

URL of Website: <https://www.oxfordsd.org/Page/9375>

Theme: Empathy

Introduction:

I picked empathy as the theme of my list to create a resource list for English I teachers that identifies additional materials to enrich their thematic unit, “Finding My Voice.” Specially, I was charged with identifying library resources that teach students about empathy. Since the texts in this unit deal with sensitive subjects, empathy is an important skill students for students to understand. It is a skill that is learned over time through exposure. More texts to supplement the readings provides additional opportunities to explore the concept of empathy more thoroughly to provide students more time to absorb the material and think about it in a critical way. This resource list includes both fiction and non-fiction materials as well as links to related items. It is intended to supplement the required texts: “How Literature Can Help Us Develop Empathy” by Beth Ann Fennelly [video]; “The Scarlet Ibis” by James Hurst [short story]; *Speak* by Laurie Halse Anderson [novel]; and “Still I Rise” [poem] by Maya Angelo.

5 Books & Their Summaries

Non-fiction

1. Fletcher, A. (2021). *Wonderworks: The 25 Most Powerful Inventions in the History of Literature*. New York: Simon & Schuster. (Note: A link to the e-book will be added when the title is catalogued.)

Fletcher’s book argues that literature is a technology that writers, throughout history, have used to create stories for the purpose of moral/ethical instruction. Through these stories, writers explored moral/ethical ideas that “invented” our understanding of concepts, like empathy. Through the study of classical literature, readers can discover the stories that have shaped mankind’s concept of moral/ethical behavior and led to the development of emotional intelligence. While there is not a chapter dedicated specifically to one of the required texts in this unit, excerpts from the following sections can supplement instruction in Unit 2 or Unit 3.

a. Background Knowledge

1. Preface: A Heaven of Invention
2. Introduction: The Lost Technology

b. Examples in Literature

1. Chapter 1: Rally Your Courage: Homer’s Iliad and the Invention of the Almighty Heart

2. Chapter 3: Exit Anger: The Book of Job, Sophocles' Oedipus Tyrannus, and the Invention of the Empathy Generator
3. Chapter 22: Believe in Yourself: Maya Angelou's I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings and the Invention of Choose Your Own Accomplice
4. Conclusion: Inventing Tomorrow
5. Coda: The Secret History of This Book

2. Garrett, H.J. (2020). *This Book Will Make You Kinder: An Empathy Handbook*. New York: Penguin Random House. (Note: A link to the e-book will be added when the title is catalogued.)



This is an adult book with illustrations that seeks to answer two questions: “Why are you kind at all, and, Why aren’t you kinder” (Garrett, 2020). The topic of empathy is discussed in this book as it relates to kindness. It weaves together Garrett’s research in metaethics and empathy and “use[s] his warm drawings of all kinds of animals to express thoughtful ideas about wellness, social justice, equality, LGBT identity, and more,” (Henry James Garrett, n.d.). This book discusses philosophical and science topics, which can be difficult for any reader to understand. However, the use of humor and illustrations makes the book accessible for both teens and adults. Even though the ideas are complex, the book is written in mostly simple sentences that are easy to read and not “academic.” Possible classroom applications include the following: use as a literature circle selection for students; use excerpts for whole class discussion; use illustrations to make thematic connections with texts. Another option is for

teachers to read the book to develop their own background knowledge and originate ideas for teaching.

3. Slater, Dashka. (2017). *The 57 Bus*. New York: Farrar Straus Giroux.



The 57 Bus tells the true story about a real incident that happened in 2013, involving two teenagers from Oakland, CA. Each day the two teens took the same eight minute bus ride home from different schools. Sasha is a white, middle class, transgender teen. Richard is a black, poor 17 year old teen. One day on the bus ride home, Richard intentionally set Sasha’s skirt on fire as a prank. Sasha is severely burned in the incident. Richard is charged as an adult with a hate crime and faces life in prison for the incident. Issues of social justice for LGBTQA people and incarcerated black teenagers are interwoven through the events of Richard and Sasha’s story. Possible classroom applications include the following: use as a literature circle selection for students or use excerpts for whole class discussion. The related [New York Times](#) article could also be incorporated.

[4. Anderson, Laurie H.\(2019\). *Shout : a Poetry Memoir*. New York: Viking.](#)



In Anderson’s memoir, she describes her childhood experiences that influenced her fictional novels like *Speak*. Anderson was sexually assaulted as a teenager and struggled to heal from her trauma. She eventually turned to writing as a way to process and heal from her experience.

Fiction

Picture Book for Pre-Reading

[5. Peña, Matt de la. \(2015\). *Last Stop on Market Street*. United Kingdom: Puffin.](#)

Last Stop on Market Street is a children’s book that promotes empathy through the story a grandmother and grandson’s visit to a soup kitchen where they meet a blind man. Nana and CJ travel by bus after church one Sunday to the last stop on the Market Street to serve food at a soup kitchen. CJ does not understand the purpose of the trip or why his grandmother rides the bus. The different perspectives of the two characters are juxtaposed throughout the ride. The story ends with the boy meeting a blind man and discovering that seeing with your eyes is only way to experience the world. This book can be used as an introduction to Unit 2 by providing a simple, concrete way to introduce the concept of empathy.

YA Novels for Literature Circles

6. [The Poet X by Elizabeth Acevedo](#)



7. [Little & Lion by Brandy Colbert](#)



8. [The Perks of Being a Wallflower by Stephen Chbosky](#)



9. [Long Way Down](#) by Jason Reynolds



10. [Punching the Air](#) by Ibi Zoboi



Graphic Novels to Consider

11. [Long Way Down: The Graphic Novel](#) by Jason Reynolds



12. [Speak: The Graphic Novel](#) by Laurie Halse Anderson



13. [Teen Titans: Beast Boy](#) by Kami Garcia



14. [The Scarlet Ibis \(comic\)](#).

5 Websites, Movies, Games & Their Summaries:

Websites About Empathy

1. **Cherry, K. (2022 October 11). What is empathy? Verywell mind.**
<https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-empathy-2795562>

This article covers the basics of empathy. A definition of empathy is provided along with information about the signs, types, uses, pitfalls, impact, barriers, causes of empathy. The article concludes with tips for practicing empathy. Links to related articles on the Verywell Mind website are provided to give readers more information on empathy related resources.

2. **Schmidt, M. (2020 August 28). How reading fiction increases empathy and encourages understanding. Discover.** <https://www.discovermagazine.com/mind/how-reading-fiction-increases-empathy-and-encourages-understanding>

[Schmidt's article](#) describes how reading fiction influences the development of empathy in readers. While reading fiction, people are able to experience people and circumstances that differ from one's own. Through this interaction between the reader and the story, we learn about different perspectives and develop empathy for other people and their experiences. This article can be used along with Beth Ann Fennelly's Ted Talk, "How Literature Can Help Us Develop Empathy."

Videos/Movies

3. **San Diego Zoo Kids. (n.d.). Bright beautiful scarlet ibis [video].**
<https://youtu.be/Mj9OiKGoPcc>

This video describes the Scarlet Ibis bird. It includes video footage of the bird and describes why it is red. The video also explains what it eats and where it lives. This short video may help students develop mental images necessary to understand the significance of the bird in the short story, "The Scarlet Ibis" by James Hurst.

4. **Brown, B. (n.d.). Brené brown on empathy [video].**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Ewgu369Jw5>

Brené Brown is a psychologist who studies vulnerability. This video defines empathy and explains the difference between empathy and sympathy. She goes on to describe what empathy is and what it looks like. The purpose of empathy is to create connection among people. This video can be used by teachers to develop background knowledge. Students may benefit by viewing the [kid friendly version](#) created by a teacher for use in her classroom; this version simplifies Brown's video to make it more accessible to students.

5. **Common Sense Media. Movies that inspire empathy.**
<https://www.common Sense Media.org/lists/movies-that-inspire-empathy>

Classroom Activities

6. **Baron_Cohen, S. (n.d.) Social intelligence test. Lab in the Wild.**
<http://socialintelligence.labinthewild.org/mite/>

“Reading the Mind in the Eyes Test” was developed by Sir Simon Phipp Baron-Cohen, a British psychologist and professor of developmental psychology at the University of Cambridge. His research on autism led to the creation of his theory of mindblindness that explains why autistic individuals lack empathy for others. The website explains that “This test will investigate your ability to read emotion from the eyes.” The test has 37 questions. In each question participants are shown a pair of eyes with four emotions labeled in each corner. Participants are asked “to select which one of the four emotion words best describes the emotion that the eyes are showing.” It took me about 10 minutes to complete the test. Students may be unfamiliar with some of the words used to describe an emotion, like the term *bewildered*.

7. The Teacher’s Guild. (2017). Empathy in your classroom: Try these activities to build empathy and community. Oakland.edu.

<https://www.oakland.edu/Assets/Oakland/galileo/files-and-documents/Empathy%20in%20Your%20Classroom%20Teachers%20Guild.pdf>

8. Common Sense Education. (n.d.). Games that build social and emotional skills.

<https://www.commonsense.org/education/top-picks/games-that-build-social-and-emotional-skills>

9. [The Empathy Game: A Card Game That Brings People Together](#)