



# The World Needs More Empathy

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[Miranda McKearney](#) [1]

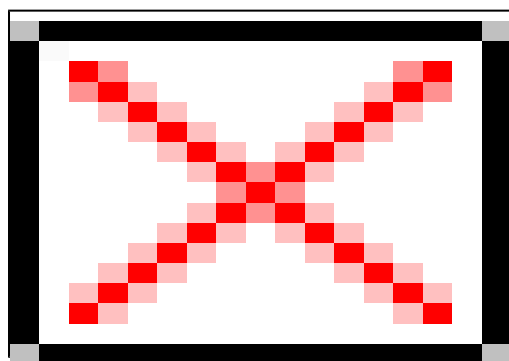
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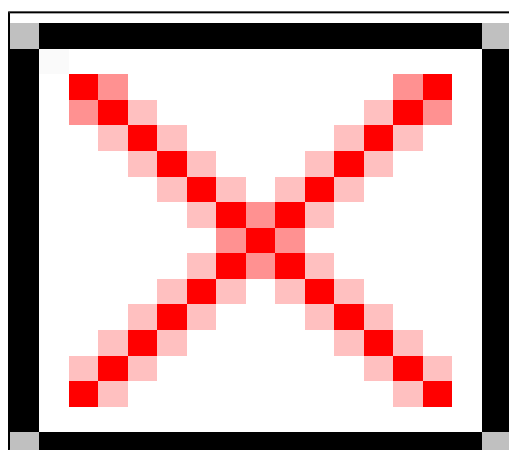
A report on **Empathy Day 2019** by those involved

A report on **Empathy Day 2019** by **EmpathyLab** founder **Miranda McKearney** and others involved in this exciting new campaign.

**EmpathyLab** founded **Empathy Day** in 2017, and since then it has taken off in an extraordinary way. On 11 June, hundreds of thousands of children experienced empathy-focused activities, in schools, libraries, bookshops and children's centres, and there was a virtual sonic boom with #EmpathyDay trending at number one on Twitter for most of the Day. There's clearly something powerful in the message - the world needs more empathy, and we can use stories to build it.



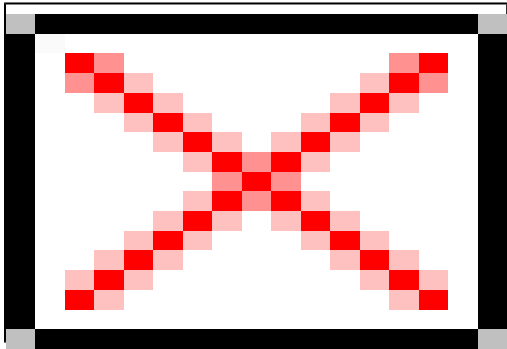
**Professor Robin Banerjee, School of Psychology, University of Sussex** says: "If you are interested in fostering children's wellbeing and resilience, research suggests that empathy should be a key priority. All too often, social and emotional education is treated as a bolt-on to the usual school curriculum. EmpathyLab's potent strategy integrates empathy education into everyday literacy and literature teaching; that's why I have been involved with supporting the organisation and its 11 pioneer schools since the very start. If you're interested in this area, do read EmpathyLab's recent impact report. It presents compelling evidence that using literature to educate for empathy not only can foster empathy skills and well-being, but has a key role to play in raising literacy standards and wider school improvement.



**Professor Teresa Cremin, Faculty of Wellbeing and Education, Open University:** The fact that Empathy day 2019 was celebrated in thousands of schools across the country this year and was trending on Twitter reflects the enthusiastic professional response to the work of **EmpathyLab**. Needed now more than ever, empathy is a life skill we cannot afford to ignore.

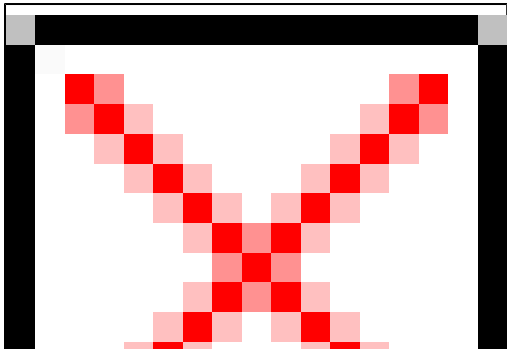
**Empathy Day** drew thousands of young people and adults together into conversations about their own and others' lives and values. Making connections through literature offers so many possibilities for both understanding other's situations and doing something, for pro-social action. This above all we surely need to press forward on.

It was a privilege to join the **Empathy Day** debate in Piccadilly this year, nudging us all to ponder on the bubbles we inhabit and the positions we take for granted. As the debate reminded us literature enables us to wear others' shoes, live their lives vicariously, and learn.

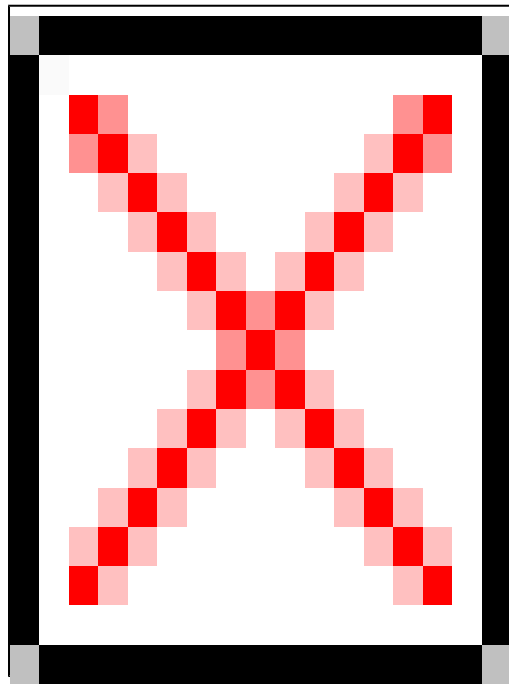


**Rachel Snape, Headteacher/National Leader of Education, The Spinney School, Cambridge:** We have loved being a partner school with EmpathyLab. The quality and experience of the training including the inputs from authors, teachers, publishers, academics, and researchers has been second to none. My colleagues have had time to make broader connections, linking books and stories to eternal human themes and to think about how to shape the curriculum to prompt deeper learning as well as inspire social action. My colleagues have loved it and have run with it! We celebrated our Big Write today with children sharing poems they had written in class. The quality of the writing as well as the sensitivity in the characterisation is of a level I am not sure we had before joining this partnership. **EmpathyLab** is having a positive impact in our school, not just on the children but importantly on how our teachers feel about the types of experiences they can offer. As my fabulous colleague Yvonne Hartley says, "EmpathyLab is a return to what teaching should be" it inspires such a natural, meaningful and enjoyable way of teaching and learning. There is such a buzz around the school."

Empathy helps us to connect with others and is what motivates us to take action to make the world a better place. At the Spinney School we really value the impact that EmpathyLab has on academic outcomes, the influence it has on relationships throughout the school and the development of pro-social skills such as collaboration, responsible citizenship and conflict resolution. It's a win-win!



**Louise Johns-Shepherd, CEO, Centre for Literacy in Primary Education:** When we first heard about **EmpathyLab** it was just a seed of an idea that was being tested out ? but it made so much sense to us at CLPE. It chimed with our work in so many ways and we were keen to support the development and the nurturing of the idea that books and stories could be used to teach empathy skills. During the time we've been involved as a partner it has grown from a seedling into a beautiful sunflower of a programme and we've been so pleased to see the developments ? and the amazing impact it is having in schools. The work that **EmpathyLab** are doing to highlight the connection between reading and developing empathy is so important, particularly at the moment, and we are very proud to have been a tiny part of what has become an exciting movement. We are looking forward to seeing it blossom even more and spread empathy across the UK.



**S E Durrant, author:** Thousands of children took part in **Empathy Day** 2019 and I was delighted [Running on Empty](#) [3] was one of the recommended reads. My protagonist, AJ, cares for his parents, who have learning difficulties, while at the same time grieving for his grandad and dreaming of running on the Olympic track. Although AJ's situation is unique, I wanted him to be as relatable as possible. Children might empathise with his love of running, his anxiety or his relationships with his family, but from these small connections they learn to empathize with his whole character and situation.

While working in schools, I see fiction enable children to understand the emotions of others. Stories allow children to be immersed in another person's experience in a way they can't in real life. If children can see some aspect of themselves reflected in a character they will be better able to understand that character's wider story. It is clear that empathy is essential and, as demonstrated by EmpathyLab, boosting it is very achievable. The invitation to walk in someone else's shoes is at the heart of Empathy Day and is a reminder that beyond our individual stories we are all human.

**EmpathyLab**'s strategy is based on scientific evidence that reading builds empathy, and alongside **Empathy Day**, it is developing a schools programme to harness that potential more fully. A recent [impact report](#) [4] has evidence of the programme's impact on children's empathy and literacy skills, their social activism and wellbeing. It also shows an impact on school improvement, standards and ethos. To get involved, teachers can attend a training day on the research behind our approach, and practical ideas for delivering empathy-focused education and events. Led by Founder Miranda McKearney OBE, it takes place on 19 November.

There are linked resources which schools and libraries can continue to use [including Toolkits](#) [5], check out the amazing [empathy-themed illustrations](#) [6], and use the [authors' blogs](#) [7] for inspiration and as a teaching resource. Use the 2019 [Read For Empathy Guides](#) [8] and you can watch a wonderful empathy themed [StoryMakers Show](#) [9] from Puffin.

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**Links:**

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