

# Dr seuss: man of religious and political controversy

Literature



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Dr. Seuss was known as the " Modern Day Mother Goose" and known for his popularity and success of writing children's stories (Morgan and Morgan 5). He was also known for his creative drawings and unique imagination (Cohen 21). He wrote children's stories that became instant successes. Three of which that became extremely successful and popular were How the Grinch Stole Christmas, Green Eggs and Ham, and The Lorax. However, with all the success of these books, there came a downfall.

As many parents and adults across the nation read these stories, they began to notice many religious and political messages featured in these children's books (Morgan and Morgan 67). Seuss had no intention of having messages featured in his stories and became upset that it became such a controversy over misunderstandings (Morgan and Morgan 67). These misinterpreted religious and political messages instantly triggered controversy in the household and at schools that sparked and created debates that still continue today (Morgan and Morgan 68).

Dr. Seuss wrote and published How the Grinch Stole Christmas in 1957. This story featured the cold-hearted Grinch that wanted to ruin Christmas for the people of Whoville. But in the end, he has a change of heart and celebrates Christmas with the Whos (Cohen 329). This book became an instant success in the bookstores because of its abnormality of your typical Christmas story (Cohen 329). It became such a success that it was even created into a movie in 1966 (Cohen 330). However, as families started purchasing and reading the book, many parents began to wonder if there were hidden religious and political messages.

Parents started believing that Seuss created this story to "exploit Christmas" as a religious message (Nel 168). Parents also believed "the anti-consumeristic message... has led many people to believe that [Seuss] was opposed to turning his characters into consumer goods" (Cohen 338). This also led them to consider that Seuss was "anti-Semitic" and trying to get the religious aspect of Christmas away from children (Morgan and Morgan 173). But sources of Seuss claimed that "How the Grinch Stole Christmas was written out of [Seuss]'s specific 'annoyance with the tradition of Christmas [being] turned into a mercantilistic holiday'" (Cohen 338).

He wanted to remind the public that Christmas was a time of celebration and giving to family and friends (Cohen 338). Seuss also wanted to get the message across that "the Christmas celebration may involve Christian religious beliefs but it need not to do so to be meaningful" (Seuss qtd. in Nel 179). This being said, Seuss wanted to have children of all religions to enjoy this story as oppose to just children that follow the Catholic faith (Nel 180). There was also a political message that was featured in How the Grinch Stole Christmas.

Parents thought the message was one that revolved around the Red Menace (Cohen 337). The Red Menace was a libertarian socialist and Marxism communist party (Nel 67). Their main goals were to overthrow the capitalist system and create their own "unique and creative world" (Nel 68). Parents and other adults felt that the Grinch's character and personality in the story was one that would support the Red Menace group and their political standpoints with his bitterness towards Christmas and his hopes of Christmas not taking place (Cohen 338).

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This sparked rumors that Seuss was possibly a communist and trying to reflect his views of "overthrowing" the government upon small children (Cohen 339). The second story that has gone through some controversy was Green Eggs and Ham. However, this book did not feature any type of political message but only a religious one. This book was published in 1960 and tells the story a character named Sam I Am and his friend, who is never named. Sam I Am is eating green eggs and ham and is trying to convince his friend to also do so but fails throughout the book until the end (Morgan and Morgan 171).

Controversy sparked after the repetitious phrase "Sam I Am, I am Sam" was repeated several times throughout the story (Morgan and Morgan 171).

Some biblical scholars have suggested that Sam I Am represents Sam from the Hebrew prophecy (Nel 65). This would stir such controversy because it is against the Mosaic Law to consume ham or meat of any kind (Nel 66).

Another skeptical religious message featured was a possible alternate Messiah (Morgan and Morgan 172). It has been said that in "the Old Testament Jahova refers himself as "I am" to Moses.

This being said, [Seuss] might be proposing the fact of an alternate Messiah named 'Sam I Am'" (Morgan and Morgan 172). Thus having these religious messages featured in this story causes Seuss to have the persona of being "anti-Semitic" once again (Morgan and Morgan 173). However, Seuss had no intention of these religious messages and was upset that many parents were misinterpreting the main idea of the story (Morgan and Morgan 173). Seuss simply wanted to create another book for children to enjoy without misunderstanding the main concept of the book (Morgan and Morgan 174).

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The third and probably most controversial book written by Seuss was *The Lorax*. This book was written and published in 1971 and was only known with controversy of political messages rather than religious ones. The book tells the story of a man named Lorax, the main character, who is trying to save the environment by trying to prevent trees being chopped down from a company with a very greedy owner known as the Once-ler (Nel 45). This story features messages " against rampant consumerism and anti-environmental industrialization" (Cohen 339).

In 1989 [*The Lorax*] became the center of a book banning controversy at the logging in California redwood county at the logging town of Laytonville, 150 miles north of San Fransico" because many children had parents that worked in businesses of chopping down and distributing trees (Morgan and Morgan 278). Many children became upset that their parents would participate in chopping down trees when the book they read was voicing out to save the trees and the environment (Morgan and Morgan 278).

The schools in this California area were interested in banning the book from the libraries and this created media attention across the United States (Morgan and Morgan 278). But after numerous debates with the school board and faculty, they decided that " the kids should think for themselves" and had the book remain on the shelves (Morgan and Morgan 278). Luckily however, there have been positive messages that have come about from this story. *The Lorax* " represents environmental conservation" and has become a " symbol for the American Forest, which is 'the nation's oldest non-profit citizen conservation organization'" (Nel 173-4).

These were Seuss' original intentions while creating this story (Nel 74). He wanted the book to be looked upon in a positive light rather than a negative one (Nel 73). Seuss's main goal for creating this book was to get the message of " anti-pollution and anti-greed" out there to the minds of children (Nel 57). He wanted to teach children the harms and dangers that some household products can do to the environment (Nel 60). He also wanted to show them how to become a good person by sharing and being able to think of others before being " greedy" and just thinking of yourself (Nel 60).

Seuss' intentions for these stories he wrote were positive but became misinterpreted by the public and by parents. The public created an image that made Seuss to look like an anti-Semitic Communist which is not what he was at all (Cohen 79). These controversies that came from these stories put Seuss in a bad light and brought upon a persona that he did not want to have. How the Grinch Stole Christmas, Green Eggs and Ham, and The Lorax are well written books that were loved by children and still loved by them today (Morgan and Morgan 64).

Since Seuss became so popular, this made him be apart of the constant public spotlight. Being in this spotlight comes along with all the opinions about his works from the public, and them trying to start controversy that will get the media and the nation into a frenzy (Nel 50). But Seuss knew that he did not need to prove himself to the public. He was able to ignore the false criticism and continued to write and create more unique and imaginative stories that were loved by children across the nation (Cohen 67).