



JUMP

into someone
else's story

Go All In for Connection for the
Empathy Day Festival 2026

Festival Toolkit

GO
ALL
IN.

National
Year of
Reading
2026

Empathy
Lab
empathylab.uk

The Empathy Day Festival: how to take part

EMPATHY

is the ability to understand someone else's feelings and point of view



The Empathy Day Festival helps us build a school where every child feels seen, valued, and understood
Teacher, Charlton Primary School



Our theme is
JUMP

into someone else's story

with a particular focus on **CONNECTION**

What is the Festival?

Seven days of fun empathy-building activity from **4-11 June**, with **Empathy Day on Thursday 11 June**. The aim of the Festival is to enable young people to connect with themselves, others and the wider world through books and stories.

By jumping into someone else's story, they can see things from another person's point of view – even if they don't agree. When we connect with others in this way, we **strengthen relationships, build community and improve our wellbeing**.

The celebration is **fully flexible**, so you can get involved how and when you want to – and **ALL** settings, including schools, bookshops, libraries, wider communities and families are invited to take part. From a full drop down day, to bitesize activity or fun table top tasks – use the Festival resources however you wish!



Your festival, your way

Start your planning now, for maximum impact in your setting



THREE easy ways to join in

- ★ **JOIN** live events
- ★ **WATCH** on demand author films
- ★ **TAKE** the Empathy Challenge – nine creative empathy-themed activities

1. Save the date:

the Festival will run from **4-11 June**. Empathy Day is on **Thursday 11 June**

2. Bring your team together

recruit young people, colleagues and your community to spark ideas, spread the word and help with the planning

3. Get top tips

on making the most of the festival and the resources available

- ★ Watch our webinar [here](#)

- ★ Libraries – look out for a live session with Libraries Connected on **30 April, 2-3pm**

4. Join a LIVE author/illustrator event

- ★ Book your place at one of our exclusive LIVE online author/illustrator events for primary or secondary (see p. 4)

- ★ All groups who wish to join must sign up to receive the live link and ensure safeguarding

5. Watch author films on demand

FREE pre-recorded author & illustrator films & Empathy Day assemblies – all available on demand from **18 May** (see p. 4-6)

6. Use our FREE resources to bring the festival to life

- ★ **New Empathy Challenge** – nine fun and creative empathy-boosting activity ideas to help young people develop their empathy skills. Activities can be aged up or down (see p. 7)

- ★ **Printables** to support your activities – available from **10 April** [here](#)

- ★ **2026 Read for Empathy collection** – expertly-curated reading recommendations to inspire your activity

- ★ **Empathy Shorts** – free 500-word short stories by top authors

7. Add a pin to the interactive festival map

share what you're doing or find out what's happening in your local area

8. Have your say!

Complete our evaluation after the festival

FESTIVAL LINEUP

Join LIVE!

THREE brilliant free live online events, each featuring two of your favourite authors, sharing their brilliant characters and empathy inspiration.

REGISTER NOW.

Primary

Thursday 4 June,
1.30-2.00pm

Louie Stowell &
Jeffrey Boakye

Recommended for ages
7-11, Key Stage 2/P5-7

[Sign up now](#)

In collaboration with



Secondary

Thursday 11 June,
1.30-2.00pm

Matt Goodfellow
& Manjeet Mann

Recommended for ages 11-14,*
Key Stage 3-4/ S1-3

[Sign up now](#)



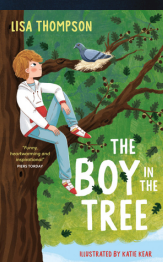
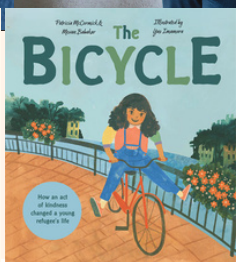
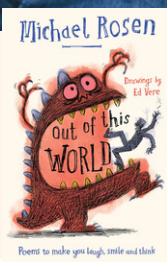
Friday Book Club Special Empathy Day edition

Thursday 11 June, 2-2.45pm

Join Ed Vere, Mevan Babakar
and Lisa Thompson for a fun &
interactive session, hosted by
Jenny McLachlan.

[Sign up now](#)

In collaboration with



Watch ON DEMAND

From **18 May**, access ALL of our fabulous pre-recorded films for all ages, from Early Years through to KS3. Watch in advance to help you start planning which films you want to share and when.

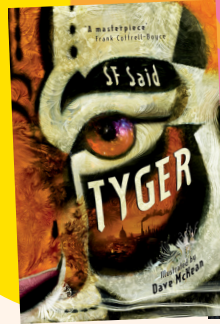
[Available here.](#)

Empathy Day Assembly

Featuring S.F. Said

Recommended for ages 7-13,
Key Stage 2 & Lower KS3, P3-S2

Use our new assembly slide deck to jump into someone else's story and read, connect and act.



Empathy Day Assembly – in Wales

Recommended for ages 7-13, Key Stage 2 and
Lower KS3, P3-S2

Pre-recorded assemblies in English & Welsh with author/illustrator, **Huw Aaron**. Versions available for both **primary** and **secondary**.

In collaboration with



Draw with Rob

For all ages

Our annual empathy-themed draw along with superstar illustrator, **Rob Biddulph**. Step-by-step inspiration for all ages.



SPARK EMPATHY with...

10-20-minute interactive films featuring top authors & illustrators. Expect readalouds and interactive activities. All films available to view on our website from 18 May.



Rachel Bright

Recommended for ages 4-7, Key Stage 1/ P2-3

Explore feelings and finding connection with others



Cariad Lloyd & Tom Percival

Recommended for ages 4-7, Key Stage 1/ P2-3

Explore a gentle story of grief and how we can support each other



Patrice Lawrence

Recommended for ages 7-11, Key Stage 2/ P5-7

Explore buried secrets and long lost connections



Chanté Timothy

Recommended for ages 7-11, Key Stage 2/ P5-7

Explore how to create your own "Supa" graphic novel characters



Kristina Rahim & Ian Eagleton

Recommended for ages 7-11, Key Stage 2/P5-7

Explore and celebrate families of all kinds

In collaboration with  just like us



Michael Rosen

Recommended for ages 11-14, Key Stage 3-4/ S1-3

Explore the courage of refugees in a true World War II story

In collaboration with  Refugee Week



Nathanael Lessore

Recommended for ages 11-14, Key Stage 3-4/ S1-3

Explore what happens when our online and offline identities collide



Cathy Reay & James Catchpole

Recommended for ages 11-14, Key Stage 2-3/S1-3

Explore and celebrate real-life stories of disability

Take the Empathy Challenge

Choose your favourite Challenge activities & accompanying printables as the basis of your festival activity.

- Develop **perspective-taking skills** and build **connection** with others, explore **emotions language** and be inspired to **take social action**.
- Try one, two or all nine – involve adults and the wider community.
- Take the challenge your way – in short sessions or over a longer period of time.

Read

Empathy Choice

Share your favourite empathy-building read.

Help us create a nationwide library full of brilliant empathy-boosting reads. Add your choice and tell us why – we want to hear your voice!

Connect

Empathy Glasses

Cut out & decorate your Empathy Superpower Glasses.

Wear them to remind you to look from the perspective of others.

DESIGNED BY
Ramzee!

Act

Empathy Resolutions

Put empathy into action by choosing & committing to an Empathy Resolution.

Choose ONE thing which makes a difference to the lives of others around you.

Empathy Book Club

Start an Empathy-themed book club – at home, school, your local library or bookshop.

In collaboration with



BOOK CLUBS
IN SCHOOLS

The Big Lunch: Sharing Stories

Join the annual Big Lunch celebration (5-8 June) by hosting a story-themed get-together in your school, street or community to share stories, food, fun and friendship.

In collaboration with



Empathy Comic Strip

Create your own empathy-themed comic strip.

Use our storyboards – think carefully about your characters, how they feel and what they experience.

Empathy Character

Connect with a character and jump into their story.

Create a character 'feeling file'. How do they feel inside and what's happening on the outside?

Empathy Exchange

Get to know someone better.

Use our conversation prompts to connect and find out what really makes them tick. Questions have been written by young people from across the UK.

Empathy News

Celebrate the good things in your community.

Seek out FIVE good things happening this week. Create a GOOD NEWS display, newspaper article, blog or video to share widely.

The Big Lunch: Sharing Stories

Go All In and jump into someone else's story at your Big Lunch

Top tips for your setting

In the National Year of Reading, the Eden Project is bringing its flagship community campaign, The Big Lunch, together with The Big Help Out for a weekend of friendship, food, fun, stories and action on 5-8 June. It's one big do, and everyone's invited to do something positive locally!

Some will share food and fun, some will come together to get things done, and everyone can connect through stories. What will you do? Here are some ideas to help you Go All In for connection with your community.

1. Plan a do to look forward to!

Take a minute to sign up for free resources including invitations, posters, ideas and tips to help you plan a do for the Empathy Day Festival. You could celebrate food, culture and connection by inviting your community to come together for a Big Lunch. It's a great way to spark conversation and share stories. What will you bring to the table?

Visit: thebigdo.com



2. Learn from the plants and animals of the rainforest

Join the Eden Project's free live lesson for primary-aged children – broadcast from their stunning Rainforest Biome on 22 April at 10am. Or, host your own session to read their new story 'One big rainforest do' – to spark conversations about empathy for the environment, community and connection. Find out more: www.edenprojectcommunities.com/schools

3. Turn your space into a story-sharing hub

Invite people to share a favourite book, recipe or personal story to create a welcoming, inclusive atmosphere and initiate conversation. Use EmpathyLab's curated booklist which celebrates our diverse communities.



4. Try a 'jump into someone else's story' activity

Use Empathy Challenge activities, or be inspired by the big do resource pack, for simple ways to spark empathy and connection. Holding a Big Lunch? Invite your community to decorate big do bunting and use conversation starters to spark connection. You'll find tons of ideas to try in both resource packs.



5. Create a community story wall

Invite contributions of stories, drawings or reflections to build a shared display. Set a date and invite your community to a Big Lunch to reveal the display. Contributing to a shared project is a catalyst for connection.

6. Arrange a Big Help Out activity

Identify simple ways your community can come together and lend a helping hand – whether that's a small volunteering task, a creative kindness activity or supporting a local cause. Keep it flexible, inclusive and easy for people to join in. Spread the word about your activity on the big do map: www.thebigdo.com



Share your Festival

Share what you do, make, create and discuss with us at EmpathyLab! We love seeing young people's work and ideas.

Share safely on social media tagging [@EmpathyLabUK](#) [#EmpathyDayFestival](#)



What's the impact?

The impact of reading for empathy on reading enjoyment

As impact partners of the University of Sussex, we recently shared new evidence of the intertwined nature of empathy development, reading engagement and reading ability. The key findings from this research indicate that

Children who are better at understanding others' emotions become better readers

If we want to encourage more young people to read, the evidence is clear that having an empathy focus is a brilliant route into greater reading engagement. [Find out more here](#)

In this increasingly divided world, it's more important than ever that we nurture this ability and particularly consider the perspectives of those we disagree with, or who live very different lives to our own.



Join the empathy education movement

EMPATHYLAB'S MISSION is to raise empathy-educated generations, inspired to build a better world for everyone, aiming to reach and benefit 1 MILLION children a year by close of 2026.

Help us grow

EmpathyLab gives educators and caregivers the tools to turn empathy into action and nurture a love of reading.

If, like us, you believe that empathy matters, join the Empathy Education movement, and support us to:

- ★ Reach and benefit more children and young people every year
- ★ Train more teachers, librarians, parents and caregivers to supercharge shared reading
- ★ Campaign for empathy development to be included within formal education

Donate today

For just £3 per month, together we can make the world a better place for everyone. [Donate here](#)

Stay up to date

To find out more and be the first to hear about our latest news, events and training, sign up to our mailing list at empathylab.uk



EmpathyLab's Schools Programme

Love the festival and want to go deeper?

Our evidence-based programme helps schools embed empathy as a core value, practiced through reading. Schools report lasting improvements in wellbeing, social and emotional development, community cohesion and reading enjoyment.

Primary, secondary and SEND settings in England, Scotland and Wales are all part of our learning community. [Find out more.](#)

