

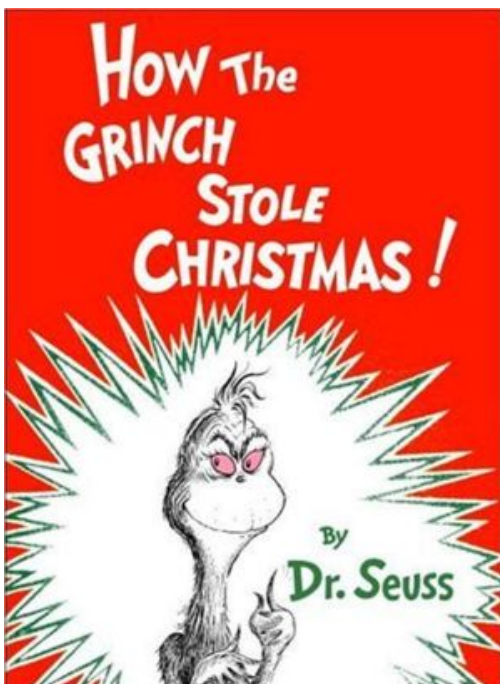
Happy Birthday Dr. Seuss!

Introduction by Gowdy Cannon

He left a mark on American Culture which is as unique and inimitable as could be. A few years ago, in a Facebook tournament I did on people who influenced your love for fantasy, I included him alongside names like Tolkien and Disney. Because he deserved it. Very few children in the U.S for the last several decades have escaped his influence. And considering how he took something as crucial to development as learning to read and crafted words and pictures to make us long for more books and to reread the same ones over and over, I would say his legacy in this arena is unrivaled.

So to honor what would have been the 114th birthday of Theodore Seuss Geisel, we pay tribute to five Dr. Seuss books that were formative to our childhoods and that have even impacted our adulthoods.

How The Grinch Stole Christmas – by D.A. Speer



As with (I assume) most other people in America, almost every childhood holiday season the animated Grinch movie would somehow end up on our TV. It usually wasn't deliberate on my family's part. The television would be on, and one of the major networks would be airing it. Thus, my memory of the story was piecemeal at best. And my most recent memory of it involved Jim Carrey, but we won't speak of "that one."

This past year while we were in Japan, my daughter suffered greatly from bacterial meningitis and made a miraculous recovery from both that *and* a mass/tumor that they discovered behind her eyes. After we moved back the States and she was given a clean bill of health, we were in shock. I think we might still be. Thus, I wanted to make this past Christmas extra special, because I was celebrating with my special daughter.

I hyped up the movie for her one day, and we sat down on the couch that evening to watch it, my arm around hers. I'm sure it was the first time I have seen it through as an adult.

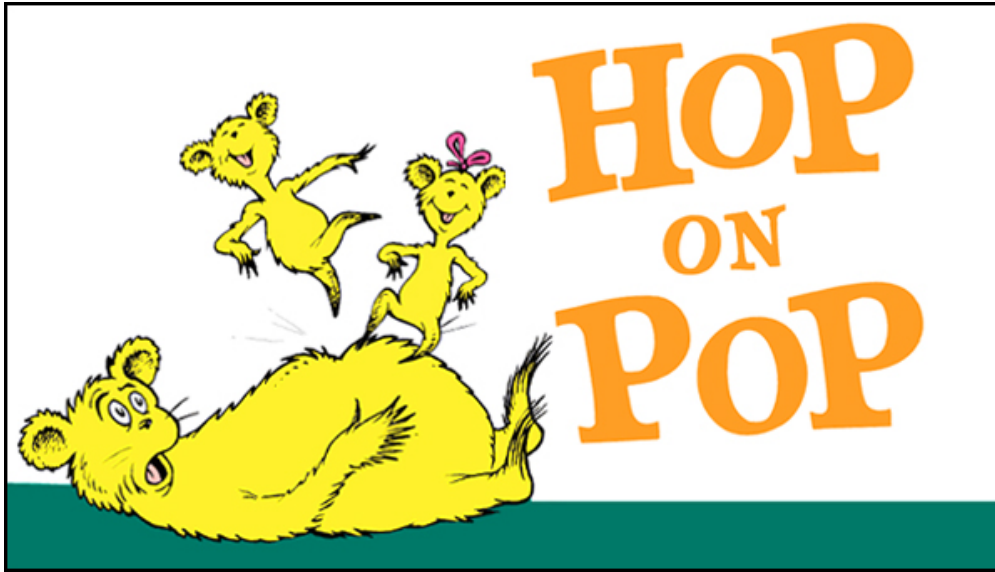
I soon realized while I was watching just what it was that kept Dr. Seuss's works alive and relevant after all these years. It wasn't the nostalgia. It wasn't the artwork. It wasn't that it was kitschy or had meme value. It was simply the heart.

When the townspeople gather together after all of their stuff is taken and happily sing their song anyway, I was completely overwhelmed. Tears started flowing.

"Christmas Day will always be just as long as we have we. Welcome Christmas while we stand, heart to heart, and hand in hand."

I hugged my daughter that much closer.

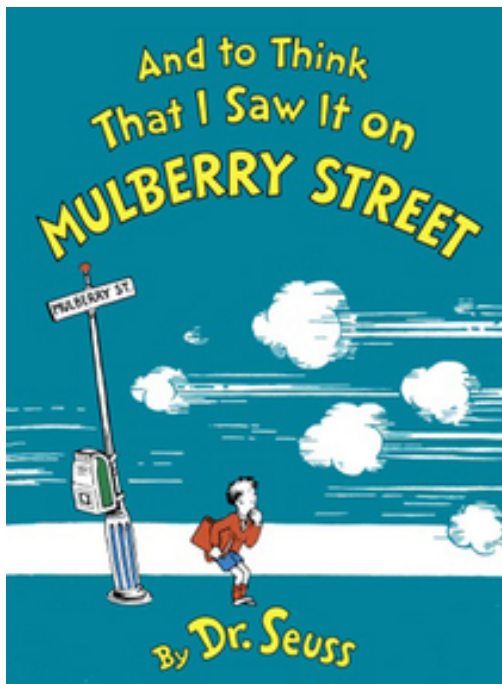
Hop On Pop – by Gowdy Cannon



A huge draw to Dr. Seuss has always been how he combines simplicity with zaniness to produce education and *Hop on Pop* is a premier example. This book is a riot to read and as a kid you probably do not realize how much you are learning about English sounds. As I've written recently, English is extremely inconsistent with pronunciation yet the good Doctor found some very common patterns and put them to at times nonsensical, other times pointed and yet always delightful phrases. I could live to be 100 and never forget the fish in the tree. Yet the quick wit of Dr. Seuss responds "How can that be?" And I will always associate this book with wanting to hop on my dad and him letting us (though not quite like in the book). Put this together with Seuss's hilarious illustrations and you have a timeless classic of a book.

This book to me is more entertaining than half of the TV episodes I have watched. At nearly 40 years old, it still tickles my brain.

And to Think That I Saw It On Mulberry Street – by Benjamin Plunkett

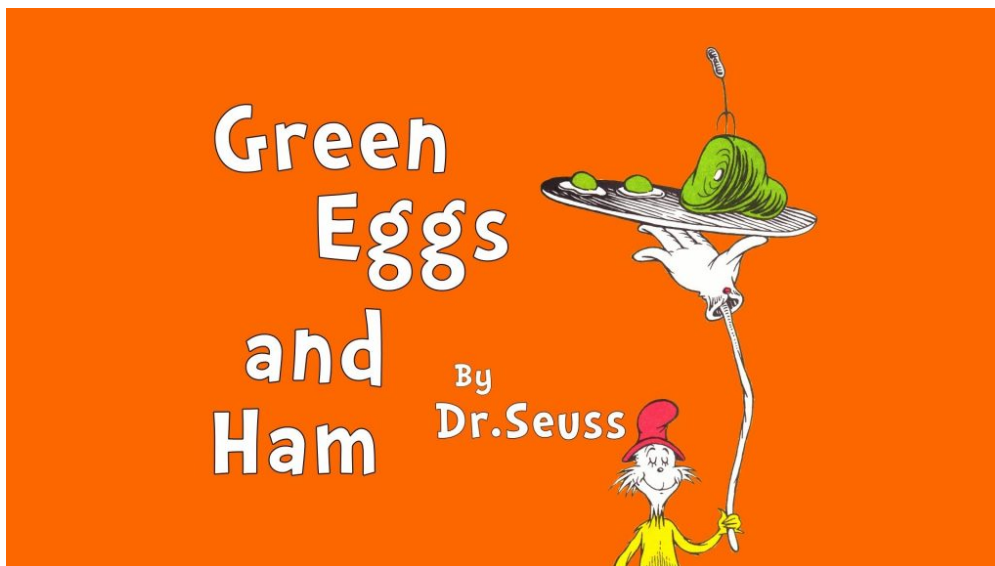


As a child, I read and owned around 20 books by Dr. Seuss (Theodor Geisel). No other books, juvenile or adult, have done more to inspire my imagination through both writing and imagery. The most imagination-inspiring and thus my favorite Seuss book of all is *And To Think That I Saw It On Mulberry Street*. Upon researching this book for REO I was surprised to discover that this was the very first children's book that he wrote in 1937. The story goes that he wrote the story to alleviate the immense boredom while traveling on a ship. And presto changeo, his first of a long and legendary line of children's books that inspired imagination in millions of kids for decades.

If you are not familiar with the story, you should be. Look it up now. The entire text of the book is online for free. Wow. Marco's imagination really grows on Mulberry Street. First it is just a horse and cart, then the horse turns into a zebra, then the cart turns into a chariot, and on and on it goes until finally there is a squad of policemen on motorcycles guiding two giraffes and an elephant pulling a wagon with a big brass band pulling another wagon with an old man watching

them in awe. And that's not all. Marco's imagination has spawned more stuff than you can, well, imagine. But Seuss could and he did. It is not an overestimation to say that Seuss probably had more of an impact on generations of children through his unforgettably imaginative writing, incredibly clever storylines, and the unfailing beauty of his signature illustrations than history's many pop culture personalities. Happy birthday, Dr. Seuss, may your works continue to impact children for many more years.

Green Eggs and Ham – by Phill Lytle

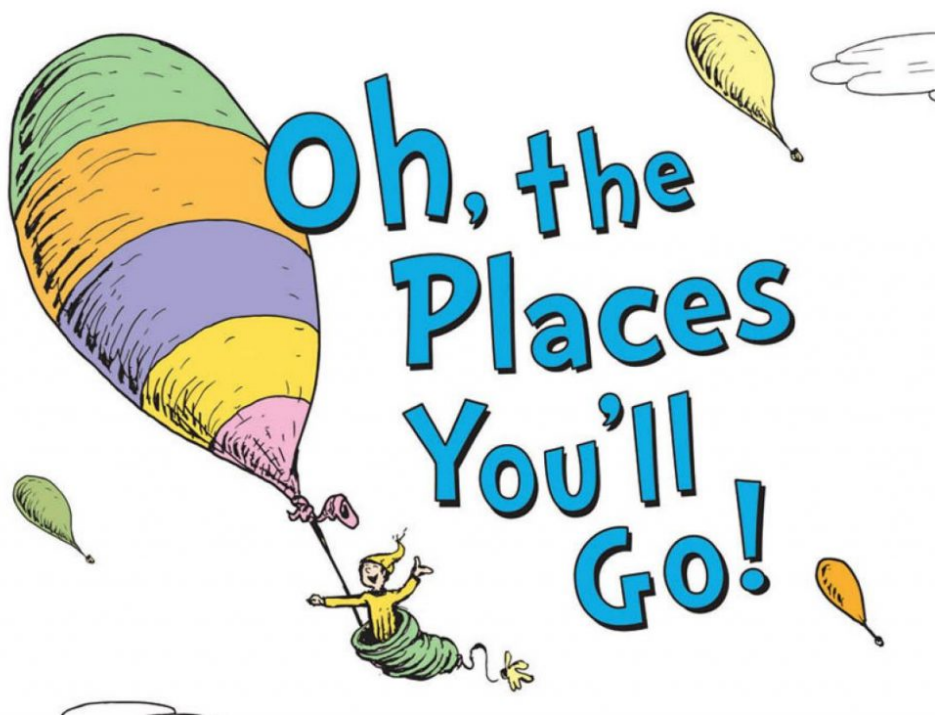


Sam (aka: Sam-I-am) is persistent. He is a bit pesky. It's no wonder the unnamed curmudgeon at the center of *Green Eggs and Ham* is so curmudgeonly. Sam just will not leave him alone. Sam-I-am makes his appearance riding the back of a happy-go-lucky creature while holding a sign announcing who he is...because, who wouldn't want to know who Sam is? Our humorless curmudgeon makes it clear at the outset that he does not care for Sam-I-am. So Sam does the most logical thing: he offers the grump some green eggs and ham. It's a hard pass on the green eggs and ham for Mr. Curmudgeon but Sam does not give up because he knows that if he can get his new "friend" to try this delicious meal, everything will change.

Sam is a genius. A happy, creative, crazy genius. His new friend – the curmudgeon – does not really dislike green eggs and ham. He dislikes Sam. We don't know why, but page 9 makes that perfectly clear. So Sam decides to wear him down. He presents one absurd option after another. Each more ridiculous than the one before. There are goats, boxes, and trains involved. By the end, Sam triumphs. The curmudgeon eats the green eggs and ham. He loves the green eggs and ham. He smiles. He puts his hand on Sam's back. He thanks Sam-I-am. They are friends indeed.

Only 50 words. That was all it took. The entire story, all 62 pages, used only 50 different words. That was the genius of Dr. Seuss. In this book, arguably his most popular, he used silly characters, crazy antics, and inventive rhymes to teach us how to try new things, how to deal with grumpy people, and how to admit when we are wrong and make amends.

Oh, the Places You'll Go! – by Amy Lytle



"You can go anywhere and be anything!"

Except when you can't.

"You are so amazing, everyone will love you!"

Except when they don't.

And that little word "except" is what makes me, a person who isn't very emotional, choke up nearly every time I read *Oh, the Places You'll Go!* In addition to Seuss' typical style of rhyme and imaginative word usage, he tackles the truth that life is hard and doesn't always go as planned, even for the brainiest and the footsy-est.

It's a book about grit.

As a teacher and a mother, I've read and studied and researched the concept of instilling resilience in children. We now have the research that shows the tell-everyone-they-are-great concept of building self-esteem does not work. Kids are too smart for empty words. Dr. Seuss was ahead of the research, publishing *Places* in 1990. He tells kids they have some choices in life, and even with brilliance and a sense of adventure, things don't always work out. But they should keep moving.

He tells them the truth.

That's five. There are so many more stories to talk about. We would love to hear about your favorites in the comment section below.