

Seuss.

If you want to pronounce the name the way his family did, say *Zoice*, not *Soose*. Seuss is a Bavarian name, and was his mother's maiden name: Henrietta Seuss's parents emigrated from Bavaria (part of modern-day Germany) in the nineteenth century. Seuss was also his middle name.

Theodor Seuss Geisel — known as “Ted” to family and friends — liked to say that he adopted the name “Dr. Seuss” because he was saving his real name for the Great American Novel he would one day write. But that's probably not true. When talking to the media, Geisel was more interested in telling a *good story* than he was in telling a *true* story.

The true story is also a good one, as we learn in Judith and Neil Morgan's excellent biography *Dr. Seuss & Mr. Geisel* (the primary source for what you are now reading). During his senior year at Dartmouth College, Ted Geisel and nine of his friends were caught drinking gin in his room. This was the spring of 1925, and the dean put them all on probation for violating the laws of Prohibition. He also stripped Geisel of his editorship of *Jack-O-Lantern* — the college's humor magazine — where Ted published his cartoons. To evade punishment, Ted Geisel began publishing cartoons under aliases: L. Pasteur, D.G. Rossetti '25, T. Seuss, and Seuss. These cartoons mark the first time he signed his work “Seuss.”

As a magazine cartoonist, he began signing his work under the mock-scholarly title of “Dr. Theophrastus Seuss” in 1927. He shortened that to “Dr. Seuss” in 1928. In acquiring his professional pseudonym, he also gained a new pronunciation. Most Americans pronounce the name *Soose*, and not *Zoice*. And that's how Ted Geisel became Dr. Seuss.

Dr.?

Dr. Seuss was not a doctor. Ted Geisel did consider pursuing a Ph.D. in English: After graduating from Dartmouth, he went to Oxford, where he studied literature from 1925 to 1926. I use the term “studied” loosely. Though his Oxford notebooks include some notes on the lectures, they reveal a much greater propensity for doodling.

One day after class, his classmate Helen Palmer looked over at his notebook.

“You're crazy to be a professor. What you really want to do is draw,” she told him. “That's a very fine flying cow!”

They got engaged, and she finished her M.A. Ted briefly contemplated becoming a scholar of the Irish satirist Jonathan Swift, but he realized that Helen was right. He really did want to draw. So, he left higher education, they returned to the U.S., and he became a cartoonist.

In 1955, Dartmouth gave him his first honorary doctorate. He would eventually receive several

more honorary degrees, including one from Princeton. By pursuing his love of drawing, Ted Geisel became one of the few people to earn a Ph.D. by dropping out of graduate school.

Quick, Henry, the Flit!

Success was not immediate. Ted married Helen in 1927, and they moved into a walk-up apartment on New York's Lower West Side while he tried to establish himself as a cartoonist. After a year of scraping by, Ted chanced upon the career that would make him famous: advertising. It all began when he happened to use a popular insecticide for a punchline. For a 1928 issue of *Judge* magazine, Seuss drew a cartoon in which a knight remarks, "Darn it all, another dragon. And just after I'd sprayed the whole castle with Flit!" The wife of an advertising executive saw the cartoon and asked her husband to hire Seuss to write ads for Flit.

In a typical Flit cartoon, large mosquitoes converge on a child at a picnic. His mother cries, "Quick, Henry, the Flit!" Father (Henry) looks for the Flit to save the day. In another, a ventriloquist's dummy sees a giant insect heading for him. To the astonishment of the ventriloquist, the dummy shouts, "Quick, Henry, the Flit!"

Dr. Seuss's ad campaign was a hit. "Quick, Henry, the Flit!" was the "Got Milk?" or the "Where's the Beef?" of its day — a catchphrase that everyone knew. As Robert Cahn wrote in his 1957 profile of Seuss, "'Quick Henry, the Flit' became a standard line of repartee in radio jokes. A song was based on it. The phrase became a part of the American vernacular for use in emergencies. It was the first major advertising campaign to be based on humorous cartoons."

Seuss went on to create ads for Holly Sugar, NBC, Ford, General Electric, and many others. For the next thirty years, advertising would remain Ted Geisel's main source of income. *The Cat in the Hat* would change all that.

"You make 'em. I'll amuse 'em"

The Cat in the Hat (1957) was Seuss's thirteenth children's book. *And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street* (1937) was his first. He wrote an even earlier, unpublished children's book in 1931.

Why did he decide to write for children? Geisel often said that a clause in his contract with Standard Oil (makers of Flit) prohibited him from undertaking many other types of writing, but not from writing children's books. As he told scholar and Dartmouth librarian Edward Connery Lathem in 1975, "I would like to say I went into children's book writing because of my great understanding of children. I went in because it wasn't excluded by my Standard Oil contract."

This might be true. However, given his tendency to embellish, there may be other truths he's

avoiding. Geisel wrote his first children's book in the same year that Helen learned she could not have children.

To silence friends who bragged about their own children, Ted liked to boast of the achievements of their imaginary daughter, Chrysanthemum-Pearl. He even dedicated *The 500 Hats of Bartholomew Cubbins* (1938) — his second children's book — to “Chrysanthemum-Pearl (aged 89 months, going on 90).” He included her on Christmas cards, along with Norval, Wally, Wickersham, Miggles, Boo-Boo, Thnud, and other purely fictional children. For a photograph used on one year's Christmas card, Geisel even invited in half a dozen neighborhood kids to pose as his and Helen's children. The card reads, “All of us over at Our House / Wish all of you over at / Your House / A very Merry Christmas,” and is signed “Helen and Ted Geisel and the kiddies.”

Perhaps curious to know what his own kiddies might have been like, in 1939 he and business partner Ralph Warren tried to invent an Infantograph, which promised to show how a couple's children would look. Although they never quite got it to work, Geisel did write advertising copy for the camera's expected debut at the World's Fair: “IF YOU MARRIED THAT GAL YOU'RE WALKING WITH, WHAT WOULD YOUR CHILDREN LOOK LIKE? COME IN AND HAVE YOUR INFANTOGRAPH TAKEN!”

His fourth children's book, *Horton Hatches the Egg* (1940), is about an adoptive father. Horton looks after Mayzie's egg and, when it hatches, becomes the newborn elephant-bird's parent.

People often asked Dr. Seuss how he, a childless person, could write so well for children. His standard response: “You make 'em. I'll amuse 'em.” The question ignores the fact that many great children's writers had no children of their own: Lewis Carroll, Edward Lear, Beatrix Potter, Margaret Wise Brown, Crockett Johnson, and Maurice Sendak, to name a few. That said, Seuss's funny answer may conceal a private sadness. As he told his niece Peggy, “it was not that we didn't want to have children. That wasn't it.”

Or he may be telling the truth about the Standard Oil contract. Or both may be true.

When he married the former Audrey Stone, who in 1968 would become his second wife, Ted Geisel acquired two stepdaughters: fifteen-year-old Lark and eleven-year-old Lea. However, for over half of his career as a children's author, Dr. Seuss had no children.

And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street

No one wanted to publish his first children's book — an ABC of fanciful creatures, including the long-necked whizzleworp and the green-striped cholmondelet. Several years later, he tried once more with a new book. Again, publisher after publisher turned it down.

The new book had seemed like a good idea. Aboard a ship, crossing the Atlantic in 1936, Geisel kept himself entertained by putting words to the rhythms of the ship's engines: "And to think that I saw it on Mulberry Street." This phrase grew into a story of a young boy named Marco imagining an increasingly fantastic parade. When Geisel arrived back home, he revised the text, added illustrations, and created a picture book.

Depending on the version of the story he tells, either 20, 26, 27, 28, or 29 publishers rejected the book. Geisel was walking down Madison Avenue, about to throw the book away, when he ran into former classmate Mike McClintock, who had just been appointed juvenile editor of Vanguard Press. McClintock promptly took him up to his office (Vanguard's offices were on Madison), where they signed a contract for *Mulberry Street*. As Geisel puts it, "That's one of the reasons I believe in luck. If I'd been going down the other side of Madison Avenue, I would be in the dry cleaning business today!" Would Seuss really have gone into the dry cleaning business? That's unlikely. But the "dry cleaning" line makes for a better story.

The Political Seuss - HORTON HEARS A WHO.

Dr. Seuss published his fourth children's book in 1940, and started on his fifth, *McElligot's Pool*, in early 1941. But that book would not appear for another six years.

He was worried about the expanding world war. As he put it, "While Paris was being occupied by the klanking tanks of the Nazis and I was listening on my radio, I found I could no longer keep my mind on drawing pictures of Horton the Elephant. I found myself drawing pictures of Lindbergh the Ostrich." Seuss is referring to Charles Lindbergh, the world-renowned American pilot and prominent isolationist. Lindbergh and other members of the America First Committee thought that the U.S. should stay out of the wars in Europe and the Pacific.

Seuss disagreed. As he later wrote, "We were going to have no choice in the matter." If war with the Axis powers (Germany, Italy, Japan) was inevitable, then, Seuss thought, the U.S. had better get prepared. Deciding to convince his fellow citizens that they needed to prepare for war, Seuss set aside *McElligot's Pool* and began his twenty-one-month career as a political cartoonist, publishing over 400 cartoons for the liberal New York newspaper *PM* between April 1941 and January 1943.

His cartoons make fun of isolationists. They mock the leaders of the Axis powers — Adolf Hitler, Benito Mussolini, and Hideki Tojo. They oppose fascism. They criticize discrimination against Jews and against African Americans, at a time when such discrimination was both legal and common.

Seuss's sensitivity to social injustice stems from his adolescence, the period of his life that he considered the source of his creativity. (Asked how much his childhood influenced his work, Seuss

replied, “I think I skipped my childhood,” but “I used my adolescence.”) His grandfather had emigrated from Germany in the nineteenth century and, during the First World War, young Ted Geisel was teased for being a German American. Classmates carrying brickbats chased him as they shouted, “Kill the Kaiser!” Fearing persecution, the Geisels’ Lutheran church stopped holding services in German and began holding services in English.

In 1921, his freshman year at Dartmouth College, no fraternities invited him to pledge. As he told his biographers, “With my black hair and long nose, I was supposed to be Jewish. It took a year and a half before word got around that I wasn’t. I think my interest in editing the Dartmouth humor magazine [*Jack-O-Lantern*] began ... that Pledge Week.”

It’s no coincidence that the boy picked on for his ethnicity and his (presumed) religion would grow up to create cartoons that attack prejudice. After the war, he brought his political message to his children’s books. A tale of a tyrannical turtle who builds his empire on the backs of his suffering citizens, *Yertle the Turtle* (1958) took its inspiration from the rise of Hitler. At the book’s conclusion, Mack — spoketurtle for his oppressed countrymen — burps, toppling the dictator Yertle. And the “turtles, of course ... all the turtles are free / As turtles and, maybe, all creatures should be.” Seuss’s opposition to anti-Semitism inspired *The Sneetches* (1961), a story in which star-bellied Sneetches discriminate against star-less Sneetches. At story’s end, they learn that “Sneetches are Sneetches / And no kind of Sneetch is the best on the beaches.”

A 1953 visit to Japan served as part of the inspiration of one of his most powerful anti-prejudice books: *Horton Hears a Who!* (1954). Dedicated to a Kyoto University professor he met on his trip, the book dramatizes the plight of the Whos, inhabitants of a planet threatened with destruction unless others (such as Horton) stand up for them. Who-ville facing annihilation suggests a parallel with two Japanese cities facing atomic bombs (dropped by the U.S. in 1945, ending the Second World War).

But the Whos could stand for any group of people threatened by a more powerful group. In the book’s memorable refrain, “A person’s a person, no matter how small,” the Whos’ small size is an arbitrary mark of difference — such as race, creed, sex, or nationality. As the *Des Moines Register* said in its review, the book offers “a rhymed lesson in protection of minorities and their rights.”

Seuss’s activist children’s books tell readers that even the smallest, apparently insignificant person has an important role to play. In *Yertle the Turtle*,

That plain little turtle below in the stack,
That plain little turtle whose name was just Mack
Decided he’d taken enough. And he had.

And that plain little lad got a little bit mad
And that plain little Mack did a plain little thing.
He burped!
And his burp shook the throne of the king!

“Plain little” Mack burps, toppling the king. In *Horton Hears a Who!*, Who citizens take to the streets to protest, but not until even the tiniest Who speaks up do they *finally* make themselves heard. When the mayor tells him, “open your mouth, lad! For every voice counts!,” little Jo-Jo shouts “YOPP!” and, finally, the Whos are heard, and those who were indifferent decide to protect them. As Horton says, “They’ve proved they ARE persons, no matter how small. / And their whole world was saved by the Smallest of All!” Reading books like these, children may get the message that even smallish Whos and little turtles can speak out and make a difference. This is a powerful lesson for young people to learn.

American Poet Laureate of Nonsense

No matter what readers learn from Seuss’s books, they will most likely learn it in rhyme. Of the forty-four books written and illustrated by Dr. Seuss, only four are in prose. If we add books illustrated by others, or written under another name, or co-authored, or published posthumously, then the total number of books is sixty-six, with only five in prose.

Why did Seuss prefer poetry? Grandpa Seuss was a baker, and Ted’s mother, Henrietta Seuss, worked in her father’s bakery before becoming Mrs. Geisel in 1901. As the Morgans note, Ted and his older sister, Marnie, often went to sleep to the sound of their mother chanting to them “softly, in the way she had learned as she sold pies, ‘Apple, mince, lemon ... peach, apricot, pineapple ... blueberry, coconut, custard, and SQUASH!’” He later said that his mother was most responsible “for the rhythms in which I write and the urgency with which I do it.”

Along with Robert Frost and Billy Collins, Dr. Seuss is one of America’s most popular poets. One reason that he rarely receives the respect that they do is that Seuss writes for children. Some critics look down their noses at “kiddie lit,” refusing to understand that, though written for people with less height or less vocabulary, children’s literature is not a lesser genre. It is literature, and good children’s literature is as worthy of praise as good literature for grown-ups.

The other reason Seuss’s poetic talents receive less notice is that he usually writes in the meter of the limerick, a form that gets little respect. Horton’s “I meant what I said and I said what I meant” has but one anapest more than “There was an Old Man with a beard.” An anapest is two unstressed

syllables followed by a stressed syllable — da-da-*duh*. Seuss sometimes introduces an initial anapest with an iamb, which is one unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable — da-*duh*. See, for example, “A person’s a person, no matter how small” or “I’m Yertle the Turtle! Oh, marvelous me! / For I am the ruler of all that I see!”

Seuss, however, is a powerful poet. He’s one of the few to change the language. Edward Lear’s “The Owl and the Pussycat” introduced *runcible* spoon. Lewis Carroll’s “Jabberwocky” coined both *galumphing* (a combination of *galloping* and *triumphant*) and *chortle* (*chuckle* plus *snort*). The word *nerd* first appears in Seuss’s *If I Ran the Zoo*

As his nonsense-poet predecessors did, Seuss invented a variety of animals and plants. Carroll gave us the Jabberwock, and Shel Silverstein, the Flying Festoon. Lear created the Jumblies, the Quangle Wangle, the Dong with a luminous Nose, and a wide range of fantastical flora. Seuss’s prodigious imagination created more, I think, than even Lear’s. In *Scrambled Eggs Super!* (1953) alone, Peter T. Hooper meets the Ruffle-Necked Sala-ma-goox, the Tizzle-Topped Grouse, the Shade-Roosting Quail, the Lass-a-lack, the Spritz, the Flannel-Wing Jay, the Twiddler Owl, the Kweet, the Stroodel, the Kwigger, the Long-Legger Kwong, the Grice, the Pelf, the Single-File Zummzian Zuks, the Mt. Strookoo Cuckoo, the three-eyelashed Tizzy, the Grickily Gractus, the Ziff, the Zuff, the Moth-Watching Sneth, the Dawf, the Bombastic Aghast, the Mop-Noodled Finch, the Beagle-Beaked-Bald-Headed-Grinch (apparently unrelated to the Christmas-stealing Grinch), Wogs (“the world’s sweetest frogs”), the Ham-ikka-Schnim-ikka-Schnam-ikka Schnopp, and a Jill-ikka-Jast. And that’s only one of Seuss’s bestiary books. He wrote nine more, each of which includes between a dozen to several dozen imaginary animals.

Oh, the Thinks He Could Think!

People often asked Dr. Seuss where he got his ideas. Since Seuss wasn’t sure himself, he tended to invent answers. As he told one such questioner:

This is the most asked question of any successful author. Most authors will not disclose their source for fear that other, less successful authors will chisel in on their territory. However, I am willing to take that chance. I get all my ideas in Switzerland, near the Forca Pass. There is a little town called Gletch, and two thousand feet up above Gletch there is a smaller hamlet called Uber Gletch. I go there on the fourth of August every summer to get my cuckoo clock repaired. While the cuckoo is in the hospital, I wander around and talk to the people in the streets. They are very strange people, and I get my ideas from them.

Though many of his inspirations were mysteries to him, Seuss based two of his most famous

characters on himself: the Grinch and the Cat in the Hat. In December 1957, just after *How the Grinch Stole Christmas!* appeared, Seuss explained the origins of the story to *Redbook* magazine:

I was brushing my teeth on the morning of the 26th of last December when I noted a very Grinchish countenance in the mirror. It was Seuss! Something had gone wrong with Christmas, I realized, or more likely with me. So I wrote the story about my sour friend, the Grinch, to see if I could rediscover something about Christmas that obviously I'd lost.

To accompany the article, he has drawn a self-portrait of Geisel looking into his bathroom mirror and the Grinch looking back. Seuss told many variations on this story, but he always mentions his identification with the Grinch, once describing him as a “nasty anti-Christmas character that was really myself.”

Although his license plate read “GRINCH,” Seuss also identified with the Cat in the Hat. A self-portrait of himself as the Cat accompanied a profile in the *Saturday Evening Post* of July 6, 1957. As his editor Michael Frith once remarked, “The Cat in the Hat and Ted Geisel were inseparable and the same. I think there's no question about it. This is someone who delighted in the chaos of life, who delighted in the seeming insanity of the world around him.” But the Cat in the Hat is more than just Geisel's alter ego.

The Cat in the Hat

Seuss wrote *The Cat in the Hat* because he was worried that children were not learning to read. Rudolf Flesch's *Why Johnny Can't Read — and what you can do about it* (1955), and John Hersey's “Why Do Students Bog Down on the First R?” (*Life*, 1954) both said that boring primers like Dick and Jane were a major cause of children failing to read. Hersey even suggested that Seuss write a better primer. William Spaulding, whom Seuss had worked with during the Second World War and who was then the director of Houghton Mifflin's education division, challenged him to “Write me a story that first-graders can't put down!” He asked that Seuss limit the book's vocabulary to no more than 225 different words, choosing those words from a list of 348. (For those of you who like to know these things, *The Cat in the Hat* has 236 different words. I counted them.)

Accustomed to using any words he liked or even making up words, Seuss nearly gave up when he faced that word list. His favorite story is that frustration with the list inspired the book. As he put it, “I read the list three times and almost went out of my head. I said, I'll read it once more and if I can find two words that rhyme, that'll be the title of my book. . . . I found ‘cat’ and ‘hat’ and I said, The title will be *The Cat in the Hat*.”

That story is probably not true. Images came to him easier than words did. In the very first

interviews he gave after the book's publication, he says that an image of the Cat inspired the book. He had halfway finished a story about a King Cat and a Queen Cat before he "realized the word 'queen' was not on the list," Frustrated and ready to quit, he then saw his sketch of "a raffish cat wearing a battered stovepipe hat." He "checked his list — both 'hat' and 'cat' were on it." So, *The Cat in the Hat* became the book's title.

The Cat himself has many literary ancestors, from Charles Perrault's Puss in Boots to George Herriman's Krazy Kat, but one of the more interesting influences is a real person. Seuss told the Morgans that he got the idea for the Cat while riding with William Spaulding in Houghton Mifflin's elevator. The elevator operator, Annie Williams, wore white gloves and had a sly smile — two of the Cat's most recognizable features.

Wherever the Cat came from, the book was an immediate hit. Published in March of 1957, *The Cat in the Hat* sold nearly a million copies by the end of 1960. The book's runaway success inspired Seuss, his wife Helen, and Phyllis Cerf to found Beginner Books, a division of Random House that would publish books designed to help children learn to read. In the fall of 1958, *The Cat in the Hat Comes Back* and four other titles launched the Beginner Books series, which would soon include P. D. Eastman's *Go, Dog. Go!* (1961), Stan and Jan Berenstain's *The Big Honey Hunt* (the first Berenstain Bears book, 1962), and Seuss's own *Green Eggs and Ham* (1960).

When publisher Bennett Cerf bet him that he could not make a book using fifty or fewer different words, Seuss wrote *Green Eggs and Ham*. The book is his best-selling title. *The Cat in the Hat* is in second place, followed by two more Beginner Books: *One fish two fish red fish blue fish* (1960) and *Hop on Pop* (1963). With the exception of *Oh, the Places You'll Go!* (1990), seven of the top eight best-selling Seuss titles of all time are Beginner Books. Dr. Seuss did not start writing children's books with the goal of helping children learn how to read, but he became America's best-known reading teacher.

The Lorax and The Butter Battle Book

But Seuss did not just want to teach children how to read. He also hoped to teach them how to think. As he wrote in an essay published in 1960, "children's reading and children's thinking are the rock-bottom base upon which this country will rise. Or not rise. In these days of tension and confusion, writers are beginning to realize that books for children have a greater potential for good or evil than any other form of literature on earth." He sought to nurture that potential for good in his post-war message books — *Horton Hears a Who!*, *Yertle the Turtle*, *The Sneetches*, *The Lorax*, and *The Butter Battle Book*.

The latter two are Seuss at his most blunt. Anger at careless treatment of the environment inspired

The Lorax (1971). However, in trying to write an ecological fable for children, Seuss found he was only writing “propaganda with a plot.” Though his political books have morals, Seuss disliked books that preach at their readers. His draft of *The Lorax* was too preachy. He was stuck.

Thinking that a trip might get him un-stuck, Audrey (his second wife) suggested that they go to Africa. In Kenya, sitting at his hotel swimming pool, Seuss saw “workmen cutting down trees” and thought, “They can’t cut down my Dr. Seuss trees!” He named these trees “Truffula Trees,” and invented the Lorax, a small, whiskery character who “speaks for the trees” because “the trees have no voices.” Seuss then saw, in the distance, a herd of elephants ambling over the top of a hill. As he later remembered, seeing those elephants “broke my logjam.” He wrote a full draft of the book on a laundry list — the only paper he had handy. After he returned to La Jolla, he revised and illustrated the book, using his remembered image of the trees for his Truffula Trees. As the Morgans note, at Audrey’s suggestion, Seuss shifted his color palette away “from his usual primary colors to mauve, plum, purple and sage-green.” The contrast between these bright colors depicting unspoiled nature and the grays, browns, and dark blues of the polluted landscape deftly highlights the need to take care of the environment. As a tribute to Audrey’s influence on the book, Dr. Seuss dedicated *The Lorax* to her and her two daughters, Lark and Lea.

The title character quickly became an icon of environmental conservation. In the book, the Once-ler (a repentant ex-industrialist) tells how he and his Thneed company polluted the environment, destroying the Truffula Trees, driving away the Lorax and the animals. Concluding by telling readers how they might make things right again, *The Lorax* advises, “Plant a new Truffula. Treat it with care. / Give it clean water. And feed it fresh air. / Grow a forest. Protect it from axes that hack. / Then the Lorax / and all of his friends / may come back.” Appropriately, when Keep America Beautiful gave Dr. Seuss an award in November 1971, the anti-litter organization predicted that *The Lorax* would “undoubtedly charm many children — and adults as well — into becoming pollution fighters.”

As confirmation of the book’s power, the Lorax is a fictional character with *real* enemies. Parents in logging communities have tried to get the book removed from school libraries and reading lists. The National Oak Flooring Manufacturers Association has published its own pro-logging rebuttal, *Truax*. Seuss’s *The Lorax* has even made the American Library Association’s annual list of challenged and banned books.

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.”

A little over a decade later, Seuss was concerned about President Ronald Reagan’s escalation of the

nuclear arms race. So he wrote *The Butter Battle Book* - and as he had done with *The Lorax*, Seuss dedicated the book to Audrey. The tale ends with a Yook and a Zook standing on the wall that divides their countries, each poised to drop a Seussian nuclear bomb on the other side. The Yook's grandson asks, "Who's going to drop it? / Will you ... ? Or will he ... ?" The reply: "'Be patient,' said Grandpa. 'We'll see. / We will see ...'" With that, *The Butter Battle Book* ends, leaving the reader to reckon with the problem posed.

Although some people thought this conclusion was a little too much for children, young readers themselves wrote their own endings and sent them to Seuss. As he told *USA Today* at the time, "most kids are saying 'Why don't we sit down and talk it over?' That seems to be the average answer." He trusted children's intelligence.

Indeed, treating children with respect was key to Seuss's philosophy of writing for them. As he said, "I don't write for children. I write for people." Or, as he once told an interviewer, "I think I can communicate with kids because I don't try to communicate with kids. Ninety percent of the children's books patronize the child and say there's a difference between you and me, so you listen to this story. I, for some reason or another, don't do that. I treat the child as an equal."

Seuss's Legacy

In 1991, a few weeks before his death, Judith and Neil Morgan asked him if there were anything he might have left unsaid. Seuss replied, "Any message or slogan? Whenever things go a bit sour in a job I'm doing, I always tell myself, 'You can do better than this.' The best slogan I can think of to leave with the kids of the U.S.A. would be 'We can ... and we've got to ... do better than this.'"

Seuss wrote books that make people think and imagine. In *On Beyond Zebra!*, he invented an entirely new alphabet because, as the book's narrator explains, "In the places I go there are things that I see / That I never could spell if I stopped with the Z. / I'm telling you this 'cause you're one of my friends. / My alphabet starts where *your* alphabet ends." In inviting readers to create a new alphabet, Seuss suggests that the imagination can lead to discoveries that are literally beyond words. So, to conclude with some verse from Seuss's *Oh, the Thinks You Can Think!*: "Think left and think right / and think low and think high / Oh, the THINKS you can think up if only you try!"

As a testament to Seuss's importance as both thinker and writer, he joins Hans Christian Andersen, Astrid Lindgren, and Mark Twain as one of the very few writers for children to have his own public statue. At the Dr. Seuss National Memorial Sculpture Garden in his hometown of Springfield, Massachusetts, a bronze Ted Geisel sits in a chair next to the Cat in the Hat. Nearby are some of the other creatures of his imagination — the Lorax, the Grinch and his dog Max, Yertle the Turtle, Horton

the Elephant, and Thidwick the Big-Hearted Moose. Lark Grey Dimond-Cates, the sculptor and Geisel's stepdaughter, said of the sculpture garden she designed, "I want people to leave taking Dr. Seuss's work a little more seriously... I think a lot of people take Dr. Seuss's work lightly — it's fluff, it's cute. If you sit down and read his books carefully, they have so much more to them."

At the sculpture garden's dedication in May 2002, Audrey paused by her late husband's likeness, looked in his eyes, and, holding back tears, clasped his bronze hand in hers. Lark asked her mother softly, "Is it right, Mom?" Audrey replied, "It's Ted. It's hard to put into words. It's an open-ended closure." Mrs. Geisel may have lacked words at that time, but she has worked to extend Seuss's moral and artistic influence through the Dr. Seuss Foundation, which provides primary support for over one hundred medical, cultural, and socially active institutions. As curator of the Seuss legacy, she reminds us that — in the words of the Lorax — "UNLESS someone like you / cares a whole awful lot, / nothing is going to get better. / It's not." Through the art and poetry of his books, Seuss encourages us to think creatively, participate in society, and do what we can to make it better. As Seuss writes in his final book, *Oh, the Places You'll Go!* (1990), "You have brains in your head. / You have feet in your shoes. / You can steer yourself / any direction you choose":

So ... be your name Buxbaum or Bixby or Bray
or Mordecai Ali Van Allen O'Shea,
you're off to Great Places!
Today is your day!
Your mountain is waiting.
So ... *get on your way!*

–Philip Nel

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