

# Should six Dr Seuss's books have been withdrawn from publication?

## What they said...

*'When children's books... present people of colour in stereotypical, dehumanising, or subordinate ways, they both ingrain and reinforce internalised racism and White supremacy.'*

**Katie Ishizuka and Ramon Stephens, authors of a 2019 study of racism in Dr Seuss**

*'If we remove every book that is offensive to someone, there will be very little left on the shelf.'*

**A statement on the removal of Dr Seuss books from publication issued by the National Coalition Against Censorship (NCAC)**

## The issue at a glance

On March 2, 2021, Dr Seuss Enterprises announced that six Dr. Seuss books — including 'And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street' and 'If I Ran the Zoo' — will stop being published because of racist and insensitive imagery.

Dr Seuss Enterprises stated, 'These books portray people in ways that are hurtful and wrong. Ceasing sales of these books is only part of our commitment and our broader plan to ensure Dr. Seuss Enterprises' catalogue represents and supports all communities and families.'

The other books affected are 'McElligot's Pool', 'On Beyond Zebra!', 'Scrambled Eggs Super!', and 'The Cat's Quizzer'. <https://www.cnc.com/2021/03/02/six-dr-seuss-books-will-be-discontinued-because-of-racist-and-insensitive-imagery.html>

The decision has provoked a backlash from some social commentators and others who have condemned the removal of the titles by Dr Seuss Enterprises as 'cancel culture'.

<https://www.newsweek.com/donald-trump-jr-calls-canceling-dr-seuss-books-absolutely-insane-1573151> 'Cancel culture' refers to the boycotting of a particular person or cultural artifact for being insensitive, inappropriate, or otherwise problematic. Its opponents use the term to describe an unreasonable limitation on freedom of expression.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cancel\\_culture](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cancel_culture)

## Background

The material that follows has been abbreviated from a Wikipedia entry titled 'Dr Seuss' and from an ABC News background piece published on March 3, 2021, and titled 'Six Dr Seuss books removed from publication over racist imagery'. The full texts can be accessed at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dr.\\_Seuss](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dr._Seuss) and <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-03-03/six-dr-seuss-books-withdrawn-from-publication-for-racist-images/13209190>

Theodor Seuss Geisel (March 2, 1904 – September 24, 1991) was an American children's author, political cartoonist, illustrator, poet, animator, and filmmaker.

Geisel adopted the name 'Dr. Seuss' as an undergraduate at Dartmouth College and as a graduate student at Lincoln College, Oxford. He left Oxford in 1927 to begin his career as an illustrator and cartoonist for Vanity Fair, Life, and various other publications. He also worked as an illustrator for advertising campaigns, most notably for FLIT and Standard Oil, and as a

political cartoonist for the New York newspaper PM. He published his first children's book *And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street* in 1937. During World War II, he took a brief hiatus from children's literature to illustrate political cartoons, and he also worked in the animation and film department of the United States Army where he wrote, produced, or animated many productions including *Design for Death*, which later won the 1947 Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature.

After the war, Geisel returned to writing children's books, writing classics like *If I Ran the Zoo* (1950), *Horton Hears a Who!* (1955), *The Cat in the Hat* (1957), *How the Grinch Stole Christmas!* (1957), *Green Eggs and Ham* (1960), *One Fish Two Fish Red Fish Blue Fish* (1960), *The Sneetches* (1961), *The Lorax* (1971), *The Butter Battle Book* (1981), and *Oh, the Places You'll Go* (1990). He published over 60 books during his career, which have spawned numerous adaptations, including 11 television specials, five feature films, a Broadway musical, and four television series.

Geisel won the Lewis Carroll Shelf Award in 1958 for *Horton Hatches the Egg* and again in 1961 for *And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street*. Geisel's birthday, March 2, has been adopted as the annual date for National Read Across America Day, an initiative on reading created by the National Education Association. He also received two Primetime Emmy Awards for Outstanding Children's Special for *Halloween is Grinch Night* (1978) and Outstanding Animated Program for *The Grinch Grinches the Cat in the Hat* (1982).

In 2004, U.S. children's librarians established the annual Theodor Seuss Geisel Award to recognize "the most distinguished American book for beginning readers published in English in the United States during the preceding year". It should "demonstrate creativity and imagination to engage children in reading" from pre-kindergarten to second grade.

Dr. Seuss's honours include two Academy Awards, two Emmy Awards, a Peabody Award, the Laura Ingalls Wilder Medal, the Inkpot Award, and the Pulitzer Prize.

### Criticism of Dr Seuss for racism

There has been increasing criticism in recent years over the way black, Asian and other characters of diverse racial backgrounds are drawn in some of Geisel's most beloved children's books, as well as in his earlier advertising and propaganda illustrations.

The National Education Association, which founded Read Across America Day in 1998 and deliberately aligned it with Geisel's birthday, has for several years deemphasised Dr Seuss and encouraged a more diverse reading list for children.

School districts across the US have also moved away from Dr Seuss. In 2017, a school librarian in Cambridge, Massachusetts, criticised a gift of 10 Dr Seuss books from former first lady Melania Trump, saying many of his works were 'steeped in racist propaganda, caricatures, and harmful stereotypes'. In 2018, a Dr Seuss Museum in his hometown of Springfield removed a mural that included an Asian stereotype.

### Retired books

Dr. Seuss Enterprises, the organization that owns the rights to Dr Seuss books, films, TV shows, stage productions, exhibitions, digital media, licensed merchandise, and other strategic partnerships, announced on March 2, 2021, that it will stop publishing and licensing six books. The publications to be removed are *And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street* (1937), *If I Ran the Zoo* (1950), *McElligot's Pool* (1947), *On Beyond Zebra!* (1955), *Scrambled Eggs Super!* (1953) and *The Cat's Quizzer* (1976). According to the organization,

the books ‘portray people in ways that are hurtful and wrong’ and are no longer being published due to racist and insensitive imagery.

## **Internet information**

On April 8, 2021, Cherwell (Oxford University’s independent student newspaper) published a comment by Beth Proctor titled ‘Deconstructing Dr Seuss: the issue of diversity in children’s literature’ in which she defends the removal of six Dr Seuss titles from publication and argues for greater diversity in children’s literature.

The full text can be accessed at <https://cherwell.org/2021/04/08/deconstructing-dr-seuss-the-issue-of-diversity-in-childrens-literature/>

On March 18, 2021, The Conversation published a comment by Monica Eileen Patterson, Institute for Comparative Studies in Literature, Art, and Culture (Curatorial Studies) and Associate Professor, Institute of Interdisciplinary Studies, Carleton University, in which she defends the removal of six Dr Seuss titles from ready availability to child readers and argues that they remain available for scholars studying historical racism.

The full text can be accessed at <https://theconversation.com/from-erasure-to-recategorizing-what-we-should-do-with-dr-seuss-books-156929>

On March 8, 2021, Reason published a comment by senior editor Robby Soave titled ‘Why Dr. Seuss Is Worth Defending’ which emphasises the aspects of Seuss’s legacy that are worth retaining.

The full text can be accessed at <https://reason.com/2021/03/08/dr-seuss-defend-cancel-culture-toronto-books-censorship/>

On March 7, 2021, The Guardian published a background piece titled ‘“It’s a moral decision”: Dr Seuss books are being “recalled” not cancelled, expert says’ which outlines the views of English professor Philip Nel in support of the books’ removal while placing the issue in a broader context.

The full text can be accessed at <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2021/mar/07/dr-seuss-books-product-recall-cancel-culture>

On March 6, 2021, The Washington Post published an opinion piece by children’s author Meena Harris titled ‘Pulling racist Dr. Seuss books makes kids’ literature better and more inclusive’ in which she defends the removal of six Dr Seuss titles from publication and argues for the benefits for children of diverse reading materials.

The full text can be accessed at [https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/seuss-childrens-literature-diversity/2021/03/05/e2838fdc-7db8-11eb-85cd-9b7fa90c8873\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/seuss-childrens-literature-diversity/2021/03/05/e2838fdc-7db8-11eb-85cd-9b7fa90c8873_story.html)

On March 6, 2021, The Advertiser published a comment by David Penberthy titled ‘Seuss’s political cartooning was overwhelmingly aimed at tackling prejudice’ in which he defends the vast body of Seuss’s work and condemns the withdrawal of six titles as a concerning overreaction.

The full text can be accessed at <https://www.adelaidenow.com.au/news/opinion/david-penberthy-seuss-political-cartooning-was-overwhelmingly-aimed-at-tackling-prejudice/news-story/23641efafc7c030613185c13daf4e0c2>

On March 5, 2021, Esquire published an interview with Dr. Philip Nel, a professor of children's literature at Kansas State University and the author of 'Was the Cat in the Hat Black?' Nel supports the decision to remove the six Dr Seuss titles from publication, argues that it is not censorship as the texts are still available and outlines the evolving study of racism within Theodore Geisel's work.

The full text can be accessed at <https://www.esquire.com/entertainment/books/a35738910/dr-seuss-racism-books-cancel-culture-interview/>

On March 5, 2021, Karin Klein, an editorial writer for The Los Angeles Times, wrote an opinion piece defending the removal of six Dr Seuss titles from publication, while condemning eBay for removing them from sale. She views eBay's action as censorship.

The full text can be accessed at <https://www.latimes.com/opinion/story/2021-03-05/if-mein-kampf-can-sell-on-ebay-why-not-discontinued-dr-seuss-books>

On March 5, 2021, The Herald Sun published an opinion piece by Susie O'Brien titled 'Susie O'Brien: Give the good doctor a polish, not the boot' in which she argues that Dr Seuss texts with racist elements should be changed not withdrawn from publication.

The full text can be accessed at <https://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/opinion/susie-obrien/susie-obrien-give-the-good-doctor-a-polish-not-the-boot/news-story/08ddbc857f40045f36d1bf1e8f3b505f>

On March 4, 2021, The Sydney Morning Herald published an opinion piece by Kate Cantrell and Sharon Bickle titled 'How racism in Seuss books can teach young readers about history and context' in which the authors contend that rather than being removed from publication racist texts should remain available so they can be discussed with young readers.

The full text can be accessed at <https://www.smh.com.au/national/how-racism-in-seuss-books-can-teach-young-readers-about-history-and-context-20210304-p577s0.html>

On March 4, 2021, The Sydney Morning Herald published an opinion piece by Duncan Fine titled 'Dr Seuss not cancelled. Old stereotypes are being made redundant' The piece defines the term 'cancel culture' as a pejorative used by supposed conservatives for changes they disapprove of. It supports the decision to remove six Dr Seuss titles from publication.

The full text can be accessed at <https://www.smh.com.au/culture/books/dr-seuss-not-cancelled-old-stereotypes-are-being-made-redundant-20210304-p577q1.html>

On March 3, 2021, The Sydney Morning Herald published a report by Jason Steger titled 'The cancel culture that stole Dr Seuss' which includes views for and against the removal from publication of six Dr Seuss books.

The full text can be accessed at <https://www.smh.com.au/culture/books/the-cancel-culture-that-stole-dr-seuss-20210303-p577hp.html>

On March 2, 2021, Reason published a report by senior editor Robby Soave titled 'Dr. Seuss Is Canceled' in which he defends the contribution made by Seuss to the promotion of literacy.

The full text can be accessed at <https://reason.com/2021/03/02/dr-seuss-canceled-books-biden-library/>

On March 2, 2021, Education Week published a comment by Sarah Schwartz titled 'The Dr. Seuss Controversy: What Educators Need to Know' in which she defends the decision to remove six Dr Seuss titles from publication and supports the need for more diversity in children's literature.

The full text can be accessed at <https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/the-dr-seuss-controversy-what-educators-need-to-know/2021/03>

On March 2, 2021, The New York Post published an article titled 'Dr. Seuss didn't have 'a racist bone' in his body, stepdaughter says' which concentrated on a defence by one of Geisel's stepdaughters against the suggestion that he was racist.

The full text can be accessed at <https://nypost.com/2021/03/02/dr-seuss-didnt-have-a-racist-bone-in-his-body-stepdaughter/>

On March 2, 2021, Forward published a comment by JP Grisar titled 'Yes, Dr. Seuss wrote racist books. He still has things to teach us.' The opinion piece acknowledges the racism in some of Geisel's work but stresses the overall worth of the values he promoted.

The full text can be accessed at <https://forward.com/culture/465011/dr-seuss-cancel-fascism-america-first-yertle-the-turtle-cat-in-the-hat/>

On March 1, 2021, New Jersey.com posted a comment by Joseph Dwyer titled 'Was Dr. Seuss racist? Should he be a victim of our cancel culture?' in which Dwyer argues responding to Geisel's work requires a more nuanced approach than that adopted by Dr Seuss Enterprises when it decided to withdraw six titles from publication.

The full text can be accessed at <https://www.nj.com/opinion/2020/03/should-dr-seuss-be-a-victim-of-our-cancel-culture.html>

On March 3, 2021, Diabolic published a comment by Erik Kain titled 'Erasing Dr Seuss' in which he argued that disputed texts need to remain available and discussed so that readers may learn from them.

The full text can be accessed at <https://diabolical.substack.com/p/erasing-dr-seuss>

On January 4, 2021, The Conversation published a comment by Lindsay Pérez Huber, Associate Professor, College of Education, California State University, Long Beach, titled 'Rooting out racism in children's books' in which she explains the importance of removing racist representations in children's books and how more diverse children's literature can be identified.

The full text can be accessed at <https://theconversation.com/rooting-out-racism-in-childrens-books-149432>

In February 2019, St Catherine University published a study by Katie Ishizuka, of The Conscious Kid Library, and Ramón Stephens, of the University of California, San Diego, titled 'The Cat is Out of the Bag: Orientalism, Anti-Blackness, and White Supremacy in Dr. Seuss's Children's Books s Books'. The study was part of the University's Research of Diversity in Youth Literature and is a detailed examination of Theodore Geisel's work that reveals what it claims to be significant evidence of racist representations.

The full text can be accessed at

<https://sophia.stkate.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1050&context=rdyl>

## Arguments in favour of withdrawing from publication six Dr Seuss's books

1. These Dr Seuss books may foster prejudiced views among children

Supporters of the removal of these six Dr Seuss titles from publication argue that young children are vulnerable to racist messages presented in texts and images. They further argue that young children's inability to verbalise the racist images they have absorbed makes them particularly susceptible to developing racist attitudes.

According to this argument, without having the ability to put into words the negative connotations of the images they see, young children are less able than adults to deal intellectually with prejudice and reject these images; therefore, they are more likely to accept these biased depictions. Philip Nel, a professor of English at Kansas State University and the author of 'Was the Cat in the Hat Black? The Hidden Racism of Children's Literature and the Need for Diverse Books' has stated, 'Children understand more than they can articulate. If you inflict racist images on them before they can express what... [these images are] articulating they may endure a harm they cannot

process.' <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2021/mar/07/dr-seuss-books-product-recall-cancel-culture>

Karin Klein, an editorial writer for the Los Angeles Times, has explained the mechanism through which children's literature creates an impression on its young readers. She has noted, 'These Seuss books were written for pre-schoolers and primary-grade students. They generally were read time and again by the same children, meaning that racist depictions of Chinese people wearing coolie hats and Africans with hoops in their noses were impressed deeply into their minds, and for many might have formed their first impressions of these groups.' <https://www.latimes.com/opinion/story/2021-03-05/if-mein-kampf-can-sell-on-ebay-why-not-discontinued-dr-seuss-books>

On March 6, 2021, The Washington Post published a comment by Meena Harris in which she also reinforces Nel's view. Harris stated, 'When you grow up in a world that has harmful messages and images that are constantly, and in many ways unconsciously, communicated through so many staples of our childhoods, it communicates an exclusionary message... So much effort is put into teaching adults to unlearn the deep-seated racism they picked up at a young age. Shouldn't we be just as committed to making sure that the next generation of kids don't learn those ideas in the first place?' [https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/seuss-childrens-literature-diversity/2021/03/05/e2838fdc-7db8-11eb-85cd-9b7fa90c8873\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/seuss-childrens-literature-diversity/2021/03/05/e2838fdc-7db8-11eb-85cd-9b7fa90c8873_story.html)

Harris further explained both the positive and negative impact books can have on developing children. She has stated, 'Children's books have a profound impact on young, developing minds. They are crucial to early vocabulary development, offer morals and lessons, and shape how children understand the world around them. At a very young age, children can begin to internalize harmful racial stereotypes based on the environment and media they're exposed to, with a number of studies showing children as young as three can harbor racial bias.' [https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/seuss-childrens-literature-diversity/2021/03/05/e2838fdc-7db8-11eb-85cd-9b7fa90c8873\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/seuss-childrens-literature-diversity/2021/03/05/e2838fdc-7db8-11eb-85cd-9b7fa90c8873_story.html)

It has been claimed that at least some Dr Seuss books contain biased depictions with the capacity to promote racial prejudice in children. Researchers published through St Catherine University, Minnesota, found that Dr. Seuss wrote about only two human black characters,

and both are depicted as monkeys. In 'And to Think that I Saw it on Mulberry Street', the 2019 St Catherine University study noted, a Chinese man is drawn 'with chopsticks and a bowl of rice in his hands, bright yellow skin, slanted eyes, a long black braid, and a conical hat.' In the book 'If I Ran the Zoo', a white man says he would 'put a person of colour wearing a turban' on display. The authors of another 2019 study noted that this was an act of 'dehumanisation', which is 'to treat someone as though he or she is not human.' The St Catherine University study claims that the treatment of non-white characters in Dr. Seuss's stories encourages 'the development and reinforcement of racial bias in young children.'

<https://globalnews.ca/news/5008003/dr-seuss-racist-books/>

Katie Ishizuka and Ramon Stephens, the authors of the 2019 study, titled, 'The Cat is Out of the Bag: Orientalism, Anti-Blackness, and White Supremacy in Dr. Seuss's Children's Books' have summarised the negative impact they believe racist depictions in Dr Seuss's books can have on young readers. They state, 'Children's books provide impressions and messages that can last a lifetime, and shape how children see and understand themselves, their homes, communities, and world. A long history of research shows that text accompanied with imagery, such as books with pictures, shapes children's racial attitudes. When children's books centre Whiteness, erase people of colour and other oppressed groups, or present people of colour in stereotypical, dehumanizing, or subordinate ways, they both ingrain and reinforce internalized racism and White supremacy.'

<https://sophia.stkate.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1050&context=rdyl>

2. These Dr Seuss books may harm children from the racial or cultural backgrounds negatively depicted

Supporters of the withdrawal from publication of several Dr Seuss books argue that these texts contain negative depictions of particular ethnic groups and that children who belong to these groups may be damaged by these representations.

A 2019 study published through St Catherine University, Minnesota, referred to some of the racist images in several Seuss books. In 'And to Think that I Saw it on Mulberry Street', the study noted, a Chinese man is drawn 'with chopsticks and a bowl of rice in his hands, bright yellow skin, slanted eyes, a long black braid, and a conical hat.'

<https://globalnews.ca/news/5008003/dr-seuss-racist-books/>

Also in 'And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street,' a white man is shown holding a whip above a man of colour and the elephant he is riding on. <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/nbcblk/reckoning-dr-seuss-racist-imagery-has-been-years-making-n1259330> In the book 'If I Ran the Zoo', a white man says he would 'put a person of colour wearing a turban' on display. The authors of the St Catherine University study noted that this threat to put a turbaned man in a cage was an act of 'dehumanisation', which is 'to treat someone as though he or she is not human.'

<https://globalnews.ca/news/5008003/dr-seuss-racist-books/>

Also in 'If I Ran the Zoo', a white boy holds a large gun while standing on the heads of three Asian men. Additionally, 'If I Ran the Zoo' features two men from Africa who are shirtless, shoeless, and wearing grass skirts while holding an exotic animal. <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/nbcblk/reckoning-dr-seuss-racist-imagery-has-been-years-making-n1259330> It has further been noted that not only do Dr Seuss books negatively depict some racial groups but these racial groups are also underrepresented in Seuss stories. The St Catherine University study found Dr. Seuss only wrote about two human black characters, and both are depicted as monkeys.

<https://globalnews.ca/news/5008003/dr-seuss-racist-books/>

It has been argued that the dehumanising and belittling depiction of some racial and cultural groups harms the self-perception of children who belong to these groups. Carl James, an education professor at York University, has stated, '[Literature] has an impact and an influence on the early development of self, the understanding of self, how children come to know themselves and [...] their potential.' Referring to children from racial or cultural backgrounds that are shown negatively, James has claimed that it is vitally important that racist depictions in children's literature not be allowed to 'undermine [children's] potential or their abilities or their sense of being or their sense of belonging.'

<https://globalnews.ca/news/5008003/dr-seuss-racist-books/> Philip Nel, a professor of English at Kansas State University and the author of 'Was the Cat in the Hat Black? The Hidden Racism of Children's Literature and the Need for Diverse Books' has stated, '[Seuss] often sees national or ethnic or racial difference as exotic and as fun, or as funny... In highlighting the exoticness of somebody, or the otherness of somebody as a point of amusement, you are telling people that national or ethnic, or racial difference can be the punch line, and that is painful if you are a member of the group who is the punch line.'

<https://www.voanews.com/usa/all-about-america/it-time-cancel-dr-seuss-due-racist-imagery> Suess Enterprises, when announcing the withdrawal of the six titles, stated, 'Ceasing sales of these books is only part of our commitment and our broader plan to ensure Dr Seuss Enterprises' catalogue represents and supports all communities and families.'

<https://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-56250658> Critics have seen the Suess Enterprises' comment as an admission that some communities and families are not supported or positively represented in the withdrawn titles.

Authors and academics have stressed the importance for children of all racial and cultural groups of seeing themselves frequently and positively depicted in children's books. Dr Suess's work has been criticised as containing stories that not only present certain racial groups negatively but as also underrepresenting them. Meena Harris, a children's author who has two non-Caucasian daughters, has noted how difficult it has been to find children's books that encouraged her children to view themselves positively. Harris has stated, 'I have two young daughters, and I've spent countless hours looking for books that would reflect their experiences and encourage their ambitions. As a new parent, I was surprised and frustrated by how hard it was to find those books. Often, I was forced to improvise on the fly — changing pronouns from "he" to "she" or "they," and sometimes even resorting to colouring a White character's skin with a brown marker.' [https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/seuss-childrens-literature-diversity/2021/03/05/e2838fdc-7db8-11eb-85cd-9b7fa90c8873\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/seuss-childrens-literature-diversity/2021/03/05/e2838fdc-7db8-11eb-85cd-9b7fa90c8873_story.html)

Lindsay Pérez Huber, Associate Professor at the College of Education, California State University, Long Beach, has similarly stated, 'In 2015...there were 85 books published in the United States that included Latinx characters from the 3,200 children's books the ...[ Cooperative Children's Book Center} received that year. That's about 2.5 percent of the total, whereas Latinx kids represent about 1 in 4 school children in the United States.' Professor Huber explained how damaging this omission of diverse and positive racial depictions can be. She stated, 'Books can serve as important tools for children to develop their own sense of self and identity. When children of colour do not see themselves in the books they read, this sends the message that they and their communities are not important.' <https://theconversation.com/rooting-out-racism-in-childrens-books-149432>

The White-centric focus of Dr Suess's books is condemned by critics as being part of a general tendency in children's literature to exclude diversity.



3. Many children reading Dr Seuss books are too young to appreciate explanations about racism

Critics of these six titles claim that child readers are too young to have the racism depicted in some of the Seuss titles explained to them as something that was once seen as appropriate but is not now.

It has been claimed that young children are unlikely to be able to understand arguments that try to place these Seuss books in a historical context, explaining that Seuss only wrote or illustrated in a racist way because racism was accepted at the time. On March 30, 2021, The Week published a comment by Jeva Lange in which she stated, 'You're not likely to have a productive conversation about historical racism with a 1-year-old.'

<https://theweek.com/articles/969777/complicated-quagmire-dr-seuss> In an opinion piece published on February 26, 2019, Tiara Jenkins and Jessica Yarmosky quote teachers of senior students who argue that it is important to teach texts that contain racism so that their distorted values can be discussed and exposed. However, Jenkins and Yarmosky note that while it may be possible to have these conversations with teenage readers, with 'books geared toward younger kids... Those discussions can get a lot more complicated.'

<https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2019/02/26/695966537/classic-books-are-full-of-problems-why-cant-we-put-them-down>

This point has also been made by writer and educator Rebehak Gienapp when offering advice to primary school teachers considering teaching reading through some Dr Seuss books.

Gienapp states, 'When considering whether to read books like The Cat in the Hat and other books with racist stereotypes in the classroom, teachers of young children need to remember that kids begin forming racial stereotypes as young as age 3. While high school teachers can have critical conversations with teenagers about racist themes in books, this is much harder to do with a group of young children.'

<https://www.rebekahgienapp.com/racism-dr-seuss/> Sheila Cordner, a senior lecturer at the College of General Studies, Boston University, has argued, 'One could argue that making problematic texts available can lead to teachable moments about discrimination, but for the targeted picture book audience, the risk of internalizing prejudice is greater than the opportunity for educating about race through Dr. Seuss' stereotyped depictions.'

<https://www.bu.edu/articles/2021/pov-why-halting-publication-of-six-dr-seuss-books-is-the-right-call/> The same point has been made by Jeanne Yacoubou, a homeschooler, and former public-school teacher, who has stated, 'If your kids or students love any of the six books containing racist images that are going out of publication and they insist that you read them, it may or may not be appropriate to explain why they're problematic. It depends on the age of your child and their level of understanding... young children may have little understanding of whatever words you use to explain why the Geisel drawings are bad. They may become upset if, when they ask for them, they're told they can't look at those books anymore or that they're gone from your home or classroom.'

<https://medium.com/age-of-awareness/using-dr-seuss-books-to-teach-anti-racism-climate-action-and-more-politics-for-kids-and-dbb0d9035b1c> Yacoubou's recommendation is that the potentially offensive books be quietly removed from the family bookshelf in a manner similar to the decision taken by Seuss Enterprises to remove the books from publication. She argues that children need to be protected from the messages contained in such texts until they are old enough to have a discussion that would explore why some of the language and images in the withdrawn books are not acceptable.

<https://medium.com/age->

[of-awareness/using-dr-seuss-books-to-teach-anti-racism-climate-action-and-more-politics-for-kids-and-dbb0d9035b1c](https://www.theguardian.com/books/2021/mar/07/dr-seuss-books-product-recall-cancel-culture)

It has also been argued that many parents may not be able to explain adequately to young children why they should not accept the racist images and concepts that these books contain. Philip Nel, a professor of English at Kansas State University and the author of 'Was the Cat in the Hat Black? The Hidden Racism of Children's Literature and the Need for Diverse Books' has stated, 'Parents may not have training in anti-racist education or may not know how to have these conversations.' <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2021/mar/07/dr-seuss-books-product-recall-cancel-culture>

4. Withdrawing these Dr Seuss books is part of an attempt to achieve more diversity in the books offered to children

Many of those who support the removal of six of Dr Seuss's books from publication explain that it is part of a larger campaign to increase diversity in children's literature. According to this argument, increasing diversity involves removing books that are racially offensive and increasing the number of books available that focus on characters of different racial and cultural backgrounds. These books with more varied characters should present them in positive, non-stereotypic ways.

Schools that support the removal of these books from publication have explained that they were 'simply shifting to a more diverse pool of literature.'

[https://www.news.com.au/entertainment/books-magazines/books/dr-seuss-cancelled-six-books-to-cease-publication-over-racist-insensitive-portrayals/news-](https://www.news.com.au/entertainment/books-magazines/books/dr-seuss-cancelled-six-books-to-cease-publication-over-racist-insensitive-portrayals/news-story/2babca85598c05a6b2938f20e448e7f8)

[story/2babca85598c05a6b2938f20e448e7f8](https://www.news.com.au/entertainment/books-magazines/books/dr-seuss-cancelled-six-books-to-cease-publication-over-racist-insensitive-portrayals/news-story/2babca85598c05a6b2938f20e448e7f8) Loudoun County Public Schools (LCPS) have explained their reduced emphasis on Dr Seuss during the annual Read Across America Day by stating, 'We want to encourage our young readers to read all types of books that are inclusive and diverse and reflective of our student community, not simply celebrate Dr Seuss... That being said, Dr Seuss books have not been banned; they are still available to students in our libraries and classrooms.' <https://www.news.com.au/entertainment/books-magazines/books/dr-seuss-cancelled-six-books-to-cease-publication-over-racist-insensitive-portrayals/news-story/2babca85598c05a6b2938f20e448e7f8>

Others have also stressed that the recent debate surrounding books by Dr Seuss should be used to prompt wider reading options for children. Viewing the question of reading diversity from an American perspective, children's author Meena Harris has stated, 'Instead of focusing narrowly on Dr. Seuss and his place in the perpetual culture war, children's literature has an opportunity to give more access to authors and illustrators of color. To diversify the gatekeepers and decision-makers in the publishing industry. To give a generation of kids who look like my daughters (and kids who don't) a chance to learn from characters that reflect their experiences.' Harris concluded, 'Ending the publication of children's books that portray harmful stereotypes is just one part of the solution. The other is proactively telling new stories that are inclusive so that every child can see themselves as the protagonist in a story full of possibility.' [https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/seuss-childrens-literature-diversity/2021/03/05/e2838fdc-7db8-11eb-85cd-9b7fa90c8873\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/seuss-childrens-literature-diversity/2021/03/05/e2838fdc-7db8-11eb-85cd-9b7fa90c8873_story.html)

Other critics of some of Seuss's work who argue for greater diversity and inclusivity in what is offered to children have considered it from a British point of view. On April 8, 2021, Oxford University's independent online student magazine, Cherwell, published a comment by Beth Proctor titled 'Deconstructing Dr Seuss: the issue of diversity in children's

literature'. Proctor explained, 'After a report in 2020 revealed that only 5 percent of British children's books featured a Black or minority ethnic main character, other titles are providing much-needed representation. "Sulwe" by Lupita Nyong'o features a young Black protagonist who wishes she looked more like her mother. The story deals with colourism as the girl is taken on a magical journey that shows her how beautiful she is. Meanwhile, "Hair Love" by Mathew Cherry is "an ode to your natural hair" in which an African American father learns to help his daughter style her hair. For older readers there are books like "The Boy at the Back of the Class" by Onjali Q. Raúf, an award-winning story about the refugee crisis told from a child's perspective...Every child deserves to see themselves represented in the books they read...These are the kind of books that children will love and learn from and, ultimately, that is what reading is all about.' <https://cherwell.org/2021/04/08/deconstructing-dr-seuss-the-issue-of-diversity-in-childrens-literature/>

Australian primary school teacher and school leader, Dr Lorraine Beveridge, has made a similar point regarding the Dr Seuss debate and the need for diversity and inclusivity in what Australian children are offered to read. Dr Beveridge has stated, 'The times are a-changing, and the decision to remove these titles from the Dr Seuss collection reflect this world-view, to ensure children's literature is inclusive and representative of the multicultural societies in which we live.' <https://primaryenglish.education/blog/what-can-we-learn-from-dr-seuss-about-the-teaching-of-reading/>

##### 5. Withdrawing these Dr Seuss books will help to preserve the author's legacy

Among those who support the withdrawal of six Dr Seuss titles from publication are those fans of Theodor Geisel's work who believe that removing these offending books from the market will preserve the rest of the author and illustrator's work from condemnation. The decision to withdraw six Dr Seuss titles from publication was taken by Dr Seuss Enterprises which justified it by claiming it worked with a panel of experts, including educators, to review its catalogue and made the decision in 2020. The company said the move was the first step in efforts to promote inclusion for all children. It stated, 'Ceasing sales of these books is only part of our commitment and our broader plan to ensure Dr Seuss Enterprises' catalogue represents and supports all communities and families.'

<https://www.nvi.com.au/story/7150473/racist-images-stop-six-dr-seuss-books/> In its statement the company also seemed concerned to ensure that Geisel's work was not unfairly censured because of some of the works he produced which are now seen as problematic. Seuss Enterprises noted the author's own story is 'one of growth with some early works containing hurtful stereotypes to later works like "The Sneetches" and "Horton Hears a Who!" which contain lessons of tolerance and inclusion.' The statement concludes with a quote from Seuss: 'It's not how you start that counts. It's what you are at the finish.'

<https://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/entertainment/books/sd-me-seuss-racism-20171005-story.html>

Stephen Silver, a journalist and film critic who writes for The Philadelphia Inquirer, sees the withdrawal from publication as a means of limiting potential damage to Theodore Geisel's standing. He emphasises that it was an action taken by Dr Seuss Enterprises, a business controlled by the author's estate and responsible for preserving and protecting the Seuss legacy. Silver further notes the action was not taken by some hostile outside agency. Silver writes, 'We can debate whether doing this was the right thing, but it's important to point out a few things. The decision was made by the company that owns and controls the books, not by the government, or by a "mob" that pressured it.'

Also, these are far from Dr. Seuss's most popular or significant works. The printing of The Cat in the Hat, The Lorax, and Green Eggs and Ham will remain unaffected. Those graduating from high school will likely continue to receive multiple copies of Oh, the Places

You'll Go! as gifts.' <https://www.inquirer.com/opinion/commentary/dr-seuss-racist-books-cancel-culture-misinformation-20210303.html>

Silver further observes that removing these books from the list of titles authorised for publication is likely to promote a more balanced and fairer appraisal of Geisel's work. Silver states, 'It's possible to grapple with the more problematic aspects of Dr. Seuss' legacy while also appreciating his good and enduring works. And the author's books, rather than being "banned," remain available all over the place, from Amazon to my own kids' school.'

<https://www.inquirer.com/opinion/commentary/dr-seuss-racist-books-cancel-culture-misinformation-20210303.html>

Australian children's writer Lili Wilkinson similarly argues that the withdrawal of these titles was intended to preserve what is best in the Dr Seuss canon. Wilkinson noted, 'I'm not at all surprised that Seuss's estate has decided to cease publication of six titles due to their racist portrayal of people of colour. To do otherwise would be disrespectful to Seuss's legacy of kindness and empathy...'

It is always worth re-examining our literary canon and asking – does the cultural value of this book outweigh the potential harm? For Seuss's estate, the answer was "no" for the six books that won't be licensed anymore.' Wilkinson added, 'This is not 'cancel culture', and it's not censorship. It's a commercial decision made by a board of experts, trying to protect an author's legacy and relevance in changing times. Not everything can stay in print.'

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2021/mar/05/dr-seuss-legacy-of-kindness-has-only-been-bolstered-by-his-estates-decision>

## **Arguments against withdrawing from publication six Dr Seuss's books**

1. Removing these books unfairly tarnishes Dr Seuss's reputation and threatens the survival of his other works

Opponents of six Dr Seuss books being withdrawn from publication complain that the action places the author's entire body of work in a negative light and threatens the continued availability of his other works. They argue that this withdrawal unfairly casts doubt on the value of all of Geisel's stories and illustrations.

It has been argued that the withdrawal of these six Dr Seuss titles from publication implies an unjust criticism of Geisel's work as a whole. In an opinion piece published in the Adelaide Advertiser on March 6, 2021, David Penberthy stated that this withdrawal 'suggests that nuanced and thoughtful discussion is pretty much dead when a person who was almost uniformly as good as Seuss can be judged so harshly on the basis of a few missteps...It is a great pity, as it makes a man who did more than any author to advance child literacy in the 20th century look like a flawed figure whose prejudices were so acute such that they need to be expunged from his record.' <https://www.adelaidenow.com.au/news/opinion/david-penberthy-seuss-political-cartooning-was-overwhelmingly-aimed-at-tackling-prejudice/news-story/23641efafc7c030613185c13daf4e0c2>

Defenders of Geisel's work stress that its overall emphasis is positive and enlightened, promoting values such as acceptance and environmentalism. Geisel's stepdaughter Lark Grey Dimond-Cates described him as 'a sensitive, intelligent, caring man', noting that he revised some of his illustrations over time and advocated for environmental conservation through books such as 'The Lorax'. <https://nypost.com/2021/03/02/dr-seuss-didnt-have-a-racist-bone->

[in-his-body-stepdaughter/](#) Critics not connected with Geisel's family have similarly argued that there remains a great deal that is valuable in the children's books he wrote. P J Grisar, the culture reporter for Forward, has noted, "A person's a person, no matter how small" is a mantra we must all accept... The parable of the Star-Bellied Sneetches, inspired by Seuss's... disdain for antisemitism, still has much to say about prejudice. "The Lorax" is a lovely ... environmental homily. And elsewhere Seuss warns children, in animal terms divorced from race, against being vain or envious ("Gertrude McFuzz") or prideful ("The Big Brag"). Even though Seuss never had children himself... he nonetheless instilled in several generations a moral compass that, for the most part, points true north.'

<https://forward.com/culture/465011/dr-seuss-cancel-fascism-america-first-yertle-the-turtle-cat-in-the-hat/> Similarly, Robby Soave, a senior editor for Reason, noted, 'Dr. Seuss's most famous books tend to promote liberal and anti-authoritarian messages. The best-known example is probably "The Lorax", a save-the-environment parable, but it's hardly the only one. "The Butter Battle Book" is a Cold War satire, and the eponymous villain of "Yertle the Turtle" is meant to echo the rise and fall of Adolph Hitler.' <https://reason.com/2021/03/02/dr-seuss-canceled-books-biden-library/>

Concern has been expressed that Geisel's work as a whole may come to be challenged and discounted as a consequence of the withdrawal of these six titles. Critics have argued that the withdrawal may prove the start of a much larger bid to remove all or most of the author's works from publication. Dr Seuss Enterprises has said that it is 'committed to listening and learning and will continue to review our entire portfolio.'

<https://www.stuff.co.nz/entertainment/books/300243163/six-dr-seuss-books-wont-be-published-for-racist-images> This has been understood by some to mean that other books by Geisel are likely to follow the six that were named in March 2021 onto a list of Dr Seuss books no longer to be made available. Robby Soave warned, 'The report that led to the cancellation of the six books also stipulates that "The Cat in the Hat" embodies a "racist tradition" and that "Horton Hears a Who!" reinforces themes of white supremacy. I would not be surprised to find the entire Seuss canon under attack a few years from now.'

<https://reason.com/2021/03/08/dr-seuss-defend-cancel-culture-toronto-books-censorship/>

Herald Sun columnist Susie O'Brien has argued that those condemning and calling for the removal of Dr Seuss books are misdirected and that their efforts may cause far more harm than good. O'Brien notes, 'People going to great lengths to vilify Dr Seuss's canon miss the point that his books are silly and fun. They're about star-belly sneetches and quimneys in chimneys and things that like to sing.'

<https://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/opinion/susie-obrien/susie-obrien-give-the-good-doctor-a-polish-not-the-boot/news-story/08ddbc857f40045f36d1bf1e8f3b505f> Robby Soave has similarly cautioned, 'Learning to read was very boring until The Cat in the Hat and Green Eggs and Ham came along in the 1950s. Problematizing everything that's different, weird, or uncomfortable won't get us any place worth exclaiming over.' <https://reason.com/2021/03/02/dr-seuss-canceled-books-biden-library/>

2. These books should be contextualised and judged with an awareness of the values that prevailed when they were produced

Defenders of the work of Theodore Geisel argue that critics need to judge his work recognising the values that were current when the stories were written and illustrated. They argue that critics need to be aware that books which were written decades and more ago may

simply be reflecting elements of the values that were then current and may be doing so without any conscious endorsement. They also argue that we need to find a better way of dealing with texts influenced by problematic past values than simply banning or removing them.

Many academics and others have called for a careful approach when considering the work of Theodore Geisel and stress the need to recognise the impact of the period within which the books were written. Ann Neely, professor of children's literature at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, has stated, 'Just as every author/illustrator is, I think that Theodor Geisel was a product of his time... We should not judge Theodor Geisel by today's standards.' A similar point has been made by Philip Nel, a professor of children's literature at Kansas State University, who has stated, 'Racism lurks in children's culture in ways we're not aware of, and (authors) can recycle images and ideas in their work without being aware of it.'

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/life/books/2017/10/06/dr-seuss-books-racist-experts-weigh-controversy/740978001/> Supporters of Dr Seuss's work argue that it has been judged insensitively and inappropriately in withdrawing it from publication. David Pemberley, writing for the Adelaide Advertiser, has stated, 'Judged by the standards of 2021 and not the mores of the 1940s, Seuss has now had six of his books cancelled.'

<https://www.adelaidenow.com.au/news/opinion/david-pemberthy-seusss-political-cartooning-was-overwhelmingly-aimed-at-tackling-prejudice/news-story/23641efafc7c030613185c13daf4e0c2>

Some commentators have argued that a recognition of the influence of the context of the period could remove the need to ban some Seuss books from publication. Theodore Geisel's stepdaughter, Leagrey Dimond, has maintained that what is needed is to publish some of these books with a disclaimer which explains that some of the images or language within them has been influenced by the time when they were written and would not be accepted today. <https://www.tmg.com/2021/03/02/dr-seuss-step-daughter-dont-pull-books-disclaimer/> Some commentators have noted that in recent years, numerous media companies have added disclaimers to address racist or other problematic depictions in their content. For example, Disney's streaming service, added a content warning to several of its animated films, including *Dumbo*, *The Jungle Book*, and *Lady and the Tramp*, warning of 'outdated cultural depictions'. HBO Max briefly pulled the United States Civil War epic 'Gone with the Wind' due to its 'racist depictions' before restoring it to the platform with an added context warning. <https://popculture.com/trending/news/dr-seuss-stepdaughter-speaks-out-against-books-pulled-publication/>

Regarding how to deal with Seuss's work, while acknowledging the influence of values that are no longer accepted, Author Erik Kain challenges publishers and readers to find a better way than removing the book from circulation. He states, 'Seuss clearly... inked some offensive cartoons, both in his children's books and wartime propaganda. It's the sort of thing that might get someone "cancelled" in a heartbeat today. That should give us pause. If people are more than just racist or just sexist or just [insert bad trait/belief/affiliation here] then maybe there's a better way forward when it comes to how we deal with them that goes beyond "end their careers, get them fired, stomp them out from polite society.'"

<https://diabolical.substack.com/p/erasing-dr-seuss> The same challenge has been posed by Kate Cantrell, a lecturer in writing, editing and publishing at the University of Southern Queensland, and Sharon Bickle, a lecturer in English Literature at the same university. With regard to the problematic aspects of Seuss's work, Cantrell and Bickle write, 'Finding

meaningful ways to contextualise these historical aspects for young readers today might be a better focus, rather than withholding a few and letting more prominent titles slide by.'

<https://www.smh.com.au/national/how-racism-in-seuss-books-can-teach-young-readers-about-history-and-context-20210304-p577s0.html>

3. Removing these books takes away an opportunity to discuss the issues they raise. Those who oppose the withdrawal of six Dr Seuss books from publication argue that removing these titles wastes a valuable opportunity to discuss with children the issues raised within them.

Some of those who object to this withdrawal of six of Theodore Geisel's published works are concerned about the attitude this demonstrates toward the past. They argue that removing evidence of past prejudices takes away a valuable opportunity to learn from them. They also argue that to present a sanitised version of former attitudes and beliefs gives children an inaccurate view of reality and ill prepares them to battle against prejudice in the future.

Madeline Phelps, a senior attending Arroyo Grande High School, has had a comment on the Dr Seuss controversy published in *The Eagle Times*, the high school's student newspaper. Phelps has cited Aldous Huxley's view on the importance of acknowledging the shortcomings of the past. She writes, 'The badness should be hunted out, acknowledged, and if possible, avoided in the future.' <https://aghseagletimes.com/1224/opinion/why-dr-seuss-controversial-books-should-not-be-banned/>

Phelps has explained further, 'Whether we like it or not, we must admit to ourselves that, during the various periods of time in which these books were produced, culture was far different and far less sensitive to the feelings of minorities. Racism and stereotyping penetrated all parts of life, and many people engaged in it, some completely oblivious to the harmful effects it produced.' She concludes, 'censoring or eliminating media that represents that past as it was, even if it appears unpleasant today, shields people from reality and leads them to an idealized understanding of the world that simply is not realistic.'

<https://aghseagletimes.com/1224/opinion/why-dr-seuss-controversial-books-should-not-be-banned/> Attitudes such as Phelps' explain why many educationalists and others believe that all Dr Seuss's titles should remain available and, as appropriate to the age of the children presented with them, should serve as an opportunity to make young readers aware of the inaccuracies and harmful nature of racial stereotyping.

Kate Cantrell, a lecturer in writing, editing and publishing at the University of Southern Queensland, and Sharon Bickle, a lecturer in English Literature at the same university have stressed that 'Children's books are among those most often banned or censored. In this case, removing the Dr Seuss titles recognises that he was writing in a time and place when racial stereotyping was commonplace and frequently the focus of humour.' Cantrell and Bickle argue, like Phelps, that such evasion of the problem of racism is inappropriate. Instead, they claim, 'These books present an opportunity to build awareness and teach young readers about history and context.'

<https://www.smh.com.au/national/how-racism-in-seuss-books-can-teach-young-readers-about-history-and-context-20210304-p577s0.html> This view is shared by Joseph Dwyer, a K-12 social studies coordinator in Essex County and a part-time lecturer in history at Rutgers University-Newark. Dwyer has stated, 'As developmentally appropriate, students must be encouraged to confront [Seuss's] record and draw their own conclusions about the full measure of Dr. Seuss and his works. This process also needs to be the responsibility of schools. Guided by educators, students need to see the materials in question

for themselves and engage in conversations about the material.’

<https://www.nj.com/opinion/2020/03/should-dr-seuss-be-a-victim-of-our-cancel-culture.html>

Teachers and parents argue that there are ways in which challenging material, such as the prejudice in some of Dr Seuss’s books, can be appropriately explored with children. Carole Soden, a teacher and librarian with over fifty years’ experience, has written, ‘I think that students (even the very young) can have discussions regarding these problems in historical context. For example, it is well known that Seuss created anti-Japanese war posters. At the time in which he did this, Americans did not know who would win the war, Pearl Harbor had occurred and the general sentiment was very much against the Japanese. What a wonderful opportunity to point out to students how unfair this was, and how it was based on our unsettled and fearful sense, and to ask for possible solutions they might have so this won’t ever happen again.’ <https://www.oif.ala.org/oif/?p=17268>

4. Rather than withdraw whole books, any problematic elements could be removed  
Some of those who oppose Dr Seuss's titles being removed from publication argue that it would be preferable to have these stories modified so that any offensive elements were removed.

Those who support modifications to problematic texts rather than their complete removal argue this is the better option because it allows the books to remain in circulation for the enjoyment of their readers. Herald Sun columnist Susie O’Brien has explained, ‘I have no problem with tweaks being made to remove overt racism, or for new editions to be issued. But it’s sad to think that classics such as “If I Ran the Zoo” and “And to Think That I Saw it on Mulberry Street” will no longer be published.’ O’Brien has argued further, ‘It’s true there is a lack of characters of colour in Seuss books, and the 2 percent that exist are largely caricatures. There are things that are out of step with our modern times, such as a depiction of a Chinese man with yellow skin and chopsticks and discussions about keeping a turbaned Arab in the zoo in an exhibit of “unusual beasts”. Such things should be changed in future editions; however, the books should not be banned altogether... Let’s tweak bits that need to be tweaked and get on with enjoying these wonderful books’

<https://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/opinion/susie-obrien/susie-obrien-give-the-good-doctor-a-polish-not-the-boot/news-story/08ddbc857f40045f36d1bf1e8f3b505f> Lindy Jones, former Miles Franklin judge and head buyer for Abbey’s Bookshop in Sydney, has made a similar point. She has asked, ‘Do the kids notice there are chopsticks [in the illustration in Mulberry Street]? If that’s the case can we not just muck around the illustrations and change them?’ <https://www.smh.com.au/culture/books/the-cancel-culture-that-stole-dr-seuss-20210303-p577hp.html>

Those who favour changing some of the Dr Seuss stories note that Geisel himself made some modifications to remove the offensive connotations of some images and phrases. USA Today opinion contributor, Jonathan Zimmerman, has noted, ‘Before he died in 1991, Seuss actually altered some of the drawings [in ‘And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street’] to make them less objectionable. In the Asian illustration, for example, he removed the figure’s pigtail, changed its yellow skin tone, and altered the accompanying text to read “Chinese man” instead of “Chinaman.”’ <https://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2021/03/11/dr-seuss-and-censorship-dont-cancel-dr-seuss-column/4627595001/> It has also been noted that Seuss altered a line in ‘The Lorax’ which referred to the pollution in Lake Erie when the authorities behind a later successful effort to clean up the lake notified him.

<https://slate.com/culture/2021/03/dr-seuss-racist-books-mulberry-street-interview.html>



Those arguing that the Seuss stories should have been modified rather than withdrawn have noted that many classic children's stories have remained in print after problematic elements were removed. In an article published in The Guardian on March 10, 2021, Kelly Robinson noted, 'Over the decades, many beloved children's books have been quietly updated to remove racist content: some people will have never read their childhood favourites in their original form, because they were updated long before modern audiences saw them.' Robinson gave as an example, 'The Hardy Boys and Nancy Drew series, which debuted in 1927 and 1930 respectively, were originally packed with unflattering portraits of ethnic villains, who were "swarthy", "hook-nosed", or "dark, and rather stupid looking".'

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2021/mar/09/dr-seuss-cancelled-theres-nothing-new-about-cutting-racism-from-childrens-books> She goes on to explain how these texts were modified to make them acceptable to modern audiences.

Robinson gives another example drawn from the work of Roald Dahl. She writes, 'Anyone who read Roald Dahl's Charlie and the Chocolate Factory after 1973 knows the Oompa-Loompas as "rosy-white" and hailing from the fictitious Loompaland. Pick up a first edition from 1964 and you'll find that the Oompa-Loompas are pygmies from "the deepest heart of Africa", depicted in illustrations as coal-black people with broad grins. Originally, the Oompa-Loompas were brought to work as slaves by Willy Wonka, who smuggled them to the UK on a ship, packed in cases with air holes. That they are not fanciful creatures from an imaginary land but actual Africans, makes it all the more disturbing when Veruca Salt demands that her father buy her one.'

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2021/mar/09/dr-seuss-cancelled-theres-nothing-new-about-cutting-racism-from-childrens-books>

Robinson argues that making changes to the Seuss stories would be a better option than removing them from publication. She concludes, 'Plenty of authors and publishers have updated their books over the years without fanfare. Seuss himself made changes to his books during his lifetime. Such work can be a factor in why some books stay in print and their authors relevant, while others disappear completely.'

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2021/mar/09/dr-seuss-cancelled-theres-nothing-new-about-cutting-racism-from-childrens-books>

5. People should be able to choose the books they wish to purchase, borrow, and read  
Opponents of the decision to remove six Dr Seuss titles from publication argue that is censorship and makes these books difficult to obtain for adults who may want to read them. They also complain that it takes out of the hands of parents and guardians the decision as to what they read to the children in their charge.

Those who oppose these titles no longer being published argue that it has prompted a push to prevent their sale and to retire them from public libraries. Although the immediate effect of their withdrawal from publication was their price rise on Amazon, critics claim that a more concerning consequence has been they are no longer for sale in many retail outlets. Two days after Seuss Enterprises made its announcement, eBay revealed that it was 'sweeping [its] marketplace' to stop the resale of Dr Seuss books taken out of publication.

<https://www.businessinsider.com.au/discontinued-dr-seuss-books-with-racist-imagery-removed-by-ebay-2021-3?r=US&IR=T> This decision has met with widespread criticism, even from those who supported the books being withdrawn from publication. Karin Klein, an editorial writer for the Los Angeles Times, has argued, 'It's a different matter to prevent adults who want to collect books from being able to purchase copies of them.' Klein criticises

eBay for acting ‘as a kind of censor of which books people can decide to collect and place on their shelves, and that’s a shame — and downright hypocritical.’

<https://www.latimes.com/opinion/story/2021-03-05/if-mein-kampf-can-sell-on-ebay-why-not-discontinued-dr-seuss-books> Paul MacDonald, a New South Wales children’s bookseller, has warned against the move among some booksellers not to offer these books for sale. He has advised against ‘hijacking conversations and a blanket dismissal of books from the past, which [he] think[s] is a worrying trend.’ <https://www.smh.com.au/culture/books/the-cancel-culture-that-stole-dr-seuss-20210303-p577hp.html>

Concern has also been expressed that public libraries have begun removing the six Dr Seuss books from their shelves. On March 2, 2021, a spokesperson from Portsmouth Public Libraries (PPS), Virginia, announced that although the six titles are currently in circulation around PPS libraries, officials had begun the process of recalling them throughout the division. <https://www.wavy.com/news/local-news/local-libraries-begin-removal-of-controversial-dr-seuss-books/> On March 3, 2021, the city public library in Hartford, Connecticut, announced that Hartford Public Library librarians would soon meet to review the books and determine whether they should remain part of the collection.

<https://www.courant.com/news/connecticut/hc-news-dr-seuss-connecticut-libraries-20210304-ym6rek5vpndwbeqxmkvzzfzo6u-story.html> On March 11, 2021, it was reported that Chicago libraries were temporarily pulling the six Dr Seuss books that had been withdrawn from publication from their shelves. The libraries indicated that they would keep the books for reference copies until they could determine a longer-term solution. <https://abc7chicago.com/dr-seuss-chicago-public-library-banned-books-list/10403192/> Critics have condemned this potential removal of texts from libraries as excessive and an unwarranted limitation of readers’ freedom to choose the material they wish to read. Peter Coyl, the Director of the Montclair Public Library, New Jersey, has stated, ‘We would consider removing them to be a form of censorship... Removing something because you don’t agree with its viewpoint or depictions isn’t something libraries should do.’

<https://www.nj.com/news/2021/03/dump-offensive-books-or-leave-it-up-to-readers-libraries-grapple-with-dr-seuss-controversy.html>

Some opponents of these books being removed from library shelves have argued that this is the result of a campaign begun by several academics whose criticisms of Dr Seuss have become influential. They complain that these academics’ views are being forced on library users who are being denied the capacity to choose for themselves what they read and how they respond. On March 8, 2021, Robby Soave, a senior editor at Reason, wrote, ‘Disappearing books from library shelves gets us closer to the classic example of censorship... What’s happening to Dr. Seuss is the result of a very specific kind of prioritization... One decided upon not by readers or the public at large, but by activist educators...’ <https://reason.com/2021/03/08/dr-seuss-defend-cancel-culture-toronto-books-censorship/>

Concern has been expressed that the widespread removal of these books from publication, sale, and public libraries will deny parents an opportunity to share them with their children. Critics have argued that it is important that parents be able to share their favourite childhood stories. It is claimed that their enthusiasm for the books will influence their children’s enjoyment. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-07-01/sharing-favourite-childhood-books-helps-children-with-reading/9927660> Lindy Jones, former Miles Franklin judge and head buyer for Abbey’s Bookshop in Sydney, has argued that parents should remain able to share

their favourite books. She has stated, “I remember [‘Mulberry Street’] as one of my favourites as a kid. It’s just the idea of the imagination and the things you make up...Parents still want something with simple language to help their children read. They remember with a great deal of delight reading Dr Seuss and they pass that delight on.’

<https://www.smh.com.au/culture/books/the-cancel-culture-that-stole-dr-seuss-20210303-p577hp.html>

## Further implications

The following is a slightly abbreviated version of an opinion piece published in The Shorthorn. The Shorthorn is the campus newspaper for the University of Texas at Arlington. The author of the comment is student Katecey Harrell. The piece was published on March 24, 2021.

The full text can be accessed at [https://www.theshorthorn.com/opinion/opinion-holding-on-to-dr-seuss-racist-past-means-unfairly-sanitizing-the-present/article\\_0160d1c4-8c43-11eb-b261-53cad5a3017e.html](https://www.theshorthorn.com/opinion/opinion-holding-on-to-dr-seuss-racist-past-means-unfairly-sanitizing-the-present/article_0160d1c4-8c43-11eb-b261-53cad5a3017e.html)

Theodor Seuss Geisel, known commonly as Dr. Seuss, is beloved by many for inspiring children to fall in love with reading. Most of us grew up with his fun rhymes and wacky worlds or were at least exposed to them in classrooms. However, the man behind iconic children’s literature is being reconsidered despite decades of adoration in the cultural consciousness and school curriculums.

On March 2, Dr. Seuss’ birthday, Dr. Seuss Enterprises ceased the publication and licensing of six of his titles, disowning them for “[portraying] people in ways that are hurtful and wrong.”. Critics in the news media would have us believe that it’s a long-overdue reckoning with Dr. Seuss’ alleged racism. However, they’re actually symptomatic of a broader cultural, iconoclastic trend. Instead of allowing nuanced conversations that consider the time in which a piece of art or story is made, some choose to obliterate the past and its artifacts, hence affronting our sensibilities today. They see themselves as disruptors of systemic racism and interrogators of structures of power, but they’re really a part of a culture of moral superiority, wielded to justify hostility and assert authority.

The 2019 study, titled “The Cat is Out of the Bag: Orientalism, Anti-Blackness, and White Supremacy in Dr. Seuss’s Children’s Books,” highlighted alleged racism. With its perspective that literature should be examined for its underlying connections to racism, the study infers the “reinforcement of racial bias” in children who read Dr. Seuss. The study authors, motivated to find offense, found racialized messages and problematic characters in almost all of Dr. Seuss’ books. Although most characters in Dr. Seuss’ books are not even human, the study identified 2 percent of human characters being people of colour, who all manifest in “stereotypical, dehumanizing, or subordinate ways”. For example, the study points to the depiction of Asian characters in *If I Ran the Zoo*, where Asian people are represented wearing conical hats or carrying the gun-toting white male narrator, which presumably illustrates white dominance...

After the bombing of Pearl Harbor, many Americans were swept up in Anti-Japanese resentment, Dr. Seuss included. As a political cartoonist, Dr. Seuss produced hundreds of works supporting the war effort during World War II, criticizing Adolf Hitler and advocating the civil rights of Jews and Black people. Unfortunately, his support of internment camps and

accusations of Japanese Americans as spies resulted in his breathtakingly racist, anti-Asian political cartoons.

After the war in 1953, Dr. Seuss visited Japan and witnessed the devastation caused by the atomic bomb in Hiroshima. His apology for his racist sentiments came in the form of “Horton Hears a Who!” in 1954, a story about the titular elephant’s struggle to protect microscopic people living on a speck on a flower, dedicated to a Japanese friend. The book’s inspirational main theme is that “A person is a person, no matter how small” — a theme indicative of the positivity that made much of Dr. Seuss’ later books classics.

Dr. Seuss is proof of not only the human tendency to make mistakes, but also the ability to learn from them. When we feel entitled to look down on our predecessors, we should remind ourselves that people in the future will judge us by their benchmarks and fostering scorn for the past will only condemn us to the same treatment.

We must remember that progress is not made in a vacuum. Acknowledging the past, placed in the context of its flaws and its contributions to the present, is what keeps us intellectually honest and vigilant. This is not a defence of racism, but rather a nuanced recognition that great art from the past is also a product of its times.