

# Dr. Seuss and the Art of Invention

Interpretive Panels for the Museum of Science and Industry



Theodor Seuss Geisel single-handedly forged an entirely new genre of art—a world that dances between the realms of Surrealism and a child’s doodles. Building on the bones of a traveling show, the Museum of Science and Industry crafted its own exhibit experience. Content explained original artwork and invited exploration through hands-on interactives and more.

## Timeline Intro

During his lifetime, Theodor Geisel, better known as Dr. Seuss, wrote and illustrated 44 children’s books, translated into 15 languages, and selling more than 200 million copies! He was most famous for inspiring children to read through easy-to-follow rhymes and colorful, whimsical illustrations, but he was also a political cartoonist, adman, painter, and sculptor, and social commentator. He was honored with two Academy Awards, two Emmy Awards, a Peabody Award, a Pulitzer Prize, and the adoration of generations of children, parents, and teachers.

## Introducing Seuss

Since childhood, Ted Geisel was fascinated by animals and loved doodling elephants, turtles, and other real and imaginary animals. Early in his career, he established a distinct style and a fanciful cast of characters that would make appearances in his work for many years to come. Using the name Seuss,

Geisel's first professionally published cartoon appeared in a 1927 edition of *The Saturday Evening Post*. Additional articles and illustrations appeared in *Judge*, *Life*, *Vanity Fair*, and *Liberty*.

### Commercial Success

Geisel's first advertising job promoted a pesticide called Flit. His "Quick Henry, The Flit" catchphrase became quite popular and led to additional work with Standard Oil of New Jersey (Flit's parent company), NBC Radio, General Electric, Holly Sugar, and many others. Geisel quickly discovered that as long as his advertisements encouraged customers to purchase the products, he could be as imaginative and zany as he wished.

### Geisel's Godivas

Geisel's first "adult" book, published in 1939, featured his lovingly created *Seven Lady Godivas*. Though the book was not a commercial success, his "Godivas" were a turning point in his growth as an artist. The work bridged Geisel's private paintings and the artwork he created for the public. He continued to refine his technique, and the results can be seen later in his children's books, *McElligot's Pool* and *Happy Birthday to You!* *The Seven Lady Godivas* was re-released in 1987.

### Seuss's Stuffed Animals

In the early 1930s, Geisel's work burst from the printed page into the third dimension. His sculptures of curious and comical creatures were especially unusual because they featured real animal parts such as beaks, antlers, and horns. His father was superintendent at the Springfield Zoo, and when animals died, a part of them went to live on in Ted's artwork. His "Collection of Unorthodox Taxidermy" featured XXX# whimsical animals, including the Two-Horned Drouberhannis and Blue Green Abelard.



## [Word Interactive Wall]

Did you know Dr. Seuss used only 223 different words to write *The Cat in the Hat*? He bet his publisher \$50 he could write *Green Eggs and Ham* using only 50 words! He did it! All of the words he used are one-syllable words, except for the word "anywhere." Now, you try. See if you can create a two-line story, using the same 50 words.

## [Excerpts From Timeline]

**1949**—Geisel publishes *Bartholomew and The Oobleck*, reminding us that humility and gratitude make us happy and wise, without them green yucky stuff falls from the skies.

**1950**—Regular zoo animals are boring... that is until, new creatures are found like the Fizza-ma-Wizza-ma-Dill. Perhaps drawing upon his father's career as a zookeeper, and young Ted's love of his animal stories, *If I Ran the Zoo*, is published.

**1956-57**—During an extraordinary two years, *If I Ran the Circus*, *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* (based upon his own post-yuletide musings about the meaning of the holiday), and *The Cat in the Hat* are published. More than 11 million copies of *Cat* have been sold, and it has been translated in 12 languages, including Latin, Yiddish, and braille.

**1958**—Selfish and mean, that's no way to rule herps, Yertle's kingdom is freed with preposterous burps! *Yertle the Turtle*, a series of three short stories, is published.

**1961**—It doesn't matter if you are a star-belly or plain, people should always be treated the same. *The Sneetches*, a book promoting tolerance and opposing prejudice, is published.

**1971**—We must speak for the trees and be quite persistent. If not, Earth as we know it will be non-existent. Geisel publishes *The Lorax*, his favorite Dr. Seuss book and a call to save the planet. Also in 1971, he receives Peabody Awards for the television interpretations of *Grinch* and *Horton Hears a Who*.

**1986**—*You're Only Old Once: A Book for Obsolete Children* is released on Geisel's 82nd birthday. As our arthritic fingers turn over each page, we lament and find humor in turning old-aged.

**1999**—Universal Studios opens Islands of Adventure theme park in Orlando, including Seuss Landing, a tribute to Ted Geisel. The amusement park features bright colors, playful music, and many attractions including a Caro-Seuss-el. It is said that in honor of Geisel's whimsical legacy, the park's buildings and landscaping include no straight lines.

**2000**—Mean and green takes to the silver screen. Universal Pictures' *Dr. Seuss' How the Grinch Stole Christmas* is released, starring Jim Carrey. This same year, *Seussical the Musical* opens on Broadway.