The Lorax

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# Introduction

The Lorax is a children's book written by Dr. Seuss and first published in 1971.[1] It chronicles the plight of the environment and the Lorax, who speaks for the trees against the Once-ler. As in most Dr. Seuss works, most of the creatures mentioned are original to the book.

The book is commonly recognized as a fable concerning the danger corporate greed poses to nature, using the literary element of personification to give life to industry as the Once-ler and the environment as The Lorax.

The Lorax was Dr. Seuss' personal favorite of his books. He was able to create a story addressing economic and environmental issues without it being dull. "The Lorax," he once explained, "came out of me being angry. In The Lorax I was out to attack what I think are evil things and let the chips fall where they might."[2]

# Plot

A boy living in a polluted area visits a strange isolated man called the Once-ler in the Street of the Lifted Lorax. The boy pays the Once-ler fifteen cents, a nail, and the shell of a great-great-great grandfather snail to hear the legend of how the Lorax was lifted away.

The Once-ler tells the boy of his arrival in a beautiful valley containing a forest of Truffula trees and a range of animals. The Once-ler, having long searched for such a tree as the Truffula, chops one down and uses its wool-like foliage to knit a Thneed, an impossibly versatile garment. The Lorax, who "speaks for the trees" as they have no tongues, emerges from the stump of the Truffula and voices his disapproval both of the sacrifice of the tree and of the Thneed itself. However, the first other person to happen by purchases the Thneed for $3.98, so the Once-ler is encouraged and starts a business making and selling Thneeds.

The Once-ler's small shop soon grows into a factory. The Once-ler's relatives all come to work for him and new vehicles and equipment are brought in to log the Truffula forest and ship out Thneeds. The Lorax appears again to report that the small bear-like Bar-ba-loots, who eat Truffula fruits, are short of food and must be sent away to find more. The Lorax later returns to complain that the factory has polluted the air and the water, forcing the Swomee-Swans and Humming-Fish to migrate as well. The Once-ler is unrepentant and defiantly tells the Lorax that he will keep on "biggering" his business, but at that moment one of his machines fells the very last Truffula tree.

Without raw materials, the factory shuts down and the Once-ler's relatives leave. The Lorax says nothing but with one sad backward glance lifts himself into the air ("by the seat of his pants") and disappears behind the smoggy clouds. Where he last stood is a small monument engraved with a single word: "UNLESS". The Once-ler ponders the message for years, in solitude.

In the present, his buildings falling apart around him, the Once-ler at last realizes out loud what the Lorax meant: unless someone cares a great deal, the situation will never improve. He then gives the boy the last Truffula seed and urges him to grow a forest from it, saying that if the trees can be protected from logging then the Lorax and all the animals may return.

# Reception

Based on a 2007 online poll, the National Education Association named The Lorax one of its "Teachers' Top 100 Books for Children".[3] In 2012 it was ranked number 33 among the "Top 100 Picture Books" in a survey published by School Library Journal – the second of five Dr. Seuss books on the list.[1]

In a retrospective critique written in the journal Nature in 2011 upon the 40th anniversary of the book's publication, Emma Marris described the Lorax character as a "parody of a misanthropic ecologist". She called the book "gloomy" and doubted it was good for young children. Nevertheless, she praised the book overall, and especially Seuss for understanding "the limits of gloom and doom" environmentalism.[4]

# Controversy

In 1988, a small school district in California kept the book on a reading list for second graders, though some in the town claimed the book was unfair to the logging industry.[5] Terri Birkett, a member of a family-owned hardwood flooring factory, authored The Truax,[6] offering a logging-friendly perspective to an anthropomorphic tree known as the Guardbark. This book was published by the National Oak Flooring Manufacturers' Association (NOFMA). Just as in The Lorax, the book consists of a disagreement between two people. The logging industry representative states that they have efficiency and re-seeding efforts. The Guardbark, a personification of the environmentalist movement much as the Once-ler is for big business, refuses to listen and lashes out. But in the end, he is convinced by the logger's arguments. However, this story was criticized for what were viewed as skewed arguments and clear self-interest, particularly a "casual attitude toward endangered species" that answered the Guardbark's concern for them. In addition, the book's approach as a more blatant argument, rather than one worked into a storyline, was also noted.

The line "I hear things are just as bad up in Lake Erie" was removed more than fourteen years after the story was published after two research associates from the Ohio Sea Grant Program wrote to Seuss about the clean-up of Lake Erie. The line remains in the home video releases of the television special.

# Adaptations

## 1972 television special

The book was adapted as an animated musical television special produced by DePatie-Freleng Enterprises, directed by Hawley Pratt and starring the voices of Eddie Albert and Bob Holt. It was first aired by CBS on February 15, 1972. A reference to pollution of Lake Erie was spoken by one of the Humming-Fish as they depart; it remains in DVD releases of the show, although later removed from the book. The special also shows the Once-ler arguing with himself, and asking the Lorax whether shutting down his factory (thus putting hundreds of people out of work) is practical. An abridged version of the special is used in the 1994 TV movie In Search of Dr. Seuss, with Kathy Najimy's reporter character hearing the Once-ler's story.

## 2012 feature film

On March 2, 2012, Universal Studios and Illumination Entertainment released a 3-D CGI film based upon the book. The release coincided with the 108th birthday of Seuss, who died at 87 in 1991. The cast includes Danny DeVito as the Lorax, Zac Efron as Ted (the boy in the book), and Ed Helms as the Once-ler. The film includes several new characters: Rob Riggle as villain Aloysius O'Hare, Betty White as Ted's Grammy Norma, and Taylor Swift as Audrey, Ted's romantic interest. The film debuted in the #1 spot at the box office, making $70 million. The film eventually grossed a domestic total of $214,030,500.

## Audio books

Two audio readings have been released on CD, one narrated by Ted Danson in the United States (Listening Library, ISBN 978-0-8072-1873-0) and one narrated by Rik Mayall in the United Kingdom (HarperCollins, ISBN 978-0-00-715705-1).

## Musical

A musical adaptation of The Lorax was originally included in script for the Broadway musical Seussical, but was cut before the show opened.

From 2 December 2015 to 16 January 2016, a musical version of the book ran at the Old Vic theatre in London. With former Noah And The Whale frontman, Charlie Fink, who wrote the music for the production.

1 Bird, Elizabeth (July 6, 2012). "Top 100 Picture Books Poll Results". A Fuse #8 Production. Blog. School Library Journal (blog.schoollibraryjournal.com). Retrieved August 22, 2012.

2 Lisa Lebduska. "Rethinking Human Need: Seuss's The Lorax." Children's Literature Association Quarterly 19.4 (1994): 170-176. Project MUSE. Web. 20 Oct. 2014. <http://muse.jhu.edu/>.

3 National Education Association (2007). "Teachers' Top 100 Books for Children". Retrieved August 22, 2012.

4. In retrospect: The Lorax. Marris, E. 2011. Nature. 476: 147–149.

5. "California: Chopping Down Dr. Seuss". Time. October 02, 1989.

6. "Truax". Terri Birkett. National Oak Flooring Manufacturers' Association (NOFMA) Environmental Committee. (PDF).