THINK AND WONDER, WONDER AND THINK: QUESTIONS AND CRITICAL THINKING IN DR. SEUSS'S WORKS FOR CHILDREN

by

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ABSTRACT

ANNA GRAHAM. Think and Wonder, Wonder and Think: Questions and Critical Thinking in Dr. Seuss's Works for Children. (Under the direction of Dr. PAULA CONNOLLY)

Dr. Seuss is one of the most recognizable and influential authors in the field of children's literature. Employing his ironic "Seussian" style of nonsensical fun through his bold illustrations, wacky characters, and lyrical rhymes, Seuss's books charmed generations of children, instilling in them a love of reading and in turn positively impacting their literacy education. The numerous interviews and articles written by Seuss reveals that a key part of Seuss's success as a children's author is due to his unique respect for his young audience, stemming from his belief in children as the future of society's moral progress. Maintaining that "you don't teach by limiting, you teach by exciting," Seuss treated his young audience as equals by presenting complex and important concepts in a simple, yet engaging way. This thesis explores Seuss's utilization of direct and indirect questions in his many of his classic works, including Horton Hears a Who, Yertle the Turtle, and The Sneetches, to encourage children's sense of curiosity and critical thinking skills. In combination with this, historical context regarding Seuss's life experiences and sources of inspiration provide further insight into Seuss's method of asking his young readers questions to promote them to think critically about topics such as following the status quo, absolute obedience to authority, and the harm caused by discrimination. Acknowledging the ongoing scholarly criticism regarding Seuss's depictions of racist stereotypes, this thesis explores the value to be found in the continued exposure of Seuss's works to young children, ultimately arguing in favor of Dr. Seuss's belief in the importance of cultivating children's curiosity.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate my thesis to my family, friends, and fellow English graduate students at UNC Charlotte.

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INTRODUCTION

With six hundred million books sold in ninety-five countries and translated into seventeen different languages, Dr. Seuss is one of the most successful authors of all-time (Russell). Throughout his over fifty-year career as an author, Seuss was awarded the Pulitzer Prize, an honorary doctorate from Dartmouth University, Caldecott Honors, and a Peabody ("Dr. Seuss: About the Author" Penguin Random House). All of Seuss's notable achievements stem from his children's books that taught generations of children how to read. Through the guidance of his beloved characters such as Sam-I-Am, the Cat in the Hat, the Lorax, and the Grinch, Seuss instilled a love of reading in children while simultaneously transforming their literacy education.

Born as Theodor Seuss Geisel in 1904, Dr. Seuss is better known by his iconic pen name (Pease 2). Beginning his career as a student contributor for Dartmouth college's humor magazine *Jack-O-Lantern*, Seuss's illustrations for the magazine marked the first time he signed his creations with the pen name "Seuss" (Pease 3). After graduating from Dartmouth, Seuss obtained advertising work at the humor magazine the *Judge*, at which he became known for his cartoons for Flit bug spray (Jones 88). Due to the financial freedom that his work in advertising provided, Seuss expanded his creative efforts into children's literature (Jones 97). Persevering through numerous rejections, Seuss published his first children's book, *And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street*, in 1937 (J. Morgan and N. Morgan 82). Seuss's early years as a children's author were intertwined with his work as a political cartoonist (Minear 15). Motivated by his hatred of Hitler, Seuss's cartoons criticized Nazi sympathizers and Americans who wanted to stay out of the increasing conflict (Gilbert). Once America officially joined WWII after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, Seuss joined the United States army as an animator who created training and propaganda films (J. Morgan and N. Morgan 116). Following the conclusion of

WWII, Seuss left the army and became a dedicated children's book author until his death in 1991 (Gorman and Corwin).

As an author and illustrator, Seuss was a pioneer in the field of children's literature, and his success within the field can be credited to his genuine respect for his young target audience. Although children's authors as a whole are typically viewed as lesser in comparison to the "true" authors of adult literature, Seuss made it clear that he valued writing for children over adults who he radically declared were "just obsolete children and the hell with them!" (Greenleaf 96). Seuss's appreciation for children as the audience of his creative works stems from his foundational view of children as the hopeful future of society's progress: "Children's reading and children's thinking are the rock-bottom base upon which the future of this country will rise. Or not rise" ("Brat Books on the March" 2). As Seuss eloquently explained, children are the ones in control of shaping society, and children's minds are therefore one of the most valuable resources that humankind possesses. Due to this, children's literature is arguably the most influential form of art, as it directly shapes children's minds, and in turn the future of all of society.

Considering the clear value that Seuss placed on both children and their literature, it is no surprise that he upheld children's books to an incredibly high standard. Dissatisfied with the "lukewarm treacle" ("Brat Books on the March" 3) that characterized the field of children's literature during his time, Seuss maintained that overly simplistic and didactic stories not only bored children, but also insulted their intelligence. As an author, Seuss took an oppositional stance to these works, and instead respected his young audience: "I try to treat the child as an equal and go on the assumption that a child can understand anything that is read to him if the writer takes care to state it clearly and simply enough" (Gorney 86). Ultimately, Seuss believed

the key to a children's author's success, and even more importantly, their responsibility as an influence on the future generation, was not to shy away from complex narratives but simply tailor the story for a younger audience, such as the use of appropriate vocabulary and visual aids.

Seuss accomplished this as a children's author by refusing to underestimate the intelligence of children's minds. Upholding that "you don't teach by limiting, you teach by exciting" (Conklin), Seuss understood that the key to successful children's literature was to simultaneously entertain and educate. After all, if child readers are genuinely engaged with the narrative due to its entertainment value, then they are also more willing to pay attention to the deeper lessons present within the story. Although Seuss correctly identified that children "can see a moral coming a mile off and they gag at it," he also understood that "there's an inherent moral in any story" (Bunzel 12). Therefore, the key to shaping children's minds through literature is not to bluntly tell them what to think, but instead encourage them to ask questions about the narrative and ultimately promote their critical thinking about the world. This sentiment is a notable aspect of the influential scholar Philip Nel's work *Dr. Seuss: American Icon*. In this work, Nel explains how "Seuss's characters encourage children to ask questions of their world… Seuss tries to cross the boundary between the page and his reader… by putting the matter into his reader's hands" (38-44).

Throughout his numerous works as an author of children's literature, Seuss incorporated both direct and indirect questions as his characteristic way of engaging with children's minds. Easily identifiable, direct questions explicitly acknowledge the reader within the narrative by including a literal question for them to ponder. Making use of the second person pronoun "you," these direct questions forcibly place young readers straight into the narrative, immediately crafting a deeper connection to the story. Through the inclusion of a direct question, readers

themselves become an inseparable part of the story and therefore must ponder the direct question to advance the narrative. Although more subtle, indirect questions also prompt child readers to question both the story itself and the world beyond. Broader in scope, indirect questions consist of any narrative element that causes readers to ponder the "inherent moral" (Bunzel 12) of the story. From lines of dialogue to character's actions, indirect questions prompt children to think without the use of a literal question mark.

One of Seuss's most well-known works, *The Cat in the Hat,* is a perfect example of the author's use of a direct question to encourage his young readers to think while simultaneously entertaining them. *The Cat in the Hat* was initially created through a commission from the director of Houghton Mifflin's education division, William Spaulding (Nel 29). Inspired by a popular Life magazine article that blamed boring educational primers for America's illiteracy rates, William Spaulding sought to fill this market void by challenging Seuss to "write me a story that first-graders can't put down!" using only 225 words from a prescribed list (J. Morgan and N. Morgan 154). Seuss's answer to this challenge was *The Cat in the Hat,* a story of nonsensical fun as the titular character interrupts Sally and her unnamed brother's boring rainy day. With his increasingly ridiculous antics, from balancing a fishbowl on his head to flying kites indoors, the cat exposes young readers to basic vocabulary words. Charmed by the cat's silliness and Seuss's dynamic illustrations, young readers are more likely to pay attention to the story and in turn develop their reading skills. Due to this combination of education and entertainment, *The Cat in the Hat* quickly became a bestseller that slowly replaced Dick in Jane as the primary teaching tool in classrooms (Go). In an interview with children's literature scholar Jonathon Cott, Seuss claimed that *The Cat in the Hat* was "the book I'm the proudest of… because it had something to do with the death of the Dick and Jane primers" (25). In addition to being the successful killer of

the Dick and Jane primers, *The Cat and the Hat*'s immense success led to the creation of the Beginner Books division of Random House, of which Seuss was the founding president and editor (Menand).

Although *The Cat in the Hat*'s ability to both entertain and teach children to read is notable, it is the conclusion to the story that truly encourages children to think. Upon learning that their mother is almost home, the siblings frantically clean up the cat's mess and send him away. When their mother returns and asks the children what they did while she was gone, Seuss does not reveal their answer. Instead, Seuss concludes the story by directly asking his young readers a question: "Well, what would you do if your mother asked you?" (*Cat in the Hat* 61). Through this deceptively simple decision to include this direct question as the story's conclusion, Seuss did not just instruct children to understand the face value of written words. Going beyond dictionary definitions and phonics, Seuss instead taught his readers the value of asking questions and cultivated their curiosity by directly acknowledging them in his text. Through the direct question posed in the text, Seuss encourages children to debate the potential merits of honesty along with obedience to authority, and in turn create the conclusion of *The Cat in the Hat* themselves. Also during his interview with children's literature scholar Jonathon Cott, Seuss declared that the ultimate theme of *The Cat in the Hat* was "a revolt against authority" (28), as is clear from the rebellious actions of the cat throughout the story. While Seuss explained that the impact of this theme is "ameliorated by the fact that the cat cleans everything up at the end" (Cott 28), the use of a direct question to conclude the story ensures that young readers engage with these questions even once they are done reading.

In a similar manner to *The Cat in the Hat*, *The Butter Battle Book* also employs a unique ending to encourage its young leaders to think critically about the world. However, while *The*

Cat in the Hat makes use of a direct question, *The Butter Battle Book* utilizes indirect questions. Motivated by his concern for the increasing tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union after the conclusion of WWII, Seuss criticized the mutually assured destruction of the arms race during the Cold War in *The Butter Battle Book* (Jones 400). An allegory for the conflict, *The Butter Battle Book* follows the increasing dispute between the Yooks and Zooks over which side of bread butter should be placed on. Through the ridiculous nature of this quarrel, Seuss incorporates an indirect question to prompt his readers to question if the reason behind real-life conflicts is also just as pointless. As the young protagonist's Grandpa tells him the history of the war, the Yooks and Zooks are revealed to be mirrors of one another in almost every way, except for the side of bread they butter. This intentional comparison of the two groups highlights how they are not fundamentally dissimilar, and instead allow petty differences to divide them to the detriment of everyone involved, no matter their side of the conflict. Functioning as a representation of young readers, the youthful Yook protagonist is the only one to question the actions of the fellow Yooks at the very end of the story by asking which side of the fight is going to bring about their mutual destruction first: "who's going to drop it?" (Seuss, *Butter Battle Book* 42). The story ends without true resolution, forcing readers to question the ending of the story and engage with their sense of curiosity, motivating them to create their own ending in their minds. By leaving readers without an answer, Seuss's story forces young readers to continue asking questions even once the narrative concludes. This was an intentional decision of Seuss, who in an interview with Kathy Hacker for the *San Francisco Examiner* explained how "I am leaving it up to them to write the happy ending for me. Adults haven't been able to do it so far" (Jones 403). Through this statement, Seuss revealed his continued faith in the minds of

children as the hope for the future, along with the responsibility of children's literature to encourage children's critical thinking.

Breaking the traditional boundaries of fiction, Seuss's direct and indirect questions for his young readers engage them with the story on a deeper level, leading them to think about the content of the story outside of its fictional narrative and in turn develop their critical thinking skills. Seuss's works provided a unique and genuinely entertaining alternative to the typical moralistic and boring primers, as his characteristic style of fun, ridiculous plots, and bold, exaggerated illustrations captivated millions of children and inspired them to think. By treating his young audience with respect and understanding the importance of literature being entertaining, Seuss succeeded as a children's author and forever changed the field of children's literature.

This work will explore how Seuss used direct and indirect questions to encourage children to critically think about his stories and in turn the real world. Utilizing close reading of Seuss's literary devices, the following chapters will analyze how Seuss's unique writing and illustrating style enabled him to communicate his direct and indirect questions to his readers while simultaneously entertaining them. In combination with this close reading, historical context regarding Seuss's life experiences and sources of inspiration will be incorporated to provide further insight into Seuss's use of questions to encourage his young readers' sense of curiosity. Chapter One will explore Seuss's depiction of the character Horton the Elephant in *Horton Hatches the Egg* and *Horton Hears a Who* as a means of encouraging children to question the status quo. Following this, Chapter Two will analyze how the change in depiction of authority figures in *The 500 Hats of Bartholomew Cubbins*, *Bartholomew and the Oobleck*, and *Yertle the Turtle* prompt young readers to question blind obedience to authority. Finally, Chapter

Three will examine Seuss's use of *The Sneetches* to encourage children to recognize and challenge discrimination.

CHAPTER 1: HORTON HATCHES A QUESTION: DR. SEUSS CHALLENGES THE STATUS QUO

There is no greater form of questioning than questioning oneself. Dr. Seuss's transformation into a man willing to question others' beliefs, and eventually even his own convictions, occurred due to the most significant event of the 20th century: World War II. Prior to WWII, Seuss had no particularly strong political convictions (J. Morgan and N. Morgan 98). Seuss credited Hitler as the catalyst for his metamorphosis: "I had no great causes or interest in social issues until Hitler" (J. Morgan and N. Morgan 98). Due to this, Seuss increased his involvement with the New York *PM* magazine, working as a political cartoonist (Gilbert). Viciously condemning Hitler and other Nazi supporters for their antisemitism, Seuss used his characteristic "Seussian" illustrations and ironic humor to rally American support for the war (Gilbert). Taking a firm stance against American isolationism in the face of Nazi expansion, Seuss argued in favor of America joining in the war effort through his cartoons (Gilbert).

One of Seuss's most well-known political cartoons attacking the Nazi regime features a woman wearing an "American First" sweater while reading aloud to a group of wide-eyed children from a story book titled *Adolf the Wolf* (Cohen 217). As the children listen in apparent alarm, the woman reads: "And the wolf chewed up the children and spit out their bones. But those were *Foreign Children* and it really didn't matter" (Cohen 217). The message of this cartoon could not be clearer: Americans who campaigned for isolationism were simultaneously approving of the mistreatment and death of children at the hands of the Nazis. Through this cartoon, Seuss established his humanitarian beliefs, founded in the concept that children from all races and cultures deserve health and happiness, and that a truly great America has a responsibility to assure this reality.

Seuss's willingness to question the status quo was not limited to his political cartoons, as his abhorrence for Hitler's policies of hatred and discrimination impacted Seuss's growing career as a children's author (Cohen 203). Wanting to ensure that children were not easily manipulated by this type of harmful propaganda, Seuss represented the value of questioning the status quo through his beloved character Horton the Elephant. Introduced in the 1940 children's book *Horton Hatches the Egg*, the elephant illustrates Seuss's stance against America's isolationism in World War II. Through Horton's loyalty and kindness towards an abandoned egg in face of others' derision, Seuss encourages his young readers to question the status quo and in turn form their own opinions on what is right and wrong.

Horton Hatches the Egg begins with Horton the elephant agreeing to help an exhausted mother bird, Mayzie, watch over her egg while she takes a rest. Unbeknownst to Horton, Mayzie immediately takes advantage of Horton's kindness, flying away and abandoning her child. Horton's mindful care of the egg, which he affectionately refers to as the "little egg" (Seuss, *Horton Hatches the Egg* 8), contrasts sharply to Mayzie's selfish disregard of her offspring, and simultaneously establishes Horton's strong moral character. Right from these first few introductory pages of the novel, it is clear how Horton's character was influenced by Seuss's regard for children, even those from different races and cultures. Horton's newfound parental relationship to the egg further reveals this, as their differing species does not impact Horton's willingness to care for an innocent child.

When the other animals come to visit Horton and see him caring for the egg, they react with intense negativity. Instead of praising Horton for his kindness and loyalty, they insult the elephant's intelligence: "Look! Horton the Elephant's / Up in a tree!... How absurd! Old Horton the Elephant / Thinks he's a bird!" (Seuss, *Horton Hatches the Egg* 19). With large grins and

wide eyes, the animals make Horton the subject of their amusement. Near the center of the opening a lion points his paw at Horton, ensuring that his companions notice Horton's place resting on the egg's nest. The lion is the only animal on the spread not looking directly at Horton, as the lion's head is turned back to face his fellow animals, illustrating how the lion cares strongly for the approval of others, which he successfully receives.

The lion contrasts sharply to Horton, who has been positioned on the side of the page to show how he is being separated from the majority. Horton's sad expression shows that upholding his responsibility to the egg is a difficult decision for him to make in the face of others' criticism. His posture reveals how he wishes to run away, as Horton leans away from the other animals to the point that the side of his body goes off the edge of the page. Horton's clear distress is made all the more impactful through the phrasing "his friends" (Seuss, *Horton Hatches the Egg* 18) to describe the other animals, revealing the personal connection that Horton has to those who now choose to shun him.

Eventually becoming bored with laughing at Horton, all the animals run off to play leaving the elephant behind. Horton is depicted as tiny, and therefore far away, in the top left corner, illustrating how he is now being left alone. Horton's sad expression and drooping posture reveal the sadness he feels at being abandoned by his friends. The other animals are drawn in the process of running across the spread, with many of them having their heads turned back to look at Horton and have one last laugh at the elephant's expense: "They laughed and they laughed. Then they all ran away. / And Horton was lonely. He wanted to play" (Seuss, *Horton Hatches the Egg* 21). It is at this crucial moment in the story when Seuss incorporates the value of questioning the status quo through the character of Horton. In the face of his friends' laughter and rejection, Horton must make a decision. Will the elephant listen to what others tell him to do

and abandon the defenseless egg? Or will he stand against them and keep his promise to care for a child in need? These indirect questions that Horton wrestles with function as a means of promoting the value of questioning the status quo to the story's young readers. What will Horton do? And even more importantly, what is the right thing to do?

Dr. Seuss's narrative supports questioning the status quo through Horton's ultimate refusal to abandon the egg: "But he sat on the egg and continued to say: 'I meant what I said / And I said what I meant… An elephant's faithful / One hundred per cent!'" (*Horton Hatches the Egg* 21). By keeping his promise to the egg, Horton makes the difficult decision to rebel against the status quo and come to his own conclusion on what is right and wrong, encapsulating the theme of the story. However, Horton is immediately met with further challenges to his decision, in the form of stalking hunters. Building suspense for readers, Dr. Seuss depicts Horton facing away, looking out into the distance, as men carrying guns approach sneakily from behind. This is paired with Horton's announcement that "No matter WHAT happens, / This egg must be tended!" (Seuss, *Horton Hatches the Egg* 22), establishing that Horton is about to place himself into danger to protect a defenseless child.

Representing the potential consequences of questioning the status quo, the hunters pose a deadly threat to Horton, as the elephant turns around to see "Three rifles were aiming / Right straight at his heart!" (Seuss, *Horton Hatches the Egg* 25). With a fearful expression on his face, Horton gazes down at the three rifles that point at him. The men holding the guns are cut off from the corner of the page, allowing the focus to remain on the threat of the weapons. Despite the threat to his life, Horton refuses to abandon the egg: "Did he run? *He did not!* HORTON STAYED ON THAT NEST!" (Seuss, *Horton Hatches the Egg* 26). Radically changing from his earlier fear, Horton's dedication to the egg imbues him with confidence and bravery. With his

arms crossed and head held high, Horton's determination overcomes even his fear of death: "Shoot if you must / But I *won't* run away!" (Seuss, *Horton Hatches the Egg* 26). Instead of being killed, Horton's unusual behavior saves his life. Fascinated and amused by Horton's act of sitting on the nest, the hunters believe that they can "sell him back home to a circus, for money!" (Seuss, *Horton Hatches the Egg* 29). This functions as a reward for Horton's decision to question the status quo, as it was Horton's refusal to abandon the egg that becomes the very thing that saves his life.

Unfortunately for Horton, his troubles are not over. The journey as the hunters' captive is long and unpleasant, as Horton struggles with seasickness. Once he is sold to a circus, Horton is lonely in the hot and stinky tent, his only company the humans who come to laugh at him. Despite it all, Horton refuses to abandon his "little egg" (Seuss, *Horton Hatches the Egg* 8). However, Horton's suffering is eventually interrupted by the surprise appearance of Mayzie, the mother bird who laid the egg. Startled by Mayzie's arrival, Horton has no time for a response, as the egg chooses that very moment to begin hatching: "A thumping! A bumping! A wild alive scratching! '*My egg*!' shouted Horton. 'My EGG! WHY, IT'S HATCHING!'" (Seuss, *Horton Hatches the Egg* 44). Responding with joy, Horton's sole attention is on the egg. Horton's joyful reaction to the hatching egg serves as Seuss's way of building up suspense for the story's conclusion, and in turn his ultimate endorsement of Horton's selfless actions.

Revealing her true selfish nature, Mayzie responds to Horton's loving excitement with anger, accusing the elephant of stealing her egg: "It's MY egg!... You stole it from me! *Get off my nest and get out of my tree*!" (Seuss, *Horton Hatches the Egg* 47). As poor Horton begins to agree to Mayzie's request, the egg finishes hatching. Out of the eggshell bursts a unique baby bird with "ears, and a tail, and a trunk" (Seuss, *Horton Hatches the Egg* 48) just like Horton. The

baby takes the center focus of the opening, as bold blue lines depict the dramatic movement of the child breaking free from its shell. Gazing at the child with a wide smile, Horton's affection for the baby contrasts with Mayzie, who is pushed off to the side of the page with an upset expression.

After noticing the commotion, the human visitors of the circus arrive to witness the brand new "elephant-bird" (Seuss, *Horton Hatches the Egg* 51) happily perched upon Horton's outstretched trunk. Making its own choice of parent, the baby elephant-bird rewards Horton's loyalty with its own, leaving Mayzie alone and pouting. The elephant-bird's hybrid biology, and its choice to form a family with Horton, is directly acknowledged by Dr. Seuss in the text as the proper ending to the story: "And it should be, it *should* be, it SHOULD be like that! Because Horton was faithful! He sat and he sat!" (Seuss, *Horton Hatches the Egg* 51). Moved by their bond, the humans at the circus return a "happy" (Seuss *Horton Hatches the Egg* 52) Horton home, along with his child. Enthusiastically welcomed by the animals who previously scorned him, Horton's willingness to question the status quo has changed his life for the better. The conclusion of the story serves as the ultimate way for Dr. Seuss to emphasize the value of questioning the status quo to his young readers.

After the publication of *Horton Hatches the Egg* in 1940, Seuss's focus on children's books shifted in favor of increasing his investment in creating political cartoons to promote America's need to join the war (Nel 39). Passionate in his convictions, Seuss remained firm and unapologetic for his condemnation of Hitler and Nazi supporters: "I was intemperate, unhumorous in my attacks… and I'd do it again" (Jones 144). Following the bombing of Pearl Harbor in December of 1941, Seuss's sentiments regarding America's need to become involved in the war became the dominant viewpoint of Americans (Minear 43). However, this did not

lessen Seuss's motivation for political cartooning, as Seuss continued to promote the war effort (Minear 44).

Despite Seuss's hatred for Hitler and Nazism due to its core values of antisemitism, Seuss perpetuated his own form of discrimination fueled by his anger over Pearl Harbor (Minear 43). Dehumanizing the Japanese people into merely the villainous enemy of the United States, Seuss agreed with American propaganda that all Japanese individuals were not to be trusted (Minear 43). When well-known activist and pacifist John Haynes Holmes published an article calling for Americans to remember that the Japanese were more than enemy soldiers but also "our brothers" in humanity, Seuss responded with a scathing article of his own, in which he declared "If we want to win… we've got to kill Japs… We can get palsy-walsy afterward with those that are left" (Jones 146). Although Seuss's vehement dedication to America's need to defeat the Axis powers is understandable, his violent dismissal of any acknowledgement of the Japanese people's humanity reveals a form of thinking that is disappointingly reminiscent of Hitler's rhetoric.

This anti-Japanese sentiment of Seuss's is further represented in his political cartoons (Cohen 240). While almost all of Seuss's illustrations feature exaggerated and stereotyped racial features, which are undoubtedly racist according to modern standards, it is the continued attack on the humanity of the Japanese people that most clearly reveals Seuss's hypocrisy. In February of 1942, Seuss published a political cartoon in *PM* that featured a procession of Japanese Americans journeying across the West Coast (Cohen 240). These Japanese men accept packages of explosives, smiling as they await orders to enact domestic terrorism (Cohen 240). The top of the cartoon summarizes it with the words "Waiting for the Signal From Home…" (Cohen 240). This political cartoon encapsulates the ever-increasing distrust toward Japanese immigrants,

including how they were not considered to be true Americans. Instead, as is evident through Seuss's use of the word "home," Japanese immigrants were still viewed as different from other Americans, and therefore belonging away from America.

Seuss was certainly not alone in this sentiment, as it was promoted by many prominent political figures in America, which in turn fed into the fears of bombings from those living on the West Coast (Minear 43). The othering of Japanese Americans culminated into President Roosevelt signing U.S. Executive Order 9066 in February 1942, forcibly relocating Japanese Americans into internment camps only six days after the publication of Seuss's cartoon (Cohen 240). Despite the blatant parallels to this act and the Nazi concentration camps, the American people largely accepted it with little protest, including Seuss (Minear 44).

However, the influence of his fellow colleagues at *PM* magazine enabled Seuss to reconsider this easy acceptance of dehumanizing Japanese individuals (Cohen 241). Charles D. Cohen, author of *The Seuss The Whole Suess and Nothing But the Seuss: A Visual Biography of Theodor Seuss Giesel,* credits *PM* editor Ralph Ingersoll for having a profound impact in guiding Seuss to question himself, specifically his discriminatory views on Japanese people (242). Ingersoll's own beliefs on the topic are best represented through one of his most popular articles for *PM,* in which he stated, "America is great . . . because of the fact that not races or creeds, but the people themselves are what is important… Neither the colors they come in nor the creeds their fathers handed down to them shall be allowed to hinder nor to help them in their pursuit of happiness. This is the American principle that is worth working and worth dying for" (Cohen 242). Although it is unknown what types of conversations the two men may have had together on the subject, what is evident is how this sentiment regarding the importance of equality impacted Seuss (Cohen 242).

Following the publication of Ingersoll's article on March 28th, 1942, Seuss's own work underwent a radical shift. No longer targeting Japanese individuals as the inhumane villains of a pure and righteous America, Seuss's political cartoons instead dared to criticize America's rampant racism, especially as a factor impeding the war effort (Minear 65). One of the political cartoons that most clearly illustrates this was published in June 1942 (Cohen 218). Titled "What This Country Needs Is a Good Mental Insecticide," the cartoon features Uncle Sam spraying insecticide into a man's head (Cohen 218). The insecticide blasts out the man's ear, cleaning the man's brain of the "racial prejudice bug" (Cohen 218). Considering that Seuss's early career was rooted in his Flit insecticide advertisements, it is clear that he was intentionally including himself as someone in need of the anti-prejudice insecticide (Pease 48).

While Seuss still upheld his conviction that the Axis powers had to be defeated, he questioned the dominant view that dehumanized and othered Japanese people, coming to his own conclusions. Seuss bravely maintained his willingness to question even upon joining the military during World War II (Pease 67). As a member of the army, Seuss's duties were tailored to his skills as an author and cartoonist, including producing informational brochures, training films, and educational materials (Jones 165). One of his primary assignments during his time in the military was the production of the film *Know Your Enemy: Japan* (J. Morgan and N. Morgan 107). Meant to educate American soldiers on Japanese history, society, and culture, Seuss's film was canceled for portraying the Japanese people with "too much sympathy" (Jones 185).

Following Japan's surrender after the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Seuss was once again contracted to create a film on Japan (Jones 188). Titled *Our Job in Japan*, the film was meant to instruct American soldiers for their time occupying Japan (Jones 189). Notably, Seuss included a warning against American soldiers "pushing people around" (Jones 189), using

the film as a means of sharing his belief that the Japanese people were human beings worthy of respect. This film eventually became the basis for Seuss's biography film on Japan, *Design for Death*, which won an Academy Award in 1947 (J. Morgan and N. Morgan 120). Despite the film's critical acclaim, Seuss was unhappy with the final product, which focused more on sensationalism than a realistic depiction of Japan (Jones 198).

In 1953, after leaving the military, Seuss decided to visit Japan (Pease 92). Motivated by a lingering sense of guilt over his previously racist beliefs, Seuss admitted that his "conscience got the better of [him]" (Jones 229). Utilizing his connections with *Life* magazine, Seuss, along with his wife Helen, took a well-funded trip to Japan (Pease 92). Wanting to finally have control over his work featuring Japanese people, which he had not had since his time in the military, Seuss spent his time in Japan learning how American occupation had impacted Japanese children (J. Morgan and N. Morgan 136). Making friends with his guide, Kyoto professor Mitsugi Nakamura, dean of Doshisha University in Kyoto, Seuss traveled across Japan to learn about the nation's people and culture (Jones 229). Seuss was particularly moved by his conversations with Japanese youth, noting how the children were "people trying to find a voice, and make it known" (Jones 230). Making personal connections with those he met in Japan, Seuss was passionate about the content of his article for *Life* magazine (Sheff). However, when his article was published with unapproved edits that Seuss felt negatively portrayed the children he interviewed, Seuss vowed to never work with *Life* again (Jones 231).

Yet to produce a work inspired by Japan that he felt proud of, Seuss turned back to his children's books, with the kind and loyal Horton serving as the perfect protagonist. Published in 1954, *Horton Hears a Who!* was dedicated to "My Great Friend, Mitsugi Nakamura of Kyoto, Japan" (Pease 93). Employing the tiny race named "The Whos" as a metaphorical representation

of the Japanese people during American occupation, the second story to feature Horton is best summarized by the elephant's insistence that "a person's a person, no matter how small" (Seuss, *Horton Hears a Who* 6). In an interview for *Parenting Magazine* with David Sheff, Seuss directly credits his experiences in Japan as the inspiration for the second Horon story: "I conceived the idea for *Horton Hears a Who* from my experiences there… Japan was just emerging, the people were voting for the first time, running their own lives—and the theme was obvious: 'A person's a person no matter how small.'"

Including similar themes to *Horton Hatches the Egg*, the second book to feature Horton as the protagonist revolves around the elephant questioning the status quo to protect those in need. The story begins by immediately establishing Horton as someone willing to question the world around him. While playing in one of the jungle's pools, Horton believes he hears someone calling for help. Although logical evidence makes the situation of "some tiny person calling for help" seem impossible, Horton's reaction when faced with something that he does not understand is to ask questions: "I'll help you. But *who* are you? *Where*?" (Seuss, *Horton Hears a Who* 3). By employing Horton asking questions to advance the plot of the narrative right from the first few pages, Dr. Seuss establishes the value of questioning as a fundamental aspect of the story.

After asking these questions, Horton notices a tiny speck of dust floating by. Coming to his own conclusions, Horton begins to share them by directly asking readers a question: "So you know what I think?" (Seuss, *Horton Hears a Who* 5). Through using the second person pronoun "you" to ask readers this direct question, Dr. Seuss engages his young audience with his text on a deeper level. Drawing them into the story, Dr. Seuss's method of direct questioning explicitly acknowledges the existence of his young readers in a metatextual manner. This

acknowledgement encourages young readers to debate the asked question for themselves, causing them to engage in a similar form of questioning that Horton is modeling as the protagonist, and therefore gain first-hand exposure to the value of questioning through the lens of the text.

After this direct question, Horton explains to readers that he believes the source of the cry for help is a person so tiny that he lives atop the dust speck, which is in danger of being blown into the pool. Feeling responsible for this tiny person's welfare, Horton states the story's major theme for the first time: "I'll just have to save him. Because, after all, / A person's a person, no matter how small" (Seuss, *Horton Hears a Who* 6). The true meaning behind this catchy rhyming phrase is clear: all people are deserving of rights and respect, regardless of any differences. By showing Horton's questioning thought process that led to this conclusion, Dr. Seuss models for his readers the benefits of critical thinking skills. Instead of simplistically telling his readers to be kind to others, Dr. Seuss reflects through Horton's curiosity how children can use their minds to become genuinely empathetic individuals, rather than blindly obeying what they are told to do by adults.

After declaring his intent to protect the tiny person, Horton follows through with action. "Using the greatest of care" to illustrate the respect he views his task with, Horton successfully places the dust speck down "safe, on a very soft clover" (Seuss, *Horton Hears a Who* 9). Horton is depicted with a large grin on his face, showing readers the personal satisfaction that can be gained from being a good person and selflessly helping others.

However, Horton's satisfaction is quickly interrupted by the appearance of a mother kangaroo and her joey. Scoffing at Horton's actions, the mother declares: "why, that speck is as small as the head of a pin. A person on *that*?... Why, there never has been!" (Seuss, *Horton*

Hears a Who 10). Contrasting to Horton, the question posed by the mother kangaroo is not asked in good faith, as she has clearly already made up her mind on what the answer is. Serving as a contrasting example to Horton who genuinely values questioning, the mother kangaroo reveals how true questioning involves being willing to listen to other's perspectives, and even doubt one's own convictions.

To emphasize her point, and prove her confidence in her correctness, the mother kangaroo stands tall with one hand on her hip. Her other hand gestures down at the clover where the dust speck rests. The mother kangaroo is mimicked by her joey, portraying her as a representation of majority opinion that Horton must question if he stays loyal to the tiny person atop the speck. This is further emphasized through the positioning of the kangaroos in the middle of the page, whereas Horton is cut off by the edge. Dr. Seuss foreshadows Horton's loyalty and willingness to question through the depiction of Horton's trunk wrapped protectively around the speck, providing a shield between the tiny person and the kangaroos' gesturing hands. Another element of contrast between Horton and the kangaroos is the worried expression on his face, illustrating the care that Horton maintains for the tiny person's welfare, and the potential consequences of the kangaroos' disbelief.

Trying once again to convince the kangaroos that the tiny person on the speck does in fact exist, Horton appeals to their familial bond: "I know there's a person down there… Quite likely… a family, for all that we know! / A family with children just starting to grow" (Seuss, *Horton Hears a Who* 13). Unwilling to even consider Horton's point of view, the mother kangaroo insults Horton, calling him a "fool" (Seuss, *Horton Hears a Who* 14). Concerned for the safety of the tiny people on the dust speck so close to the splashing kangaroos in the jungle pool, Horton quickly picks up the clover and leaves.

Although Horton left the presence of the mocking kangaroos, the elephant encounters continuous insults from other jungle animals, as news of his role as the protector of the dust speck spreads. None of the other animals are willing to believe Horton, some going as far as to accuse the elephant of insanity: "He talks to that dust speck! He's out of his head!" (Seuss, *Horton Hears a Who* 16). In the face of such widespread opposition from everyone he knows, Horton begins doubting himself. It is at this moment in the story that Horton questions himself and his beliefs, as represented through Horton asking a question: "Should I put this speck down?" (Seuss, *Horton Hears a Who* 16). After posing this question to himself, Horton works out the answer by thinking of the potential consequences of his action, with his primary concern being the safety of the people atop the dust speck who could be harmed without the elephant's protection. Through modeling the benefits of curiosity and critical thinking, Horton in turn guides young readers to question why the other animals do not agree with him that "a person is a person, no matter how small" (Seuss, *Horton Hears a Who* 16). While Horton may have initially questioned himself, this pivotal moment in the narrative actually represents the value of questioning the status quo.

This is further supported in the next opening, where the existence of the tiny people is confirmed when their mayor thanks Horton for his loyal protection: "My friend… you're a *very* fine friend. / You've helped all us folks on this dust speck no end" (Seuss, *Horton Hears a Who* 18). Revealing that the name of the tiny race of people is the "Whos," Dr. Seuss incorporates the value of questioning into the very identity of the Whos. Named after a question word, the Whos embody questions and questioning. After all, acknowledging the existence of the Whos requires Horton to first question his perception of the world, and then the status quo when others shun him.

To learn more about the people on the dust speck and further connect with them, Horton asks them a question about their home: "You mean… you have buildings there, too?" (Seuss, *Horton Hears a Who* 21). Horton listens to the Mayor's reply with an open mind, contrasting with the mother kangaroo who immediately dismissed Horton. By asking the Whos a question as a means of opening a dialogue between them, Horton shows how curiosity can lead to new relationships. Horton's growing connection with the Whos further serves as a form of questioning the status quo, as Horton not only rebels against the other animals by acknowledging the existence of the tiny race of people, but also builds a relationship with them through additional questioning.

Just as Horton begins to connect with the Whos, the other animals interrupt to put a stop to Horton's subtle form of rebellion against the status quo. Attacking Horton by climbing atop his back, a group of monkeys insist that the Whos do not actually exist. Although Horton attempts to use his trunk to keep the clover out of reach, the monkeys successfully steal it. Handing off the clover to an eagle to dispose of it, Horton continues to try and stand up for the Whos: "Please don't harm my little folks, who / Have just as much right to life as us bigger folks do!" (Seuss, *Horton Hears a Who* 27). Unwilling to listen to Horton's plea, the eagle drops the Whos' clover into a clover field, believing that Horton will be unable to find it.

Horton searches through the entire field of clovers. For each clover that he approaches, he asks it a question: "Are you there?" (Seuss, *Horton Hears a Who* 30). This shows Horton's dedication to his friends symbolically through the act of asking a question, which is what led to their friendship in the first place. When an exhausted Horton's patience finally pays off and he reunites with the Whos, he does so by asking them a series of questions: "are you safe? Are you sound? Are you whole? Are you well?" (Seuss, *Horton Hears a Who* 33). This once again

underscores the importance of asking questions and reflects on how this enabled Horton to make friends with the Whos, which requires Horton to continuously question the status quo.

The Whos answer Horton with a question of their own: "Will you stick by us Whos while we're making repairs?" (Seuss, *Horton Hears a Who* 34). By asking Horton if he will remain their loyal protector and friend, the Whos are simultaneously causing readers to question if they would do the same if they were in Horton's place. Horton responds to this by stating that "of course I will stick. / I'll stick by you small folks through thin and through thick!" (Seuss, *Horton Hears a Who* 34). This interaction between the Whos and Horton, once again facilitated by asking questions, both emphasizes Horton's sense of moral character and foreshadows that there are more obstacles to come.

These obstacles present themselves on the very next pages in the form of the return of the mother kangaroo. This time, the mother kangaroo is leading the other animals behind her, emphasizing how the mother kangaroo is the symbol of the majority opinion. Offended by Horton's continued questioning of the status quo through his loyalty to the Whos, the mother kangaroo declares that Horton is "going to be roped! And you're going to be caged!" (Seuss, *Horton Hears a Who* 38). The mother kangaroo's willingness to escalate to physical violence to force Horton to conform illustrates the true difficulties of questioning the status quo.

Despite the threat to his own wellbeing, Horton does not speak up until mother kangaroo also announces her intent to boil the dust speck in oil. Calling for the Whos to make their voices heard, Horton begs: "Don't give up! I believe you all! / A person's a person, no matter how small! / And you very small persons will *not* have to die / If you make yourselves heard!" (Seuss, *Horton Hears a Who* 47). Although the Whos try their best to be loud enough to be heard, the mother kangaroo and the other animals are unable to hear their cries.

Unwilling to give up on the Whos, Horton eventually saves them by once again asking questions: "Are you sure all your boys / Are doing their best? Are they ALL making noise? / Are you sure every *Who* down in *Who*-ville is working? … Is there anyone shirking?" (Seuss, *Horton Hears a Who* 51). Willfully engaging with Horton's questions, the Mayor of Who-ville frantically searches through the town, eventually finding a young Who named Jo-Jo who is not helping make noise. Grabbing the young Who, the Mayor convinces Jo-Jo that "every voice counts!" (Seuss, *Horton Hears a Who* 57). When Jo-Jo's voice joins in with the rest of his people, it makes all the difference, and the Who are finally able to make themselves known to the other animals.

The story concludes with Horton saving the day by making sure that the Whos are heard, which he confirms by asking the previously skeptical animals one final question: "Do you see what I mean? / They've proved they ARE persons, no matter how small. And their whole world was saved by the Smallest of All!" (Seuss, *Horton Hears a Who* 58). Horton provides an answer to the question through a paraphrased version of his ultimate message that a person's a person no matter how small. By using the pronoun "you," Dr. Seuss ensures that Horton's final question is not only posed to the other animals, but also directly to readers. Therefore, this direct question asks readers if they also understand the message that Horton has been trying to share, and most importantly, if they agree.

Seuss's willingness to question the status quo's racist beliefs regarding the Japanese people, and then in turn his own prejudice, is chronicled not only in his political cartoons, but also in his works of children's literature. Horton the elephant's development as a character from his initial foundations in *Horton Hatches the Egg* to his role in *Horton Hears a Who* mirrors Seuss's own journey of growth. Loyal and kind, Horton remains steadfast in his own beliefs in

the face of others' casually accepted cruelty. Challenging the status quo, Horton represents how Seuss grew to value questioning the largely undisputed racist beliefs of America. Through Horton's willingness to question, the elephant champions the lives of the Whos, proving via his positive impact on the young Jo-Jo that everyone's voice matters, no matter how small. Just as Horton's actions on behalf of the Whos reflect Seuss's journey to Japan, young Jo-Jo represents the Japanese children Seuss met and interviewed, and these characters illustrate Seuss's belief that the voices of the Japanese children mattered for the future of their nation and in turn the world as a whole.

CHAPTER 2: "DOWN HERE AT THE BOTTOM, WE, TOO, SHOULD HAVE RIGHTS:" DR. SEUSS CHALLENGES AUTHORITY

"I'm subversive as hell!" Dr. Seuss proudly announced in an interview with children's literature scholar Jonathan Cott (28). The evidence to support Seuss's claim can be easily found within his creative works. Seuss's ability to "criticiz[e] something in a clever and indirect way in order to make it weaker or less effective" ("Subversive," def. 2) perfectly describes the satirical style characteristic of his political cartoons, especially those in which Seuss condemned America for its isolationism and racism. Clearly impacted by living through WWII, Seuss's postwar works of children's literature are markedly different in content and tone from those published before the war (Nel 47). Incorporating the subversive elements present within his political cartoons, these postwar works of children's literature encourage children to question authority instead of maintaining blind obedience.

Out of all Seuss's works, the stories featuring the recurring characters of Bartholomew Cubbins and King Derwin function as the best example of the shift between Seuss's pre and post war books. Introduced in the 1938 work *The 500 Hats of Bartholomew Cubbins*, the characters undergo a radical change when they reappear in *Bartholomew and the Oobleck*, which was published in 1949. Although the first story establishes King Derwin as a powerful ruler and Bartholomew as an underdog hero, it is not until *Bartholomew and the Oobleck* in which Seuss incorporates a subversive theme of questioning authority. In his biography on Seuss, professor and scholar Philip Nel identifies the key shift between Seuss's books before and after WWII: "What we might call Seuss's 'message books' are a distinctly postwar phenomenon, beginning in 1949 with the publication of *Bartholomew and the Oobleck*… In this postwar work, dictatorial blundering affects not just Bartholomew but the entire nation" (47). King Derwin's role as an

authority figure is directly questioned within the narrative of *Bartholomew and the Oobleck*, escalating beyond the amusing tone that Seuss employed via his depiction of the character in *The 500 Hats of Bartholomew Cubbins.*

The 500 Hats of Bartholomew Cubbins establishes the difference in the power relationship between Bartholomew and King Derwin right from its first few pages. King Derwin is introduced to readers as he looks out at his kingdom from the castle balcony, with the "mighty view" making him "feel mighty important" (Seuss, *500 Hats of Bartholomew Cubbins* 2). With his chin pointed upwards and his hands crossed behind his back, King Derwin presents himself as a confident royal, wearing a fancy robe and golden crown. All of these elements combine to represent King Derwin as a traditional royal figure, and therefore someone in a position of authority. Turning the page presents readers with a sharp contrast to King Derwin in the form of the peasant boy, Bartholomew. Depicted as tiny on the spread, Bartholomew gazes across the expansive country to the large castle in the distance. Bartholomew's home is not a castle, but instead a small hut, representing his lack of wealth and power in comparison to King Derwin. Despite having similar posture to King Derwin, the difference between the characters is notable, as Bartholomew wears simple shorts and a vest, with his only adornment being his hat. Unlike King Derwin, the "backward" view of the Kingdom that Bartholomew sees makes the boy feel "mighty small," contrasting Bartholomew's lack of power in comparison to that of King Derwin (Seuss, *500 Hats of Bartholomew Cubbins* 4). Seuss's decision to highlight the difference in positions of power between Bartholomew and King Derwin from the first few pages of the story primes young readers to pay attention to the power dynamics between the two characters, as King Derwin is clearly in a position of authority over young Bartholomew. However, this depiction does not present any questions regarding the roles of power between child and

authority figure. On the contrary, the introduction of King Derwin and Bartholomew merely perpetuates the typical understanding of a regal king versus a peasant boy, establishing that this power dynamic is the natural order of the world.

The story of *Bartholomew and the Oobleck* also begins by establishing the power dynamics between King Derwin and Bartholomew. Seuss accomplishes this through the explanation that "if it hadn't been for Bartholomew Cubbins, that King… would have wrecked that little Kingdom" (Seuss, *Bartholomew and the Oobleck* 1). This lone sentence identifies how the roles of King Derwin and Bartholomew in this later book are wildly different from *The 500 Hats of Bartholomew Cubbins*. Functioning as the savior of the kingdom, Bartholomew's identity as a character subversively defies the typical power structure between ruler and citizen, illustrating how a child can successfully question authority for the greater good. Unlike the characters' debut novel, *Bartholomew and the Oobleck* makes it clear from the very first page how it is the King himself who is the danger present in the story, as the upcoming conflict is now referred to by the kingdom's people through the name "The-Year-the-King-Got-Angry-with-the-Sky" (Seuss, *500 Hats of Bartholomew Cubbins* 1). While the amusingly long name is sure to capture the attention of child readers, it also serves to reveal how King Derwin's irrational temper is what placed the kingdom in danger, requiring it to be saved by Bartholomew in the first place.

These narrative elements are emphasized by the page's accompanying illustration, which depicts the side profiles of King Derwin and Bartholomew. Wearing a fancy crown atop his head, a frowning King Derwin looks outward above Bartholomew's head. In contrast to King Derwin, Bartholomew's facial expression displays concern, not anger, as the young boy gazes up at the King. The placement of the character's side profiles, with King Derwin being above

Bartholomew, reveals how the King is in a position of authority over Bartholomew. However, their contrasting facial expressions establish Bartholomew as the more emotionally mature of the two, defying typical expectations of King Derwin as a leader and therefore indirectly calling readers to question the King's worthiness of this position of authority, just as Bartholomew will further into the story in order to save the kingdom.

Bartholomew meets King Derwin for the first time in pre-war story *The 500 Hats of Bartholomew Cubbins* when the young boy goes into town to visit the market. As the King rides down the busy street in his fancy carriage, the common people are all expected to remove their hats as a sign of respect for their ruler, serving as a physical act of acknowledging the King's position of authority. However, Bartholomew finds himself unable to remove his hat, as another one magically appears in its place atop his head. Initially unaware of his magical hat, Bartholomew does not understand the King's reaction and attempts to question him: "I don't like to say you are wrong, Sire… but you see, my hat *is* off" (Seuss, *500 Hats of Bartholomew Cubbins* 10). The narrative immediately supports the King's perception of the events currently unfolding and in turn refutes Bartholomew for questioning an authority figure by revealing the truly magical nature of the hat. As Bartholomew makes many more unsuccessful attempts to remove the magical hat, he proves that the King was correct, and that Bartholomew did still in fact have a hat on his head.

Angry over Bartholomew's continued refusal to follow his command, the king's face becomes "purple with rage" and he shakes "with such fury that the carriage rocked on its wheels and the Royal Coachman could hardly sit in his seat" (Seuss, *500 Hats of Bartholomew Cubbins* 13). Although this reaction could be interpreted as King Derwin having an irrational temper, the narrative instead supports the King's anger as an understandable response to Bartholomew's

disrespect, even if unintended. This is shown through the crowd's wide-eyed focus on young Bartholomew, as the boy's fellow citizens stare at him with evident shock. Believing Bartholomew to be an "impudent trickster" (Seuss, *500 Hats of Bartholomew Cubbins* 13) who is purposely defying his ruler, King Derwin orders that Bartholomew be arrested and brought to the castle to be taught a lesson on respect, which would restore the natural order of a young boy being unquestioningly obedient to an authority figure.

While King Derwin is depicted as being justly offended by Bartholomew's disrespect in *The 500 Hats of Bartholomew Cubbins*, King Derwin's defining characteristic in the post-war *Bartholomew and the Oobleck* is his irrational temper. As Bartholomew reveals to readers, the young boy has witnessed the King's anger "many, many times before" (Seuss, *Bartholomew and the Oobleck* 2). However, the King's temper becomes truly illogical when his anger becomes fixated on the sky out of boredom with the weather. Clearly concerned by the King's tendency for rage, Bartholomew Cubbins "tried to calm him" (Seuss, *Bartholomew and the Oobleck* 5) by explaining how there are simply only so many types of weather. Through this act of attempting to pacify the King's anger over such a ridiculous subject, Bartholomew subversively defies the expected role between both a citizen and ruler and a child and adult. Functioning as the voice of reason, Bartholomew's ability to handle the King's volatile emotions with patience only further emphasizes the true ineptitude of King Derwin as a leader, and in turn causes readers to again indirectly question King Derwin's worthiness of the role.

Unfortunately for Bartholomew, his use of logic does not successfully calm the temper of King Derwin, who insists that he wants "something NEW to come down" from the sky (Seuss, *Bartholomew and the Oobleck* 5). Truly shocked by the King's continued irrationality, Bartholomew refuses to blindly support King Derwin's desire: "That's impossible, Your

Majesty. You just can't have it" (Seuss, *Bartholomew and the Oobleck* 5). This blunt refusal of King Derwin's request is another example of Bartholomew questioning the logic and demands of an authority figure, instead of obediently agreeing. King Derwin attempts to reinforce the power dynamics between the child and authority figure by harshly reminding Bartholomew of their respective roles: "Boy, don't you dare tell me what I can or cannot have! Remember, Bartholomew, I am King!" (Seuss, *Bartholomew and the Oobleck* 5). The accompanying illustration further serves to depict this, as King Derwin is shown in the midst of yelling at Bartholomew, leaning into the young boy's face as a form of intimidation. The size difference between the two is dramatically apparent with the contrasting physical scale drawing attention to their power dynamics, since Bartholomew's smaller size represents his subservient position to the King.

Although it would be expected for Bartholomew to cower as the newfound target of the King's temper, Bartholomew remains calm and logical. Directly acknowledging King Derwin's position of authority, Bartholomew subversively criticizes the King's ridiculousness: "I know, Sire… You rule all the land. And you rule all the people. But even kings can't rule the *sky*" (Seuss, *Bartholomew and the Oobleck* 5). Rejecting the King's version of reality, Bartholomew's willingness to question authority in the face of irrationality causes young readers to also question expectations of blind obedience to authority figures.

In the pre-war book *The 500 Hats of Bartholomew Cubbins*, the difference in King Derwin's personality is stark. Instead of being irrational and the cause of unnecessary conflict, King Derwin shows his capacity for patience and mercy. Although Bartholomew has been arrested for his disobedience, King Derwin provides Bartholomew with a final opportunity to remove his hat. Of course, due to the magical nature of the hat, Bartholomew is unable to fulfill

the King's request, and simply ends up taking off "hat after hat after hat until he was standing in the middle of a great pile of hats" (Seuss, *500 Hats of Bartholomew Cubbins* 19). Now faced with what is clearly not a simple prankster, the King takes control over the situation in the manner typical of a leader. Determined to solve the mystery of the hat, King Derwin asks others for advice, from the Keeper of Records to a master hat maker. When these experts are unable to solve the mystery, King Derwin employs the logical reasoning skills expected of an authority figure to conclude that "this *must* be more than an ordinary hat" (Seuss, *500 Hats of Bartholomew Cubbins* 23). Through this portrayal of King Derwin's response to these events in the narrative, Seuss reinforces the typical understanding of a competent authority figure as someone to be both respected and obeyed, a portrayal that is the polar opposite of King Derwin *in Bartholomew and the Oobleck*.

King Derwin's earlier willingness to actively seek out the advice of others stands in harsh contrast to his irrational temper in the post-war *Bartholomew and the Oobleck*. The conflict of the second story's narrative revolves around the King's refusal to acknowledge the logical warnings of Bartholomew. Growing increasingly obsessed with his anger at the boring weather, King Derwin decides to call upon the court wizards to create a new form of weather to fall from the sky. Illustrating his ability to think ahead to the future consequences of the King's decision, Bartholomew's willingness to question authority escalates into the boy directly telling the King what to do: "Oh, no, Your Majesty! Don't call *them*!" (Seuss, *Bartholomew and the Oobleck* 7). In an attempt to reestablish the expected blind obedience to an authority figure, King Derwin's response to Bartholomew is to order the boy to stop questioning him: "You hold your tongue, Bartholomew Cubbins! You do as I command you. Blow my secret whistle!" (Seuss, *Bartholomew and the Oobleck* 7). Although Bartholomew is literally ordered to no longer

question the King, the boy refuses to silently obey orders. In a small act of rebellion, Bartholomew declares that King Derwin "may be very sorry" (Seuss, *Bartholomew and the Oobleck* 7) before calling upon the magicians. As is evident through this scene, the true conflict in *Bartholomew and the Oobleck* revolves around King Derwin's irrational temper, not the presence of magic, which has yet to appear. The illogical nature of this situation is the King's behavior first and foremost, causing readers to question his ability to be a successful leader alongside Bartholomew, and approve of the young boy for his brave willingness to question authority.

While King Derwin's irrationality and immaturity are his defining characteristics in *Bartholomew and the Oobleck*, these traits are given to the King's young nephew, Grand Duke Wilfred, in *The 500 Hats of Bartholomew Cubbins*. Frustrated by all the attention that a peasant boy is receiving, the Grand Duke escalates King Derwin's attempts to solve the mystery of the magical hat by suggesting to his uncle that "if I were King… I'd chop off his head" (Seuss, *500 Hats of Bartholomew Cubbins* 32). The Grand Duke Wilfred functions as a negative and corrupting influence on King Derwin, who regretfully agrees to his nephew's suggestion out of concern that Bartholomew's hat is a creation of dark magic: "A dreadful thought… but I'm afraid I'll have to" (Seuss, *500 Hats of Bartholomew Cubbins* 32). Although King Derwin is willfully agreeing to literally kill a young boy, the narrative does not portray the King as a cruel tyrant. Instead, that role is prescribed to the young Grand Duke, who is clearly manipulating his uncle out of a desire to prove his position of power over a peasant boy.

King Derwin is not being negatively influenced by anyone in *Bartholomew and the Oobleck*. In fact, the King has Bartholomew attempting to be a positive influence and convince him of the importance of looking out for the kingdom, subversively providing an example of

how a leader should truly act. This is revealed through Bartholomew's concerned response to the King's command for the court magicians to create a new type of weather, which brings in an uncontrollable magical force into the story in the form of the oobleck. As the bright green goo begins to fall faster and faster from the sky, King Derwin is ecstatic at the proof of his power as the kingdom's ruler to change the very weather. Remaining the more mature of the two, Bartholomew responds to the situation by voicing his concern: "Do you really think it's safe, Sire?" (Seuss, *Bartholomew and the Oobleck* 17). Bartholomew's direct question regarding the safety of the oobleck causes readers to simultaneously wonder about the potential danger, while also wondering why King Derwin does not care, despite being the one in a position of power. Once again attempting to reestablish control over Bartholomew, King Derwin declares that the boy must "stop asking foolish questions" (Seuss, *Bartholomew and the Oobleck* 17) and instead blindly carry out his orders.

The narrative quickly provides evidence to support Bartholomew's concern by having the oobleck begin to rain havoc on the entire kingdom. While visiting the royal bell ringer to pass on King Derwin's orders to announce the day as a brand-new holiday, Bartholomew's worry that the oobleck is dangerous is proven correct. Gazing out the bell tower's window, Bartholomew notices "that poor robin down there in that tree! She's stuck to her nest! She can't move a wing! That oobleck's gooey! It's gummy! It's like glue!" (Seuss, *Bartholomew and the Oobleck* 20). Bartholomew's observation not only reveals the danger of the oobleck, but also shows how the young boy is capable of acknowledging and caring about the safety of those with even less power than himself, a trait that a successful leader should have but that King Derwin notably does not possess. This contrasts to *The 500 Hats of Bartholomew Cubbins* which proved the boy incorrect when he attempted to question the king's perspective on the magical hat early in the

story. Instead, in *Bartholomew and the Oobleck,* the narrative supports and praises Bartholomew for his willingness to question authority by proving him right.

Comprehending the expansive threat posed by the oobleck, Bartholomew announces that "someone's got to warn the people! Got to wake 'em and warn 'em to stay inside their houses!" (Seuss, *Bartholomew and the Oobleck* 21). Immediately taking responsibility, Bartholomew races against the rapidly spreading oobleck to selflessly help others. Although Bartholomew attempts to enlist the help of the royal trumpeter and the Captain of the Guards, the adults find themselves incapacitated by the sticky oobleck after ignoring Bartholomew's repeated warnings. Growing more fearful of the danger presented by the oobleck as it continues to spread, Bartholomew finally concludes that "I'll get the King's horse! I'll ride through the country! I'll warn the people of the kingdom myself!" (Seuss, *Bartholomew and the Oobleck* 29). At this moment in the story, it is clear that Seuss is presenting Bartholomew as a true leader, not King Derwin. While King Derwin is the cause behind the threat facing the people, young Bartholomew is the one willing to selflessly help others regardless of the personal risk to his own safety. Contrasting to King Derwin, Bartholomew possesses the qualities of both a successful leader and a true hero, causing readers to question if the King deserves his position of authority.

Unlike in the post-war *Bartholomew in the Oobleck*, only Bartholomew's own safety is at risk in the pre-war story *The 500 Hats of Bartholomew Cubbins* and there are no escalating consequences for the kingdom's wellbeing. The danger that Bartholomew individually faces in the first story's narrative is his potential beheading at the hands of the executioner. However, when the executioner is going to behead Bartholomew, the boy is ironically saved by the very thing that led to his death sentence, as the executioner declares that he cannot kill someone

wearing a hat. When Bartholomew expresses his curiosity and questions why he is being spared, the executioner replies that "I don't know… but it's one of the rules" (Seuss, *500 Hats of Bartholomew Cubbins* 34). Unquestioning obedience to the rules is something that the narrative approves of, since this is what saves Bartholomew's life. *The 500 Hats of Bartholomew Cubbins* does not promote questioning rules, nor the authority figures who create them, and therefore does not promote critical thinking or curiosity in the way that is characteristic of the post-war *Bartholomew and the Oobleck*.

Unexpectedly happy at Bartholomew's luck, Grand Duke Wilfred takes advantage of the situation and announces his desire to "do away" (Seuss, *500 Hats of Bartholomew Cubbins* 37) with Bartholomew himself by pushing the boy off the castle's highest tower. However, Bartholomew is saved by King Derwin, who desires Bartholomew's most recent hat, as the hats have been growing fancier and fancier each time they reappear. Caught up in his jealousy toward Bartholomew, Grand Duke Wilfred questions King Derwin's authority by declaring that he is "going to push [Bartholomew] off now!" (Seuss, *500 Hats of Bartholomew Cubbins* 41) despite his uncle's command. Furious at the young duke for his disrespect, King Derwin reasserts his position of authority by saving Bartholomew and instead spanking Grand Duke Wilfred. King Derwin pays Bartholomew a large sum of gold for his hat, presenting the King as a kind and generous leader, the polar opposite of his portrayal in *Bartholomew and the Oobleck*. The story's conclusion reinforces the natural order of the king as an authority figure to be respected and unquestioningly obeyed, since the King is depicted as the hero who ultimately saved the day by sparing Bartholomew.

Bartholomew and the Oobleck's conclusion does the exact opposite of reinforcing blind obedience to an authority figure. Instead, the story's narrative concludes by directly

acknowledging King Derwin's flaws as a leader and upholds Bartholomew as making the right decision by questioning him. As the kingdom continues to be flooded with oobleck, Bartholomew returns to the King after trying to warn his fellow citizens, only to find King Derwin glued with oobleck to his throne. When the King begins to complain, Bartholomew finds that he "could hold his tongue no longer" and declares that "this is all *your* fault! Now, the least you can do is say the simple words, 'I'm sorry'" (Seuss, *Bartholomew and the Oobleck* 42). Bartholomew's anger is clear both through his words and the accompanying illustration, which depicts Bartholomew in a manner similar to early within the story when King Derwin shouted at Bartholomew for questioning his authority. With one hand gesturing wildly at the King, Bartholomew leans into the King's personal space, unafraid to directly confront an authority figure over his wrongdoings. Although anger has previously been depicted only as an illogical and immature emotion, Bartholomew's actions show how fury can be righteous when motivated by caring for others, a quality that a leader should possess.

King Derwin makes one final attempt to reassert his position of authority by denying Bartholomew's request to apologize: "ME… ME say I'm sorry! Kings *never* say 'I'm sorry!' And I am the mightiest king in all the world!" (Seuss, *Bartholomew and the Oobleck* 42). In an ultimate act of rejection of both King Derwin's personal authority and the concept of an authority figure's absolute power, Bartholomew "looked the King square in the eye" and declared "You may be a mighty king… But you're sitting in oobleck up to your chin. And so is everyone else in your land. And if you won't even say you're sorry, *you're no sort of a king at all!*" (Seuss, *Bartholomew and the Oobleck* 43). Through this last line of his statement, Bartholomew subversively redefines the concept of what it means to truly be a leader. Instead of simply being someone who holds a position of power, Bartholomew asserts that being a leader

requires caring about others and a willingness to admit one's mistakes. The narrative immediately supports Bartholomew's definition of what makes a leader by having King Derwin tearfully admit his wrongdoing and apologize, which magically causes the oobleck to melt away, saving the kingdom.

The shift in Seuss's depiction of King Derwin as a regal leader to a selfish buffoon serves as an example of Seuss's evolution as a subversive children's author. While the initial appearance of King Derwin in *The 500 Hats of Bartholomew Cubbins* encourages children's blind obedience to authority figures, the change in characterization of King Derwin in *Bartholomew and the Oobleck* promotes child readers to question authority alongside young Bartholomew. Adding additional layers of complexity to Seuss's narrative, the portrayal of King Derwin in *Bartholomew and the Oobleck* as the origin of his kingdom's peril causes young readers to question if the King is worthy of his position of authority. As Bartholomew continuously questions King Derwin to the point of directly confronting him, the boy's willingness to do so is what ultimately saves the kingdom, serving as Seuss's endorsement of a child questioning authority. This is Seuss utilizing the story's narrative to encourage children not to be blindly obedient to authority figures but instead use their own critical thinking skills to question authority, and even develop their own sense of right and wrong.

As is evident through the change in King Derwin's characterization from the pre-WWII *The 500 Hats of Bartholomew Cubbins* and the post-WWII *Bartholomew and the Oobleck*, Seuss's experiences living through this monumental time in history impacted the subversive nature of his writing as a children's book author. Specifically, Seuss's knowledge of how German children were manipulated by propaganda to support the Nazi party likely shaped his decision to encourage children to question authority (Jones 237). In his biography on Seuss, New

York Times best-selling nonfiction author Brian Jay Jones revealed the depths in which this influenced Seuss's writing process:

> In his visits to Germany both before and during World War II, Geisel had seen firsthand the effects of propaganda on children, and its ability to powerfully and immediately shape their morals and worldview. If Dr. Seuss was going to engage in propaganda, [he] was determined to make certain he was saying something he strongly believed in—and ideally saying it in such a way that readers might not realize they were on the receiving end of a moral or message (237).

This thought process of Seuss's is evident within his post-WWII works, especially those like *Bartholomew and the Oobleck* which encourage children to question authority. After all, helping children develop critical thinking skills and employ them to question authority figures would protect children from being as easily manipulated by propaganda in the manner that German children were during the Nazi occupation of Germany.

In one of Seuss's post-WWII books, *Yertle the Turtle*, he specifically targets the leader of the Nazi party, Adolf Hitler, as an authority figure that children should question. Seuss himself explained how he modeled the tyrant king turtle Yertle on Hitler in his interview with Jonathan Cott: "Children's literature as I write it and as I see it is satire to a great extent - satirizing the mores and the habits of the world. There's Yertle the Turtle… which was modeled on the rise of Hitler" (29). By subversively depicting Hitler as an arrogant turtle king who is overthrown by one of his citizens, Seuss promotes children questioning both Hitler and other authority figures who abuse their position of power.

The story begins by highlighting how content all the turtles were before King Yertle acted on his arrogant desire to expand his power. Swimming and splashing in the pond, the

turtles all have happy smiles on their faces because they "had everything turtles might need" (Seuss, *Yertle the Turtle* 2). However, the next page reveals that King Yertle is not satisfied by the apparent happiness of his people, as he only cares about growing his own power. The accompanying illustration emphasizes King Yertle's dissatisfaction, as he sits on his rock throne with a large frown on his face. King Yertle does not notice or acknowledge the current happiness of his people, as revealed through the illustration's sole focus on King Yertle. By not depicting the happiness of the turtles in the accompanying illustration, Seuss highlights King Yertle's lack of care for his citizens and in turn emphasizes King Yertle's growing obsession with power. All of these elements combine to pose an indirect question to the story's young readers about what a leader should truly value - his people or his own power? King Yertle declares himself ruler of "all that [he] see[s]" (Seuss, *Yertle the Turtle* 3), and yet he has done nothing to earn his position of authority. Seuss establishing this early in the narrative allows him to foreshadow how the story will continue to prompt its young readers to question Yertle's worthiness of his role as King.

King Yertle fulfills his selfish desire for more power by abusing his position of authority to force the turtle citizens to literally make him a taller throne: "He ordered nine turtles to swim to his throne. And, using these turtles, he built a *new* throne. He made each turtle stand on another's back / And he piled them all up in a nine-turtle stack" (Seuss, *Yertle the Turtle* 6). Seuss's use of the words "ordered, "made," and "commanded" to describe King Yertle's actions further depict the turtle king's lack of care for his citizens. Instead of asking nicely, King Yertle instantly turns to harsh, demanding language to assert his dominance over his citizens. This unfair treatment is further emphasized when paired with the symbolism of the turtle citizens literally making King Yertle's throne, representing how a king's position of power depends on

his people. Despite this, King Yertle is clearly not appreciative of the turtles' sacrifice. The illustration shows the concerned faces of the precariously balanced turtles in the stack, contrasting with King Yertle's upright posture and smile. These narrative elements subversively criticize King Yertle's selfish actions as a ruler, which simultaneously primes readers with indirect questions on King Yertle's worthiness of his position of authority.

King Yertle is delighted that his field of vision has expanded due to the newfound height provided by his citizens: "All mine! … Oh, the things I now rule! … I'm Yertle the Turtle! Oh, marvelous me! For I am the ruler of all that I see!" (Seuss, *Yertle the Turtle* 8). However, this expanded perspective does not extend to a consideration of his people's needs. Seuss continues to subversively criticize King Yertle's arrogance and selfishness through the contrast between King Yertle's voiced happiness and the quiet suffering of the turtles making the tower. The illustration further depicts this, as it shows King Yertle grinning as he points to all the things below him that he believes himself to be the king of, while the turtles in the stack look at one another in clear distress.

Now that the narrative has successfully employed indirect questions about King Yertle's worthiness of his position of power, Seuss introduces a new character, an ordinary turtle citizen named Mack, to directly question King Yertle. Seuss makes a point to highlight how insignificant Mack is in comparison to King Yertle by describing him as a "plain little turtle" who was "just a part of his throne" (*Yertle the Turtle* 9). This emphasis on the power difference between the two illustrates the bravery that Mack possessed to directly question King Yertle's actions by forcing the King to acknowledge Mack's physical distress: "I've pains in my back and my shoulders and knees. How long must we stand here, Your Majesty, please?" (Seuss, *Yertle the Turtle* 9). By using the pronoun "we" Mack is not just standing up for himself, but also trying

to help his fellow citizens. This presents Mack as a leader in contrast to King Yertle, who does not care about his fellow turtles. However, Mack is willing to directly question authority on their behalf. Mack is also willing to do this despite being the least powerful of the turtles, as shown by his position at the very bottom of the stack. Mack's act of directly questioning King Yertle causes his fellow turtles to shift their attention away from King Yertle and onto Mack himself, allowing the illustration to emphasize the significance of his action. Even King Yertle is forced to acknowledge Mack's questioning, as shown in the illustration through King Yertle frowning down at Mack.

The next page focuses solely on a large-scale illustration of King Yertle, drawing the attention back to the King as he attempts to reassert his position of authority over Mack. With the bold splash of blue as the only color on the page, reader's eyes are drawn to King Yertle, whose eyebrows are downturned into an angry frown. Bold, jagged lines expand outwards and surround King Yertle, reflecting his emotional intensity. King Yertle is depicted yelling with such intensity that he is propelled forward from the force. The first word that King Yertle utters in reply to Mack is "SILENCE," (Seuss, *Yertle the Turtle* 11*)* showing how King Yertle attempts to use his authority to immediately put an end to anyone questioning his power. This is further revealed by King Yertle reminding readers of the difference in positions of power between himself and Mack: "I'm king, and you're only a turtle named Mack. You stay in your place while I sit here and rule" (Seuss, *Yertle the Turtle* 11-12). Although King Yertle's declaration is meant to reassert his position of authority, his irrationally angry response to his citizen's statement of concern only prompts readers to continue to question the worthiness of his position of authority.

Furious at Mack, King Yertle escalates from verbally abusing Mack to doing the opposite of his request by calling for more turtles to make his tower higher as a show of power. Seuss continues to prompt readers to question King Yertle's worthiness of his role as a leader through his description of the increasing unhappiness of the turtles: "And the turtles 'way down in the pond were afraid. They trembled. They shook. But they came. They obeyed" (Seuss, *Yertle the Turtle* 14). This shows how when a tyrannical leader's authority is questioned, they often respond by merely increasing their abuse as a way to prevent any further questioning. Seuss emphasizes how each turtle "stepped on the head of poor Mack" (*Yertle the Turtle* 14) in the process of joining the stack, making it all the more significant that Mack continues to be willing to question King Yertle on behalf of his fellow turtles, regardless of how they also participate in his harm.

"That plain little turtle" Mack once again questions King Yertle's authority and speaks out on behalf of his fellow turtles: "But down here below, we are feeling great pain. I know, up on top you are seeing great sights. But down at the bottom, we, too, should have rights" (Seuss, *Yertle the Turtle* 18). Through this declaration from Mack, Seuss includes the overall lesson of his story, which is that all people deserve equal rights. This message is communicated to readers by Mack once again directly questioning the actions of an authority figure. Mack acknowledges the power and benefits that King Yertle is obtaining thanks to abusing the labor of his citizens. The illustration accompanying this notably does not include King Yertle, allowing readers' focus to stay on Mack, and in turn his questioning. At this point in the story, readers have been primed to question authority alongside Mack and therefore even question if Mack makes a better leader than the King, considering how Mack is willing to stand up on others' behalf.

King Yertle once again tries to reassert his position of authority by attempting to silence Mack's questioning: "You hush up your mouth! You've no right to talk to the world's highest turtle! … There's nothing, no, NOTHING, that's higher than me!" (Seuss, *Yertle the Turtle* 20). In this final declaration, King Yertle practically dares readers to question if there is truly no turtle more powerful than him and foreshadows Mack's inevitable success at subverting his authority. As King Yertle demands his citizens to add to his tower once again, Mack's willingness to question authority escalates into the ultimate form of questioning, which is directly rebellious action. After once again emphasizing the "plain little turtle" Mack's supposed insignificance, Seuss describes how Mack finally "Decided he's 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!" (Seuss, *Yertle the Turtle* 24). Unlike King Yertle, whose temper led to the suffering of his citizens, Mack productively channels his righteous anger at his unjust treatment into an act of rebellion. Although Mack is in a lesser position of power in comparison to King Yertle, it is a "plain little thing" (Seuss, *Yertle the Turtle* 24) that enables Mack to save himself and his fellow turtles, which Seuss emphasizes to lead his child readers to question if Mack was ever truly insignificant, despite the arrogant beliefs of King Yertle.

The narrative concludes with a question posed for readers to ponder: "And the turtles, of course… all the turtles are free. As turtles, and, maybe, all creatures should be" (Seuss, *Yertle the Turtle* 28). In his interview with Seuss, children's literature scholar Jonathon Cott asked "why 'maybe' and not 'surely'?" (28) regarding the last line in Yertle in Turtle. Seuss replied, "I qualified that in order to avoid sounding too didactic or like a preacher on a platform. And I wanted other persons, like yourself, to say 'surely' in their minds instead of my having to say it" (Cott 28). This explanation from Seuss directly reveals how his ultimate goal in writing *Yertle*

the Turtle was to employ questions to encourage his child readers to engage in their own questioning. Seuss initially accomplishes this in the narrative of *Yertle the Turtle* through Mack modeling the importance of directly questioning abusive authority figures. Due to Mack's willingness to question King Yertle, he becomes the savior of his fellow turtles, providing a contrasting example of how a leader should truly behave. As child readers have been primed to see the value in questioning through Mack's example, they are more likely to question Seuss himself as the author when he makes the decision to include the indirect question through the word choice of "maybe" instead of "surely" to conclude the story. By concluding the narrative in this manner, Seuss shows how the entire story was a lesson meant to assist children in exercising their critical thinking skills and learn the value of questioning.

Both post-WWII Seuss works *Bartholomew and the Oobleck* and *Yertle the Turtle* encourage child readers to question authority through subversive criticism of leaders, a marked difference from the pre-WWII story to feature a traditionally regal ruler in *The 500 Hats of Bartholomew Cubbins.* Through the depiction of King Derwin and King Yertle's arrogant greed for more power, Seuss prompts readers to question if the leaders deserve their position of power. This is emphasized through the kings' contrast to regular citizens in the form of Bartholomew and Mack, as both characters display the leadership qualities of bravery and selflessness, providing an example of how someone in a position of authority should treat their subordinates. Both Bartholomew and Mack directly question authority to speak up for others, and doing so saves both themselves and their fellow citizens. As their willingness to directly question authority escalates into rebellious action, Bartholomew and Mack represent to child readers the importance of questioning authority.

CHAPTER 3: A SNEETCH IS A SNEETCH: DR. SEUSS CHALLENGES DISCRIMINATION

In 1915, when Dr. Seuss was eleven years old, a German submarine torpedoed the British ocean liner *Lusitania* (J. Morgan & N. Morgan 15). Resulting in the death of over one-hundred American passengers, the destruction of the *Lusitania* ignited distrust and hatred of Germany in the United States, which eventually culminated in America joining WWI (O'Gan and Wallover). As a third-generation German immigrant, young Seuss experienced the negative consequences of this growing anti-German sentiment first-hand (Pease 14). Called a "Hun" by his classmates, a common anti-German slur for the time, Seuss found it difficult to make friends due to his German heritage (J. Morgan and N. Morgan 15). Seuss found companionship in his older sister Marnie, and the two bonded over their shared experiences as the victims of anti-German discrimination (J. Morgan and N. Morgan 18).

As Seuss grew older, anti-German views steadily increased. The German language was removed from curriculums in many states, German books were taken out of libraries, and music by German composers was no longer performed by orchestras (Siegel and Silverman). The initially German names of roads, schools, and even foods were anglicized, as Sauerkraut became "Liberty Cabbage" and Hamburgers became "Liberty Burgers" (Manning 16-17). This sentiment against German Americans was encouraged by former president Theodore Roosevelt, who declared in a 1915 speech that "There is no room in this country for hyphenated Americanism" ("Roosevelt Bars the Hyphenated" 1). Amid the rising tensions against Germany, Roosevelt's words endorsed the common sentiment of the time, which was that only multigenerational Americans of Anglo descent were worthy of being considered "true" Americans.

In 1919, President Woodrow Wilson echoed his predecessor's belief: "any man who

carries a hyphen about with him carries a dagger that he is ready to plunge into the vitals of this Republic whenever he gets ready… If I can catch any man with a hyphen in this great contest I will know that I have got an enemy of the Republic" ("Explains Our Voting Power in the League" 2). By declaring that American immigrants who still acknowledged the culture of their homeland were dangerous traitors, Wilson effectively endorsed discrimination against German Americans as the righteous view of patriotic Americans. This is particularly notable considering the increasingly violent attacks on German Americans during the time, including the lynching of the German American Robert Paul Prager due to false accusations of him being a German spy only a year before in 1918 (Siegel and Silverman).

Due to this, Seuss's family determined that it was safer to deny their identities as German Americans and fully assimilate into the dominant Anglo-American culture once America officially joined WWI in 1917 (J. Morgan and N. Morgan 20). Seuss's mother and Marnie participated in the war effort by knitting supplies for American soldiers, while Seuss himself tried to appear loyal to America by joining the Scouts and becoming a top seller of war bonds in his local community (J. Morgan and N. Morgan 20-22). Despite his families' attempts at assimilation, the child who would later become Dr. Seuss continued to be impacted by the discrimination against German Americans. Seuss shared in a 1979 interview for *Parents Magazine* how "During the fever of World War I, when I was about fourteen, everyone was angry at the Germans… I was not only known as the 'Kaiser,' but because of my father's job at the brewery, the 'Drunken Kaiser.' I sometimes fled home with coals bouncing off my head" (Jones 24). Although Seuss had no control over his German American identity, he still found himself ostracized for what made him different.

Seuss's experiences with discrimination as a child were likely a contributing factor to his increasingly progressive views on equal rights. Understanding what it was like to be shunned for being different, Seuss took a stance against discrimination in both his political cartoons and his children's books (Cohen 241). Although Seuss himself perpetuated racist views, particularly through the representation of racial stereotypes in his earlier works, his own childhood struggles with discrimination undoubtedly influenced his willingness to question his own beliefs, and in turn the racist ideals of society as a whole. Seuss began incorporating his anti-discrimination stance into his creative works around the time of WWII, when many German Americans were showing support to the racist ideologies of the growing Nazi party in Germany (Pease 63). Feeling a sense of responsibility as a German American, Seuss used his art to question discrimination based on people being different (Jones 307).

The very first examples of this occurred during Seuss's time working as a political cartoonist for *PM* Magazine (Cohen 241). According to Seuss, he enjoyed working for *PM* since it was "against people who pushed other people around" (J. Morgan and N. Morgan 101). Seuss captured this sentiment in many of his political cartoons that criticized American society's problems with discrimination (Pease 64-65). In July of 1942, Seuss published a political cartoon criticizing Mississippi senator Theodore Gilmore Bilbo, who had recently organized a filibuster to impede a bill to abolish poll tax (Cohen 244). Like many other Jim-Crow laws, such as literacy tests, poll taxes were implemented to prevent Black Americans from being able to exercise their right to vote (Nieman 102). In his political cartoon, Seuss depicted Senator Bilbo standing atop a cellar door, keeping people trapped below (Cohen 244). Through the inclusion of the words "U.S. Racial Prejudice" across the Senator's chest, Seuss clearly attacks Senator Bilbo for his discriminatory policies (Cohen 244). Highlighting the hypocrisy of Senator Bilbo, the

illustration depicts the Senator holding the American flag and stating the Pledge of Allegiance (Cohen 244). However, the traditional pledge is changed to include the caveat "With Liberty and Justice for all… (Expect the boys and girls I keep down in the cellar)" (Cohen 244). The entire cartoon encapsulates this message, as it is titled "The Guy Who Makes a Mock of Democracy" (Cohen 244).

Seuss continued to create political cartoons that condemned discrimination and the American political figures who perpetuated it. In August of 1942, Seuss changed his target of criticism to Georgia Governor Eugene Talmadge, a vocal white supremacist and proponent of racial segregation (Minear 41). Accusing Talmadge's racism as being anti-American, Seuss published a political cartoon that depicted Governor Talmadge holding a slaver's whip, accompanied by a "Race Hatred" bird sitting on his shoulder (Minear 80). Remaining loyal to his "Race Hatred" bird over America, the cartoon Governor Talmadge announces that "you can keep your American eagle. I got a bird all my own!" (Minear 80). Through this political cartoon, Seuss made his beliefs on discrimination clear, including the systemic discrimination represented through racial segregation.

Years later, Seuss found himself once again inspired by his stance against segregation. In the summer of 1953, Seuss published a short comic titled "The Sneetches" in *Redbook* Magazine (Cohen 219). Tackling the issue of discrimination in a metaphorical manner, Seuss's single-panel comic featured two pairs of yellow ostrich-like creatures (Cohen 219). Divided by the presence of stars on their bellies, the Sneetches with stars ostracize those without, echoing the actions of those who supported segregation. Condemning the discriminatory actions of the Sneetches with stars, Seuss made the point of his comic clear with its simple two-line poem: "And, really, it's sort of a shame, / For except for those stars, every Sneetch is the same" (Cohen 219-220). Due to

the proximity of the comic's publication date with the U.S. Supreme Court's continued refusal to rule in favor of *Brown v. The Board of Education* in 1952, Seuss's biographer Charles D. Cohen credits the ongoing historical court case on segregation as the clear inspiration for "The Sneetches" comic (Cohen 219-220).

Seuss eventually revisited "The Sneetches" comic, expanding the story and publishing it as the title story of a children's book in 1961, *The Sneetches and Other Stories*. When interviewed by children's literature scholar Johnathan Cott about his decision to expand the story, Seuss explained that he was "inspired by [his] opposition to anti-Semitism" (29). Although *The Sneetches* was published after WWII ended, antisemitic beliefs did not end along with the war. Seuss's own community, La Jolla, in southern California was impacted by antisemitism (Jones 307). As biographer Brian Jay Jones learned in an interview with Seuss's neighbor and long-term friend Judith Morgan, Seuss was "stunned to learn, for example, that the Real Estate Brokers' Association of La Jolla refused to rent or sell to Jewish families… One of his neighbors casually informed him that the La Jolla Beach and Tennis Club had an unspoken policy of not accepting Jewish members" (307). Faced with the undeniable proof that his Jewish neighbors were being ostracized for their differences in the same manner that he himself was a German American child during WWI, Seuss wrote and published *The Sneetches* as a way of encouraging his child readers to question discrimination.

From the very first page of *The Sneetches*, Seuss prompts his readers to question the discrimination present within the creature's society. The story's opening lines explain how there are two different types of Sneetches: the "Star-Belly" Sneetches and the "Plain-Belly" Sneetches (Seuss, *The Sneetches* 3). The accompanying illustration reveals that these two groups of Sneetches do not live in harmony, as it depicts a Star-Belly Sneetch ostracizing a Plain-Belly

Sneetch. With its chin haughtily raised in the air, the Star-Belly Sneetch ignores the Plain-Belly Sneetch as it walks past. This clearly leaves a negative impact on the Plain-Belly Sneetch, whose defeated appearance contrasts to the prideful Star-Belly Sneetch. The Plain-Belly Sneetch's mouth and eyes are downturned, and its shoulders are drooping, capturing the loneliness it feels from being ostracized. The illustration on the very first page establishes the existence of discrimination in the Sneetches' society and reflects the harm that it causes its victims. Seuss questions the reason behind this discrimination by clarifying how "those stars weren't so big. They were really so small" (*The Sneetches* 3). This suggests to children that the difference between the Sneetches is not all that important, therefore raising the implied question of whether the Star-Belly Sneetches are acting justly.

Seuss uses both direct and indirect methods to prompt readers to question the actions of the Star-Belly Sneetch with the last line on the first page: "You might think such a thing wouldn't matter at all" (*The Sneetches* 3). Although this "thing" clearly matters to the two groups of Sneetches, Seuss's words encourage his child readers to question the validity of the Star-Belly Sneetch ostracizing the Plain-Belly Sneetch over their small difference. Although the question itself is implied, the use of the second person pronoun "you" directly acknowledges young readers as the audience within the actual narrative, causing them to pay closer attention to the implicit question being raised about discrimination.

Seuss follows this implicit question with an explanation of why this seemingly minor difference is causing strife in the relationship between the Sneetches. Due to the stars on their bellies, The Star-Belly Sneetches believe that they are "the best kind of Sneetch on the beaches" (Seuss, *The Sneetches* 4). This sense of superiority is what motivates the Star-Belly Sneetches to declare that they will "have nothing to do with the Plain-Belly sort!" (Seuss, *The Sneetches* 4).

The accompanying illustration once again portrays how the arrogant Star-Belly Sneetches are harming the Plain-Belly Sneetches through discrimination. As a Star-Belly parent and child Sneetch walk along the beach they ignore a Plain-Belly parent and child Sneetch. This illustration reflects the image on the first page, as the prideful Star-Belly Sneetches refuse to even look at the Plain-Belly Sneetches as they strut past with their "snoots in the air" (Seuss, *The Sneetches* 4). Watching the Star-Belly Sneetches with sad expressions, the Plain-Belly Sneetches are positioned off to the side of the page, showing how they are separated from the others. The negative impact that this is having on the Plain-Belly Sneetches raises an implicit question for readers that will continue to feature prominently throughout the narrative, which is if the difference in their bellies is truly a valid reason for the Star-Belly Sneetches to discriminate against the Plain-Belly Sneetches.

Seuss specifically engages his child readers with this implied question in the next page, which focuses on how even the young Sneetches are impacted by discrimination. When the Star-Belly Sneetches play games, they do not allow the Plain-Belly Sneetches to join: "When the Star-Belly children went out to play ball, / Could a Plain Belly get in the game…? Not at all. / You could only play if your bellies had stars" (Seuss, *The Sneetches* 5). In a scene reminiscent of what Seuss himself experienced as a German American child, Seuss utilizes a scenario that his young readers are more likely to relate to. This further enables child readers to build a sense of connection and empathy with the Plain-Belly Sneetches and therefore question how the Star-Belly Sneetches treat them.

The narrative continues to emphasize the harm that discrimination is causing the Plain-Belly Sneetches to encourage children to question the Star-Belly Sneetches' actions. When the Star-Belly Sneetches have fun social events, the Plain-Belly Sneetches are never allowed to

attend. Instead, the Plain-Belly Sneetches are "left out… cold, in the dark of the beaches. / They kept them away. Never let them come near. / And that's how they treated them year after year" (Seuss, *The Sneetches* 7). The accompanying illustration depicts a group of dejected Plain-Belly Sneetches surrounded by a monotone dark blue beach and sky to capture the sense of gloom they feel due to their isolation. This is emphasized by the stark contrast of the happily chatting Star-Belly Sneetches as they sit around a fire roasting treats. Unlike the Plain-Belly Sneetches, the Star-Belly Sneetches are surrounded by a bright white background, representing the warm light from the fire and associating the Star-Belly Sneetches with happiness. While the previous pages depicted the negative impact of discrimination on a smaller scale, and therefore enabled young readers to connect to the Plain-Belly Sneetches' pain on a more personal level, this scene escalates the issue by showing how all the Plain-Belly Sneetches are harmed by the Star-Belly Sneetches' arrogance and cruelty. Highlighting the damage caused by discrimination on a grander scale continues to prompt readers to question the Star-Belly Sneetches' willingness to ostracize others just for being different, and question if this difference really matters.

The Plain-Belly Sneetches are filled with hope when they encounter the traveling salesman Sylvester McMonkey McBean, who possesses a machine that can provide the Plain-Belly Sneetches with stars. The sad and lonely Plain-Belly Sneetches quickly agree to pay for McBean's services and change their identities to become Star-Belly Sneetches, reflecting Seuss's own attempts to hide his German American identity to avoid discrimination. Upon receiving their stars, the new Star-Belly Sneetches gleefully announce to the original Star-Belly Sneetches that they are "exactly like you! You can't tell us apart. / We're all just the same, now" (Seuss, *The Sneetches* 12). However, instead of welcoming the new Star-Belly Sneetches as they hoped, the original Star-Belly Sneetches still try to find a reason to ostracize the others. The original

Star-Belly Sneetches claim that they are "still the best Sneetches and they are the worst" (Seuss, *The Sneetches* 13). With this one statement, it is revealed that the social division between the Sneetches was not actually due to the difference of their bellies. Instead, the Star-Belly Sneetches simply used this minor difference between the groups as a way to make themselves feel superior and therefore have a reason to discriminate against the Plain-Belly Sneetches. This calls into question the actions of the Star-Belly Sneetches for young readers, as it reveals that they had no valid reason for discriminating against the Plain-Belly Sneetches.

Seuss follows this by having the original Star-Belly Sneetches pose a direct question to readers: "But, now, how in the world will we know… / if which kind is what, or the other way around?" (*The Sneetches* 13). This question from the original Star-Belly Sneetches further encourages child readers to doubt the validity of the significance of the Sneetches' different bellies. After all, if the two groups can no longer tell one another apart, then it is clear that it is not their minor physical difference that is actually dividing them. Instead, the arrogant and cruel Star-Belly Sneetches simply enjoy the feeling of superiority that they receive from discriminating against the Plain-Belly Sneetches. Once again reflecting to his own childhood experiences, the parallels between the Plain-Belly Sneetches unsuccessfully attempting to assimilate to avoid discrimination mimics the same attempts of German Americans like Seuss.

Taking advantage of the situation, McBean offers his services to the original Star-Belly Sneetches: "Belly stars are no longer in style… / This wondrous contraption will take off your stars / So you won't look like Sneetches who have them on thars" (Seuss, *The Sneetches* 17). Eager to mark themselves as different from the new Star-Belly Sneetches, the original Star-Belly Sneetches happily pay McBean to use his machine. In doing so, the original Star-Belly Sneetches remove the very aspect of their identities that initially brought them so much pride, showing how

what they truly value is having an excuse to exclude others, not the stars. By employing this form of ironic humor, Seuss continues to prompt his readers to question the validity behind the social division of the Sneetches, especially the discriminatory actions of the original Star-Belly Sneetches.

The now Plain-Belly Sneetches pass by the new Star-Belly Sneetches to gloat, "we know who is who! Now there isn't a doubt. / The best kind of Sneetches are Sneetches without!" (Seuss, *The Sneetches* 18). With their hands on their hips and their chins in the air, the new Plain-Belly Sneetches show off their freshly plain bellies. In response to the hypocrisy of the new Plain-Belly Sneetches, the original Plain-Belly Sneetches are "frightfully mad" (Seuss, *The Sneetches* 19) that the new Plain-Belly Sneetches have appropriated the previous symbol of their discrimination. This serves to further call into question the social division between the Sneetches caused by the original Star-Belly Sneetches, as it highlights that the stars do not matter and are merely an excuse that the original Star-Belly Sneetches used to discriminate.

Unfortunately for the original Plain-Belly Sneetches, Sylvester McMonkey McBean uses their understandable anger as an opportunity to once again take advantage, inviting them to have their new stars removed. Cheekily acknowledging the ridiculous humor of the situation, Seuss directly speaks to his child readers: "Then, of course, from THEN on, as you probably guess, / Things got into a horrible mess" (*The Sneetches* 19). By once again using the second person pronoun "you" to directly acknowledge the child readers in the narrative, Seuss ensures that his readers are engaged with the story and are therefore more likely to consider the important questions being raised about the discrimination of the original Plain-Belly Sneetches.

The situation with the Sneetches grows increasingly ridiculous as they become stuck in a seemingly endless cycle of adding and removing stars from their bellies. As the Sneetches

"chang[e] their stars every minute or two" eventually "neither the Plain nor the Star-Bellies knew / Whether this one was that one… or that one was this one / Or which one was what one… or what one was who" (Seuss, *The Sneetches* 21). This is reflected in the accompanying illustration, in which the Sneetches rush in and out of McBean's machine, making a closed figure eight shape to represent the pointlessly endless cycle of their actions. The frantic nature of the Sneetches' actions is shown through dark and thick lines that outline the path of the Sneetches' movements in the figure eight, further emphasizing the ridiculous nature of their situation. Seuss's decision to depict this scene with a tone of ironic humor pokes fun at the truly ridiculous nature of the Sneetches' actions. This both draws in readers' attention and prompts them to question the entire basis of the Sneetches' social division. After all, if the Sneetches are changing their stars so rapidly that no one knows who is who, then this reveals how this minor difference is not truly a valid reason for the Star-Belly Sneetches to discriminate against the Plain-Belly Sneetches.

Once Sylvester McMonkey McBean successfully takes all of the Sneetches' funds, he laughs as he drives away, declaring that "They will never learn. / No. You can't teach a Sneetch!" (Seuss, *The Sneetches* 22). As is evident from McBean's easy manipulation of the Sneetches, it was the Star-Belly Sneetches' discrimination of the Plain-Belly Sneetches that made all the Sneetches, regardless of stars, vulnerable to being taken advantage of. After all, if the original Star-Belly Sneetches did not place so much value in being able to feel superior to the original Plain-Belly Sneetches, then McBean would have nothing to sell them. McBean's easy manipulation of the Sneetches shows how societal division based on insignificant differences ends up hurting everyone, even those who initially seem to be solely benefiting from a position of privilege, like the Star-Belly Sneetches did at first. The negative consequences that the Sneetches experienced from McBean's manipulation serves as Seuss's way of criticizing the

Star-Belly Sneetches' discrimination of the Plain-Belly Sneetches. This in turn raises an important question for readers, is there ever a truly valid reason to discriminate against others, especially for differences beyond their control?

Despite Sylvester McMonkey McBean's claim that Sneetches are incapable of learning from their mistakes, the narrative concludes with the Sneetches coming together regardless of their differences. Although the Sneetches were taken advantage of by McBean, his appearance provided the Sneetches with the opportunity to learn that: "Sneetches are Sneetches / And no kind of Sneetch is the best on the beaches" (Seuss, *The Sneetches* 24). In a radical shift from the rest of the narrative, the final illustration depicts the Star-Belly Sneetches and the Plain-Belly Sneetches happily getting along with one another, holding hands and smiling. The narrative's conclusion serves as Seuss's way of approving of the Sneetches' decision to set aside their minor differences and come together as a loving and supportive community, free from discrimination.

As the narrative of *The Sneetches* poses both indirect and direct questions about the discriminatory actions of the Star-Belly Sneetches, young readers are primed to learn this lesson alongside the Sneetches and eventually apply these newfound questioning skills to their own lives. Proof to support *The Sneetches*' ability as a story to prompt children to question discrimination was found in a student's reaction to the Sneetches during a NPR Podcast. In January 2023, the National Public Radio Podcast "Planet Money" collaborated with Shale Meadows Elementary School's third grade class on an episode focused on economic lessons in children's books (Beras). As the teacher, Mandy Robek, was reading aloud, her students quickly began to question the discriminatory actions of the Star-Belly Sneetches (Beras). One student, Katie, questioned the Star-Belly Sneetches' reason for discriminating against the Plain-Belly Sneetches: "Oh, that's kind of mean… That's kind of mean because, like, just 'cause their bellies

are plain and they don't have stars in it doesn't mean that they're not special (Beras). Through the comment that Katie made, she revealed how *The Sneetches'* depiction of discrimination made her question the validity of mistreating others for their differences.

Another student, Noah, followed up on Katie's remark by directly connecting the Star-Belly Sneetches' discriminatory actions to its real-world inspiration: "I kind of think… It's almost like what happened back then, how people were treated… Like, disrespected… Like, white people disrespected Black people, but then, they might stand up in the book" (Beras). As Noah spoke, it is clear how his initial questioning of the discrimination in *The Sneetches* led to him critically thinking about examples of discrimination in America. Noah's critical engagement with *The Sneetches* proves that the story succeeds in encouraging children to question discrimination both within the context of the story's narrative and within the real world. If Seuss was alive to witness Noah's response to *The Sneetches*, the author would undoubtedly be proud to know that he succeeded in communicating the ultimate goal of his story.

However, in response to Noah's comments on *The Sneetches,* Amanda Beeman, the assistant director of communications for the school district, put an end to the read-aloud of the story (Beras). Concerned that a discussion on race, equal rights, and discrimination might garner backlash from parents, she stated "I don't know if I feel comfortable with the book being one of the ones featured. I just feel like this isn't teaching anything about economics, and this is a little bit more about differences with race and everything like that… I just don't think it might be appropriate for the third-grade class and for them to have a discussion around it" (Beras). Unhappy with the decision for the read aloud to end, the students questioned Beeman's decision, claiming that they wanted to know how *The Sneetches* ended (Beras). Although the read-aloud unfortunately concluded, Seuss's story clearly had an impact on these students, providing

support to his claim that his ultimate goal as a children's author was that he “want[ed] people to think” (Sheff).

CONCLUSION

As a pioneer in the field of children's literature, Dr. Seuss's unique respect for his young audience enabled him to make a lasting impact on generations of children. Through his works, Seuss embodied his belief in the importance to "not talk down to them as kiddies but talk to them clearly and honestly as equals" ("Brat Books on the March" 3). Seuss accomplished this in his works by simultaneously entertaining and educating his young audience. His unique style clearly drew the favor of his child readers, considering that *The Cat in the Hat* is the second most checked out book from the New York Public Library since its founding in 1985 ("Top 10 Checkouts of All Time" New York Public Library). In her article celebrating the 25th anniversary of *The Cat in the Hat* for the *Chicago Tribune*, University of Arizona professor Helen Renthal perfectly described the magical impact that Seuss's books has on child readers:

> A Dr. Seuss Book never comes to rest in a library but is passed among children as a special favor they do for each other. They delight in his rollicking rhythms, his unexpected rhymes, in sounds they can feel and taste on their tongues… His drawings are bold and vivid and full of outrageous surprises. Words and drawings are inseparable, each illuminating the other. And at the heart of his fantasy there is always reality curled like the worm in an apple (38).

To expose his young readers to the "worm in an apple" in his books, Seuss utilizes both direct and indirect questions in his works to cultivate his young readers' sense of curiosity and critical thinking skills, encouraging them to question both his stories and the world outside of them.

Considering the lasting influence of Seuss in the field of children's literature, and the clear impact he has on his child readers, it is no surprise that he has been the subject of numerous scholarly analyses. In more recent years, Seuss as a literary figure and his works have come

under scrutiny due to elements of racist stereotypes and lack of diversity. Philip Nel's 2017 book, *Was the Cat in the Hat Black?* explored the iconic work's connections to minstrelsy and analyzed the protagonist as a harmful blackface creation. Philip Nel's work expanded outside of the realm of scholarly discourse when a Massachusetts school librarian rejected former first lady Melenia Trump's donation of Seuss books (Puente). Claiming that the donated Seuss books were "steeped in racist propaganda, caricatures, and harmful stereotypes," the librarian criticized the choice to donate books by Seuss in favor of works featuring diverse characters (Puente). This instance promoted discussion of Phillip Nel's work and another groundbreaking work analyzing the portrayal of race in Seuss's works "The Cat is Out of the Bag: Orientalism, Anti-Blackness, and White Supremacy in Dr. Seuss's Children's Books Supremacy in Dr. Seuss's Children's Books" by Katie Ishizuka and Ramón Stephens. In their work, Ishizuka and Stephens analyzed Seuss's stories for children and found that only two percent of the human characters were people of color, all of whom were "depicted through racist caricatures" (33).

With this increasing focus on Seuss's portrayal of race in his works for children, the Dr. Seuss Enterprises eventually came to the decision in March 2021 to end the publication of six books by Seuss due to "these books portray[ing] people in ways that are hurtful and wrong" ("Statement from Dr. Seuss Enterprises"). As this topic entered public debate, many parents and teachers have decided to cease exposing children to any works by Seuss (Barajas). With increased focus on Seuss' racist comics and political cartoons outside of his career as a children's author, many individuals also believe that continuing to read Seuss's books to children serve as an endorsement of racist beliefs, including Ishizuka and Ramón (35).

The overall response to the racial stereotypes and lack of positive diverse representation in Seuss's works has been to censor them by removing them from publication, school

curriculums, and library events (Helmore). The criticism of Seuss's portrayal of people of color is undoubtedly legitimate and reveals the much-needed increased importance given to the ongoing discussion on the need for diverse representation in children's literature. However, while it is certainly necessary to protect all children from texts that could potentially harm them, the decision to remove all Seuss's works denies children the opportunity to question. As is evident through *Horton Hears a Who, Bartholomew and the Oobleck, Yertle the Turtle,* and *The Sneetches*, not all of Seuss's books include racist stereotypes, but in fact encourage questioning the elements of society that lead to them, such as the status quo, authority figures, and discrimination. Seuss's works have been proven to successfully prompt children to question, as evident through Katie and Noah's questioning of discrimination in *The Sneetches* during NPR's podcast read aloud for their third-grade class (Beras).

By simply removing these texts, children are denied the learning opportunity of questioning and developing their own sense of right and wrong. If children have their sense of curiosity and critical thinking skills developed through reading these works by Dr. Seuss, then they are more likely to question Dr. Seuss himself. As is evident by the long-standing commercial success of Dr. Seuss and the genuine love of reading that he cultivates in his young readers, adults should not underestimate children and instead value their sense of curiosity.

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