

Dr. Seuss

Theodor Seuss Geisel was born in Springfield, Massachusetts in a wealthy family of brew masters of German background. Before launching a career as a children's author, he was a successful advertising artist and political cartoonist.

The demand for beginner books increased in America during the post-war baby boom. Besides, as the article "Why Can't Johnny Read?" by Rudolph Flesch suggests, there was a concern with children's literacy. The conventional "Dick and Jane" readers were not appealing to children. There was a need for more lively primers and Dr Seuss was offered the challenge to illustrate and write a primer using only 220 words. His answer to this call was *The Cat in the Hat* (1957), of which he said "It is the book I'm proudest of because it had something to do with the death of the Dick and Jane primers". It was followed by *Hop on Pop* (1963), and *Green Eggs and Ham* (1960), a masterpiece of minimalism and nonsense poetry written using only 50 different words.

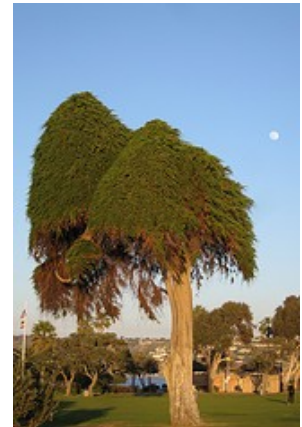


Seuss is a true artist of the picture books. He explores the tension between text and pictures, the gaps between what we read and what we see –which makes good picture books. He is a central figure in the history of nonsense literature, heir to Edward Lear. He created bizarre creatures and new words. "Nonsense wakes up the brain cells", he pointed out. His playfulness and nonsense encourages children to be creative, to ask questions of their world, it stimulates thought. His *ABC* (1965) invites children to experiment with language, to delight in its pleasures, and to increase the associations that they assign to words. The author believed that "children welcome good writers who talk, not down to them as juveniles, but clearly and honestly as equals".

Some of his books convey social messages, addressing the major issues of the time, such as Civil Rights in *The Sneetches* (1961) or environmental conservation in *The Lorax* (1971). *The Lorax* became a symbol of 'American Forests', a non-profit organization encouraging the protection of forests, and therefore was attacked by the logging industry. Responding to criticism of his book Seuss said "the Lorax doesn't say lumbering is immoral. I live in a house made of wood and write books printed on paper. It's a book about going easy on what we've got. It's anti-pollution and anti-greed". In *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* (1957), he criticizes those who exploit Christmas just for profit.

Seuss's style was initially disliked by critics in the children's literature establishment. A librarian said: "we'd rather children read something better, something more like A.A. Milne". English critics also disliked him: "compared with Lear and

Carroll he seems madly common, slick, unmemorable ... the style is overpoweringly American"; it is brash and slangy, the standard is better for children". Nowadays, he continues to be an icon of children's literature in America, where one out of every four born children receives as his first book a Dr Seuss book. He is in the top 20 of the best-selling children's books, where his closest rival is J.K. Rowling; Beatrix Potter is his closest competitor in the top 100. He is also a source of inspiration for modern writers such as Sandra Boynton in her *Pajama Time!* (2000) and *Oh My Oh My Oh Dinosaurs!* (1993). Seuss's book *One Fish Two Fish Red Fish Blue Fish* is read as a celebration of diversity and tolerance. It directly influenced Johny Valentine's *One Dad Two Dads Brown Dad Blue Dads*.



Dr. Seuss's verses are still enormously popular in the USA today, to the extent that they form part of the universal American heritage, as the construction of the *Dr. Seuss National Memorial Sculpture Garden* in his hometown Springfield, Massachusetts, indicates.

Bibliography

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Dr. Seuss. There are lots of American folklore heroes. Johnny Appleseed stories are based on the life of a real person. Other folklore tales talk about imaginary characters like Paul Bunyan. We don't know who started the stories about Paul Bunyan but somehow the tales of his adventures became part of American culture as they were recited over and over again. The Cat in the Hat and the Grinch are among the many imaginary characters invented by Dr. Seuss. Even though Dr. Seuss is an imaginary name, there is a real person who wrote all Dr. Seuss stories. His name is Theodor Seuss Geisel. Theodor Comedian Robin Ince enters the wonderful wacky world of Dr Seuss, and uncovers some surprising real world science hidden within these childhood classics. He's joined by scientists and fellow Seuss fans Sophie Scott, Andrea Sella, Mark Miodownik and Adam Rutherford who reveal some of the very real scientific ideas hiding within the seemingly nonsensical worlds and rhymes of Dr Seuss. From "The Cat in the Hat comes Back" to "The Lorax" and "Oh the Places You'll Go" Robin and his team of scientists reveal how ideas about the environment, scale, chemistry, These are a couple of quick activities to introduce your students to Dr. Seuss. Have fun with your students as you share his books. You can add to the celebration of all things Seuss by creating costumes, experimenting with Oobleck, and making crazy inspired hats. Reading the books aloud without even looking at the pictures, you'll also discover that students find the doctor's word play and rhyme to be as engaging and as his outlandish illustrations. Quick links to unit plan resources: 2 Items. Lesson Plan. 2 Items. Book. About This Unit. Preinstructional Planning. During Instruction