

# Seuss

CONTINUED FROM | PAGE 3

The Cat in the Hat, an immediate hit, published in March, 1957, sold a million copies by the end of 1960. Of all of his characters, Geisel identified himself with The Cat in the Hat and the Grinch.

But Dr. Seuss did not want to just teach children to read – he wanted to teach them to think and to nurture the good within. In 1960, in a published essay, Geisel wrote: “children’s reading and children’s thinking are the rock-bottom base upon which this country will rise. Or not rise.” His other post-war message books include The Sneetches, a tale about prejudice with the star-bellied sneetches looking down on the starless sneetches; The Lorax about the careless treatment of the environment; and The Butter Battle Book about a Seussian nuclear bomb.

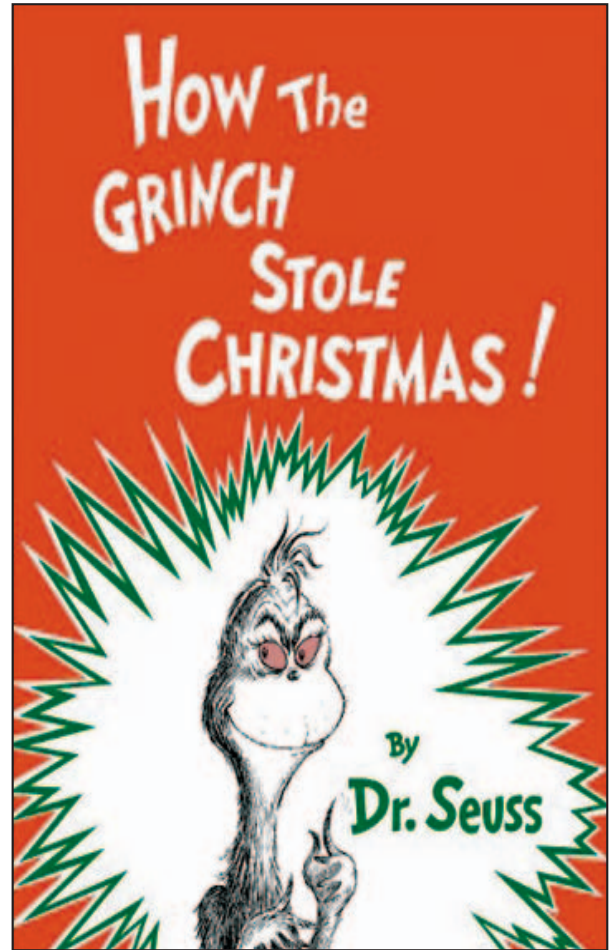
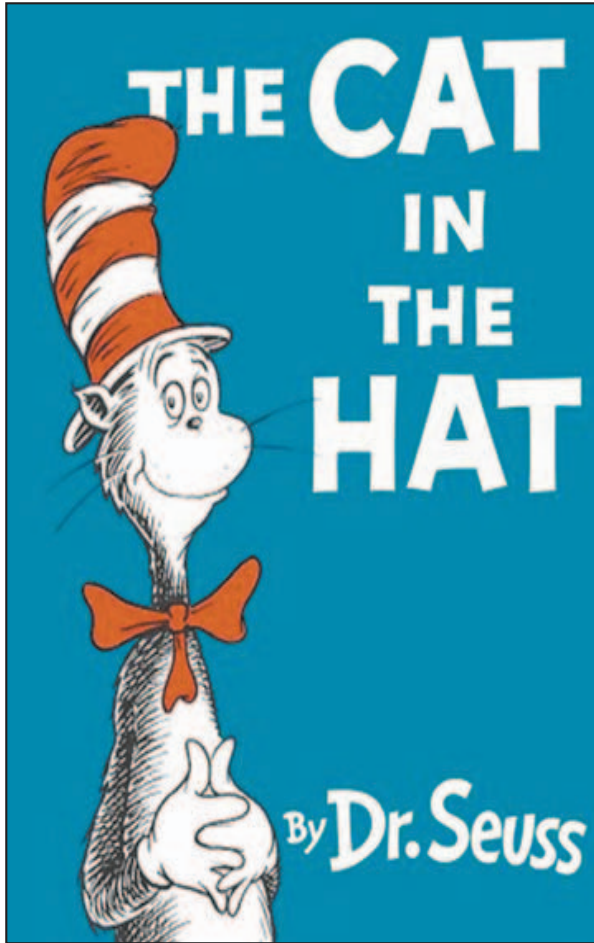
Though he never had any children of his own, Geisel passionately believed in the importance of speaking to children as equals, as people, not patronizing them. His final book Oh, the Places You’ll Go (1990) is perhaps his own manifesto, an exquisite summary about what a book does, why story matters and how it can awaken the imagination, and even transform a life – no matter what the circumstances.

He begins by giving the power to the reader to see his own potential: “Congratulations!”

“Today is your day. You’re off to Great Places! You’re off and away!” Off into the mind, into the imagination which allows a child to go anywhere – a profound message of hope.

“You have brains in your head. You have feet in your shoes. You can steer yourself any direction you choose.” Geisel urges each child to harness the power of belief, to take back a sense of personal power to steer his or her life despite what may be dire circumstances.

Geisel reminds us all that change offers the opportunity to choose: “You’ll look up and down streets. Look ‘em over with care. About some you will say, ‘I don’t choose to go there.’ With your head full of brains and your shoes full of feet, you’re too



smart to go down any not-so-good street.”

Dr. Seuss acknowledges the complexity of life but instills confidence in the child that he or she has what it takes to make a difference in her own path and that of others. “You will come to a place where the streets are not marked. Some windows are lighted. But mostly they’re darked ... Do you dare to stay out? Do you dare to go in?...Simple it’s not, I’m afraid you will find, for a mind-maker-upper to make up his mind.” Despite life’s challenges, Dr. Seuss is rooting for children to believe in themselves: “You’ll get mixed up with many strange birds as you go. So be sure when you step. Step with care and great tact and remember that Life’s a Great Balancing Act.”

Letting loose Dr. Seuss happens every time a book is placed in the hands of a child. The more challenging the circumstances

of a child’s life, the more books matter – for books are not just sparks for the imagination, they are harbingers of hope. In the spirit of Dr. Seuss, the City of Nashua has a diverse and impressive roster of give-away literacy programs to promote reading.

The Children’s Literacy Foundation gives literacy grants to ten schools in Vermont and New Hampshire. Dr. Norman Crisp School of Nashua was selected as one of 10 schools to receive a 2017-18 Year of the Book \$25,000 grant to promote cultural literacy, funds that will sponsor new books for libraries and classrooms; author-illustrator-storyteller presentations; mini-grants for classroom literary projects; family literacy celebrations.

Book Cellar of Nashua, and Manchester, promotes literacy on many fronts – through dona-

tions to the Boys & Girls Club; Head Start; the Share program; Hillsborough DOC; homeless shelters; school libraries; stocking summer reading list books; extra discounts; Saturday story hours. Retail Manager Emma Hall: “Our staff can help parents or teachers find a good, age-appropriate book for that tough-to-shop-for kid, stubborn readers, kids with reading delays, or kids who are accelerated – a key to being able to promote a love of reading.”

The YMCA of Greater Nashua SLLP – Summer Learning Loss Program – now in its third year – served 50 first and second graders in a summer reading program – aimed at the fact that studies show that students reading below grade level at the e four times more likely to drop out of school. Elizabeth Covino, Director of Community Relations: “Incoming first graders gained an average of

5 to 6 months of reading over the course of the Y’s 6-week program!” Nashua Rotary West Literacy Committee provides books to the State Women’s Prison for Christmas and Mother’s Day to help mothers share books with their children.

This year, the United Way of Greater Nashua, BAE Systems, the Nashua Public Library and P & L Landscaping, collaborated to create six “Little Free Libraries” – free-standing miniature house-type structures filled with free books. Dr. Seuss would undoubtedly agree that we cannot give away too many books – our society depends on our children. Geisel expressed his philosophy in the words of the Lorax: “UNLESS someone like you / cares a whole awful lot / nothing is going to get better. / It’s not.”

D. Quincy Whitney is a career journalist, author, historian and Nashua resident of more than 40 years. Contact Whitney at quincysquill@nashuatelegraph.com.