



HELPING KIDS THRIVE IN UNCERTAIN TIMES

With Dr. Michele Borba

RAISING THRIVERS

How to Teach Proven Traits That Help Kids Thrive Now and Later

Michele Borba, Ed.D.

Educational Psychologist, TODAY Contributor, International Speaker and Author

UnSelfie: Why Empathetic Kids Succeed in Our All-About-Me World

Thrivers: The Surprising Reasons Why Some Kids Struggle and Others Shine

Building Moral Intelligence: 7 Essential Virtues That Teach Kids to Do the Right Thing

Parents Do Make a Difference, and The Big Book of Parenting Solutions

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7 Essential Character Strengths to Help Kids Thrive

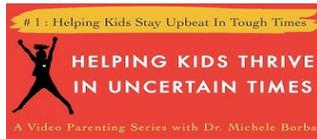
By Dr. Michele Borba

Thrivers: The Surprising Reasons Why Some Kids Struggle and Others Shine

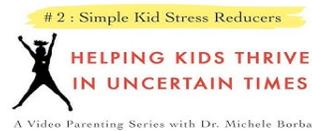
Character Strength	Abilities	Benefits
<p>1. SELF-RESPECT: Healthy identity, self-awareness, understanding & utilizing personal strengths</p> 	<p>Self-Awareness Strength Awareness Finding Purpose</p>	<p>Healthy Sense of Self Positive Self-Identity Service and Meaning</p>
<p>2. EMPATHY: Understanding & sharing another's feelings, relating, acting compassionately</p> 	<p>Emotion Literacy Perspective Taking Empathic Concern</p>	<p>Reading & Sharing Emotions Understanding Other Views Compassionate Action</p>
<p>3. SELF-CONTROL: Managing stress & strong emotions, delaying gratification, stretching focus</p> 	<p>Attentive Focus Self-Management Healthy Decision-Making</p>	<p>Delayed Gratification Coping & Regulation Self-Discipline/Mental Strength</p>
<p>4. INTEGRITY: Adhering to strong moral code and values, ethical thinking, practicing honesty</p> 	<p>Moral Knowing Moral Identity Ethical Reasoning</p>	<p>Valuing Virtue Strong Moral Compass Ethical Decision Making</p>
<p>5. CURIOSITY: Open to experiences, ideas and life, taking creative risks to discover, learn, create</p> 	<p>Curious Mindset Creative Problem-Solving Divergent Thinking</p>	<p>Creativity Generating Alternatives Innovation</p>
<p>6. PERSEVERANCE: Fortitude, tenacity, resolve to endure and increase sense of purpose</p> 	<p>Growth Mind-Set Goal-Setting Learning from Failure</p>	<p>Determination and Drive Self-Mastery & Agency Self-Sufficiency</p>
<p>7. OPTIMISM: Positivity, gratitude, hopefulness to self-advocate & keep pessimism in check</p> 	<p>Optimistic Thinking Assertiveness Hope</p>	<p>Positive Attitude Self-Advocacy Hopeful Life Outlook</p>

10 Free Videos on Raising Kids in Uncertain Times

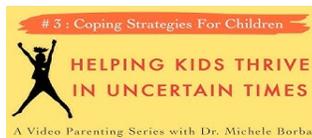
Dr. Borba worked with NBC to create a special free 10-part video series for parents during the pandemic (or any uncertain time). **Each five-minute video, free features a different topic based on parental concerns with practical, evidence-based tips** including: reducing children and teen stress, curbing family bickering, handling social distancing, restoring hope, reducing sibling battles and parent burnout. Just **click onto each link to watch each five-minute video**. For more on raising resilient kids see Dr. Borba's book: [*Thrivers: The Surprising Reasons Why Some Kids Struggle While Others Shine*](#) (Mar 2001). Visit [Dr. Michele Borba -YouTube channel](#) to view each.



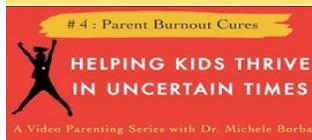
Helping Kids Stay Upbeat in Tough Times: Sharing good news to keep empathy open, learn emotional literacy by Facetiming with loved ones.



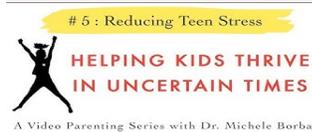
Simple Kid Stress Reducers: Practicing deep breathing together to maximize relaxation and ways to think about helpers to reduce stress and activate empathy.



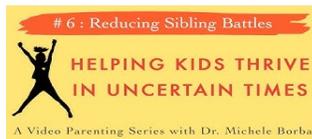
Coping Strategies for Children: Learning the signs of childhood stress and why keeping to a routine reduces anxiety. How to create a calm down corner and a few quick relaxation strategies so kids learn self-regulation.



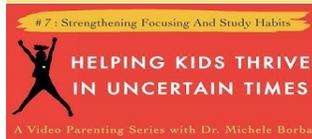
Parent Burnout Cures. How to do a self-check to identify burn out signs; why you must boost self-care on the agenda. Watch news intake, exercise, sleep and identify and fix one reoccurring hot spot to reduce stress.



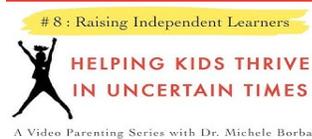
Reducing Teen Stress. How teens are coping in a crisis, 3 ways to improve teen wellness, teen connectors, acknowledging grief and ideas teens say work for them (that parents can use).



Reducing Sibling Battles. Four dynamics that increase sibling battles and when to worry; halt labeling, anticipate the battle, stay neutral, a no tattling rule, and problem solving strategies every kid should know.



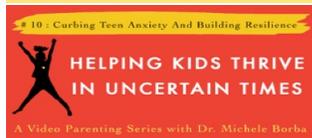
Strengthening Focusing and Study Habits. How to help kids in distance learning, simple study skills and time management, chunk the task and doing hardest thing first to help kids become independent learners.



Raising Independent Learners to Stretch Achievement and Reduce Battles. The parents' role: be a guide, not doer; praise effort not end product to cultivate a growth mindset and read, read, read (and fun routines).



Boosting Social Skills. How to increase kids' personal connection during social distancing, practice social skills (and how), ways to find kid interaction and peer support, tips to engage with extended family



Curbing Teen Anxiety & Building Resilience. The signs of anxiety and trauma in kids, when to worry, how to stretch attention span and help kids find hope in uncertain times.

A Reflection Guide to Raise Kids Who Thrive

Change begins with reflection. Here are questions to consider after reading *Thrivers* or hearing Dr. Borba talk about resilience and why we must reset our parenting and educational priorities for our kids' sake.

1. What preconceptions about resilience did you have? Were any views changed by reading or hearing Dr. Borba?
2. Do you think raising children who can thrive today is easier, no different or more difficult than when your parents raised you? Why? What impact (if any) do you think the pandemic will have on children?
3. Many people feel there is a mental health crisis in today's children. Do you? Which other (if any) concerns do you have about today's children? What factors may be preventing kids from developing thriving capacities?
4. A major theme of *Thrivers* is that resilience abilities are learned and that parents do make an enormous difference in influencing kids' thriving potential. How much influence do you think parents actually have? How did your parents influence your character development? At what age do you think parents start losing their influence? Do you think that our ability to influence kids comes back? If so, at what age? What influences children's character and thriving development most: peers, media, education, parents, pop culture, or something else?
5. *Thrivers* describes seven character strengths found essential to peak performance and resilience: Self-Respect, Empathy, Integrity, Self-Control, Curiosity, Perseverance, and Optimism. Which trait do you feel is most essential for children today? Which is most difficult to nurture? Which trait do you emphasize most in your family? Lease? Which would you like to emphasize more? What could you do to help your child acquire the virtue? If you were to rank the strengths by importance to thrive, what would your list be? Why?
6. Dr. Borba states that character strengths are teachable and that thrivers are *made, not born*. Do you agree? Which of the seven character strengths do you think are more difficult to teach to children today? Why?
7. One of the best ways our kids learn character strengths is by watching us. How would your child describe your behavior? Which of the seven character strengths best exemplify your character? Which character strength would you like to increase in yourself, and how would you do so?
8. What kind of person do you want your child to become? How will you help your child become that person?
9. Our culture's obsession with grades, scores and rank is one reason for the Character Void. Do you agree? If you asked your child what matters most to you: his character or grades? How do you think (or hope) he responds?
10. The first character strength is Positive Identity or Self-Respect that emanates from children's awareness of themselves and their strengths and interests. How would you describe your child to someone? What strengths or interests do you see in your child that could help him gain confidence? How will you nurture them?
11. Dr. Borba stresses that kids are born with the potential for empathy, but unless it is intentionally nurtured will remain dormant. Teen's empathy decreased 40 percent in 30 years. What factors are hindering the development of this strength? How are you enhancing your child's empathy? What could you do to enhance it even more?
12. What are some of the sayings, proverbs or experiences you recall from your childhood that helped you define your values? How are you passing on your moral beliefs to your child to help her develop Integrity? What have you done with your child recently to reinforce your moral beliefs so she sees herself as a moral being?
13. How was discipline handled in your family as you were growing up? How did it affect your Integrity or Self-Control? What is the most common method you use to discipline your child? How effective is it in enhancing her knowledge of right and wrong and willingness to adhere to those values?
14. Research shows that Self-Control is a better predictor of adult wealth, health and happiness than grades or IQ. Do you agree or disagree and why? Are today's kids raised to have self-control? Are you noticing a change in children's (and adults') ability to self-regulate? If so, why? How well do your children manage emotions?
15. *Thrivers* describes several approaches to teach Self-Control and reduce anxiety (like mindfulness, yoga, meditation and stress-management). Do any interest you? Are there ways you might join other parents (playgroups, scouting, play dates) to teach stress-management practices to your children together?
16. Research on Perseverance stresses the need to praise kids for effort, not the grade or end product. What type of praise do you give your child? After reading the research on the power mindset has on grit, would you consider changing how you praise or help your child handle mistakes or failures?
17. How important is it to have an optimistic child? Do you think it's harder to raise a child today with hope and about their world? What are ways that you and your community could help kids see the "good" in their world?
18. What would you like your greatest legacy to be for your child? What will you do to ensure that legacy?

Dr. Borba's book: [*Thrivers: The Surprising Reasons Why Some Kids Struggle and Others Shine*](#) (GP Putnam) is available March 2021 online or any major book store. www.micheleborba.com

52 Great Kid Books to Boost Moral Imagination

By Dr. Michele Borba www.micheleborba.com

Author, *UnSelfie: Why Empathetic Kids Succeed in Our All About Me World*



Books can transport children to other worlds and transform their hearts. I learned that lesson as both a teacher and a mother. I've seen those wondrous moments when a child's heart opened and saw the world differently. It's why *The Hundred Dresses* by Eleanor Estes is one of my favorite children's books. It tells the stirring story of Wanda Petronski, a poor, quiet, third-grade girl who always wears the same faded blue dress. Wanda has no friends and often sits and plays alone. She also must endure a few cruel classmates who constantly taunt her about her one dress. "What are you going to wear tomorrow?" the girls would dig, knowing she has only one dress.

Finally, one day Wanda blurts, "I have a hundred dresses at home—all different colors!" Well, the torment spirals to such a level that Wanda's parents can no longer endure the cruelty their daughter faces. (Her father's letter describing her daughter's pain is priceless!) And the Petronski family moves to a different location. Only later do the "mean" girls realize that Wanda has remarkable artistic talents: she did have a hundred dresses at home—but they were all drawn on paper, and guilt sets in. YES! Those girls finally understand the pain they caused and even empathize. But by then Wanda is gone and the girls can never make amends for their cruel actions.

Over the years I've read my now well-worn book to countless classes as well as to my children, and its haunting tale never fails to stir their emotions. I ask, "Have you ever had someone make fun of how you dress or look or made fun of another kid or excluded them because they looked differently?" and hands always rise slowly or the children will look down at their feet.

Danny was no different. He was a third grader and his teacher read to his class *The Hundred Dresses*. The book touched him and "changed me on the inside. I thought of Ryan," he told me. "He was lonely and had kids picking on him just like Wanda. That book made me feel differently about Ryan and me. It made me want to do something to help."

The right book can not only touch a child's heart but also mobilize empathy into compassion. That's the miracle of the right words. New [research](#) confirms the power of literary fiction to elevate children's hearts and activate their empathy. It turns out that reading literature—even for short periods—can enhance empathy, and proof of that is showing up not only on paper-and-pencil tests, but also on images of our brains. The more effort we make trying to figure out a character's intentions, emotions, or thoughts, the greater the odds that our empathy muscles are stretched as well. It's why I chose "MORAL IMAGINATION" as the fourth Empathy Habit in *UnSelfie: Why Empathetic Kids Succeed in Our All About Me World*.

Here are 52 favorite books listed in *UnSelfie* that can help children and teens step into a character's shoes—emotionally at least—and identify with their discomfort and feel their pain. Part of the secret in activating empathy is offering material that matches the child's interests as well as reading abilities. Chapter Four—pages 71 to 92—in *UnSelfie* offers dozens of ways to stretch children's hearts as they read, as well as questions to ask to boost perspective taking. I also offer ideas to help you find the right book for the right kid. Meanwhile, keep looking until you find the perfect match and let's keep reading to our children!

Younger Children

1. *Angel Child, Dragon Child*, by Michele Maria Surat. A young Vietnamese girl arrives at her new American school and faces taunts by her classmates for her cultural differences.

2. *A New Coat for Anna*, by Harriet Zeifert. Though there is no money to buy Anna a new coat, her mother's determination to save money for many months produces a beautiful gift.

3. *A Special Trade*, by Sally Wittman. When she was young, the little girl's grandfather pushed her in the stroller. Now five,

Grandfather has a stroke: the girl pushes Grandfather as he once pushed her. Plain glorious for kids.

4. *Fat, Fat Rose Marie*, by Lisa Passen. A little girl must stand up to the class bully who keeps picking on her overweight friend and treating her most unfairly.

5. *Fly Away Home*, by Eve Bunting. The plight of a homeless boy and his father is told in this poignant tale. The only home that Andrew and his dad have is an airport, and as Andrew's dad says, "It's warm. It's safe. And the price is right."

6. *Molly's Pilgrim*, by Barbara Cohen. Deals with issues of disrespect, loneliness and prejudice as a young immigrant girl is ridiculed and rejected by her classmates for her cultural differences.
7. *Old Henry*, by Joan W. Blos. Henry's neighbors don't appreciate the way their eccentric resident keeps his yard, so they run him out of the neighborhood then find themselves missing him.
8. *Somebody Loves You, Mr. Hatch*, by Eileen Spinelli. A year-round Valentine to read to children on the impact they have on others. This book can start a Kindness Challenge.
9. *Through Grandpa's Eyes*, by Patricia MacLachlan. A sensitively told tale of a young boy who visits his blind grandfather and learns there is more than just one way of seeing than from using your eyes: young John learns to "see" as his Grandpa does. (Perfect for empathy)
10. *The Bedspread*, by Sylvia Fair. A gloriously written account of two elderly sisters whose embroidery reflects their diverse personalities. The final product offers two very different views of life with the clear message, "There is no one way that is better." Great for discussing diversity, tolerance, sensitivity and empathy.
11. *The Giving Tree*, by Shel Silverstein. An absolute gem that's become a classic parable about giving and kindness appropriate for just about any age. It's just that good!
12. *The Wednesday Surprise*, by Eve Bunting. Wednesday nights are special: that's when Grandma comes and together they read story after story. All the time they are planning a surprise for Dad's birthday. Dad gets the surprise of his life: his mother reads for the first time to her son. His daughter taught her.
13. *Wilfrid Gordon McDonald Partridge*, by Mem Fox. A young boy learns his friend from the old people's home is losing her memory! He sets out to help her find it, and in doing so learns the power of caring. A favorite!

For Children Ages 8 to 11

14. *Blubber*, by Judy Blume. An overweight girl must learn to deal with ridicule and rejection from her classmates.
15. *Building Blocks*, by Cynthia Voigt. A short but heartwarming tale in which a twelve-year-old boy is transported back in time and wakes up to find himself in the bedroom of a ten-year-old boy, who he discovers is to become his father. He literally "gets into the shoes of his father" and takes on a whole new understanding of his dad's strengths and weaknesses.
16. *Charlotte's Web*, by E.B. White. The problem of a pig named Wilbur who is slated to be butchered because he was the runt of the litter. Charlotte the spider figures out how to save Wilbur's life without regard for her own life. It is rich in the moral values of fairness, empathy, conscience and compassion.
17. *Dear Mr. Henshaw*, by Beverly Cleary. A Newbery Award-winner about a boy coming to grips with his family's divorce. He describes his feelings through a series of letters to an author who becomes a significant other in his life.
18. *Number the Stars*, by Lois Lowry. Based on the true, compassionate story of a young Danish girl who sacrifices her life to save her friend from the Nazis.
19. *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, by Mildred Taylor. A black Mississippi family during the Depression refuses to give in to the unfair treatment and social injustice by white neighbors.
20. *Stone Fox*, by John Reynolds Gardner. Based on a Rocky Mountain legend, Stone Fox tells the story of Little Willy, who lives with his grandfather in Wyoming. When Grandfather falls ill, he is no longer able to work the farm, which is in danger of foreclosure. Little Willy is determined to win the National Dogsled Race—the prize money would save the farm and his grandfather. I still remember reading this to my sons and sobbing.
21. *Stone-Faced Boy*, by Paula Fox. Ridicule and rejection from class mates cause Gus to "turn off" his emotions and become "stone-faced."
22. *Teammates*, by Peter Golenbock. Powerful text describing the racial prejudice and unjust treatment experienced by a black player in major league baseball and the difficulty of getting along as a team.
23. *The Bear's House*, by Marilyn Sachs. A moving account of a lonely girl who must deal with a dysfunctional home environment. Powerful for building empathy.
24. *The Boy on the Wooden Box*, by Leon Leyson. Remarkable memoir written by one of the youngest children to survive the Holocaust on Oskar Schindler's list perfectly captures the innocence of a small boy who goes through the unthinkable. Leon Leyson was only ten years old when the Nazis invaded Poland and his family was forced to relocate to the Krakow ghetto. Perseverance, grit, optimism. empathy!
25. *The Hundred Dresses*, by Eleanor Estes. An impoverished girl is made fun of by her classmates, who mock her for always wearing the same faded blue dress. A powerful story about that helps sensitize children to the cruelty of emotional abuse.
26. *The Invisible Boy*, by Trudy Ludwig. (Or anything else by Trudy Ludwig. She's that good). Meet Brian, the invisible boy. Nobody ever seems to notice him or think to include him in their group, game, or birthday party...until, that is, a new kid comes to class. When Justin, the new boy, arrives, Brian is the first to make him feel welcome. And when Brian and Justin team up to work on a class project together, Brian finds a way to shine.
27. *The Little Prince*, by Antoine de Saint-Exupery. The Little Prince is on a search as to what is truth and discovers: "It is only with the heart that one sees rightly." This classic is a moral gem that addresses the virtues of honesty, conscience, responsibility, and empathy.
28. *The One and Only Ivan*, by Katherine Applegate. An unforgettable novel (and winner of the Newbery Medal) that celebrates the transformative power of unexpected friendship. Inspired by the true story of a captive gorilla known as Ivan, this illustrated book is told from the point of view of Ivan himself. Perspective Taking!!
29. *The Sneetches*, by Dr. Seuss. The classic Seuss story about the Sneetches and the Sneetches each thinking they are the best. It's a wonderful way to introduce the concept of prejudice to very young children.
30. *The Witch of Blackbird Pond*, by Elizabeth George Speare. A 16 year old girl in a Puritan community and balks at their narrow-minded. She later befriends a lonely old woman who is unjustly accused of being a witch and eventually Kit is unjustly accused as well.
31. *Wonder*, by R J Palacio. Over six million people have read the #1 New York Times bestseller and fallen in love with Auggie Pullman, an ordinary ten-year-old boy with a facial deformity. A remarkably courageous kid, Auggie comes across as a sweet, funny boy who wants the same things others want: friendship, understanding, and the freedom to be himself. Empathy!!!

For Tweens & Teens --- Please check suitability

32. *A Lesson Before Dying*, by Ernest J. Gaines. Set in a small Cajun community in the late 1940s, a young black man is unjustly accused of murder and is sentenced to death. Enormously moving tale of compassion, unfairness, mercy, and unfairness.

33. *Black Like Me*, by John Howard Griffin. A true story about a white man in the 1950s who darkens his skin so he can “become” a black man living in the deep South. The racism and unfairness he encounters are just wrenching.

34. *Children of the River*, by Linda Crew. A thirteen-year-old girl has fled Cambodia with her aunt’s family to escape the Khmer Rouge army, leaving behind her family and the boy she has loved since she was a child. Now, four years later, she struggles to fit in at the high school. Depicts the emotional grief for her lost family and the consequences of war. For advanced readers.

35. *Farewell to Manzanar*, by Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston and James D. Houston. The touching true story of a Japanese American family who was uprooted from their home and set to live at the Manzanar internment camp because of their Japanese ancestry.

36. *Great Expectations*, by Charles Dickens. This literature classic is the story of a young orphan boy who mysteriously acquires a great fortune and then tries to discover his benefactor. The crux of the novel is his relationship with two men: his foster father, a simple, kind man and the evil Abel Magwitch, an escaped convict who the boy befriends.

37. *Lord of the Flies*, by William Golding. A group of English schoolboys become stranded on a desert island during a nuclear war. Gradually throughout the ordeal their character transforms from “civilized” and “proper” into cruel, greedy savages without an ounce of kindness.

38. *Of Mice and Men*, by John Steinbeck. The friendship between two stirring characters: mentally handicapped and warm-hearted Lenny and his protector, George. Heartbreaking moments depicting a world that can sometimes be cruel and selfish make for ripe moral discussions.

39. *Manchild in a Promised Land*, by Claude Brown. First published in 1965, this is one of the most remarkable autobiographies of our time. It is a thinly fictionalized account of Brown’s childhood as a hardened, streetwise criminal trying to survive the toughest streets of Harlem and makes it. It is affirmative, inspiring and rich with values.

40. *Night*, by Elie Wiesel. Wiesel tells a wrenching story based on his own experiences in the concentration camp during World War II in which he witnesses the death of his family. It is unforgettable and sends a clear message of how immoral intolerance can be and the impact of a complete lack of empathy.

41. *Please Stop Laughing at Me!: One Woman’s Inspirational Story*, by Jodie Blanco. An inspirational memories about how one child was shunned and even physically abused by her classmates from elementary to high school. Impossible not to be moved! For young teens.

42. *Pride and Prejudice*, by Jane Austen. The classic about the prejudice that occurred between the 19th century classes and the pride, which would keep lovers apart. Look carefully at the “supposed arrogance” of a few of the characters: particularly the uncle. What becomes apparent in the ending is that some people put on airs to cover up insecurities or traumatic earlier experiences.

43. *Speak*, by Laurie Halse Anderson. A tough, tender and funny story of a teenage outcast. It captures the harsh

conformity of cliques and a teen’s struggle to find acceptance. Beware: the issue of rape is addressed but her ultimate triumph (and her surprise “rescuers”) will make you cheer.

44. *The Color of Water*, by James McBride. A moving memoir of a young black boy growing up at a time of racial polarization. The unforgettable character is his compassionate mother who raises her children to see themselves as human beings who have something to give to others.

45. *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, by Mark Haddon. Christopher John Francis Boone knows all the countries of the world and their capitals and every prime number up to 7,057. He relates well to animals but has no understanding of human emotions. He cannot stand to be touched. Although gifted with a superbly logical brain, for fifteen-year-old Christopher everyday interactions and admonishments have little meaning. He lives on patterns, rules, and a diagram kept in his pocket. This novel is funny, poignant and fascinating and it helps the reader perceive the world of the character.

46. *The Diary of Anne Frank*, by Anne Frank. Talk about Anne’s indomitable optimistic spirit and ability to find goodness despite horrendous circumstances. It is just plain magnificent and should be read by every child.

47. *The Hate Crime*, by Phyllis Karas. High-school sophomore, Zack, never thought being Jewish was any big deal until someone painted anti-Semitic graffiti on the Temple Israel.

48. *The Invisible Thread*, by Y. Uchida. This is a powerful memoir of a Japanese American girl who was held with her family along with 130,000 other Japanese American citizens in U.S. internment camps during World War II.

49. *The Outsiders*, S.E. Hinton. This remains a favorite of boys and does present great discussion possibilities. It addresses a vicious gang of kids whose idea of good time is beat up the greasers until one night things go too far. There is also a movie version of the book.

50. *To Kill a Mockingbird*, by Harper Lee. A deeply moving novel about prejudice and injustice as seen through the eyes of a little girl, the daughter of a lawyer who defends a black man against an unfair rape charge in a Southern town in the 1930s. The film starring Gregory Peck is also glorious and provides wonderful discussion opportunities about **conscience**, empathy, tolerance, respect, and unfairness. The movie is also strongly recommended.

51. *Warriors Don’t Cry*, by Melba Pattillo Beals. The true remarkable story of Melba Pattillo, one of the nine teenagers chosen to integrate Little Rock’s Central High School and the racism they endured.

52. *The Hate U Give*, by Angie Thomas. Plain riveting! Sixteen-year old Starr Carter moves between two worlds: the poor black neighborhood where she lives and the fancy suburban prep school she attends. Her world is shattered when Starr witnesses the fatal shooting of her childhood best friend, Khalil, at the hands of a police officer. Khalil was unarmed.

The books and ideas are adapted from my book, [UnSelfie: Why Empathetic Kids Succeed in Our All About Me World](#) which describes how to cultivate the Nine Crucial Habits of Empathy, and offers dozens of proven ways parents and teachers can use them from toddlers to teens to do so.

Follow me on Twitter [@MicheleBorba](#) or on my website [MicheleBorba.com](#) for over 500 blogs on character and empathy and how to contact me to speak.

104 Movies for Children and Teens to Stir Empathy

By Dr. Michele Borba www.micheleborba.com

Author, *UnSelfie: Why Empathetic Kids Succeed in Our All About Me World*



Films can stir our emotions, spark our curiosity, creating lasting memories, and become portals to other worlds. In some cases, a movie can whip our conscience, shift our perspective, or activate our feelings so we stand up and change the world for the better. The right movie can stir a child's empathy better than any lesson or lecture ever could. The right movie matched with the right child can also be the gateway to opening his heart to humanity. And the right films can help us teach children the nine essential empathy capacities culled from science that I identified in my book, **UnSelfie: Why Empathetic Kids Succeed in Our All-About Me World**. Here are 104 wonderful movies that help teach those crucial nine habits that cultivate empathy. Then refer to **UnSelfie** for over 300 fun, evidence-backed ways to give kids the Empathy Advantage. The Symbols (P, S, T, A) designate the recommended age and suitability for each film: P-Preschoolers; S- School-age; T-Tweens/Teens. Do view the film first to ensure suitability. Many of these movies are emotionally-charged, so please use your judgment.

Empathy Habit 1. EMOTIONAL LITERACY

Recognizing, understanding, & communicating feelings

The right films can be a fun way to help kids recognize emotions. Pick ones that depict different emotions and then identify characters' feelings and how the child feel as the viewer. Also, turn off the television sound for a few minutes and have kids try guessing together how the actors feel based on their body language or facial expressions. Nail biting can mean "She's tense!" A clenched jaw could signify "He's scared!" Nodding and leaning in mean "She's interested!" Other movies in this resource for emotions: **Dumbo**, **Shrek**, **Despicable Me**, **Finding Nemo**, **Frozen**, **Harry Potter**, **Bambi** and **Inside Out** (Pixar, 2015). The best for giving important messages about needing to feel-and express-*all* of young emotions, whether happy or sad, told from perspective of an 11-year-old. **P, S**

Empathy Habit 2. MORAL IDENTITY

Adopting & exercising an ethical code

- Watch clips from **Sully**, then review Chesley Sullenberger's childhood in *UnSelfie* (on pages 25-27) and how he formed a moral code. Discuss moral identity and help children create moral mantras. **S, A**
- **All the President's Men** (Warner Brothers, 1976). Real-life story of the two Washington Post reporters who followed their conscience and would not give up on covering the saga of the Watergate break-in. **T**
- **A Few Good Men** (1992). Military lawyer defends Marines accused of murder. They content they were acting under orders. Show last scene on "true honor is inside." **T**
- **A Man for All Seasons** (1966). The story of Sir Thomas More and how he gives his life rather than lie about what he believes. **T**

- **Casablanca** (1942). Yes, it's dated but the moral lessons still apply as time goes by—especially last scene with Rick Blaine (Humphrey Bogart) and his decision: Lisa should stay with Laszlo. **T**
- **Labyrinth** (1986). The struggle between good and evil and the lesson that words are powerful, life can change in an instant, and to be careful of what we wish for. **S**
- **Millions** (2004). Ethics, being human, and moral identity all come to fore when two orphans find a bag of money, struggle with how they should use it, and learn what we are really made of. **S**
- **Norma Rae** (1985). Powerful portrayal of a young woman who follows her conscience and in doing so makes a difference. **T**
- **October Sky** (1999). True story about boy's dream of becoming a rocket scientist and struggle with his "moral obligation" to work in the coal mines and remain with his family. **S, T**
- **Pinocchio** (1940). A rambunctious puppet longs to be a boy. His "conscience," Jiminy Cricket, has a full time job. **P, S**
- **The Man Without a Face** (1993). Former teacher disfigured in a car accident becomes feared in his town. A boy learns to judge by character, not appearance. **S, T**
- **The Nasty Girl** (1990). Young German girl discovers that many community members aided Hitler and spends 10 years documenting the truth. **S, T**
- **The Ox-Bow Incident** (1943). Two drifters come to a town in 1885. Rumor says they killed a popular rancher. Group takes law into own hands, hangs them, then discovers their innocence. **T**
- **Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory** (1971). Trust, honesty, gratitude, moral identity: a grateful child repeatedly chooses to do the right thing!

Empathy Habit 3. PERSPECTIVE TAKING

Understanding others' needs & walking in their shoes

- In the Disney film *Freaky Friday*, a mom and daughter don't get along. One day they mysteriously switch bodies, are forced to learn the other's perspective. Here are films to discuss role taking and understand other people's perspectives with kids.
- **An American Tail** (1986). Little mouse gets separated from his immigrant Jewish family and wanders through New York meeting a series of multi-ethnic characters. **P, S**
- **Dumbo** (1941). This is a classic story of a lonely little elephant with over-sized ears who is unmercifully picked on. **P**
- **Follow the Drinking Gourd** (1993). Story of the Underground Railroad: powerful introduction for young children about slavery & racial injustice. **P, S**
- **Ghosts of Mississippi** (1996). Slain civil rights leader, Medgar Evers, and attempts of a white assistant D.A. to convict his killer during racially-charged times. **T**
- **Glory** (1989). First black volunteer infantry unit in the Civil War and their white commander. Wonderful discussions about tolerance, anti-war, and conscience. **S, T**
- **Perfect Harmony** (1991). Exclusive Southern boys school in the 1950s with two boys of different race who volley for the lead choir and encounter bigotry. **S, T**
- **Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry** (1992). Black Mississippi family's struggle to keep their land and dignity during Depression through the eyes of a young black girl. **S, T**
- **The Blue and the Gray** (1990). Civil War saga depicts how intolerance pits family against family in one of this country's most tragic wars. **T**
- **The Defiant Ones**, (1958). Two convicts—one black and one white—who are shackled together. The two must overcome their hostility to work together when they escape from a chain gang. **T**
- **The Elephant Man** (1980). True story of a severely deformed man, who with the help of an empathetic doctor, moved from the freak shows into society. Beauty lies on the inside! **T**
- **The Grapes of Wrath** (1940). John Steinbeck's saga of the Joad family and their struggle to reestablish social justice. Conscience, compassion, loyalty, perseverance. **T**
- **The Long Walk Home** (1989). Affluent white wife tries to make sense of why her struggling black maid would protest racial intolerance and support a bus boycott. **T**
- **To Kill a Mockingbird** (1962). Film of unforgettable novel of a childhood in a sleepy Southern town and the crisis of injustice that rocked it. **T**

Empathy Habit 4. MORAL IMAGINATION

Using books, films or images to cultivate empathy

- All films in this resource would help enhance the fourth empathy habit: Moral Imagination. Favorites such as **The Shawshank Redemption**, **The Pursuit of Happiness**, **The Book Thief**, or **The King's Speech** can activate children's hearts. My favorite would be **The Never Ending Story**, an epic story within a story about a lonely boy and a strange book that draws him into the beautiful but doomed world of **Fantastica**. As he's drawn deeper into **Fantastica**, he must find the courage to face unspeakable foes and the mysteries of his own heart. Why not initiate a regular Family Movie

time? Some neighborhoods hold Summer Movie Nights: families take turns tacking a sheet outside, plugging in the DVD, spreading blankets on the lawn and showing a great flick such as **The Blind Side**, **The Outsiders**, **E.T.**, **The Extra-Terrestrial**, or **The Breakfast Club** for the neighborhood kids to watch?

Empathy Habit 5: SELF-REGULATION

Keeping cool when feeling strong emotions

- **Anne of Green Gables** (1985). Eight-year-old orphan's struggles to cope with her unpredictable temper, find happiness, and change the lives of those she touches. **S**
- **Gandhi** (1982). Chronicles Gandhi's life from the prejudice he encounters as a young South African attorney and his cause of passive resistance and eventual assassination. **T**
- **Kundun** (1997). Life of the 14th Dalai Lama, his pacifist views and the increasing difficulties he faces as a nonviolent man in an increasingly violent world. Great discussion opportunities. **T**
- **Places in the Heart** (1984). A young widow determined to survive as a cotton farmer during the Depression. Compassion, self-reliance, perseverance, self-control. **T**
- **Ruby Bridges** (1998). Six-year-old ordered by federal judges to be the only black child in an all-white school and led the cause of racial integration in the school system. I love this child! **S, T**
- **Rudy** (1992). Despite mediocre academic record and athletic ability, a boy earns his goal of playing football at Notre Dame with a strong heart and grit. **S, T**
- **Shrek** (2001) Don't just a book by the cover: it's what is inside that matters! Fun conversation about Ogres and self-control. **P, S**
- **The Karate Kid** (1984). A teen struggling to find acceptance, encounters bullying, but discovers using your fists to handle problems gets you injured so he turns to martial arts. **S, T**

Empathy Habit 6. PRACTICING KINDNESS

Developing and exercising compassion every day

- Two Miami moms worried that "cruel" was the new "cool" at the middle school, so they initiated Parent-Kid Movie Nights. Each month, parents and kids watched films like **Mean Girls**, **Billy Elliot**, **Bully**, or **Cyberbully**, and then discussed how kids can stick up for each other. Those talks helped switch the social scene so kids now think it's cool to be kind. Try movie nights!
- **A Christmas Carol** (1951). Miserly old man, Ebenezer Scrooge, finally discovers the virtues of giving and being kind. **S**
- **A Little Princess** (1995). Young Sara faces a strict headmistress and overcomes hardship with courage and kindness and changes the lives around her. **S**
- **Annie** (1982). An orphan proves that money isn't everything, anyone can make a difference, and other people matter. (Sing out "It's a Hard-Knock Life"!)) **S**
- **Babe** (1995). Great empathy lessons: families can come in all shapes and sizes, stay true to yourself and stick up for others who are doing the same thing! **P, S**
- **Charlotte's Web** (1972). E.B. White's classic about Charlotte, the spider great caring deed saves Wilbur the pig from the slaughter. **P, S**

- **Forrest Gump** (1994). An intellectually-impaired man with a heart of gold. His heart is what transforms the lives of those around him. Character wins out over intellect. **S, T**
- **Pay It Forward** (2000). A young boy attempts to make the world a better place after his teacher gives him that chance. Clip of how kindness pays it forward is powerful! **T**
- **Pollyanna** (1960). Pollyanna finds the best in people and spreads “gladness” to an entire community is a glorious message about kindness. **S**
- **The Diary of Anne Frank** (1959). Anne’s indomitable optimistic spirit and ability to find goodness despite horrendous circumstances. **S, T**
- **The Little Match Girl** (1991). Hans Christian Andersen tale of a homeless little girl who nearly freezes to death but adopted by a mutt and saved by kindness. **S**
- **The Point** (1971). Animated musical about a young boy who is rejected and isolated because his head is round and not pointed like everyone else’s. **S**
- **The Secret Garden** (1987). Frances H. Burnett’s classic tale about an orphaned child who brings joy to a gloomy family. Sensitivity and empathy abound. **S**
- **The Velveteen Rabbit** (1985). The animated Margery Williams classic of a little boy and a stuffed toy bunny learn the true meaning of love. **P, S**

Empathy Habit 7: COLLABORATION

Teamwork to learn to think “Us,” not “Them”

- **A Bug’s Life** (1998). A misfit ant, looking for “warriors” to save his colony for greedy grasshoppers, recruits a group of bugs that turn out to be an inept circus troupe. **P, S**
- **Antz** (1998). A colony of complacent ants always doing what they’re trained to do until they learn that sometimes you must buck the system to do what you think is right. **P, S**
- **Babe** (1995). The opening line of the film captures its essence: “This is a tale about an unprejudiced heart, and how it changed our valley forever.” May it spread. **S**
- **Beauty and the Beast** (2017). A beautiful Belle offers herself to the ugly Beast in order to save her poor father’s life and discovers his wonderful kind heart. **S, T**
- **Frozen** (2013). Encourages young women to support and stay loyal to each other. Kindness, loyalty and family love! **P, S**
- **Hidden Figures** (2016). A team of female African-American mathematicians and their vital role in NASA during the U.S. space program’s early years and discrimination. Favorite line: “Here at NASA we all pee the same color.” And the restroom sign of desegregation is chopped down. What a message! **T**
- **Lady and the Tramp** (1955). Lady, the classic spaniel, and Tramp, the downtown mutt, learn to be best buddies and accept others for what they are. **P, S**
- **McFarland, USA** (2015). True story of 1987 cross-country team from a mainly Latino high school. Coach leads the team to win a state championship and turn his family’s perceptions around. **S, T**
- **Minions** (2015) and **Despicable Me** (2010). Lighthearted, at time hilarious, the characters are in tune with each other even though they don’t speak a real language. **P, S**
- **Pearl Harbor** (2001). A tale of war and friendship mixed in with history. Scene of Doolittle raid scene, Aleck Baldwin’s speech, and collaboration of U.S. troops is powerful. **T**
- **Pocahontas** (1995). Friendship of Indian girl and Captain John Smith and how history changed as Native Americans and English settlers learned to live side by side. **S**
- **Remember the Titans** (2000). True story of newly appointed African-American coach and his high school team on their first season as a racially integrated unit. Fabulous speech by the coach. **T**
- **The Rainbow Fish** (1997). The Rainbow Fish has gorgeous scales. A fish asks for one, he refuses and finds his selfishness leaves him alone and sad. But don’t despair: there’s a lesson learned. **P, S**
- **The Sand Lot** (1993). Great for boys and for instilling the message of teamwork, sportsmanship. **S**
- **The Sneetches** (1960). Dr. Seuss birdlike creatures that look exactly alike except some have stars and some don’t. The stars create an “Us vs. Them” division. There are great moral lessons here. **P, S**

Empathy Habit 8: MORAL COURAGE

Speaking up for others and publicly do what is right

- **We Bought a Zoo** has a powerful scene in which the teen admits to his dad that he is crazy about a girl, but unless he musters courage to tell her, their relationship is over. His dad’s advice: “You know, sometimes all you need is twenty seconds of insane courage-just literally twenty seconds of just embarrassing bravery, and I promise you that something great will come of it.” Here are other films to help kids learn the power of courage and to speak up for others.
- **Brave** (2012). A rebellious one is engaged to a prince wants to be anything but a “princess,” runs away to be “herself” and learns lessons of courage and grit along the way. **P, S**
- **Cinderella** (2015) A refreshing remake of the animated original and a tribute to the old-fashion value of kindness. Best line: “Take courage and be kind.” **P, S**
- **Freedom Song** (2000). Mississippi, 1961 and the unsung small town citizens who risked their lives to stand up for justice and bring change at the grassroots. **S, T**
- **Hacksaw Ridge** (2016). WWII Army Medic, Desmond T. Doss, refuses to kill people and becomes first in American history to receive Medal of Honor without firing a shot. Inspiring! **T**
- **Harry Potter** (Every Harry Potter movie). “You were named for two headmasters of Hogwarts. One of them [Snape] was a Slytherin and he was probably the bravest man I ever knew.” **S**
- **Miracle of Midnight** (2000). How one Danish family risked their lives in a remarkable effort to save thousands of Jewish countrymen the Holocaust. **S, T**
- **Pete’s Dragon** (2016). A brave, orphan boy’s adventures and his best friend Elliott, who happens to be a dragon. There’s always a place for everyone! (And my son produced it!) **P, S**
- **The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman** (1974). Triumphs and tragedies of a fictional former slave. Taking sip from the “white only” drinking fountain and defying racism is the key scene! **T**
- **The Secret of NIMH** (1982). Heartwarming story of how mother mouse’s grit, courage and love conquers enormous obstacles. And she must seek aid of a colony of rats to save her son. **P, S**

- **The Wizard of Oz** (1939). After viewing discuss which-courage, intellect, and heart-do your kids feel is most important in leading a good and decent life. **P, S**
- **Twelve Angry Men** (1957). Henry Fonda portrays the voice of conscience and courage as foreman to a jury who want a quick verdict against an innocent boy on trial. **T**

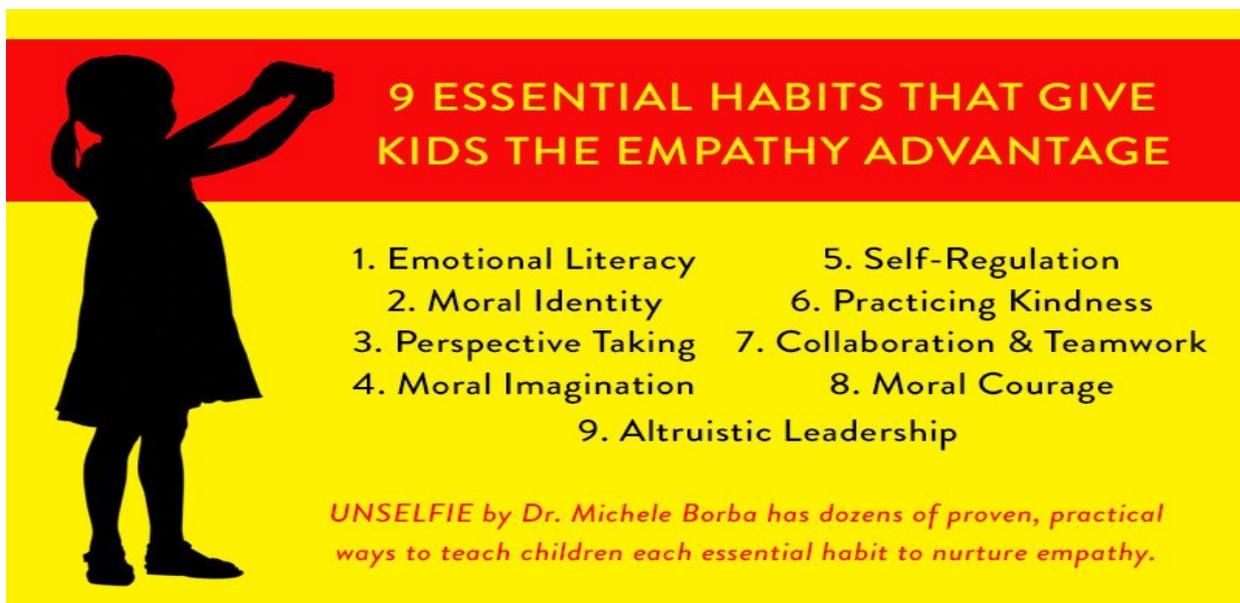
Empathy Habit 9: ALTRUISTIC CHANGE MAKING

Wanting to make a positive difference

- **A Brave Heart: The Lizzie Velasquez Story** (2015). Role model urges kids to stand up to bullies. **S, T**
- **Au Revoir, Les Enfants** (1987). True story of 11-year-old in Nazi-occupied France who discovers three classmates are Jewish and hiding from the Nazis and shelters them. **T**
- **Dunkirk** (2017). Allied soldiers in are surrounded by the German army and evacuated during a field battle in World War II by civilians. Collaboration, Altruism, Empathy! Humanity! I dare you to watch this one and not get teary-eyed. **T**
- **Finding Nemo** (2003). Nemo is separated from his father. The scene in which the fish in the tank decide to help Nemo (sacrificing their freedom) is a powerful display of altruism. And Nemo returns to set them free. **P, S**
- **Free Willy: Escape from Pirate’s Cove** (2009). A young girl befriends a stranded baby orca park and does everything to see him get back to his pod. Protecting wildlife. **S**
- **He Named Me Malala** (2015). Inspiring documentary on an extraordinary brave teen social activist and youngest Nobel Prize winner, Malala Yousafzai. **S, T**
- **Hotel Rwanda** (2004). True story of a Hutu, who in midst of a genocide of the Tutsis, hides them in his hotel. His compassion and empathy for his fellow Rwandan’s saves their lives. When I was working in Rwanda, I stayed in the hotel next to this one — it still gives me goose bumps. The power of one! **T**
- **Schindler’s List** (1993). An immense message that kindness of can change the world. Oskar Schindler saved over 1100 Jewish lives in World War II. **T**
- **The Dark Crystal** (1982). On another planet in the distant past, a Gelfling embarks on a quest to find the missing shard of a magical crystal, and so restore order to his world. **S**
- **The Hurricane** (1999). Wrongfully accused of murder, boxer Rubin “Hurricane” Carter writes his story from prison. An alienated youth mounts campaign to get him released. **T**
- **The Rescuers** (1997). Two mice work for the Rescue Aid Society and rescue children in trouble throughout the world. **P, S**

I know I’ve missed many other fabulous movies, so please use ones that you think would resonate with your children or students. Today’s digital natives are drawn to a digital world. Using the right film clips can create fabulous discussions about character and activate their empathy. Once you find a film that works, please pass it on to another caring adult. Let’s help our children think WE, not ME.

For more information about the nine habits of empathy and dozens of evidence-based ways to cultivate them in children, please see [UnSelfie: Why Empathetic Kids Succeed in Our All-About Me World](#).



9 ESSENTIAL HABITS THAT GIVE KIDS THE EMPATHY ADVANTAGE

1. Emotional Literacy
2. Moral Identity
3. Perspective Taking
4. Moral Imagination
5. Self-Regulation
6. Practicing Kindness
7. Collaboration & Teamwork
8. Moral Courage
9. Altruistic Leadership

UNSELFIE by Dr. Michele Borba has dozens of proven, practical ways to teach children each essential habit to nurture empathy.