



20+ Activities  
Crowdsourced  
from First Book  
Members!

# PROMOTING RESPECT & EMPATHY:

A Toolkit for Educators  
of All Grades



# INTRODUCTION

“Empathy begins with understanding life from another person’s perspective. Nobody has an objective experience of reality. It’s all through our own individual prisms.”

– Sterling K. Brown

In the absence of empathy, differences have the potential to breed conflict. Members of the First Book Network know this well, and in our daily work with children, we recognize our responsibility to teach kids the importance of being able to step into the shoes of another, and see the world through their perspective. This is true empathy. This is preparing our kids to create a more caring and compassionate world.

The First Book Network is deeply engaged in helping children from birth to age 18 develop respect and empathy. Whether in a classroom, health clinic, afterschool program, local community center, or another meeting place, First Book members know that developing these skills takes time, repetition, practice and interaction with others. We cannot truly know the meaning of respect or empathy without others. And we learn best when we work together.

In this toolkit, *Promoting Respect & Empathy: A Toolkit for Educators of All Grades*, is a collection of activities, tips, book recommendations, and more gathered from First Book members across the U.S., who, like you, support kids in under-resourced communities and programs. All of the content comes from educators in urban cities, rural communities, suburban towns and Native American reservations. These activities show the creativity of First Book members, as well as how fun, imaginative and meaningful interactions can help students learn and practice building respect and empathy.

Lastly, this project is the third installment in a series of resources sponsored by the Maryland State Education Association (MSEA) and First Book to address bias, cultural competence and empathy. In a recent survey of educators, we found these areas to be of critical importance across the country. It is our hope that in sharing the great work already being done across the First Book member community, you will find even more ways and ideas to promote respect and empathy.

## Want to share your experience or idea?

Share your tip or strategy for promoting respect and empathy on Twitter or Instagram. Use the hashtag **#FirstBookCommunity** and **#FirstBookEmpathyProject** to share your story.

We’ll collect the posts and routinely share out additional ideas via the First Book blog and emails to the First Book community!



@firstbook



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# HOW TO USE THIS TOOLKIT

Whether you have just a few minutes a week, or the flexibility to plan for more, this toolkit is designed to help you maximize the time you have with students and give you clear, actionable steps to lead an impactful activity in your program or classroom. The source? Your fellow members of the First Book Network, who, like you, support children in under-resourced communities across the country, and who've implemented these activities with consistent success.

**This toolkit has five sections:**

**Whole Group Activities** – Divided into elementary, middle and high school, these activities provide a full outline of the materials needed, and step-by-step actions you can take to replicate the activity with your students in group settings.

**Routines & Habits** – Since promoting respect and empathy can happen all year long, this section offers suggestions for daily, weekly or monthly habits you can begin with your students to create an ongoing culture that celebrates respect and empathy.

**Member Recommended Books to Promote Respect & Empathy** – First Book members share their favorite books and recommendations on how to use them to promote respect and empathy with students. This section also shares more about First Book's resources that can serve as a launch pad for discussion and reflection.

**Additional Resources** – To go beyond books, First Book members recommend a number of websites to boost your knowledge, and give you greater insight when promoting respect and empathy. They can be found here.

**Appendix** – There is no need to recreate the wheel as a member of the First Book Network. This section includes the handouts that you can use to implement the whole group activities.

## RESPECT

To show consideration for the feelings, wishes, rights or traditions of others.

## EMPATHY

The ability to step into the shoes of another and see the world through their perspective.

### For quick reference, check out the icons!



**Grade** – Look for the grade band to let you know the suggested age and grade for each activity. However, don't let this stop you from reading each activity – we believe you may get inspiration from many activities to support your work.



**Time** – Look for the clock icon to let you know how much class or program time an activity should take. Note, this does not include time needed to prepare for the activity! Activities that require more than one class or group meeting are preceded by the number of class meetings, and then the time (for example 2 x 15 minutes).

There are many ways to build respect and empathy – from using stories, film, daily routines and more. We received hundreds of submissions, and what follows are only a few of all that we reviewed. Our goal is to share activities that could be implemented in a variety of locations, that are flexible enough for you to modify to fit the time you have available.

We hope you and your students enjoy these activities and that you find creative and inspiring ways to promote respect and empathy.









# ROUTINES & HABITS TO PROMOTE RESPECT AND EMPATHY

Learning and practicing respect and empathy takes time, and habits form with repetition, experience and interaction with others. Check out the daily, weekly or monthly routines and habits First Book members use to build an atmosphere of caring, kindness, respect and empathy.

**"I CHOOSE A BOOK EACH MONTH TO DISCUSS WITH A FOCUS ON EMPATHY.** After reading a book, I'll ask students to identify actions, words and behaviors of characters that show or don't show empathy. I also ask students what they would and could do in a similar situation do model empathy. When I see students showing respect and empathy to others, I reward and celebrate them."

– *First Book member in Fairfield, CA*

All grades

**"I IMPLEMENT ACCOUNTABLE CONVERSATION INTO MY CLASSROOM.** It is a powerful tool to build respect and empathy. Asking questions such as those below give students time to slow down and consider the perspectives and opinions of their classmates."

- Can you repeat what \_\_\_\_\_ shared?
- Do you agree or disagree?
- What I heard you say is...
- I don't understand. Can you tell me in different way?
- What would you do if...
- How might you feel if...

– *Maria Snider, Child Care Director, St. Paul, MN*

All grades

**"I USE MY MORNING GREETINGS TO PROMOTE EMPATHY.** As students arrive, they get to choose how they want to be greeted – either with a handshake, side hug or fist bump. Then, when school starts we have a 'Morning Meeting.' This is where students share good news from home or community (e.g., a relative coming to visit, winning a sports game, finishing a good book, or other good news). We also acknowledge and wish the students well who are absent. This helps develop empathy by encouraging students to connect with each other – beyond the surface so that we can share and celebrate good things in their lives. Next year, I'll create a wheel so that students can spin it to show their preferred greeting."

– *First Book member in Pomona, CA*

All grades



**“OUR CLASS HAS A ‘WISH YOU WELL’ HELPER EACH DAY.** This practice was inspired by Conscious Discipline. Essentially, when a student is absent, our ‘Wish You Well’ helper calls that student to check in on them, and to let them know that our class wishes them well.”

– Randa, *Preschool Library Media Specialist, Henderson, KY*

Grades

PreK-5th

**BUILD EMPATHY BETWEEN SPECIAL NEEDS STUDENTS & GENERAL EDUCATION STUDENTS.**

“I’m a special education teacher and I help our general education students learn how to respectfully support their peers with physical disabilities. When I visit classes, I’ll read a book about a student with the same or similar disability as a student in our school. We talk about ways that students can support their peers with different physical abilities – whether by helping them without doing things for them, or giving them space when they are making unexpected choices rather than engaging them inappropriately.”

– Hannah, *Special Ed teacher, Portland, OR*

Grades

K-5th

**SET UP READING BUDDIES.** “In my school, we have reading buddies where middle school students volunteer to read to K-2 students two days a week in the library before school. This is a great way to regularly encourage empathy. The older students develop positive relationships with their little buddies and consistently show kindness and compassion as they help them learn to read.”

– First Book member in *Bulls Gap, TN*

Grades

K-8th

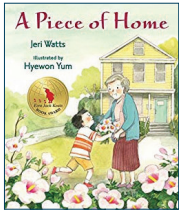
**“I INVITE STUDENTS TO CHOOSE AND SHARE A POEM WITH THE CLASS.** To kick off our poetry unit, I ask students to choose a poem (any poem), print it, and bring it to class. They have to read their poem in front of the group, and explain how they connect with/relate to the poem. Kids are asked to keep whatever someone shares in class within our class – they are NOT to go out and start gossiping with their peers about what someone shared during our class time. Over the years, I’ve heard students read poems that remind them of their parents’ divorces, abusive situations, parents who have been deported and parents who have died or who have terminal illnesses. I’ve even had kids come out as gay and transgender during poetry day. The end result is consistent – students form bonds, they get up and get tissues for other students, friendships form and beef gets squashed. I’ve witnessed teenagers experience a deep sense of understanding for their peers for the first time. They realize that every single person has a story.”

– April McNary, *teacher, Phoenix, AZ*

Grades

5th-12th

# MEMBER RECOMMENDED BOOKS TO PROMOTE RESPECT & EMPATHY



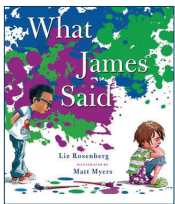
“Our school is in a rural town with little exposure to other nationalities. We read ***A Piece of Home*** by Jeri Watts in the library and learned about the differences between the Korean language and English by learning a few words in Korean (e.g., hello and goodbye). The students are just learning the alphabet so the idea of reading without the A-Z alphabet is mind expanding! We also share times when we were the new student/child in a new situation without any friends, and what we could do to make it easier for others in this situation.”

– *First Book member in Bedford, VA*

Grades



K-4th



“I like to do a brief lesson on friendship and communication using a book that I purchased from the First Book Marketplace, ***What James Said*** by Liz Rosenberg.

The book tells about a comment that is twisted when being shared from one person to the next, and the main character gets angry instead of communicating with her friend when she thinks he’s been saying bad things about her. We read the book and talk about the misunderstanding. After, we play the telephone game first in small groups and then as one large group to demonstrate how words can be twisted as they are passed on and that good communication sometimes requires being brave, having empathy and asking what was actually said.”

– *Corrin Rockwell, school counselor, Canton, PA*

Grades

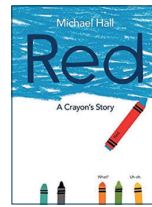


1st-5th

Grades



1st-4th



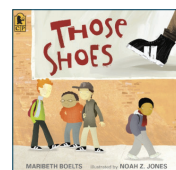
“Our school watched a video based on the book ***Red: A Crayon's Story*** by Michael Hall and then discussed the ways in which we may be different (races, religions, beliefs, likes/dislikes, hobbies, academic abilities, athletic abilities, etc.), but also ways we are the same. Then every student is given a crayon template to color and decorate to best represent them. We hung a huge crayon box in the hallway, with all student crayons representing each of us. This activity helped students appreciate the ways we are different, and how we are the same.”

– *First Book member in Birch Run, MI*

Grades



5th-8th



“***Those Shoes*** by Maribeth Boltz is a great story to discuss wants vs. needs. Middle school students care a lot about fashion and shoes. We wear uniforms at our school to cut down on bullying. However, even though 90% of our students receive free lunch, name brand shoes are a big deal here, and many students can’t afford them. The book is great to help students identify wants vs. needs, show a great example of empathy, and to appreciate the things they do have.”

– *Deana, school librarian, Bolivar, TN*

“**Fish Cheeks** is a short story by Amy Tan that I have often used to give my students exposure to a different, but similar cultural experience.”

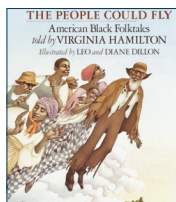
<https://bit.ly/FishCheeks>

– *First Book member, Santa Maria, CA*

Grades



5th-8th



“**The People Could Fly: American Black Folktales** by Virginia Hamilton offers stunningly beautiful imagery. Picture books are a great way to introduce the abstract

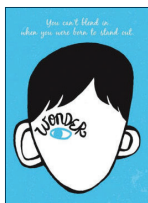
concept of theme to middle school students. They are short and the images can create serious emotions for students. When doing our unit on Frederick Douglass, this book allows students to put themselves in the shoes of slaves and evokes powerful feelings. Students gain a deeper understanding of the hardships that slaves faced and learned to empathize with them.”

– *First Book member in St. Louis, MO*

Grades



5th-8th



“I love to start the year with my 6th graders reading R.J. Palacio’s **Wonder** because it instills in kids the importance of seeing someone beyond face value, and that you can work together to make an

important difference. Asking questions such as “Who showed empathy? How?” and “Who did not?” opens the door to powerful conversations about the impact the differences we all have has on others.”

– *Melissa Molitor, 6th grade English Language Arts teacher, military base in MD*

Grades



5th-8th

Grades



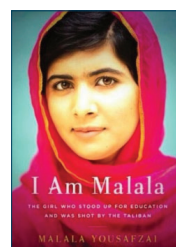
6th-12th



“I serve students on an Indian reservation and try to use culturally relevant materials whenever possible. I like using **Three Feathers** by Richard Van Camp. The book is set on a reserve in northern Canada

and the main characters are young adults that find themselves in trouble with the law. The author/illustrator (it is a graphic novel) offer an alternative to the mainstream response to youth breaking the law and use the culture to help the youth make significant changes in their lives. We watch a few author videos on YouTube to get some background information, discuss how to read a graphic novel (some have never read a book in this format) and then independently read. Discussion that follows always comes back to respect – of self, of others and for the land. It is a powerful book for our students. Following this activity, one grade level uses it as a springboard for argumentative writing.”

– *First Book member in Belcourt, ND*



“My high school students read **I am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban**. To help them have a better frame of reference for the book, we also

watched the Academy Award-nominated animated film, *The Breadwinner*. This book and film gave my students a better understanding of life for Muslim people under the Taliban rule. They could see that not all people from that area of the world are as our news so often portrays them – as terrorists. This book and film helped my students learn the importance of trying to understand a person’s situation before making a judgement about who they are or were, an essential component of empathy.”

– *First Book member in South Glens Falls, NY*

Grades



9th-12th

# FAVORITE RESOURCES TO PROMOTE RESPECT & EMPATHY

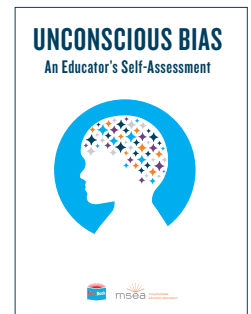
Want more resources to promote respect and empathy? First Book members use the following websites to increase their knowledge and obtain tools, tips and more to support kids as they develop respect and empathy.

- First Book Healthy Feelings & Relationships Section with discussion guides for over 30 books. [FirstBookMarketplace.org/healthy-feelings-relationships](http://FirstBookMarketplace.org/healthy-feelings-relationships)
- Second Step Lessons [www.secondstep.org](http://www.secondstep.org)
- Sanford Harmony [www.sanfordharmony.org](http://www.sanfordharmony.org)
- Conscious Discipline [www.consciousdiscipline.com](http://www.consciousdiscipline.com)
- NewsELA [www.newsela.com](http://www.newsela.com)
- Courageous Conversations [www.courageousconversation.com/about](http://www.courageousconversation.com/about)

First Book and the Maryland State Education Association (MSEA) are focused on addressing bias, cultural competence and empathy to support educators in their work with students. This is the third resource in a series of free downloadable tools to help you and your students. Find the first two below!



Calendar  
<http://bit.ly/MSEACal1819>



Unconscious Bias  
Educator  
Self-Assessment  
<http://bit.ly/BiasSelfAssessment>



In summary, developing respect and empathy is a process. It can be exciting, memorable and most of all, life changing. Seeing the world through the eyes of others, and having consideration for their rights, feelings and traditions helps us coexist. It is our hope that the activities in this toolkit – all from the First Book Network – have given you actionable steps and “lightbulb” moments to further support your work with students.

The First Book Network is here to support your incredible work, and we look forward to sharing more voices on this important topic. We invite you to follow us on our blog, Twitter and Instagram for additional tips, activities and resources you can use to promote respect and empathy.

# APPENDIX

## PEACE TABLE INSTRUCTIONS



1

### TALK TO EACH OTHER AND LISTEN WITHOUT INTERRUPTING.

The person who did the inviting will speak first, in a calm and quiet voice and explain why they are upset. Use the following to start the conversation:

- When \_\_\_ happened, it made me feel \_\_\_.
- When you said \_\_\_ to me, it made me feel \_\_\_.
- I am concerned that \_\_\_.

2

### TAKE TURNS SPEAKING AND LISTENING.

3

### FIND OUT WHAT YOU BOTH NEED TO HAVE A PEACEFUL RESOLUTION.

4

### BRAINSTORM AND LIST LIST WAYS TO SOLVE THE PROBLEM.

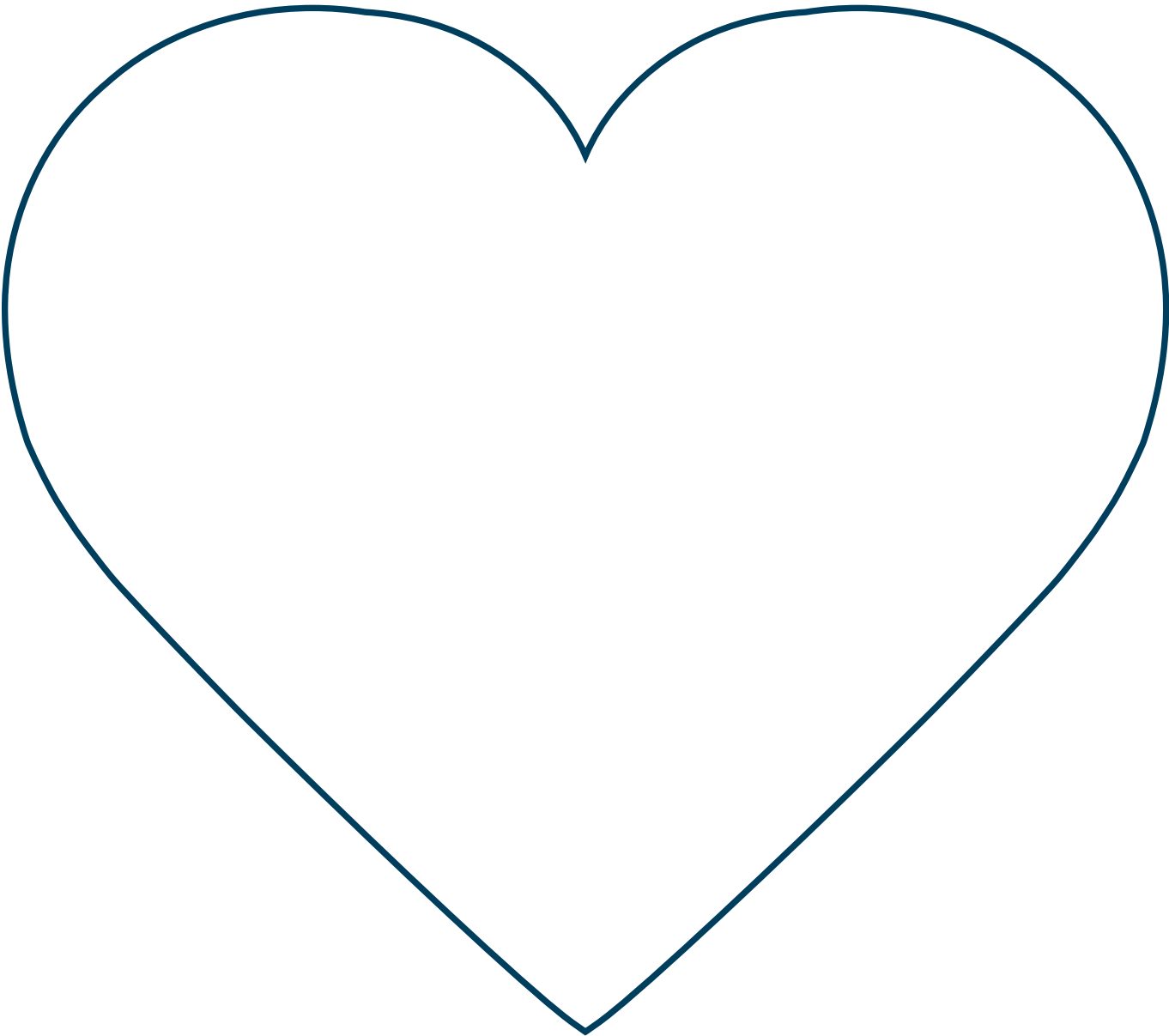
5

### CHOOSE THE IDEA YOU BOTH LIKE BEST.



*If you are unable to reach an understanding, ask a mediator or an adult to help.*

HEARTS FOR ALL – HEART TEMPLATE



## HEARTS FOR ALL – POSITIVE WORDS

### A

active  
admirable  
adorable  
adventurous  
agreeable  
amazing  
angelic  
athletic  
attractive  
awesome

### B

beautiful  
brave  
brilliant  
bubbly

### C

calm  
champion  
charming  
cheery  
classic  
courageous  
creative  
cute

### D

dazzling  
delightful  
divine

### E

electrifying  
elegant  
enchanted  
encouraging  
energetic  
enthusiastic  
excellent  
exciting

### F

fabulous  
fair  
fantastic  
fine  
friendly  
fun  
fun loving  
funny

### G

generous  
genius  
genuine  
giving  
gorgeous  
graceful  
great

### H

hard-working  
handsome  
happy  
helpful  
healthy  
honest  
honorable

### I

imaginative  
impressive  
independent  
intellectual  
intelligent

### J

joyful

### K

kind  
knowledgeable

### L

legendary  
lively  
lovely  
lucky

### M

marvelous  
masterful  
motivating

### N

natural  
nice

### O

one-hundred percent  
open  
optimistic

### P

perfect  
phenomenal  
positive  
pretty  
proud

### Q

quick  
quiet

### R

remarkable  
radiant

### S

sweet  
sparkling  
special  
stupendous  
sunny  
super  
supportive

### T

talented  
terrific  
trusting  
truthful

### U

upbeat

### V

vibrant  
victorious

### W

wonderful  
wondrous  
worthy  
wow

### Y

### Z



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