

Leadership Lessons

The Messages Picture Books

Bring Us

Brandy Sanchez



Brandy Sanchez is a librarian, certified leadership coach, and founder of the SoulFire Collective, an organization dedicated to the inclusive, sustainable leadership of library directors and managers. She has devoted her twenty-year

career to learning and development, first as the Continuing Education Consultant for the Missouri State Library and then as a Public Services Librarian and Technology Instruction Coordinator for the Daniel Boone Regional Library, Columbia (MO). Her recent work includes a collaboration with the Center for Trauma Informed Innovation to design library-specific training on trauma-informed supervision.

I have worked in youth services for most of my twenty-year career as a librarian. During this time, I have had the privilege of serving on the 2010 Caldecott, 2017 Newbery, and 2021 Sibert Award Selection Committees.

I sincerely appreciate my fellow committee members who inspired me with their love of children's literature and their passion for bringing stories to life for young people everywhere.

Throughout our deliberations, my colleagues demonstrated the power of genuine empathy, active listening, and a growth mindset. I utilize these skills daily in my current work as a leadership coach for library directors and managers.

While I no longer work on the front lines of youth services, I still have a deep-rooted love of children's literature, particularly picture books. They are incredibly effective at taking complex concepts and making them accessible to all ages through illustration. When captivating artwork is combined with moving language, the result is a rich emotional experience for the reader.

To illustrate, I'd like to suggest three thought-provoking picture books that offer an unexpected lesson in library leadership. With each children's title, I will also recommend an adult book with a corresponding theme. I hope you find these titles as insightful as I did.

What Feelings Do When No One's Looking by Tina Oziewicz, illustrated by Aleksandra Zajac, translated from the Polish by Jennifer Croft (Elsewhere Editions, 2022)

In this quiet book, each emotion is represented by an almost Seuss-like creature simply going about their day. The gentle lines and soft edges create a sense of calm and safety, a requirement for curiously investigating difficult feelings like anger and anxiety. The poignant ending reminds us that this multitude of emotions lives within each person.

Emotional intelligence is the central leadership lesson in this book. This is our ability to identify, understand, and consciously act on our feelings. It is directly connected to our ability to self-regulate and empathize with others.

A leader with high levels of emotional intelligence is capable of helping others productively manage and express their own feelings. This is essential when building trust, navigating conflict, or problem-solving as a team.

Corresponding adult title: *Permission to Feel: Unlocking the Power of Emotions to Help Our Kids, Ourselves, and Our Society Thrive* by Marc A. Brackett (Celadon Books, 2019)

Dr. Brackett is the founding director of the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence and the lead developer of RULER, an evidence-based approach to social and emotional learning that has been adopted by thousands of schools worldwide.

His book outlines the RULER framework and offers practical ideas for reducing problematic behaviors in the classroom as well as levels of stress and burnout among educators. His teachings easily translate to managing teams and workplace dynamics within libraries of all kinds.

What Do You Do with an Idea? by Kobi Yamada, illustrated by Mae Besom (Compendium Kids, 2013)

Have you ever had an idea that you couldn't let go of? At first, you dismiss it, but it keeps popping up. Then you say, "Later, after I'm done with <fill in the blank>." Finally, the tension becomes so great that you must take action.

In this inspiring book, we meet a child who comes face-to-face with an idea that takes the shape of a golden-crowned egg. As the idea comes closer to hatching, the monochromatic illustrations become more and more colorful and fantastical. In the end, the idea is given wings and allowed to soar.

As an adult, what do you do when you've got a dozen or more golden ideas? Write them down. Keep track of them in your Notes app, start a Google Doc, or jot them down in a journal.

Recording your ideas does not require that you act on them. Instead, use this as a way to enhance your creativity. Then, as you begin to notice recurring themes, you can intentionally choose to act on the ideas that resonate with you the most.

Corresponding adult title: *Start Right Where You Are: How Little Changes Can Make A Big Difference for Overwhelmed Procrastinators, Frustrated Overachievers, and Recovering Perfectionists* by Sam Bennett (New World Library, 2016)

Bennett is an improv and theater actor turned time management guru. Her book is broken up into short, manageable chapters that can be read in five minutes or less. Her many insights and ideas will inspire you to take action by making small changes in the way you prioritize your work and organize your time. She also runs a helpful Facebook Group, Secrets of Highly Productive People.

After the Fall: How Humpty Dumpty Got Back up Again by Dan Santat (Roaring Brook Press, 2017)

Have you ever had a book show up in your life at the exact moment you needed it? That's how I describe my relationship with this book.

It was 2020, and I was at the height of my professional burnout. The back cover read, "Life begins when you get back up." I was hooked and pulled the book off the reshelving cart.

Five minutes later, I was a total mess. I was standing at the children's desk with tears streaming down my cheeks and snot dampening my face mask.

This book is about trauma and loss, but also hope and healing. Through his illustrations, Santat communicates the fear and grief we all feel after adverse, life-changing circumstances. At the time, I equated it with the pandemic.

But, slowly—ever-so-slowly—Humpty begins to find his courage. He adapts, grows, and evolves into an entirely new way of being. The final illustrations are absolutely triumphant!

For me, the leadership lesson is simple. We are not our circumstances. We are not what has happened to us. We are defined by how we choose to respond. Despite our cracks and bruises, our strength and courage are still there, just below the surface.

Corresponding adult title: *Trauma Stewardship: An Everyday Guide to Caring for Self While Caring for Others* by Laura van Dernoot Lipsky (Berrett-Koehler, 2009)

It is an unfortunate reality that the nature of our work puts library staff at risk of experiencing primary or vicarious trauma. Lipsky, a long-time social worker, helps readers identify the most common trauma responses and offers a framework to find healing through reflections, writing exercises, and daily practices. The book's subject is lightened by cartoons punctuated throughout. This is a must-read for those library leaders wanting a more trauma-informed approach when supporting their teams or serving at-risk groups within their communities. &