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10 stories behind Dr. Seuss stories

- Story Highlights
- Dr. Seuss wrote "The Cat in the Hat" because of bet over 50-word book
- Boris Karloff is voice of main character in "How the Grinch Stole Christmas!"
- Author agreed to remove negative line about Lake Erie from "The Lorax"

By Stacy Conradt

(Mental Floss) -- 1. In case you haven't read "The Lorax," it's widely recognized as Dr. Seuss' take on environmentalism and how humans are destroying nature. Loggers were so upset about the book that some groups within the industry sponsored "The Truax," a similar book -- but from the logging point of view.

Another interesting fact: the book used to contain the line, "I hear things are just as bad up in Lake Erie," but 14 years after the book was published, the Ohio Sea Grant Program wrote to Seuss creator, Theodore Geisel, and told him how much the conditions had improved and implored him to take the line out. Geisel agreed and said that it wouldn't be in future editions.

2. Somehow, Geisel's books find themselves in the middle of controversy. The line "A person's a person, no matter how small," from "Horton Hears a Who!," has been used as a slogan for pro-life organizations. It's often questioned whether that was Seuss' intent in the first place, but when he was still alive, he threatened to sue a anti-abortion group unless they removed his words from their letterhead.

Karl ZoBell, the attorney for Dr. Seuss' interests and for his widow, Audrey Geisel, says that she doesn't like people to "hijack Dr. Seuss characters or material to front their own points of view." Mental Floss: 5 stories about Seuss himself

3. "If I Ran the Zoo," published in 1950, is the first recorded instance of the word "nerd."

4. "The Cat in the Hat" was written because Dr. Seuss thought the famous Dick and Jane primers were insanely boring. Because kids weren't interested in the material, they weren't exactly compelled to use it repeatedly in their efforts to learn to read. So, "The Cat in the Hat" was born.

5. Bennett Cerf, Dr. Seuss' editor, bet him that he couldn't write a book using 50 words or less. "The Cat in the Hat" was pretty simple, after all, and it used 225 words. Not one to back down from a challenge, Mr. Geisel started writing and came up with "Green Eggs and Ham" -- which uses exactly 50 words.

The 50 words, by the way, are: a, am, and, anywhere, are, be, boat, box, car, could, dark, do, eat, eggs, fox, goat, good, green, ham, here, house, I, if, in, let, like, may, me, mouse, not, on, or, rain, Sam, say, see, so, thank, that, the, them, there, they, train, tree, try, will, with, would, you.

6. It's often alleged that "Marvin K. Mooney Will You Please Go Now!" was written specifically about Richard Nixon, but the book came out only two months after the whole Watergate scandal. It's unlikely that the book could have been conceived of, written, edited and mass produced in such a short time.

Also, Seuss never admitted that the story was originally about Nixon. That's not to say he didn't understand how well the two

flowed together. In 1974, he sent a copy of Marvin K. Mooney to his friend Art Buchwald at the Washington Post. In it, he crossed out "Marvin K. Mooney" and replaced it with "Richard M. Nixon," which Buchwald reprinted in its entirety.

7. "Yertle the Turtle" = Hitler? Yep. If you haven't read the story, here's a little overview: Yertle is the king of the pond, but he wants more. He demands that other turtles stack themselves up so he can sit on top of them to survey the land. Mack, the turtle at the bottom, is exhausted. He asks Yertle for a rest; Yertle ignores him and demands more turtles for a better view.

Eventually, Yertle notices the moon and is furious that anything dare be higher than himself, and is about ready to call for more turtles when Mack burps. This sudden movement topples the whole stack, sends Yertle flying into the mud, and frees the rest of the turtles from their stacking duty.

Dr. Seuss actually said Yertle was a representation of Hitler. Despite the political nature of the book, none of that was disputed at Random House -- what was disputed was Mack's burp. No one had ever let a burp loose in a children's book before, so it was a little dicey. In the end, obviously, Mack burped. Mental Floss: The Dr. Seuss quiz

8. "The Butter Battle Book" is one I had never heard of, perhaps with good reason: it was pulled from the shelves of libraries for a while because of the reference to the Cold War and the arms race.

Yooks and Zooks are societies who do everything differently. The Yooks eat their bread with the butter-side up and the Zooks eat their bread with the butter-side down. Obviously, one of them must be wrong, so they start building weapons to outdo each other: the "Tough-Tufted Prickly Snick-Berry Switch," the "Triple-Sling Jigger," the "Jigger-Rock Snatchem," the "Kick-A-Poo Kid", the "Eight-Nozzled Elephant-Toted Boom Blitz," the "Utterly Sputter" and the "Bitsy Big-Boy Boomeroo."

The book concludes with each side ready to drop their ultimate bombs on each other, but the reader doesn't know how it actually turns out.

9. "Oh The Places You'll Go" is the final Seuss book published before he passed away. Published in 1990, it sells about 300,000 copies every year because so many people give it to college and high school grads.

10. No Dr. Seuss post would be complete without a mention of "How the Grinch Stole Christmas!" Frankenstein's Monster himself, Boris Karloff, provided the voice of the Grinch and the narration for the movie. Seuss was a little wary of casting him because he thought his voice would be too scary for kids. If you're wondering why they sound a bit different, it's because the sound people went back to the Grinch's parts and removed all of the high tones in Karloff's voice. That's why the Grinch sounds so gravelly.

Tony the Tiger, AKA Thurl Ravenscroft, is the voice behind "You're a Mean One, Mr. Grinch." He received no credit on screen, so Dr. Seuss wrote to columnists in every major U.S. newspaper to tell them exactly who had sung the song. Mental Floss: How cereal transformed American culture

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