



Welcome to the Empathy Day Festival!

The Festival takes place all across the UK and around the world. last year over 800,000 children and young people took part in schools, libraries, community centres and families across the world.



The aim of the festival is for everyone, everywhere to jump into someone else's story

Stories connect us to ourselves, with others and to the wider world



Stories connect us.

This helps us to understand each other better.

Award-winning author SF Said explains how in the upcoming film.

SF Said is author of *Varjak Paw* and its sequel *The Outlaw Varjak Paw* which won Blue Peter Book of the Year.

His novels *Phoenix* and *Tyger* have both been nominated for multiple awards, and *Tyger* won Children's Book of the Year and The Week Junior Book Awards.



Empathy Day Festival Assembly 2026 with S.F Said
EmpathyLab

EMPATHY DAY FESTIVAL



Watch on  YouTube
EmpathyLab

Think of a story...

- ★ Where you met a character who was similar to you
- ★ Where a character's story helped you understand a situation you haven't experienced yourself
- ★ Which has changed your mind about something



Stories are a really brilliant way to build connections and help us understand others.

Can you think of a story where you met a character that was similar to you? What did you notice about them? Did it help you understand yourself a bit better?

Have you read a story where you've met a character facing a situation you've not experienced yourself? How did you feel or think as you saw the story through their eyes?

Can you think of a story which has opened you up to new ideas, or changed your mind about someone? Perhaps the characters' experiences helped you understand something from a perspective different to your own?

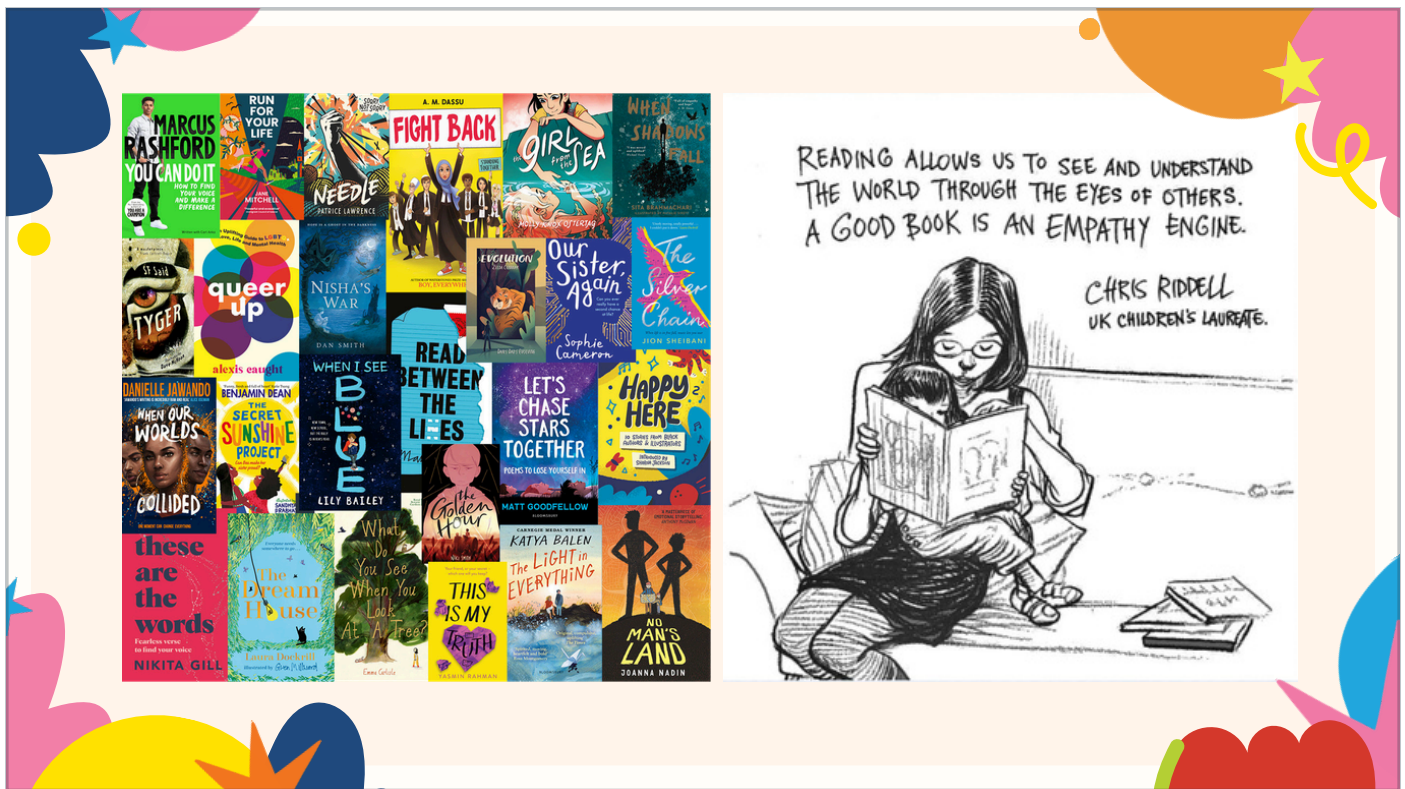


We can think of books in lots of different ways.

Books can be mirrors which reflect ourselves and help us untangle our own feelings and emotions as we see ourselves in the character.

Books can also be windows which allows us to see into the lives of people very different to us, and understand the world for a different perspective.

Books can be many other things too - look at all the different ideas here. How could a book be a stepping stone, or warm blanket? Have a discussion about which books readers see as blankets, escape hatches or anchors, etc.



At EmpathyLab we think of books as a kind of training ground for getting to know others.

Even if you are completely different from a character in every single way imaginable, you can still experience the world the way they do and understand how they feel.

This makes books empathy engines - they help us build empathy.

but what is empathy?

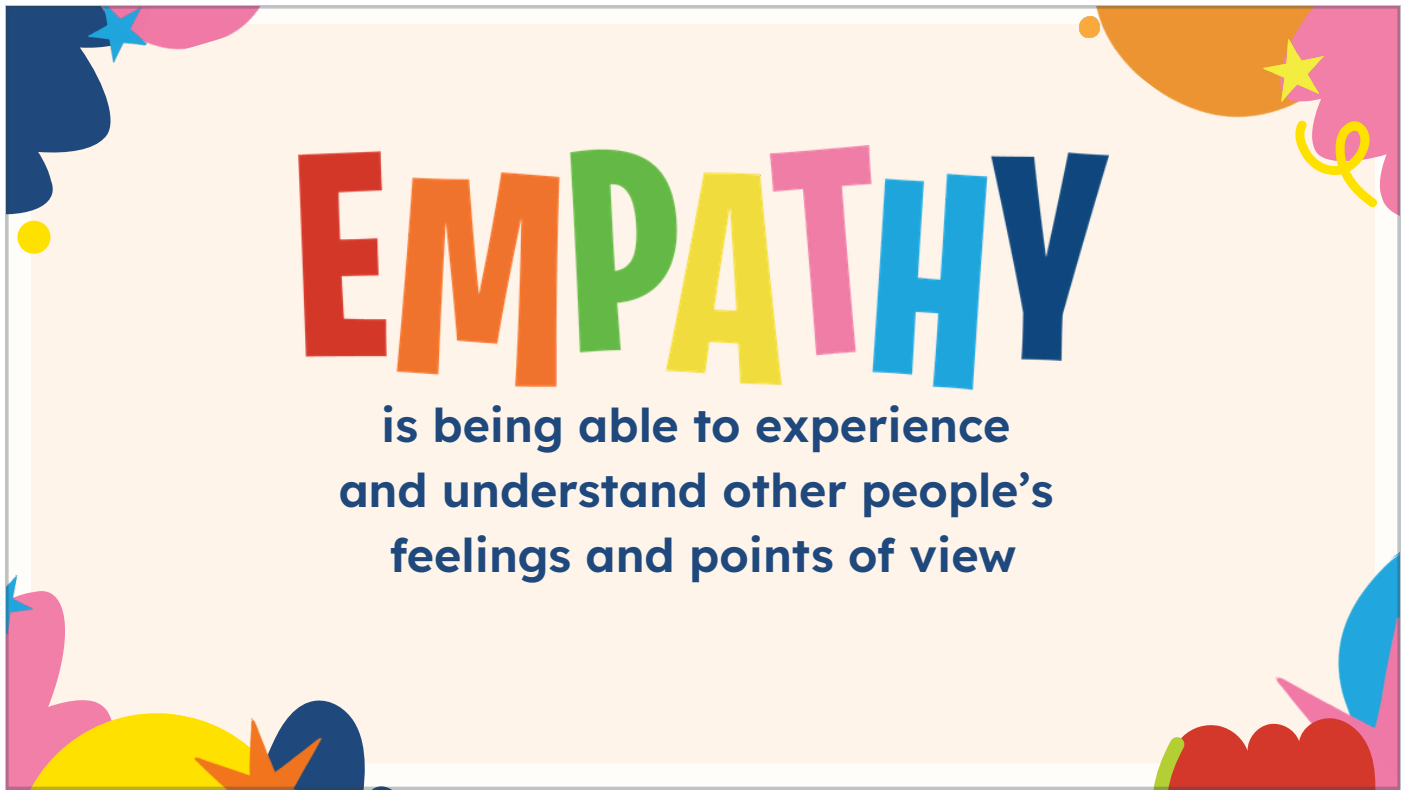


As you watch this short film think about what mark uses to show Murray what empathy is and how it works.

After the film:

discuss the ways in which Mark showed Murray what empathy is - by using a story and helping him to imagine the situation and 'feel with' him

For older students you may like to discuss the idea that we can't ever understand 'exactly' how the other person feels - but we can try to understand, take the time to do this, and books can really help us with this.



This is the definition of empathy that we use at EmpathyLab.

It's important that we try to understand people feelings AND their points of view.

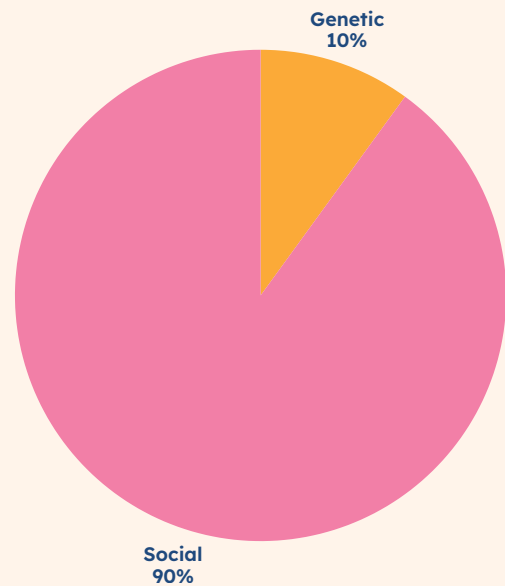
How would you describe empathy? People often talk about 'walking in someone else's shoes' can you think of your own metaphor to describe empathy?

We'll discuss later about why empathy matters.

Empathy is a learnable skill – empathetic people are **MADE** not born

★ 10% of empathy is genetic

✳ 90% is from social factors



The good news is that empathy is a learnable skill!

It is very much nurture over nature - our families, teachers, and other adults can all help us build our empathy.

And you can grow your empathy at any time in your life. In fact at EmpathyLab we think of it as something you have to keep practising throughout our lives.

With older students:

discuss what the social and environmental factors might be - they might want to reflect on how they are influenced by parents, friends, the media, influencers, etc



There are three main elements of empathy.

Feeling: we feel with others. This often happens quite naturally. When we see someone else feeling something like happiness or anger, we feel a bit of that emotion too.

Thinking: We use our brains and, importantly, our brilliant imaginations to try and work out how someone else feels and why.

Acting: Because we understand their feelings and points of view, either through experiencing or imagining, we are inspired to take action, perhaps to help someone or be kind. The action part is very important because that's how things change for the better.

Why does empathy matter?

When we build connection and understanding, we...

Improve our happiness

**Strengthen our friendships –
even if we don't always agree**

Recognise and celebrate our differences

Create a kinder world



So why does building our empathy matter?

When we strengthen our connections to others, and try to understand their feelings and experiences, we:

Improve our own happiness: strong relationships = positive mental health

Strengthen our friendships - we don't always have to agree or get along, but empathy can help us disagree whilst still remaining friends because we understand why they feel as they do.

Empathy really helps us to recognise our differences and to celebrate these as strengths - after all what would the world be like if everyone was exactly the same?!

And empathy helps us create a kinder world. By understanding others we can take action to make things better for everyone.



During the Empathy Day Festival (4-11 June) there are all sorts of ways to jump into someone else's story, connect with others through books, and build your empathy skills.

This short film features all the authors and illustrators you can meet during the Festival - whose story will you jump into next?