrow

Miles is entranced to find a lost budgie, which sadly dies. It emerges that it belonged to their irascible neighbour, who comes round on hearing the news. As they share their love of the bird, Miles discovers that Mr Buxton is actually rather wonderful.

Barrington Stoke

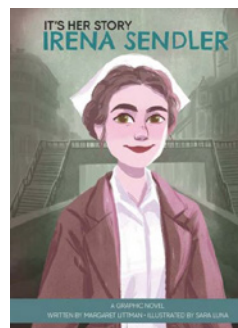
Graphics



Finding My Voice **Aoife Dooley**

Frankie is autistic. Her new secondary school isn't an easy place to be. She is bullied and fearful. But Frankie learns the importance of being herself and not judging others, as she makes a new circle of friends and, together, they triumph in the *Battle of the Bands*.

Scholastic



It's Her Story: Irena Sendler **Margaret Littman**

Illustrator Sara Luna

A true story of courage in World War Two Poland. Irena, a Catholic social worker, supported Jewish families in the ghettos and rescued babies and children. An inspiring picture book graphic story of empathy driving human beings to take extreme risks to save others.

Sunbird Books

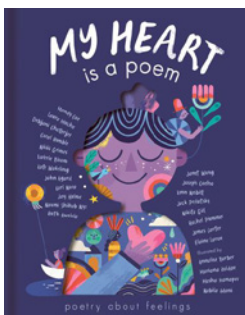


Illustration © Paula Bowles

Keep an eye on
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for extra resources

Poetry and non-fiction

Poetry



My Heart is a Poem

Mandy Coe, Laura Mucha, Debjani Chatterjee and 17 others

Illustrators Annalise Barber, Mariana Roldán, Masha Manapov, Nabila Adani

A poetry collection all about feelings – joy, sadness, fear. Wonderful poets articulate how it feels to be embarrassed, or hurt, or ache to get picked for the team. Poetry has a remarkable power to encapsulate and resolve our myriad human emotions.

Little Tiger



What You Need to be Warm

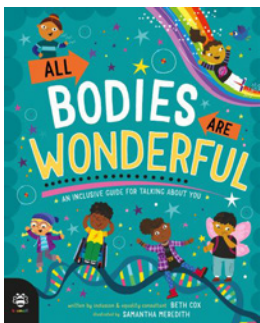
Neil Gaiman

Illustrators Oliver Jeffers, Yuliya Gwilym, Nadine Kaadan, Pam Smy, Daniel Egnéus and eight others

Neil Gaiman's extended poem is based on thousands of replies to his question 'What are your memories of being warm?' It's a simply beautiful offering of warmth to people who are cold or have had to flee their homes.

Bloomsbury Children's Books

Non-fiction



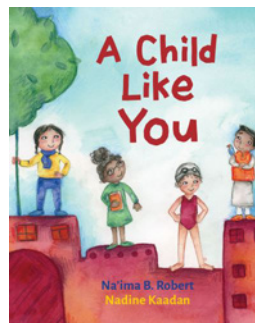
All Bodies Are Wonderful

Beth Cox

Illustrator Samantha Meredith

A beautifully positive celebration of the diversity of human beings. It covers science, emotional well-being and our relationship with each other and the world we inhabit. Empathy permeates all aspects of life in this fascinating, reassuring and life-affirming book.

b small publishing



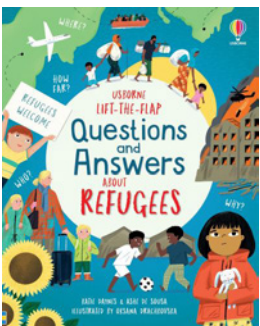
A Child Like You

Na'ima B. Robert

Illustrator Nadine Kaadan

Empathy can spark a determination to challenge the wrongs in our world. A terrific picture book about four real-life children who campaign for change – for instance to save the planet and combat child slavery. A stirring read!

Otter-Barry Books



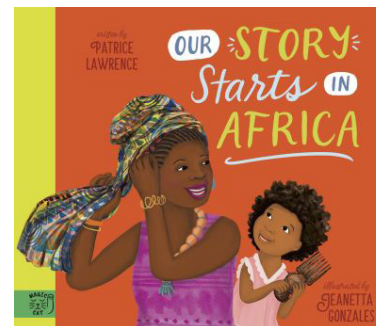
Lift the Flap: Questions and Answers about Refugees

Katie Daynes & Ashe de Sousa

Illustrator Oksana Drachkovska

What happens when home isn't safe any more? This highly topical, well-written text answers many questions about the refugee experience, taking an inclusive, thoughtful stance. Younger children will enjoy the interactive, visual approach, and will learn a lot.

Usborne



Our Story Starts in Africa

Patrice Lawrence

Illustrator Jeanetta Gonzales

A celebration of Africa's history and African woman told through the empathetic conversation Tante Janet has with Paloma, who is uncertain of her place in the world. Tante Janet helps Paloma develop a sense of pride in her identity and heritage. An inspiring picture book.

Magic Cat Publishing

Verse novels and novels

Verse novels

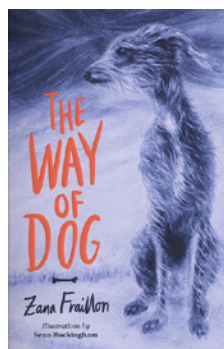


The Final Year
Matt Goodfellow

Illustrator Joe Todd-Stanton

Nate's voice rings loud and true – in a northern dialect – in this authentic, moving verse novel – don't miss this one! He's in his last year of primary school, looking after his brothers while his mum plays bingo. Then precious brother Dylan collapses...

Otter-Barry Books



The Way of Dog
Zana Fraillon

Illustrator Sean Buckingham

A puppy born in unpromising circumstances finds his forever manup, but a terrible accident rips them apart. This verse novel told from the perspective of Scruffity highlights both the cruelty of humans and the intense bonds formed between humans and animals.

Chicken House

Keep an eye on
empathylab.uk
for extra resources

Novels



City of Stolen Magic
Nazneen Ahmed Pathak

Illustrator Sandhya Prabhat

It's 1855 in India and a wonderfully empathetic central character, Chompa, has a special magic she's forbidden from using. This fast-paced read is part magical realism and part historical fiction; it explores feelings around Empire, immigration and moving home.

Puffin

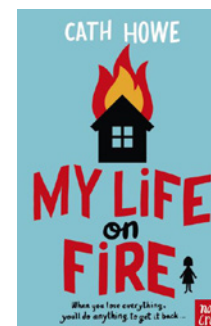


Finding Bear
Hannah Gold

Illustrator Levi Pinfold

A magical story where the Arctic landscape creates a sensory backdrop to the story of April, who has formed a deep connection with a polar bear. A story that movingly highlights the plight of animals fighting for survival as climate change destroys habitats.

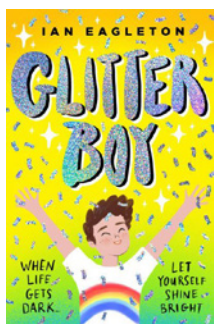
HarperCollins Children's Books



My Life on Fire
Cath Howe

A child's response to trauma. Ren's home burns down and although the family is safe, they lose everything. Ren's grief leads her to totally out of character behaviour. An empathetic friend Casper, helps her make sense of her feelings and find a way to heal.

Nosy Crow



Glitter Boy
Ian Eagleton

A story of identity and prejudice. James is different and his dad misguidedly tries to protect him by encouraging him to be like his classmates. But James finds people who support him and give him the confidence to be his true self.

Scholastic



How to Be More Hedgehog
Anne-Marie Conway

Lily's stammer is getting worse, and after a cyberbullying incident all she wants to do is hibernate like her favourite animal, the hedgehog. But inspiringly she finds her strength and speaks out, driven by her passion for the environment.

UCLan Publishing



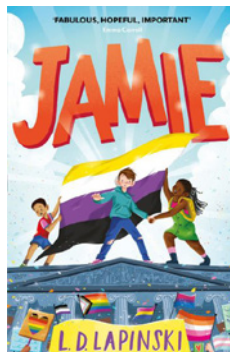
Novels



Until the Road Ends **Phil Earle**

Peggy is evacuated from war-torn London. Her beloved stray dog Beau is left behind, and heroically rescues people from the rubble. When Peggy's parents are killed, Beau knows he has, somehow, to find her. Powerful insights into wartime emotions, from an animal's perspective.

Andersen Press



Jamie **L.D. Lapinski**

Reading is powerful! This novel helps us really understand the experience of being non-binary. Jamie is at a turning point, forced to choose between going to a girls' or a boys' school. They fight to be heard, for their experience to matter. Hugely positive.

Orion



Fablehouse **E.L. Norry**

Fablehouse shelters children in care from a society unable to accept their skin colour. Troubled Heather finds a strangely compelling cairn, and a magical escapade unfolds. A thrilling adventure with profound insights into how children in care feel and the power of friendship.

Bloomsbury Children's Books



Cosima Unfortunate Steals a Star **Laura Noakes**

Illustrator Flavia Sorrentino

Cosima is disabled and lives at the Home for Unfortunate Girls, along with three best friends. Although they long for a real family, they're deeply suspicious of Lord Francis Fitzroy's plan to adopt them. Funny, moving and featuring joyous, authentic representation.

HarperCollins Children's Books



Kofi and the Rap Battle Summer **Jeffrey Boakye**

Kofi is a beguiling character, a young boy with a head full of dreams and big ideas that sometimes lead him into trouble. In this joyous coming-of-age story Kofi learns how good friends and a loving family can help him use his creative talents for good.

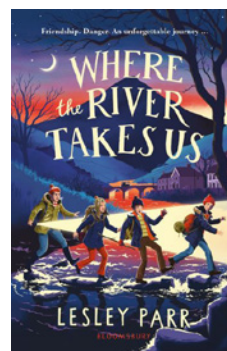
Faber



The Mystery of the Missing Mum **Frances Moloney**

In his hilarious voice, Jake shares the hunt for his missing mum. We gradually realise he's striving to blank the memory of her hospital admission. A moving, readable novel helping readers understand the struggle of living with a parent with mental-health problems.

Puskin Children's Books



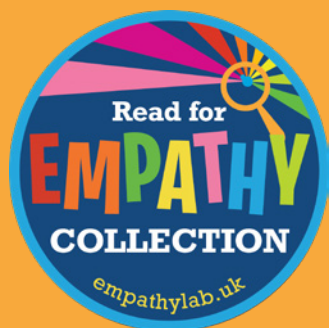
Where the River Takes Us **Lesley Parr**

Jason's brother Richie tries to keep things going after their parents' death, but he's getting into big trouble. Set in Wales, this story has beautifully drawn relationships and a thrilling adventure as Jason and friends race to win £100 for sighting a big cat...

Bloomsbury Children's Books

The Empathy Year

Use our programmes to build empathy awareness, skills and action all year round



February

65 expertly-chosen books to build empathy, for 3-16 year olds

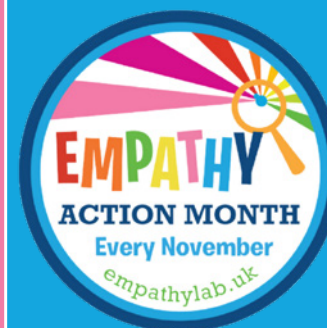
Use all year round



May/June

Mission Empathy activities in communities

Empathy Day Live! Free online festival with leading authors & illustrators



November

Focus on putting empathy into action

Empathy Resolutions activity, with inspiring author examples

Supported by year-round in-depth Affiliate School programme, modular CPD & short training courses

How to get involved

- Come on our **short training courses** www.empathylab.uk/our-foundation-empathy-programme
- Become an **Affiliate School** www.empathylab.uk/training
- Create change in November's **Empathy Action Month** www.empathylab.uk/empathy-action-month
- For **empathy-boosting ideas, tips and templates** visit www.empathylab.uk

Celebrate Empathy Day

- **Use the Mission Empathy Activities** – fun ideas to develop key empathy skills (see page 10)
- Download the **Family Activity Pack** from **1 May** at www.empathylab.uk
- Join the **Empathy Day Live!** Festival on **6 June**. Inspiring LIVE online author/illustrator events for KS1-3, including a **nationwide assembly**

Join our drive to benefit **ONE MILLION** children a year by 2026

Register NOW! for your free Empathy Day toolkits at www.empathylab.uk/empathy-day



This Empathy Day, we're inviting everyone to join Mission Empathy. Charge up your empathy superpower in three simple steps:

Read. Connect. Act.



JOIN MISSION EMPATHY

Complete **THREE** activities – **ONE** from each category.

READ

Read to understand

Empathy Encounters

GET READING to discover new book characters

Empathy Powerpose

CHOOSE your favourite empathy book & strike a powerpose with it

Empathy Bookshelf

SHARE your favourite empathy reads

CONNECT

Get to know someone better

Empathy Exchange

USE our conversation starters to have deeper conversations

Empathy Spot

NOTICE where empathy is happening and its positive effect

Empathy Emotions Map

MAKE a map recording your emotions across a day

ACT

Put empathy into action

Empathy Resolution

MAKE an Empathy Resolution and use it to make everyday behaviour changes with a big ripple effect

INSPIRE others to put empathy into action

Find out more:

www.empathylab.uk/mission-empathy-challenge

Top tips: empathy-building reading practices

1. Help recognise feelings Use lots of different emotion words when discussing stories. Our emotion maps from top illustrators are a great resource www.empathylab.uk/RfE-illustrators-gallery

2. Talk about characters Focus on the characters and their feelings, more than the plot. Which was most interesting? What are they afraid of? What might they do next?

3. Don't forget the pictures Illustrations are especially good for 'reading' other people – can you tell from the pictures how the character feels?

4. Share diverse books Introduce children to stories set in other countries and with characters of different races, religions and experiences. Inspire them to imagine life for people in different situations from their own.

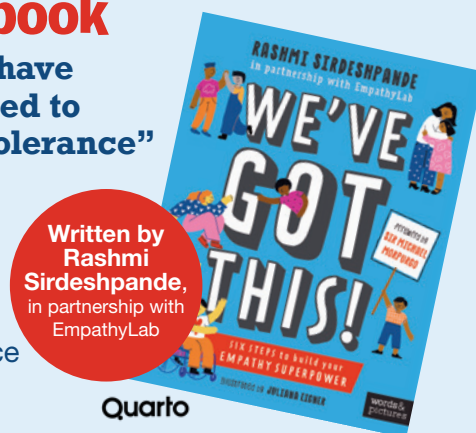
5. Listen 100% Listening is a crucial part of empathy. Listen carefully as children explore what they've learnt about other people. Use our resources www.empathylab.uk/the-listening-switch

6. Put empathy into action Could a book help inspire children to take action to help others? Rich social action resources here www.empathylab.uk/empathy-action-month

New empathy handbook

"Say hello to your new must-have book... EVERYTHING you need to foster empathy, kindness & tolerance"
Hannah Gold, author

- A brilliant handbook for 7-11s
- Build empathy in six simple steps
- Inspiring activities, amazing science



Out now **£9.99**

How to order the books in this Guide

- Find your **local independent bookshop** at booksellers.org.uk/bookshopsearch or order online via EmpathyLab's Bookshop.org page: uk.bookshop.org/shop/empathy-lab
- Order via peters.co.uk/empathy2024. For any queries, call 0121 666 6646 or email empathy@peters.co.uk
- Or borrow the books from your **local library**

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