

Barb's BookSpot: Episode 13
Put Yourself in *Their* Shoes: Using Children's Books to Talk about Empathy.
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THIS IS MY DOLLHOUSE . Copyright © 2016 by Giselle Potter. Schwartz & Wade Books, a division of Random House, New York, NY.

In *This is My Dollhouse*, our narrator has a real sense of pride in the wonderful play-world she has created from scratch and a cardboard box. Reused bits of trash, toys and household items become furnishings for her doll “family”. When she visits Sophie, and sees her slick, realistic doll house complete with plastic family and all the extras, she worries that her friend must never see her own poor creation. Wonderful scenes and details help readers to understand the feelings of both girls, as they try to understand each other. Sometimes it is hard to guess how others will respond and sometimes, we get it wrong. This lovely story presents opportunities to talk about friendship, pride, creative play, imagination and empathy. A bonus – the inside of the book cover provides instructions and ideas for creating your own doll house.

A BIKE LIKE SERGIO'S. Text copyright © 2016 by Maribeth Boelts. Illustrations copyright © 2016 by Noah Z. Jones. Reproduced by permission of the both author and the publisher, Candlewick Press, Somerville, MA.

The well-developed characters in this book face feelings that we all can relate to, and Boelts gives readers a glimpse into how hard it can be to make decisions. Ruben wants a new bike so bad, he can hardly think of anything else. When the lady in the store drops a bill, he must decide whether to keep it, or return it. When he thinks he has lost the bill himself, he can identify with how the lady must feel. Should he avoid her, so he can keep the money and not have to face her? Should he return her bill? Readers follow Ruben as he truly empathizes with the “lady in the blue coat”, and makes his decision based on it. My favorite line in the whole book is this: “I am happy and mixed up, full and empty, with what’s right and what’s gone.” Feeling empathy and doing the right thing can be hard and messy sometimes. You will find plenty to talk about when you share this great story with young readers.

THE THREE LUCYS. Text copyright © 2016 by Hayan Charara. Illustrations © Sara Kahn. Reproduced by permission of the publisher, Lee & Low Books, New York, NY.

Based on the true experiences of the author’s family during the July War in Lebanon, 2006, this story follows Luli, a young boy worried about his three cats who were left behind when his family travelled to Beirut to visit his grandparents. Bombing prevents the family from returning home for over a month, and who knows what they will find when they return? Who knows what has happened to the cats? With Luli, readers experience fear, confusion, and grief when in the end, only two of the three cats are found. So many children witness or experience upheaval in their lives, and it colors how they feel every day. This book allows a glimpse into the life of such a child, and provides opportunities for those who have never experienced war to think about what it must be like – to put themselves in the shoes of another.

THEY ALL SAW A CAT. Copyright © 2016 by Brendan Wenzel. Reproduced by permission of the both the author and the publisher, Chronicle Books, San Francisco, CA.

When “the cat walked through the world, with its whiskers, ears and paws...” everyone saw him just a little differently. Wenzel depicts the cat from the point of view of each critter he passes, including a mouse, a flea, a fish, a bee... and many more. A prey animal will certainly see something different than one who preys on this creature! In the end, the cat will see his own reflection in a pond, and readers are asked what they imagine he saw? Perhaps empathy begins with how we see ourselves. This fun story with the catchy refrain will entertain readers of all ages, and depending on how they “see” it, there are many lessons to share at its heart.

