

## Empathy Day Presentation by Penny Chrimes



### CHUNK 1

Hi - I'm Penny Chrimes and I'm the author of two books about a gang of street children in round-about Victorian London. Here they are - Tiger Heart and The Dragon and her Boy. I'll be reading bits from both books later.

You might wonder why I started this with a picture of old boots.

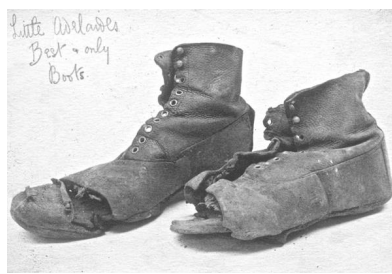
Well something called Empathy Day is happening this week - to encourage us all to think about empathy and why we all need it. And the theme this year is Walking in Someone Else's shoes.

Empathy is really important for writers. Because having empathy is all about imagination, and as you all know from writing stories yourselves, you have to have imagination to write a really good story.

When you write a story, it is like practising what it might feel like being somebody else.

And when you read a story the very best books make you feel what it's like to be that character.

So here are those old boots again - take a good look and see if you can make out what's written on the photograph.



Could you read it? It says 'Little Adelaide's Best and Only Boots'

Those boots belonged to a little girl about same age as you - living in East End of London in late Victorian times. A little girl maybe like this - from the same collection of photographs.



How would it feel to walk in those boots? How would it feel to only have one pair of shoes - and only wear those for best? Would they hurt? Would they be too big, or too small? What if it was raining? Would unkind people point at your boots and maybe laugh or sneer?

At the end of this I'm going to set you a writing challenge about walking in someone else's shoes - they could be Adelaide's Best and Only Boots, or they could be some other shoes entirely.

But first I'm going to tell you about why writers believe that feeling Empathy is so important when they are writing a story.

First of all - what is Empathy? Well, it's different from sympathy - different from just pitying someone.

Empathy is a connection - it's actually letting yourself imagine what it's like to be that person. And it actually can be quite painful, if that other person is going through something really upsetting.

So we don't always want to do it - because you are having to put yourself in their shoes. And that's not always a comfortable place to be.

But how does that connect with reading a book? Well, best books actually make the characters so real, and the things that are happening so real, that you feel like it's happening to you.

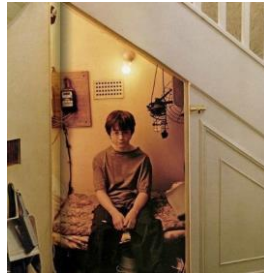
Can you think of books that have made you feel like that - made you feel sad - made you feel happy - even made you feel guilty because your character has done something awful that they feel really bad about?



What about Edmund in the Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe?

He goes off to join the Witch who has been making Narnia always Winter and never Christmas. He eats so much of her enchanted Turkish Delight that he feels sick. But it's not just too much Turkish Delight that is making him feel sick. It's guilt for betraying his brother and sisters. I don't know about you, but when I read that when I was younger, I used to feel really sick too, because I could just IMAGINE how he felt so vividly.

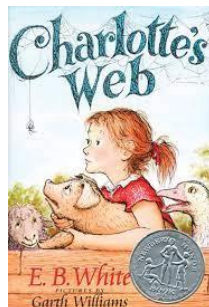
And we've all done things that have made us feel guilty - and sick - when we think about it afterwards.



And what about Harry Potter?

He has nothing but a broom cupboard under the stairs for a bedroom and all he gets for Xmas from the Dursleys is a 50 pence piece. What's great about that is that J.K Rowling makes us laugh - but she also makes you imagine really clearly what it must be like to be Harry.

And of course it's not just about books that make us laugh - I don't know about you, but I always cry at the end of Charlotte's Web - I always cry at the end of that, and that's because I feel empathy. I'm sure you have lots of examples from your favourite books that have made you feel a certain way.



One of the ways when you are writing a story about a character is to describe how they look. OK - you can just say they looked sad, or they had tears trickling down their cheeks - but there are other ways you can show how someone is feeling. How are they sitting? Or standing. Do they look sad, or happy, or lonely? Maybe impatient - hopping about from one leg to another - or excited, or puzzled about what to do next? Or maybe scared of a bully who is making their life a misery.

Going to read you a bit from Tiger Heart. The heroine, Fly, is a street kid - or gutterling - who has rescued the Tiger from his cage and escaped with him. But they have both been captured again; Fly has been drugged and the Tiger is starting to despair that she will ever be able to rescue them both from the evil man who has imprisoned them in his mansion.

### READING P 119 -121 Tiger Heart

*'When she crept downstairs next morning, the Tiger was lying at the back of the cage with his eyes closed ...'*

How can Fly tell how the Tiger is feeling at the start of that bit? How can she tell how he is feeling at the end?

It's called body language - and it's one of the things you can pick up on in real life when you get really good at Empathy.

I'm going to stop talking now for a few minutes and what I want you to do now is to think about a character in a book that you really enjoyed.

Maybe Alice in Wonderland - feeling puzzled or scared or frightened or very cross!

Maybe Harry Potter, facing the dementors?

Maybe a character who is being bullied, or is feeling lonely without any friends?

How would their bodies show how they were feeling?

Write down the name of that character, and write down what that feeling was.

And then I want you to split into pairs and each of you pretend to be the character you have chosen, just using the way you are sitting or standing.

Is your character happy, or excited, or maybe puzzled or confused and they don't know what to do next? Or very scared, because something awful is about to happen?

Then your partner has to guess what you are feeling - and maybe try and guess who the character was.

And then the other person in the pair can have a go at pretending to be the character they chose.

I'll see you again when you've had a go at doing that.

### PAUSE VIDEO

### ACTIVITY 1 - BODY LANGUAGE - SPLIT INTO PAIRS AND ACT OUT EMOTION OF CHARACTER IN BOOK. NO WORDS.

### PLAY VIDEO

A very clever author once said 'The past is a foreign country. They do things differently there.' Which might make you think it's difficult writing stories that are set in the past.

But that's why I like writing stories set in the past, because I can still imagine how my characters might have felt - and that's a way of bringing them alive, and bringing the past back to life.



These are photos of children who would have counted themselves lucky to have a pair of boots like Adelaide - from a book called Spitalfields Nippers.



These are children who lived in East London, very little money, very little food - I like to look at these photos when I'm making up stories about my gutterlings for my books *Tiger Heart* and *The Dragon and Her Boy* - helps me to imagine my gang of street children having magical adventures on the streets of Victorian London.



All my gutterlings have jobs - because they don't have any parents to look after them, and if they didn't work, they wouldn't have money for food.

Here's another picture I was looking at when I was writing my gutterling books. This is one of the jobs they do:



This is a mudlark - standing almost up to their knees in freezing Thames mud and water. Mudlarks spend all day searching through the mud for things they could sell - coins if they were lucky, bits of metal, anything that might pay for something to eat and a bed for the night.

I thought I'd go and find out what it was like.

### **Paddling insert**

Here I am - beside the Thames near Blackfriars Bridge and within sight of St Paul's cathedral - much the same place as the mudlarks would have hunted for anything dropped in the mud that they could sell.

It's not even winter - it's the middle of May - and already my feet feel like they're turning in to ice.

I don't want to think very hard about what I'm standing in - and the Thames is a lot cleaner now than is what in the mudlarks' time.

I now have a lot of empathy for those poor little children who spent all day wading around trying to find anything they could sell for food.

I wouldn't want to do that for very long!

You don't of course have to actually do everything your characters do, in order to have empathy - for them. You can use your imagination.

Going to read a bit from The Dragon and Her Boy, soon after Stick and the Dragon first meet. The Dragon has got stuck underground and Stick needs to free her before the police - or the crushers - come back with their muskets and start shooting at them both.

### **READING - THE DRAGON AND HER BOY**

P 70 'We needs to skedaddle, sharpish!'

So you can see two very different viewpoints in that bit. Stick has found himself stuck underground with a very curmudgeonly and untrustworthy dragon. At first, he is just scared of her eating him.

But how does he start to feel after that? And what about the dragon - how is she feeling?

There are two big pieces of paper on the floor - I'd like you to split into two groups - half of you are going to be the dragon and half of you are going to be Stick.

And I'd like you to write down on paper some words for how you are feeling. You can share ideas while you are doing it, and see what great words you can come up with. Remember the words might change - they might start off feeling one thing, and then start to feel something else.

And then each group can tell the other group how they were feeling.

### **PAUSE VIDEO**

**ACTIVITY 2 - DIFFERENT VIEWPOINTS OF CHARACTERS - GIRLS TO SPLIT INTO 2 GROUPS - DRAGONS AND STICKS - WRITE ADJECTIVES ON SHEETS OF PAPER ON FLOOR AND DISCUSS**

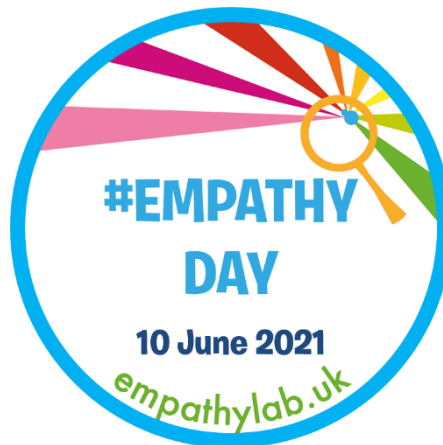
### **PLAY VIDEO**

Now before I finish - and before I set you your writing challenge - this is a story I wrote specially for Empathy Day.

It's called, 'If Red Riding Hood had had a little Empathy.'

<https://www.empathylab.uk/empathy-shorts>

## READING



So I hope all that has got you thinking about Empathy a bit.

Some of it is about us all being kinder to one another in real life, how we talk to each other, how we notice how other people are feeling - and imagining how we would feel in someone else's shoes, if people were being unkind to us, or if we feel left out, or bullied, or lonely, or sad.

So now for your writing challenge I'd like you to write a story about how it would feel to walk in somebody else's shoes.

It could be Adelaide's Best and Only Boots.



If you are Adelaide - do your feet hurt? Are the boots too big or too small?

Are you proud of those shoes - but then maybe some richer children make you feel self-conscious, by laughing at you?

But you don't have to write about walking in Adelaide's boots - it could be somebody else's shoes completely.

Maybe it's somebody going to a party and everyone else has prettier shoes than them? I still remember when that happened to me when I was five years old and my mum made me wear shoes like these





and everyone else has shoes like these!



Maybe a ballet dancer, dancing on points and they have to keep going and keep smiling, however much it hurts.



Or it could be a clown - with boots like these - what does it feel like, having to be funny all the time, even when you are feeling sad?





Or it could be a refugee, who has lost their home and everything they owned - and maybe their shoes are from a charity and don't fit very well?



Anyway - have fun writing your stories - maybe your teachers will share some of them with me.

And enjoy Empathy Day.

Because Empathy is all about using your imagination, really.

