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Main content

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DR SEUSS

First published by Random House: 1971.

Theodor Seuss Geisel, better known as Dr Seuss, wrote more than 40 children's books, beloved for their zany rhymes and sinuous illustrations. In August 1971--the year after the creation of the US Environmental Protection Agency and celebration of the first Earth Day--Seuss published a book that became a kind of Silent Spring for the playground set.

Thousands of children have learned about environmental destruction from the *The Lorax*, Seuss's tale of ecological ruin brought on by greed. The book still resonates: Universal Studios is due to release a feature-length animation of it next year. It packs in a lot of sophisticated concepts for a picture book, from the interconnectedness of ecosystems to the effects of industrial pollutants on freshwater systems. There is even a trophic cascade--a shift in top predators that triggers changes through a food chain.

And what initially seems like a simplistic take on environmental policy--industry bad, activists good--turns out to be more subtle. The hero does not save the day; that task falls to the next generation. This downbeat, if realistic, plot arc makes me hesitant about introducing the book to my young daughter.

An ecologist might classify the book's lost paradise as a 'Truffula savannah'. The keystone species are the Truffula trees, which...

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This is a list of children's classic books published no later than 1990 and still available in the English language. Books specifically for children existed by the 17th century. Before that, books were written mainly for adults – although some later became popular with children. In Europe, Gutenberg's invention of the printing press around 1440 made possible mass production of books, though the first printed books were quite expensive and remained so for a long time. Gradually, however, improvements I had to have children to discover this magical book of farmyard thinking. *The Wind in the Willows* (1908). Kenneth Grahame. Because knights are not always like King Arthur's crowd. Some of them are crazy. Four hundred years old and still going strong. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865). Lewis Carroll. Because children's literature does not have to be predictable. Again, I had to have children to discover this baffling fantasy story. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891). Oscar Wilde. Children's books still contain moral lessons – they continue to acculturate the next generation to society's beliefs and values. That's not to say that we want our children to be wizards, but we do want them to be brave, to stand up for each other and to develop a particular set of values. We tend to see children's literature as providing imaginative spaces for children, but are often short-sighted about the long and didactic history of the genre. And as historians, we continue to seek out more about the autonomy and agency of pre-modern children in order to understand how they might also have found spaces in which to exercise their imagination beyond books that taught them how to pray. Literature. Books.