

ELMER

EARLY YEARS
TOOLKIT &
RESOURCES FOR

EMPATHY
DAY
4 - 11 June 2026
FESTIVAL

Empathy
Lab

**GO
ALL
IN.**

National
Year of
Reading
2026

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 children 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. Even the very youngest children can flex their empathy muscles by exploring feelings, trying to understand others, and practising kindness.

The celebration is fully flexible, so you can get involved how and when you want to. From a full drop down day, to bitesize activity or fun table top tasks for families to try – use the Festival resources however you wish!



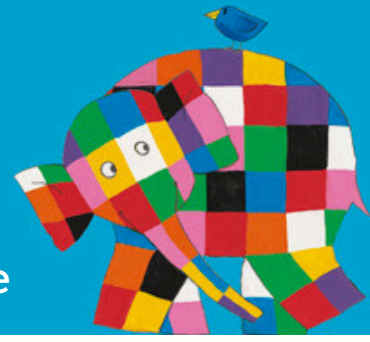
Your festival, your way

Start your planning now, for maximum impact in your setting



THREE easy ways to join in

- ★ **TAKE** the Empathy Challenge – nine creative empathy-themed activities
- ★ **WATCH** on demand author films
- ★ **RUN** your own empathy-themed Story or Rhyme Time



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 children, 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](#)

4. Watch author films on demand

- ★ FREE pre-recorded author & illustrator films – all available on demand from **18 May**, including a brand-new **Draw With Rob** and **Spark Empathy** films with **Rachel Bright** and **Cariad Lloyd & Tom Percival**



- ★ Listen to **Julia Donaldson** reading an extract of the brilliant *Room on the Broom*, celebrating its 25th anniversary [here](#)
[link <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sFyE1OZfhOc>]

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

- ★ **New Empathy Challenge** – nine fun and creative empathy-boosting activity ideas to help children develop their empathy skills. Activities can be aged up or down
- ★ **Printables** to support your activities – available from **10 April** [here](#) plus *Room on the Broom* activity sheets (in this pack) and a new **First Time Feelings** activity pack from Puffin (available at www.empathylab.uk from 5 May)
- ★ **2026 Read for Empathy collection** – expertly-curated reading recommendations to inspire your activity

6. Add a pin to the interactive festival map

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

7. Have your say!

Complete our evaluation after the festival

Take the Empathy Challenge



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!

Empathy Book Nook

Set up an empathy-themed book nook

Create a cosy corner with cushions and blankets and display books that focus on feelings and which invite children to jump into stories different to their own.

Children could draw emotions words to decorate the nook.

Add to your nook throughout the year, with new book choices.

Empathy Character

Explore feelings through stories

Using a soft toy or puppet, tell a story with simple emotions (happy, sad, worried, excited).

Invite children to mirror those feelings.

How they could make the puppet feel better? Take turns to comfort the toy through words or actions.

Connect

Empathy Superpower

Create Empathy Superhero Masks

Get crafty using our templates.

Set up a colourful display to celebrate everyone's brilliant designs. Host a short parade where older children share their empathy superpowers with their parent or carer.

The Big Lunch: Sharing Stories

Host a story-themed Big Lunch (5-8 June) in your setting or community.

Invite parents and carers in to share stories, food, fun and friendship.

In collaboration with



Empathy Story Time

Create an empathy-themed sensory box to explore understanding and caring for others

Select items, with only a few that can connect with your chosen story (e.g. a tissue if the character is sad, a plaster if they're hurt, or a cuddly toy to comfort them). As you read the story, explore which items are helpful and why.

Act

Empathy Bunting

Put empathy into action and create your own Empathy Day Festival bunting.

What small actions can YOU promise to take which will make things better for others?

Decorate the Empathy Day Festival bunting templates with drawings, scribbles or words that show what being kind means.

Empathy Exchange

Make a gift for someone

Whether it's creating a handmade card, making a simple bird feeder or painting a stone, set up a "Kindness Day" where everyone makes or does something kind for another person.

Take a look at our empathy post card templates, or make your own.

Empathy Tree

Celebrate the good things in your setting or community

Stick or paint a large tree on a wall and attach pre-made leaves every time someone says or does something kind for another person.

Write or draw on the leaf to remind you why the leaf is being added, then watch together as your tree grows its beautiful leaves.



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. Turn your space into a story-sharing hub

Invite everyone 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.

3. 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.



4. 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.

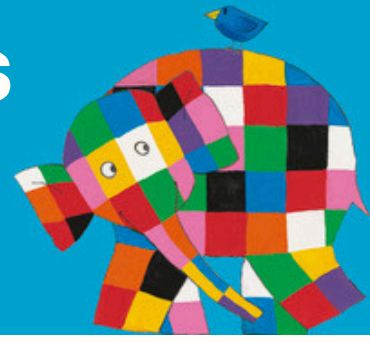


5. Arrange a Big Help Out activity

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



Jump into someone else's story RHYME TIME



Rhyme Time is a simple, fun and engaging activity particularly suited to Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS).

Our theme for this year's Empathy Day Festival is all about connection and encouraging children to jump into someone else's story and, through character and rhyme, young children can begin to develop empathy and explore the feelings of others in a gentle and enjoyable way.

We have a selection of rhymes for you to choose from, and encourage you to use as many as you have time for.

How to run a 'jump into someone else's story' rhyme time

Before you begin, and if available, gather some props. Dressing-up clothes and hats, scarves, toys, or child-friendly musical instruments work well, but avoid anything too loud that may hurt sensitive ears.

- 1. Choose your rhymes**
We recommend keeping each rhyme to just one simple verse so it's easy to remember, and choose what is most age-appropriate for the group.
- 2. Welcome everyone to the space**
Let them know that they are part of the Empathy Day Festival. Briefly explain that they will be learning about other people's feelings through rhyming stories.
- 3. Introduce this year's theme: jump into someone else's story**
Explain that before you start, you are going to need their help. Invite those who are able, to do their biggest jump and younger children or children that need to remain seated, to wave or clap instead.
- 4. Speak or sing the rhyme**
The first time through to introduce the sound, pattern and rhyme. Repeat it a second time all together. You may need to do it a few times or one line at a time.
- 5. Share your props and lead actions or movement to bring the rhyme to life**
Then together, explore and enact the different ways you can all help the character.

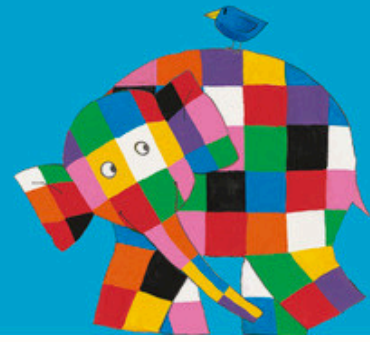
TOP TIPS

- ★ Always speak at a slow and steady pace and model emotions with big gestures and clear facial expressions
- ★ Keep it short, simple and interactive



Connect and jump into someone else's story

RHYME TIME



Rhyme

What can we do to help?

Incey Wincey Spider

Incey is all soggy from the rain. But making big circles with your arms like the sun will help to dry up the rain, then fingers can be Incey climbing back up again.

Humpty Dumpty

Use a toy as Humpty and work together as a group to help make Humpty feel better again. You could use a pretend plaster, a gentle hug or share some kind words to cheer Humpty up.

Jack and Jill

Act out being Jack and Jill, then talk about what they might need to feel better after their tumble. Pretend to rub a sore arm or leg, and ask everyone to check that their friends are okay.

Little Miss Muffet

All pretend to be Miss Muffet, eating curds and whey and look scared or move away when Spider comes near. But what if Spider just wants to be her friend and becomes sad? Seeing this everyone offers to share their curds and whey to make Spider feel welcome.

Grand Old Duke of York

Some of the group are feeling very tired after all that marching up and down the hill but they're too far away from home to have a good rest. Perhaps others in the group can help by making them a cup of tea and a snack?

I Hear Thunder

Model being scared of the thunder, or use a toy to demonstrate, then explore how kind, comforting words can help someone feel better. Share a pretend umbrella with a friend or offer them a towel to dry off if they're getting soaking wet.

We would love to see what rhymes you are sharing and enjoying for the Empathy Day Festival! Show us your favourites on social media, tagging @EmpathyLabUK & #EmpathyDayFestival

Room on the Broom

Match the feelings

As the witch and her friends soar through the sky, they discover a few surprises! From the joy of finding a lost hat to the fright of meeting a hungry dragon, our favourite characters feel a lot of different things.

Match the key moments from the story with the emotions they might have felt along the way, drawing a line to connect them.



The witch and her cat fly through the wind



The witch's broom snaps in two



The dog finds the witch's hat



The witch thanks her friends



The witch's friends face the scary dragon



The witch loses her hat

Grateful

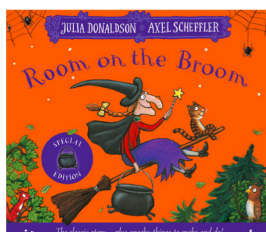
Brave

Sad

Happy

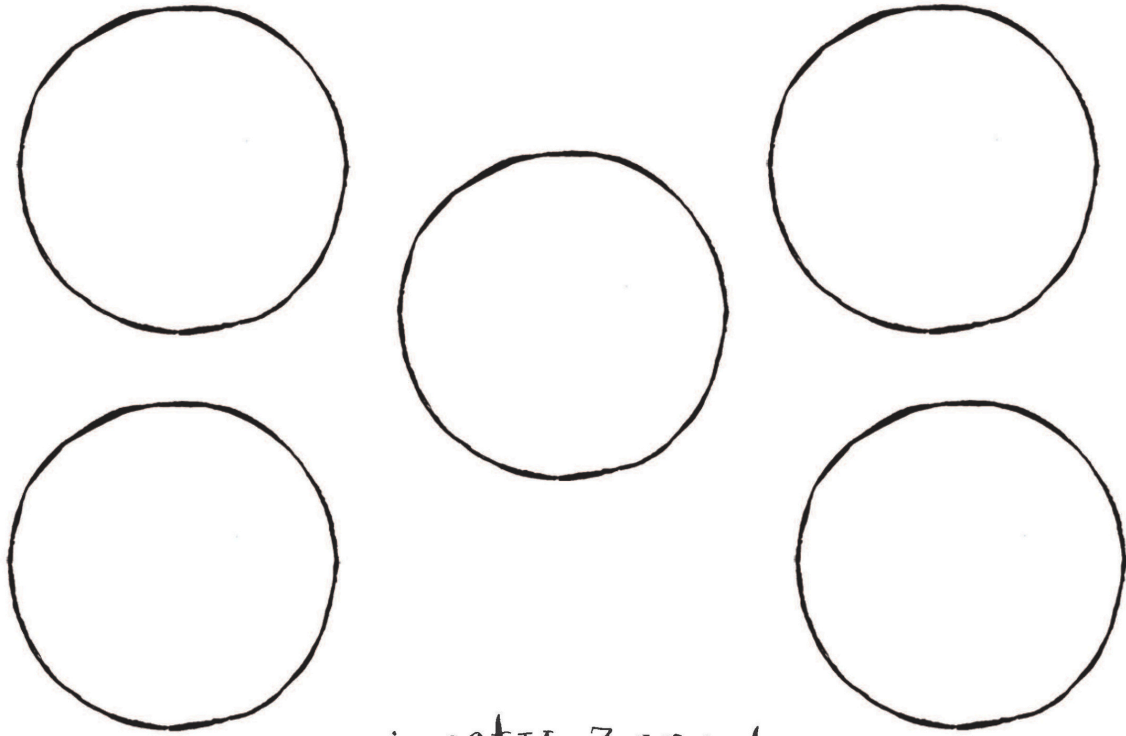
Scared

Proud

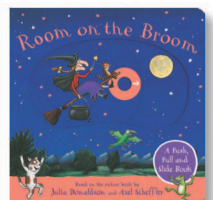
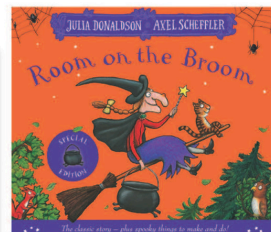


Cast a Magic Spell!

Draw the things that you would put into a cauldron.

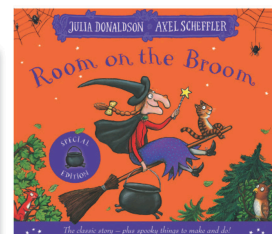


Iggety, ziggety, zaggety, ZOOM!



JULIA DONALDSON * AXEL SCHEFFLER

Get Colouring!

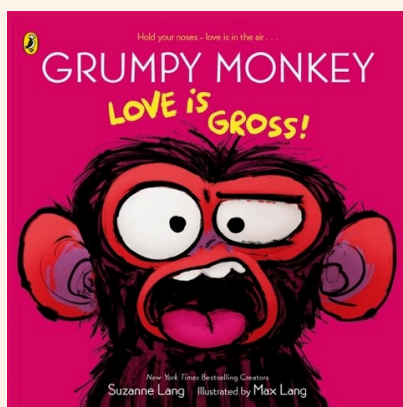
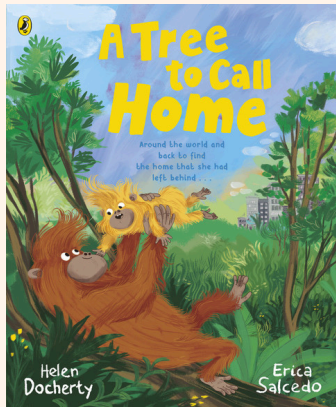
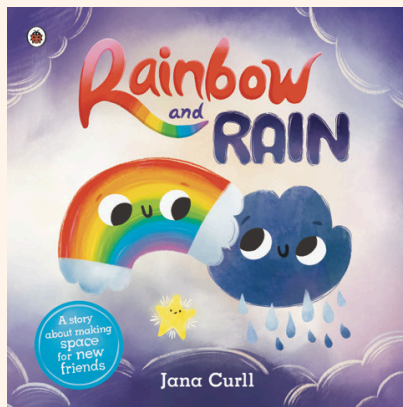
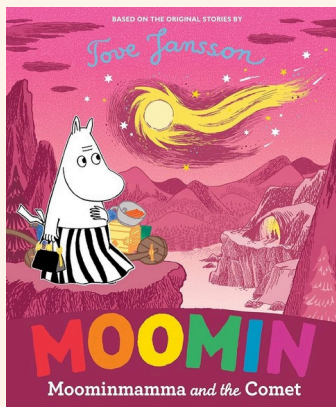


Room on the Broom © Julia Donaldson and Axel Scheffler 2001, 2023 - Macmillan Children's Books



Let's explore First Time Feelings!

Understanding and sharing feelings is a key empathy skill, which can be developed from the earliest age. EmpathyLab are delighted to partner with Puffin Books to share a selection of picture books which help young children, their families and caregivers explore 'first time feelings' together, with accompanying new resources.



Did you know?

Picture books and shared reading can help us understand challenges, new feelings and first-times as children experience them, helping families and children to navigate our complex world.

First Time Feelings

This gorgeous selection of picture books explores themes experienced by young children, including **belonging & inclusion, how to navigate sensitive home lives & unique settings, anxiety & nervousness, anger & mood management** and more.

Calling budding reader reviewers!

The theme of this year's Empathy Day Festival is 'jump into someone else's story', and Puffin Books are inviting you to join them in doing just that, **by reading and reviewing one of the five books on the 2026 First Time Feelings list**. If you'd like to apply to receive a FREE copy in exchange for an honest review, follow @PuffinBooksUK and @EmpathyLabUK and look out for a post with more details.

FREE First Time Feelings activity pack

PLUS download our **brand new activity pack**, featuring a complementary activity sheet for each book, to help you explore the story's themes and characters and bring them to life in your setting or at home. Available from **5 May**.

WIN a £100 library of Puffin picture books!

Puffin are generously offering **FIVE** lucky settings the chance to win **£100** of **empathy-boosting picture books EACH**. Simply share a photo of any of your Empathy Day Festival activity or displays with us **by 12 June** and we will choose our three favourites and announce them on the 19th.

Email entries to empathyday@empathylab.uk with the subject **First Time Feelings**. Ts&cs apply.



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.](#)

