**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 Johny 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 attached 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**


**Photographs:** 1. “Dr Seuss star on Hollywood Boulevard”. (c) hankoss, 2007. In flickr with cc licence. 2. “Dr Seuss tree in La Jolla, California”. (c) slworking2, 2008. In flickr with cc licence
Dr. Seuss followed the tendencies of the time to use racial stereotypes for the Japanese, as in this poster urging the purchase of War Bonds. National Archives. 3. His cartoons were used to sell war bonds. Dr. Seuss was tasked with running a unit which wrote and produced animated films for the purpose of propaganda, training, and information. He worked primarily as a writer during his period with the Army. One example of his writing during the period was revealed in a film which was screened to American troops in the latter days of the war in Europe. The Dr. Seuss alias evolved from a pseudonym that Geisel came up with at Dartmouth College, his undergraduate alma mater. Not coincidentally, Seuss was also the maiden name of Geisel's mother, Henrietta. In its traditional pronunciation, Seuss rhymes with voice. But as the author's fame grew, people started mispronouncing it. Geisel's friend, Alexander Liang, responded by writing a poem: You're wrong as the deuce / And you shouldn't rejoice / If you're calling him Seuss / He pronounces it Soice. One of Ted Geisel's other aliases came from an unlikely source. At Dartmouth, Geisel once si Dr. Seuss Birthday Party. Crazy Hat Day. Drawing Activities. Time 4 Kindergarten. Dr. Seuss week. Celebrate literacy in your classroom with Dr. Seuss books and activities. Make a fun Thing one and Thing 2 hat or make Oobleck for a fun science experiment. Crazy Hat Day. Time 4 Kindergarten. Make a Dr. Seuss Thing 1 and Thing 2 hat with this Free download template. Great for Crazy Hat Day. This fun Dr. Seuss hat is quick and easy to make. Kindergarten Teachers. Kindergarten Activities. Dr. Seuss was not a real doctor. He add-ed the to his name to honor his dad, who wanted Theodor to finish his doctoral degree. Even though he never became a real doctor, he did write books that helped millions of kids learn to read. Dr. Seuss had also used other names, or pen names, to write books. These names include Theophrastus Seuss, Theo LeSieg (which is his real name spelled backwards), and Rosetta Stone. Dr. Seuss wrote more than 60 children's books, including some which have been made into movies, such as The Cat in the Hat, Horton Hears a Who, and How the Grinch Stole Christmas.