

Read For Empathy

Empathy is our ability to understand and experience someone else's feelings. It builds stronger, kinder communities. Empathy is a skill we can all learn and when young people identify with book characters, they learn to see things from others' points of view. As they read, they are building their empathy skills.

The Light in Everything by Katya Balen 10+



Tom and Zofia, two young people coping differently with trauma, are thrown together when their parents fall in love. Pain, anger, fear and shame are sensitively depicted in this beautifully crafted story about diving into the unknown with trust and love.

The Secret Sunshine Project by Benjamin Dean 10+



A celebration of family, friendship, courage, identity and love. The story opens with a grieving family, but, through Bea's understanding for her older sister, ends with a joyous celebration of Pride that brings a community together and transcends hate.

No Man's Land by Joanna Nadin 10+



In a time of conflict Adam and Sam are sent to safety, but Adam is unhappy as his world view is challenged and he risks being radicalised. A thought provoking exploration of the impact of war on families, friendship, communities and countries.

Fight Back by A. M. Dassu 11+



Aaliyah experiences racism following a terrorist attack. She and her friends decide to demonstrate how a diverse and inclusive community can stand together. The story explores how tribal thinking shatters lives, and the powerful leadership role young people can play in challenging hate.

When I See Blue by Lily Bailey 11+



Ben has OCD. His first-person narration is so powerful that we acutely feel his agony as he is dominated by voices in his head. Building a deeply empathetic friendship with April develops his self-esteem in this warm, funny, sensitive novel.

Boy, Everywhere by A. M. Dassu 11+



13-year-old Sami has a privileged, peaceful life in Damascus, full of football and computer games. But in a flash all this is gone, and his family have to flee Syria. We have visceral insights into the terror experienced by refugees and asylum seekers, and are moved to tears by the way Sami and his family are always trying to help others.

Needle by Patrice Lawrence **13+**



Patrice Lawrence really helps readers get under the skin of her characters, and in this book we meet Charlene, a traumatised teenager. We understand why she is so angry, but we also see how she appears to those on the outside. Unflinching and very moving.

Read Between the Lies by Malcolm Duffy **13+**



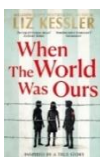
Two boys in a newly blended family seemingly have nothing in common, until they discover they both have dyslexia. Brilliantly depicted characters give insight into the challenges of this condition. This is a must-read with a heart-stopping denouement.

Splinters of Sunshine by Patrice Lawrence **13+**



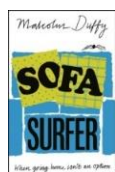
Richly drawn characters are key to this book, which tackles life's realities for so many young people. Issues of family breakdown, prison, racism and county lines are woven together in a mystery story about understanding each other, forgiveness and love.

When the World Was Ours by Liz Kessler **13+**



A powerful story told from the separate viewpoints of three best friends in Germany as war begins. It demonstrates how hatred turns to extremism and how humanity is so easily shattered when tribal behaviour takes hold. Empathy is the antidote to tribalism.

Sofa Surfer by Malcolm Duffy **13+**



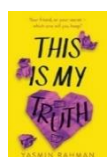
Tyler's life is disrupted by meeting Spider, who is homeless, and becoming anxious about her. We connect with Tyler's desperation to help her and through strongly drawn characters gain new insights into hidden homelessness. Thoughtful novel.

When Shadows Fall by Sita Brahmachari **13+**



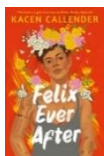
Grief, mental health and the importance of nature are interwoven in this complex and very emotional book. The central character, Kai, is in a maelstrom of family trauma that very nearly overwhelms him. Loyal friendship provides comfort and some healing.

This Is My Truth by Yasmin Rahman **14+**



An unflinching exploration of how domestic violence affects a family through fear and shame. While Amani's story is centre stage, her friend Huda's hidden emotions are also revealed. An insightful story showing how hard it can be to seek help, and the devastating impact of secrets.

Felix Ever After by Kacen Callender **14+**



Felix is a young trans man, exploring an identity he doesn't quite understand. A deeply felt, authentic depiction of the impact bullying and misunderstanding can have on a vulnerable teenager, and a celebration of empathetic friendship.

And the Stars Were Burning Brightly by Danielle Jawando **14+**



Nathan is 15, and his brother Al has just committed suicide. Agonisingly, he and friend Megan try to find out why. Written with such empathy that we too experience the fury, guilt and grief of those left behind. Ultimately a celebration of life.

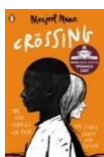
Free Verse Novels

Little Light by Coral Rumble **11+**



Ava is enchanting, collecting friends wherever she goes but her life is challenging as her family escapes an abusive situation. This heart-warming verse novel gives us a sense of how love and empathy can make a difference to traumatised children.

The Crossing by Manjeet Mann **13+**



A brilliant verse novel told from the perspectives of British teenager Natalie and refugee Sammy who is struggling to reach UK shores. We become deeply involved in characters who feel all too real, making this a profound and unsettling read.

Gloves Off by Louisa Reid **13+**



This verse novel explores body image, self-confidence and bullying that explodes into brutal violence. Lily and her mother Bernadette are victims of an unforgiving society. Experiencing life in their shoes may just make us think before we rush to judge others

The Silver Chain by Jion Sheibani **14+**



Azadeh struggles with her mum's mental illness, supporting her father and making space for music in this beautiful verse novel. We get a deep sense of Azadeh's turmoil and distress as she tries to maintain an external impression of normality.

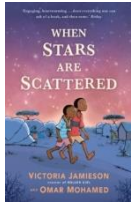
Punching the Air by Ibi Zoboi & Yusef Salaam **14+**



Based on true miscarriage-of-justice events, this is the story of Amal, a black teenager whose life has been blighted by racism and prejudice. An exceptional firstperson verse novel through which we experience Amal's dreams, regrets and memories. A visceral experience of the impact a lack of empathy and understanding has on people who are unjustly treated.

Graphic Novels

When Stars Are Scattered by Victoria Jamieson & Omar Mohamed 10+



A beautiful, empathetic graphic novel about Omar, a Somali boy separated from his mother, stranded for years in a Kenyan refugee camp and struggling to care for his younger brother. We get right inside his head, living through his ambitions and frustrations as he yearns to be educated and leave the camp. In the moving end pages, we discover it's all based on a true story, and that the brothers are thriving in America.

The Sad Ghost Club by Lize Meddings 11+



Themes of loneliness, isolation and belonging are reflected in this unusual graphic novel. It conveys the powerfully compassionate message that it's OK to feel sad and go through difficult times, and celebrates empathetic friendship.

Non-fiction

Black and British by David Olusoga 10+



A revealing history of British black heritage from the Romans onwards. We are horrified by the cruelty and racism displayed to black people, grateful to those who felt empathy and fought for justice. A fight that continues!

Silence Is Not an Option by Stuart Lawrence 12+



Empathy often underpins our desire to make a difference. Stuart Lawrence is the brother of murdered Stephen Lawrence, and in this powerful non-fiction book, he gives young people tools to 'stand up, speak out, be the difference.'