

Read for Empathy Collection 2024

A guide to empathy-building books
For young people aged 12-16

How does
empathy work?

Graphic and
Verse novels

Poetry

Non-fiction

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. Young people 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 young people 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

This guide is for people living and working with 12–16-year-olds and contains 25 brilliant books, which have been selected by an expert panel. They have been chosen for their power to improve key empathy skills, but they also offer rich insights into other people's feelings and life experiences.

Key empathy skills

Perspective-taking

Naming & sharing emotions

Empathic listening

Social action

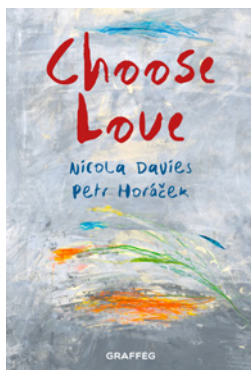
Please use them to inspire young people to turn feelings of empathy into action – in their homes, schools and communities.

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 Primary Guide for 3-11-year-olds and a Guide with a previous Welsh collection visit www.empathylab.uk/RFE-2024

Poetry, verse and graphic novels

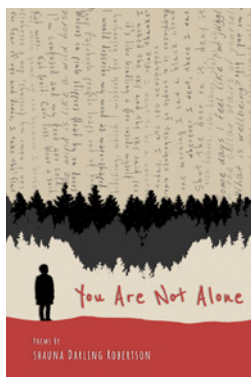
Poetry



Choose Love **Nicola Davies & Petr Horáček**

A beautifully illustrated collection of poems telling individual stories of refugees escaping war and persecution. Poetry can expose stark truths and raw emotions and this collection is painful but uplifting, the resilience of the human spirit movingly highlighted by the final poem, 'Unbroken'.

Graffeg



You Are Not Alone **Shauna Darling Robertson**

In this time of massive concerns about young people's mental health and well-being, this poetry collection feels like an empathetic friend. It's a book to dip into and realise, as the title suggests, that whatever the situation, words can comfort and let you know that you are not alone.

Troika Books

A * symbol indicates titles that are more suitable for older readers and books with themes that may need to be introduced with caution

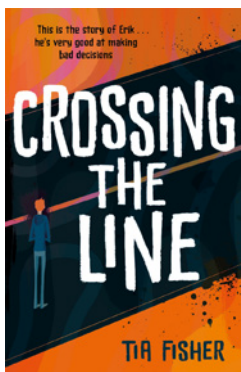
Verse novels



Stand Up Ferran Burke **Steven Camden**

Brimming with empathy and humour, this brilliantly written verse novel is a coming-of-age story with themes of belonging, identity, friendship and family. We join Ferran as he starts high school and stay with him as he becomes a thoughtful young man.

Macmillan

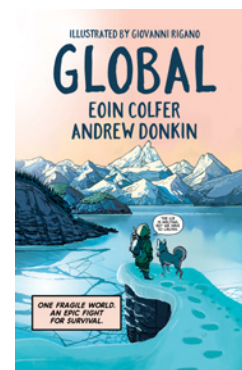


Crossing the Line* **Tia Fisher**

A terrifying account of how Erik, grieving for his dad, gets sucked into county lines. This is an emotional read with no easy answers, but Erik's friendship with Ravi offers a chink of optimism that he can turn his life around.

Hot Key Books

Graphic novels



Global **Eoin Colfer & Andrew Donkin**

Illustrator Giovanni Rigano

An extraordinary graphic novel exploring the devastating impact of climate change from the perspective of two very different young people on opposite sides of the globe, in India and Canada. This engaging book will trigger deep discussions about empathy for the environment.

Hodder Children's Books



Oxygen Mask **Jason Reynolds** **Art by Jason Griffin**

Atmospheric and unique, *Oxygen Mask* depicts the isolation of family life in lockdown, narrated by the son. The father is ill, struggling for breath, and each individual is caught up in their own worries. But there is love and humour and at the end, recovery and hope.

Faber

"We can all increase our empathy superpower through reading because the empathy we feel for the characters in stories can transfer to real life situations."

Joseph Coelho, Waterstones Children's Laureate

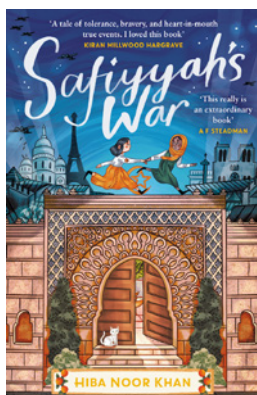
Novels



You Think You Know Me* **Ayaan Mohamud**

Hanan is a remarkable young woman, a high-flying Muslim student confronted with racism and violence. When her brother is attacked, Hanan can no longer stay silent. A thought-provoking novel that shows how damaging relying on preconceived ideas and stereotypical judgements can be.

Usborne



Safiyyah's War **Hiba Noor Khan**

A beautifully constructed story with unforgettable characters. Safiyyah is a Muslim in Paris courageously working with the Resistance to save persecuted Jews. A book that shows how empathy and commitment to our shared humanity cut through religious and cultural divides.

Andersen Press



SOLD: What Will It Take to Find Freedom?* **Sue Barrow**

Stories bring insight into circumstances beyond our experience. This heartbreaking novel introduces Roza, a fifteen-year-old Albanian girl sold into slavery. Roza has the same hopes and loves as most fifteen-year-olds but is trapped in a desperate situation. An unforgettable read.

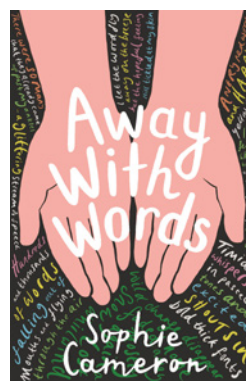
Cadence Publishing



Promise Boys* **Nick Brooks**

A compelling mystery thriller that tackles the impact of class, privilege, systemic racism and power inequalities. Fast-paced and with brilliant characterisation, this is a nuanced and brilliantly written story that will keep you gripped to the very last page.

Macmillan



Away With Words **Sophie Cameron**

Gala has moved from Spain to Scotland. She's deeply unhappy in a country so different from home with an unfamiliar language. But the very words that isolate Gala are her key to making new connections and starting to settle.

Little Tiger



Swimming on the Moon **Brian Conaghan**

This reassuring story explores the bond between Anna and her non-verbal autistic twin brother, their anxiety as they watch the breakdown of their parents' marriage and how they support each other through the most difficult period of their lives.

Bloomsbury Children's Books



Sing If You Can't Dance **Alexia Casale**

Ven is an outspoken and determined teenager coping with chronic pain. She is angry, sometimes frustrated, but she is also a great problem solver and is driven to find new ways of fulfilment. This is an authentic story of courage, hope and love.

Faber

Keep an eye on
empathylab.uk
for extra resources

Novels



What the World Doesn't See Mel Darbon

Love permeates this beautiful novel. Sad circumstances lead to Maudie kidnapping her brother Jake from his carer. Hiding in perilous conditions, Maudie's understanding and empathy for her disabled brother grows and, even though they are separated from family and friends, the bonds deepen.

Usborne



Kicked Out A.M. Dassu

An insightful book about being a friend and ally. The story highlights the injustices experienced by a young man navigating the asylum process and the friends who campaign to help him. Wonderful insights into how empathy drives social action.

Old Barn Books



Hazel Hill is Gonna Win This One Maggie Horne

A brilliant story that sensitively tackles sexual harassment, misogyny, sexuality and cyber-bullying from the perspective of Hazel Hill, a teenager with a deep sense of justice. It carries a powerful message about having the courage to stand up to inappropriate behaviours.

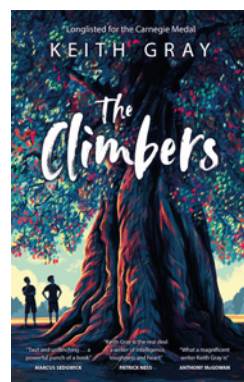
Firefly Press



One More Mountain Deborah Ellis

The extreme suffering of girls and women under Taliban rule in Afghanistan is captured in this story of Parvana, Shauzia and Damsa. But we also have a glimpse of the bravery, courage and resilience of persecuted people who refuse to submit.

Oxford University Press



The Climbers Keith Gray

A short book packing a big punch. A brilliantly written story of teenage rivalry focused on tree climbing that perfectly captures the complexities of the teenage male psyche and the dangers of toxic masculinity. Intelligent and insightful, this is an extraordinary book.

Barrington Stoke



Wild Song Candy Gourlay

It's 1905 and we join Luki, a determined young woman travelling from the Philippines to the World Fair in Missouri. Excitement becomes anger as she experiences racism and misogyny. This book exposes human-rights issues that are sadly still profoundly relevant today.

David Fickling Books

"The books help young readers learn about empathy's power to connect us and develop understanding of other people's experiences... They do not shy away from life's difficulties, but bring hope and healing in the face of these."

Read for Empathy collection judges

Novels



Boy Like Me **Simon James Green**

What happens when you secretly feel different from everyone else? Jamie is discovering his identity and falling in love at a time when exploring sexuality, even through books, was risky. Thank goodness for the courageous librarian who supports Jamie and defends freedom.

Scholastic



The First Move **Jenny Ireland**

Juliet and Ronan are chess-loving teenagers, who are hiding big secrets. A love story with a difference, exploring how communication and trust allow people to be their true selves, even when it means acknowledging disability and profound trauma.

Penguin

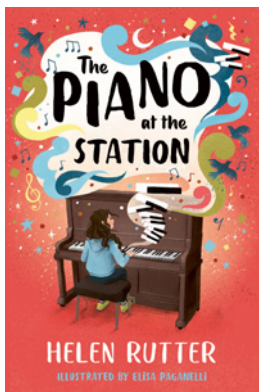


Different For Boys* **Patrick Ness**

Illustrator Tea Bendix

A brilliant, moving LGBTQ+ story that cleverly explores prejudice, friendship, sexuality and masculinity. The author perfectly captures the confusion and isolation of being gay in school and the gender norms that stop teenage boys from revealing their true selves.

Walker Books

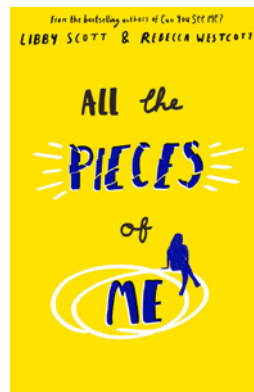


The Piano at the Station **Helen Rutter**

Illustrator Elisa Paganelli

A masterclass in the difference it makes to have your feelings understood. Troubled Lacey is rescued by an empathetic teacher who gives her purpose through music. Her new self-belief drives her to lead a campaign to save the piano at her local station.

Barrington Stoke



All the Pieces of Me **Libby Scott & Rebecca Westcott**

This novel offers rich insight into the life of Tally, a neurodivergent teenager. We experience the extreme impact bullying has on someone perceived as different, but are also given hope that truly empathetic adults can change young people's lives.

Scholastic



Quiet Storm **Kimberly Whittam**

A joyous book about growing up and finding your voice. Meet Storm, whose shyness limits her life. But Storm has a talent for running. With the support of empathetic teammates, her confidence grows and she abandons her toxic friendship circle and becomes a sporting hero.

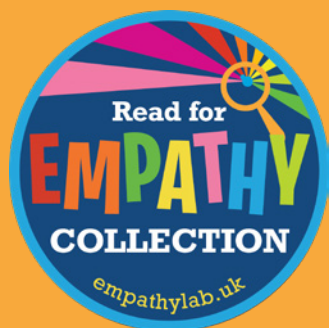
Usborne

“We need to stop ‘bolting on’ work on young people’s socio- emotional skills. EmpathyLab’s strategy of integrating work on empathy with literacy and reading for pleasure is efficient, and hugely potent.”

Professor Robin Banerjee, University of Sussex

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

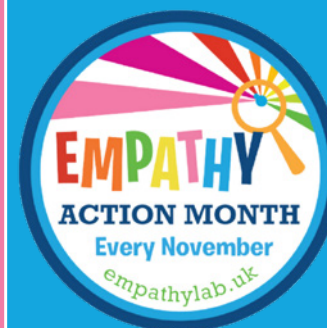
Use all year round



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
- For **empathy-boosting ideas, tips and templates** visit www.empathylab.uk
- Create change in November's **Empathy Action Month** www.empathylab.uk/empathy-action-month

Celebrate Empathy Day

- Download the Family Activity Pack from **1 May** at www.empathylab.uk
- Join the **Empathy Day Live! Festival** on **6 June**
- **Use the Mission Empathy Activities** – fun ideas to develop key empathy skills (see page 8)

Join
our drive
to benefit
ONE MILLION
children & young
people 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. Put empathy into action Could a book help inspire young people to take action to help others? Find rich social action resources to help you www.empathylab.uk/empathy-action-month

2. Talk about the characters Instead of discussing what might happen next, focus on the characters and their feelings to build understanding of other people. Our emotion maps by top illustrators are a great resource www.empathylab.uk/RfE-illustrators-gallery

3. Read aloud Sharing stories aloud at any age builds a sense of community, connection and shared experience.

4. Share diverse books Include a wide range of books set in other countries and with characters of different races, religions and experiences. Inspire young people to imagine life for people in different situations from their own.

5. Listen 100% Listening is a crucial part of empathy. Listen carefully as young people discuss their experience of a book.

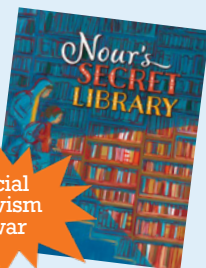
6. Build human connections Read titles from the collection yourself as a springboard for deep conversations which will help you understand and connect with young people in new ways.

The power of picture books for all ages

Picture books play an important empathy-building role for all ages. Try using these pairs of books to explore similar themes different perspectives. Picture books selected from our Read for Empathy collection for 3–11s.



social
activism
/ war



social
refugees/
displaced
people



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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