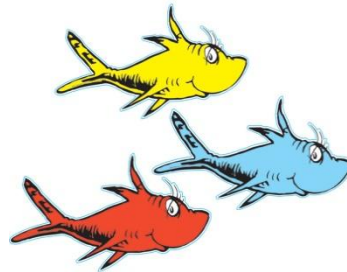




# Multi-Genre Research Project:

## Theodor Seuss Geisel



By:

Elizabeth Howlett

February 28<sup>th</sup>, 2013



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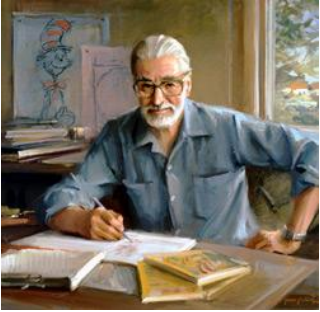
# Dear Reader,

With bright and vibrant colours, silly rhyme schemes and a cast of fictional creatures, Dr. Seuss' books have captured the imaginations of millions of children around the world. Although he is remembered fondly for his children's books, these seemingly nonsensical stories have strong underlying themes of political action and social justice. Furthermore, Dr. Seuss' simple, yet creative writing has been instrumental in influencing the early literacy movement by engaging young children by capturing their imagination.

As a child, I too was infatuated by Dr. Seuss' books for their zany characters and outlandish storylines – so much so that my mother painted an assortment of his characters on my bedroom wall. As an adult looking back on these artifacts from my childhood, I've been able to find new appreciation for these books by reading beyond the surface to take into account the historical, political and sociological references throughout. For my multi-genre project, I have chosen to research the life and works of Theodor Seuss Geisel to uncover the real man behind the Dr. Seuss persona. I hope you enjoy, and thanks for reading!

- Elizabeth Howlett

# Biography



Theodor Seuss Geisel was born to parents Theodor and Henrietta on March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1904. Growing up in Springfield, Massachusetts during the First World War Geisel experienced frequent discrimination due to his German heritage. As a teenager, Geisel attended

Dartmouth College where he worked as the editor of the school's humour magazine, *The Jack-O-Lantern*; however, he was removed from the position when he was caught drinking on school grounds. In order to continue contributing to the magazine, Geisel began using his middle name "Seuss" as a pen name to hide his identity.

Geisel went on to study English and Oxford University as his father had a strong desire to see him become an English professor. After a single semester at school, Geisel quit university in order to tour Europe. During his short time at Oxford though, Geisel met Helen Palmer, who would later become his wife. Noticing his talent for illustrations, Palmer encouraged Geisel to become an artist rather than pursuing a career as an English professor.

After having returned to the United States, Geisel married Palmer in 1927 and began a fifteen year career creating marketing campaigns for The Standard Oil Company under the name of "Dr. Theophrastus Seuss". Then in 1928, Geisel began working on the Flit campaign that would gain him national recognition: "Quick Henry,

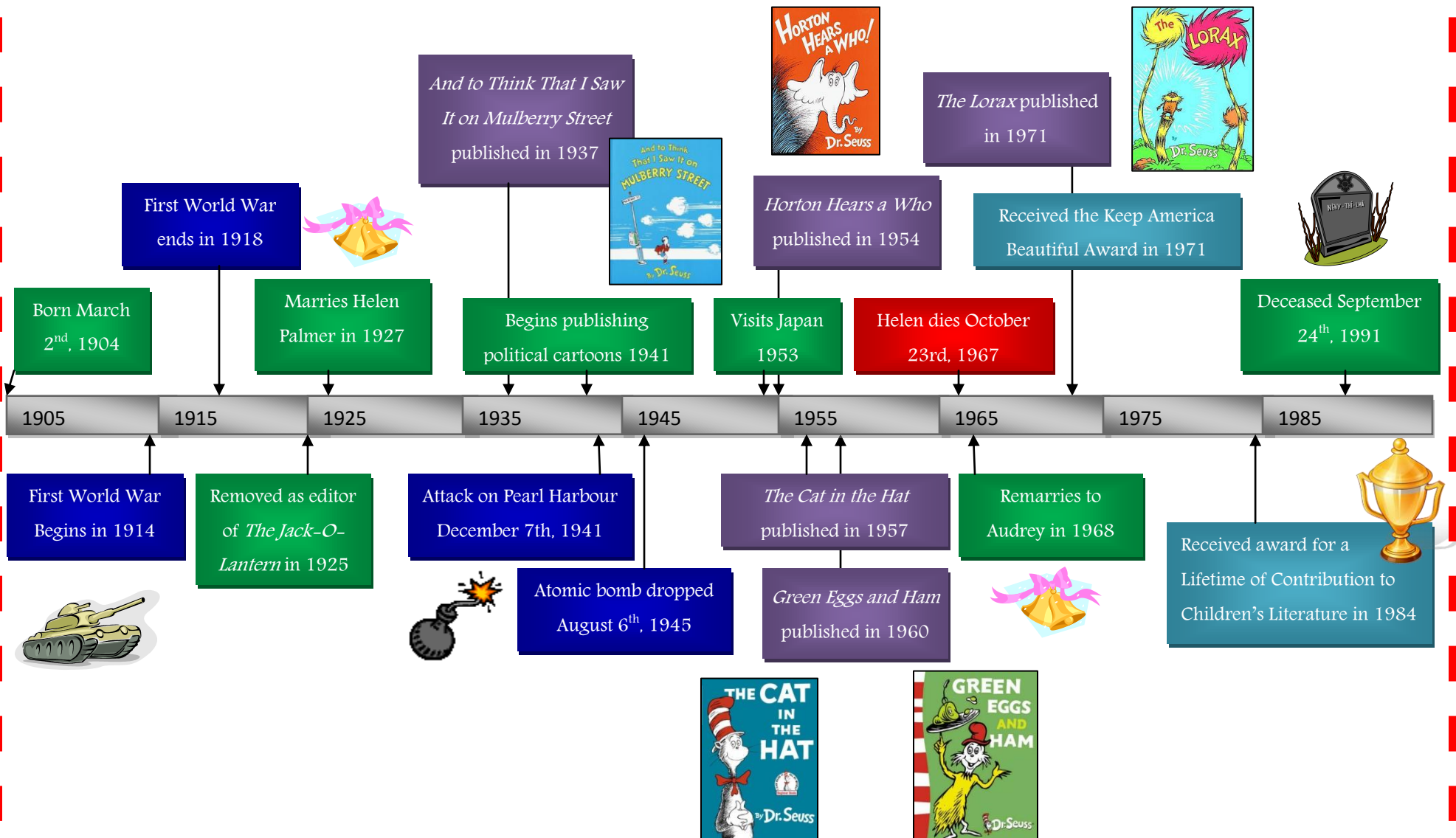
grab the Flit!" It was also at this time that Geisel first began using the shortened pen name "Dr. Seuss".

While working for Standard Oil, Geisel published his first children's book, *And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street*, in 1937 after having been initially rejected 27 times by publishing companies. Geisel went on to publish three more children's books before becoming a political cartoonist during the Second World War. Between April 1941 and January 1943, Geisel published more than 400 cartoons that mocked various world leaders, including Hitler and Mussolini, and criticized the discrimination against Jews and African-Americans.

Over the span of his career, Geisel published over 60 children's books selling over 222 million copies worldwide. Renowned for their simple, yet creative wording, Geisel's books became great tools for encouraging early literacy. Furthermore, his wildly imaginative stories include profound messages that advocate for inclusion, environmental protection and social justice. In fact, Geisel was honored with numerous awards including an award from the Keep America Beautiful organization for his strong message of environmentalism in *The Lorax* and a Lifetime of Contribution to Children's Literature award from the Pulitzer Prize Committee in 1984.

Three weeks before passing away in 1991, Geisel was asked if he had any message he would like to leave behind. Staying true to his devotion for social action, he simply left the following message for youth today: "We can, and must do better than this".

# The Life of Theodor Seuss Geisel



## Journal Entry – September 8<sup>th</sup>, 1921

Today was my first day at Dartmouth College. Everyone I know is currently pledging their allegiances for a variety of campus fraternities – except for me. Apparently I look “too Jewish”, whatever that means. I mean yes, I have black hair, and a big nose... but I’m not Jewish. And what if I was Jewish? What difference would it make?

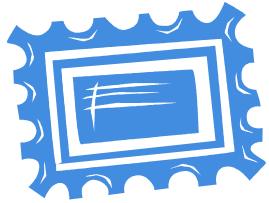
It’s not like I care what people think anyway. I’m used to people being jerks. I remember back in Springfield when neighbourhood kids used to throw things at my grandpa and me, calling us “German filth” and all sorts of names. I mean yes, my grandfather immigrated to Springfield from Germany but that was way back before I was even born. And just because my grandpa is originally from Germany, it doesn’t mean that he sympathized with the Germans during the war. I don’t think those kids even knew what the war was about. All they knew was that my family was from Germany, and in their books that made us bad people.

Anyway, I should probably be getting to bed. There’s this campus humour magazine called *The Jack-O-Lantern* that sounds pretty neat. I’m going to go down there tomorrow to see if they’ll at least let me submit some cartoons. I figured since I’ve always liked to doodle, it might be a good way to try and fit in around here.

Goodnight.

- Ted

*"Say what you mean and act how you feel, because those who matter don't mind, and those who do mind don't matter."*



To: Theodor Geisel, Sr.  
138 Howard St.  
Springfield, MA  
01144

From: Theodor Geisel, Jr  
Lincoln College - Oxford University  
42 Turl Street, Oxford, UK  
OX1 3DR

Hey Dad,

I know you've always dreamed that I would grow up to become an English professor, but I've decided to leave Oxford University. Don't get me wrong — I appreciate all the hard work you've done to send me away to school. It's just that I can't really see myself as an English professor. I just find myself spacing out in class while the professor lectures. I can't imagine ever being that person in front of the class, droning on and on. I feel like most of the time I just sit there in class and doodle in my notebook. I'm planning on moving back to the U.S. to pursue a career as a cartoonist. I know you might think that's crazy, but it's something I really enjoy. I hope you're not disappointed in me.

I also wanted to let you know that I met a girl. Her name is Helen Palmer, and she's so beautiful. Beautiful, and smart — I think you'd really like her. I met her one day in my Anglo-Saxon class as I was doodling in my notebook. I'll never forget that moment. She's actually the one who convinced me that I should follow my dream to be a cartoonist. She really believes in me. I'm thinking about asking her to marry me. I can't imagine moving back to the U.S. without bringing her with me. I really want you and mom to meet her. I hope all is well back at home. Love,

- Ted

**“You have brains in your head. You have feet in your shoes. You can steer yourself any direction you choose. You're on your own. And you know what you know. And YOU are the one who'll decide where to go...” – From *Oh, The Places You'll Go!***





❧❧❧  
We are pleased to announce the long awaited arrival of

*Chrysanthemum-Pearl*

Miraculously delivered by stork on May 1<sup>st</sup> 1931

The Geisels, Ted and Helen, invite friends and family to  
celebrate with them at their home on May 15<sup>th</sup>

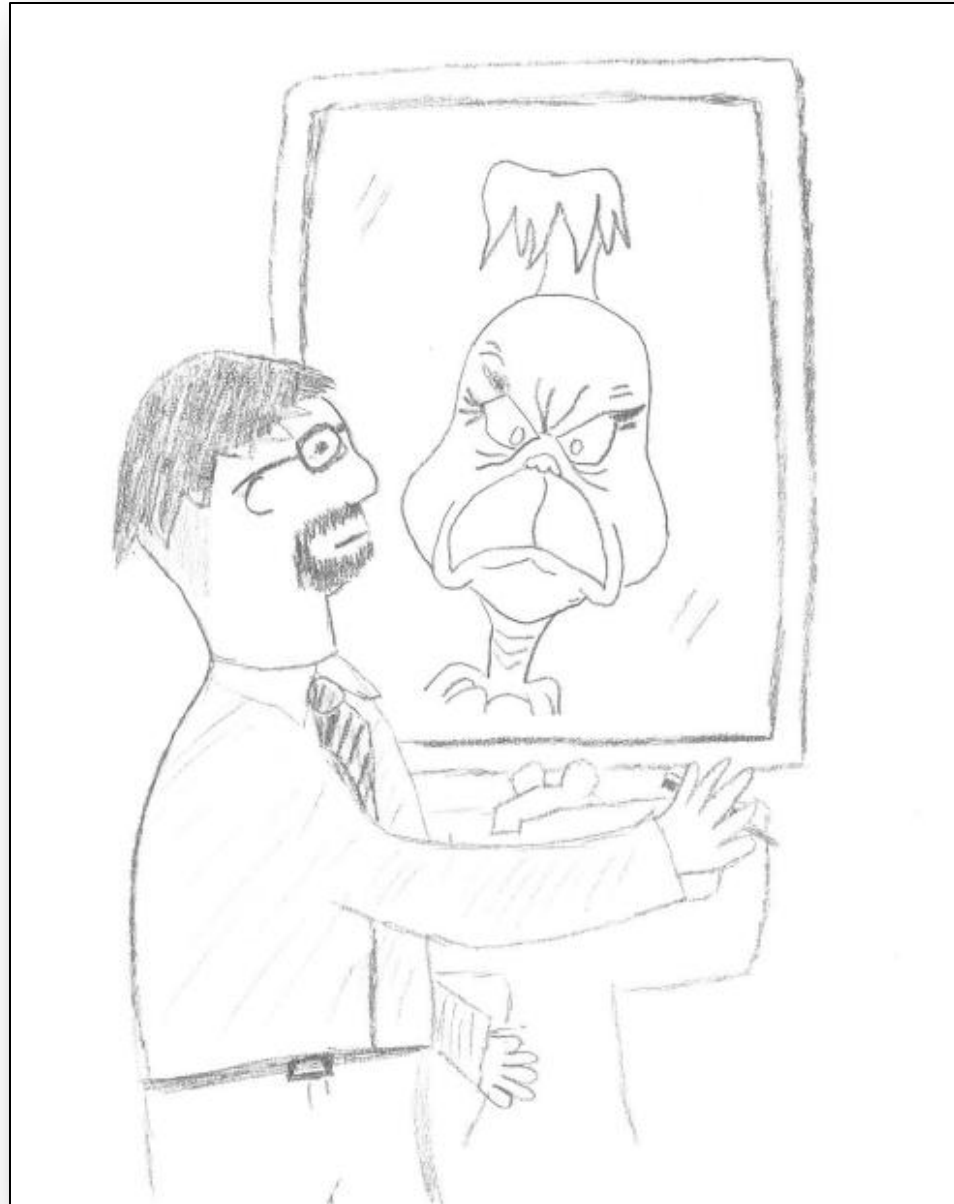
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Geisel wrote his first children's book in 1931 after finding out that he and his wife Helen were unable to have any kids of their own. To cope with the disappointment Geisel invented a daughter, Chrysanthemum-Pearl. Geisel dedicated his second book to this imaginary daughter and she was even included in several of the Geisels' Christmas cards.



## Character Sketch

The Grinch is perhaps one of the most memorable characters from Geisel's collection of books. When asked where the idea for the Grinch had come from, Geisel explained that he had been brushing his teeth one morning on December 26<sup>th</sup> when he noticed he had a "Grinchish" quality about him. It was at this time he realized that somewhere, somehow he had lost the joy of Christmas. As a result, Geisel wrote *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* to try and rediscover the Christmas spirit.



## Dialogue between Theodor Geisel and Bennett Cerf

“You know, it still blows my mind that *The Cat in the Hat* has done so well,” Bennett said leaning back in his chair.

“Can’t believe it’s done so well?” Ted replied “What on earth do you mean by that?”

“Well, the book sold close to a million copies within its first three years! That’s incredible – especially for a book that’s just about a cat in a hat.” Bennett paused. “What was it again... just 250 words you used?”

“Hah!” Ted retorted. “It was 225, actually. When you have talent like *mine*, you don’t need to use all kinds of fancy words.”

“225? I don’t know how you come up with this stuff, but I’m glad you do!”

“225 is child’s play! I bet you I could write a book using only 100 different words and sell more copies than *The Cat in the Hat*,” Ted bragged.

“Just 100 words?” queried Bennett. “You’re insane! There’s no way.”

“No way? Nothing is impossible, my friend” boasted Ted. “Why, I’ll bet you I could do it using just 50 unique words.”

“50!?” exclaimed Bennett. “Now you really are crazy, Ted. Are you telling me that you think you can write a best-selling children’s book using only 50 unique words?”

“Oh, I don’t think I can do it. I KNOW I can.”, Ted smirked.

“Fine”, said Bennett. “I will bet you \$100 that you can’t write a children book using only 50 different words.”

“You’re on”, said Ted. The two men shook hands, Bennett shaking his head and chuckling to himself. Ted paused, thought to himself for a moment and then proclaimed “I think I will call it *Green Eggs and Ham*”.

After betting his publisher, Bennett Cerf, that he could write a book using no more than 50 unique words, Geisel went on to write *Green Eggs and Ham*. Not only would *Green Eggs and Ham* go on to become Geisel’s best-selling book, but it also became the fourth-best selling English-language children's book of all time

## **SPRINGFIELD MUSEUMS ASSOCIATION TO BUILD DR. SEUSS MEMORIAL**

Today the Springfield Museums Association announced a plan to build a memorial dedicated to the popular children's book author and illustrator, Dr. Seuss, who died of cancer in late September of last year. Originally from Springfield, Theodor Seuss Geisel published his first book *And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street* back in 1937 under the pen name, Dr. Seuss. Since then, his books have become best-sellers around the world.

"Dr. Seuss was a great example of the power of creativity and imagination for the youth of today" said the president of the Springfield Museums Association, Joseph Carvalho. "Dr. Seuss saw the magic and adventure in everything around him, and we want to inspire that in kids to

help them to realize that they can follow their dreams and grow up to be whatever they want to be."

The project is estimated to cost close to \$6 million and will be paid for by a combination of private and public funding. Included is a sizable donation made by Seuss' wife, Mrs. Audrey Geisel.

"I can't think of a better way to honour my husband than to do so with art" Mrs. Geisel said in a recent interview. "Ted had such a vibrant imagination that really allowed him to see the world from a unique perspective."

The memorial will be made up of more than 30 statues and sculptures of Dr. Seuss along with a variety of characters from his books including the Cat in the Hat, the Grinch and Horton, from *Horton Hears a Who*. Construction is expected to begin in early spring of this year.

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