From Horton to Hitler: The Dual Legacies of Dr. Seuss

Josslyn Schain and Blake Paris

Senior Division

Group Documentary

Process Paper: 464

When first choosing a topic for our National History Day project, we were instinctively drawn to the entertainment industry. This inclination stems from our passion for film, as we both find documentaries and interviews especially impactful. The initial idea for Dr. Seuss in particular came from Josslyn's AP World History class when her teacher discussed the underlying war-related themes in Dr. Seuss's children's books during World War II. This insight sparked her curiosity in literature and its reflection of societal and historical events. With the National History Day theme in mind, she aimed to interweave these interests with Blake. We considered exploring Dr. Seuss's influence as a pivotal figure in children's literature however we landed on World War II as a turning point in Dr. Seuss's career. This topic not only aligns with our shared passion for film and literature but also resonates with the theme, revealing the profound impact historical events can have on individual artists and their work.

We began conducting research in the comfort of our own Lower School library. From there we identified themes embedded in Seuss's books and began looking for secondary sources to analyze these allegories. As we continued to research we found his involvement as a political cartoonist and included his cartoons as additional primary sources. We also thoroughly studied World War II, what caused it, and its impact utilizing both primary and secondary sources.

Once we landed on Dr Seuss, we knew we wanted to create a documentary since we are both visual learners and benefit from watching clips and interviews during class, always discussing them outside of the classroom. As we researched Dr. Seuss we were overwhelmed by the abundance of primary sources and knew it would be a disservice to exclude them from our project. Landing on a documentary would allow us to showcase these sources and weave a compelling narrative that underscored our argument.

World War II marked a turning point in Dr. Seuss's career, transforming him from a whimsical children's author to a political commentator and propaganda producer. Initially renowned for his imaginative children's books, the onset of war and the rise of fascism compelled Seuss to use his voice for political expression, through his books, editorial cartoons, and wartime propaganda. Seuss embedded themes of equality, anti-fascism, and anti-authoritarianism demonstrating a significant evolution in his artistic approach.

Dr. Seuss's transformation during World War II encapsulates the theme of turning point. Dr. Seuss, a beloved children's author, used his talents to address serious political issues during the war. Seuss's journey from storytelling to political activism demonstrates the ability of historical and social changes to influence artists. His legacy, both celebrated and critiqued, offers insight into the complexities of artistic expression during challenging times and the impact of an individual's creative voice on generations.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Balda, Kyle, and Renaud, Chris, dirs. *The Lorax*. Produced by Janet Healy and Christopher Meledandri. Universal Pictures, 2012.
This primary source is a film of The Lorax, which is based on Dr. Seuss's book. We will use this to support the ways that Dr. Seuss encouraged people to care more about the environment.

By Jeanne Lesem. "Dr. Seuss!: Talking with Dr. Seuss." *The Washington Post (1974-)* (Washington, D.C.), 1977, 185. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Washington Post (146804719).
This is a primary source that comes directly from Theodore Seuss Geisel in an interview about his efforts to educate the youth through children's books. We will use this in our documentary to support and explain his methods for strengthening youth literature through children's books.

"Commando Duck | Donald Duck Vs. the Japanese | 1944 | WW2 Era Cartoon." Video, 06:55. YouTube. Posted by The Best Film Archives, November 25, 2013. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IWAf3dQxAfQ.
This is a primary source for one of Disney's WWII cartoons that produces propaganda. We are using this clip to acknowledge Dr. Seuss's controversy by showing the context of the propaganda during this era by other creators, such as Disney.

Geisel, Theodor Seuss. "Relatives? Naw... Just Three Fellers Going Along for the Ride!" Cartoon. *PM Magazine*, 1941. Digital file.
This is a primary source of a political cartoon created by Dr. Seuss. We will use this cartoon to show the influence WWII had on Seuss's works during this time. He frequently attacked nativism and isolationism in his works. We will insert this as an example in the documentary.

Geisel, Theodore Seuss. "And on This Platform, Folks, Those Most Perplexing People... the Lads with the Siamese Beard! Unrelated by Blood, They Are Joined in a Manner That Mystifies the Mightiest Minds in the Land!" Cartoon, *PM Magazine*, July 8, 1941. Digital file.

This is the primary source of a political cartoon created by Dr. Seuss. Through Seuss's depiction of fascism and isolation, we will use this political cartoon to demonstrate how the war influenced Seuss's propaganda. We will show this in the montage of other political cartoons in the documentary.

———. "And the Wolf Chewed up the Children and Spat out Their Bones... but Those Were Foreign Children, and It Really Didn't Matter." Cartoon, *PM Magazine*, October 1, 1941. Digital file.

This is a primary source that shows one of Dr. Seuss's political cartoons. We will use this cartoon as the first political cartoon to analyze how Seuss produced propaganda against isolationism and pushed for wartime efforts.

———. *And to Think I Saw It on Mulberry Street*. N.p.: Vanguard Press, 1937.
This is a primary source of one of Dr. Seuss's children's books. We will use this to show Seuss's first book and how significant the difference in his literature is after the war.

———. *The Butter Battle Book*. N.p.: Random House, 1984.
This is a primary source for one of Seuss's children's books. We will use this to show Dr. Seuss's efforts to educate young kids about what is going on in the real world.

———. "Cages Cost Money." Cartoon. *PM Magazine*, December 15, 1941. Digital file.
This is a primary source for one of Seuss's political cartoons. we will use this to show Dr. Seuss"s efforts in persuading Americans to support America financially.

———. *Green Eggs and Ham*. N.p.: Random House, 1960.

This is a primary source of children's literature created by Dr. Seuss. We will use this to show how Dr. Seuss educated the youth and tried to teach them a lesson.

———. *Horton Hears a Who!* N.p.: Random House, 1955.
This is a primary source of children's literature created by Dr. Seuss. We can use this to emphasize Dr. Seuss's efforts in educating the youth.

———. "Insure Your Home against HItler." Cartoon. *PM Magazine*, July 28, 1942. Digital file.

This is a primary source of a political cartoon created by Dr. Seuss. We can use this to show Dr. Seuss's efforts to boost morale in America while the war is going on.

———. "Maybe It's None of Our Business... but How Much Are YOU Giving This Christmas in U.S. War Bonds and Stamps?" Cartoon. *PM Magazine*, December 22, 1942. Digital file.
This is a primary source showing Dr. Seuss's political cartoons. We will use this to support how influential Seuss's cartoons were and how they helped the American economy.

———. "Me? I'd Give My Life for My Country." Cartoon. *PM Magazine*, September 1, 1942. Digital file.
This is a primary source showing one of Dr. Seuss's political cartoons. We will use this to support the propaganda Seuss created, and we can use this to show that propaganda was a common thing happening worldwide.

———. *The Sneetches and Other Stories*. N.p.: Random House, 1961.
This is a primary source for one of Dr. Seuss's children's books. We will use this to support the way Dr. Seuss advocated for many different groups and causes.

———. *Yertle the Turtle*. N.p.: Random House, 1958.

This is the primary source for a children's book created by Dr. Seuss. We will use this when we show his children's books and explain what points he was trying to illustrate to the kids.

Giesel, Theodore Seuss. *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*. N.p.: Random House, 1957.

This is a primary source for a children's book created by Dr. Seuss. We can use this to show Dr. Seuss's efforts in educating the youth.

Hayward, Jimmy, and Steve Martino, dirs. *Horton Hears a Who!* Twentieth Century Fox, 2008. DVD.
This is a primary source that shows a clip from the Horton Hears a Who movie. We are going to use this clip to show how Horton Hears a Who is Dr. Seuss's apology for his "5th Column" political cartoon of racist depictions of Japanese people. He wrote this book dedicated to his Japanese friend as an apology for his discrimination.

"Looney Tunes - the Ducktators 1942 High Quality HD." Video, 07:48. YouTube. Posted by Classic Comedy Channel, April 25, 2018. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rVtB6afVg9A.
This is a primary source showing a looney tunes video of Hitler and the Nazis becoming powerful and then being taken down by the Americans. We used this to show contemporary work in the era of Suess's controversy and the media landscape post-Pearl Harbor.

Seuss, Dr. "Waiting for the Signal from Home." PM Magazine, February 13, 1942. Special Collections & Archives, UC San Diego, La Jolla, 92093-0175. Accessed [January 4, 2024].
This is a primary source showing a controversial political cartoon created by Dr. Seuss. We will use this to show what he was looked down on for and why he had to apologize through some of his other books and illustrations.

Seuss, Dr. "Ho hum! When he's finished pecking down that last tree he'll quite likely be tired." PM Magazine, May 22, 1941. Special Collections & Archives, UC San Diego, La Jolla, 92093-0175. Accessed [January 3, 2024].
This political cartoon by Dr. Seuss shows nationalism and boosts American morale against Hitler. We will use this to show Dr. Seuss's efforts to boost morale in America while the war was going on.

Seuss, Dr. "You can't build a substantial V out of turtles!" PM Magazine, March 21, 1942. Dr. Seuss Political Cartoons. Special Collection & Archives, UC San Diego Library. Accessed [January 3, 2024].
This is a primary source that displays a Dr. Seuss political cartoon. The image is meant to increase war production. We can use this to show Dr. Seuss's efforts to boost morale in America while the war is going on.

"Tokio Jokio | 1943 | World War 2 Era Propaganda Cartoon." Video, 07:09. YouTube. Posted by The Best Film Archives, November 19, 2016. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sy9rGAO-qfc.
This is a primary source that Warner Brothers used to produce and display propaganda for World War II. We will insert this clip along with the other Disney racist clips to explain how, at the time, many cartoonists were stereotypical, and this makes Seuss's wrongdoings seem less out of line.

Welch, Bo, dir. *The Cat in the Hat*. Universal Pictures, DreamWorks Pictures, 2003.
This is the primary source for the Cat in the Hat movie, which is based on Seuss's book. We used this in our film to showcase some of the different books he wrote and how he influenced companies to make movies off on his books.

"Your Job in Germany." Video, 12:50. YouTube. Posted by Onelimit, October 13, 2010. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7OUR5uvs9aw.
This primary source is a short video written by Theodore Geisel to help boost morale among soldiers who are going to Germany. We used a clip from this video to show Seuss's other influences during the war, not just books and political cartoons but as a director in an effort to promote war efforts.

Secondary Sources

The Asia-Pacific Journal. Last modified August 15, 2017. Accessed December 4, 2023. https://apjjf.org/2017/16/Minear.html#:~:text=URL%3A%20https%3A%2F%2Fapjjf.
The story talks about the opening of the Dr. Seuss Museum in Springfield and how Dr. Seuss's cartoons from wartime that showed racist ideas about Japanese people were left out. This article also analyzes some of Dr. Seuss's political cartoons and children's books. We used this to highlight Seuss's controversy and explain why many of his political cartoons and children's books are still shown today.

Bailey, John P. "Three Decades of Dr. Seuss." *Elementary English* 42, no. 1 (1965): 7-12. JSTOR.
This is a secondary source that goes through Seuss's literature before, during, and after the war and how these times impacted his writings. We used this to show how the different eras affected Seuss's work and how he was so influential.

Bannai, Lorraine K. "Japanese American Internment." In *Encyclopedia of the Supreme Court of the United States*, edited by David S. Tanenhaus, 7-12. Vol. 3. Detroit, MI: Macmillan Reference USA, 2008. Gale in Context: U.S. History.
This is a secondary article that gives us background on Pearl Harbor and why Japanese Americans were sent to internment camps. We used this to give history and context in

relation to Seuss's political cartoon "waiting from a signal from home" but also to show how Seuss predicted the camps.

By Henry Mitchell. "Dr. Seuss on Ecology: Lorax and Thneeds." *The Washington Post, Times Herald (1959-1973)* (Washington, D.C.), 1972, 1. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Washington Post (148326720).
This secondary source talks about Seuss's career and goes into detail about the lorax. We used this to highlight how Dr. Seuss revolutionized children's literature by adding on the educational principles of American figures and including elements of creativity and individuality in literacy. We can show the side of Seuss that not only had a deeper meaning to his stories but embedded democratic values and inclusive education.

"Dr. Seuss and WWII: Analyzing Political Cartoons." Video, 56:15. YouTube. Posted by The National WWII Museum, December 17, 2020. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3aQ1N8pSy38.
This is a secondary source that talks about Seuss's cartoons with a lot of detail. We used this to strengthen our script while we talked about the political cartoons.

Globe and Mail (Toronto, Canada). "THEODOR (DR. SEUSS) GEISEL DIES of THROAT CANCER." September 24, 2013, A2. Gale in Context: U.S. History.
This is a secondary source that explains how Dr. Seuss died and his impact before his death. We used this to talk about his death but also how he still impacted and influenced people untill the day he died.

"GUSTAV, TADD AND TODD: DR. SEUSS' 'LOST STORIES.'" In *Talk of the Nation*. N.p.: Gale, 2011. Gale in Context: Biography.
This secondary article is a broadcast transcript discussing Seuss's change from early prejudices to advocating for tolerance and his creative approach to early childhood reading. We used this to give background on Seuss's early career and his reasons for child education through literature.

Kelly, R. Gordon. "American Children's Literature: An Historiographical Review." *American Literary Realism, 1870-1910* 6, no. 2 (1973): 89-107. JSTOR.
This secondary source talks about how literature educated the youth and how Dr. Seuss changed that. We used this to discuss what set Dr. Seuss apart and why he thought the quality of a child's brain was extremely important.

Klein, Christopher. "When Dr. Seuss Went to War." HISTORY. Last modified March 2, 2016. Accessed November 30, 2023. https://www.history.com/news/when-dr-seuss-went-to-war.
This is a secondary source that focuses on his transition from children's books to political cartoons during the time of the war. We used this to support our thesis that WWII marked a turning point in Seuss's career.

Library of UCSD. Accessed December 4, 2023. https://library.ucsd.edu/speccoll/dswenttowar/index.html.
This secondary source talks about Seuss's career as a whole. We used this to add more depth to Seuss's role as a political cartoonist. We also used this to support our thesis that WWII marked a turning point in Dr. Seuss's work and society as a whole.

The National WWII Museum. "Dr. Seuss and WWII: Analyzing Political Cartoons." The National WWII Museum | New Orleans. Last modified December 17, 2020. Accessed November 30, 2023. https://www.nationalww2museum.org/about-us/notes-museum/dr-seuss-and-wwii-analyzing-political-cartoons.
This is a secondary source that talks about the emergence of children's literature in the early to mid-1900s. We will use this source to support the introduction to children's literature, the start of Seuss's career, and the evolution of children's literature.

"The Temple of Seuss; Theodor Seuss Geisel." *The Economist*, April 10, 2004, 69(US). Gale in Context: U.S. History.
This is a secondary source that tells us about what Dr. Seuss did for work and some of his smaller achievements. We will use this source to describe Seuss's role as a political cartoonist and explain, in the introduction, the allegories behind some of Seuss's most beloved stories.

"Theodor Seuss Geisel." In *Major Authors and Illustrators for Children and Young Adults*. Detroit, MI: Gale, 2002. Gale in Context: Biography.
This is a secondary source that introduces Dr. Seuss's background and career. We used this in the beginning of our documentary, introducing Geisel and giving background

Weber, Sheryl. "Dr. Seuss and U.S. Isolationism WWII." History Teaching Institute, Ohio State University. Accessed January 4, 2024.
This is a secondary source that dives into the reasons America wanted to stay isolated from the war and not help other countries. We will use this to give historical context on why Seuss produced anti-isolationist political cartoons.

Wolosky, Shira. "Democracy in America: By Dr. Seuss." *Southwest Review* 85, no. 2 (2000): 167. Gale in Context: Biography.
This is a secondary source that shows how Dr. Seuss's work started and how it evolved. We will use this to show how his stories carry American values, boosting morale.

"World War II (1939–1945)." In *Gale Encyclopedia of World History: War*. Vol. 2. Detroit, MI: Gale, 2008. Gale in Context: U.S. History.
This is a secondary source that gives us an understanding of WWII. We will use this source to give context on the history of WWII and how it was the turning point in Seuss's works

Zeisler, Andrea. "Dr. Seuss Goes to War: The World War II Editorial Cartoons of Theodor Seuss Geisel." *Mother Jones*, November/December 1999, 81+. Gale in Context: U.S. History.

This is a secondary source that dives deep into Dr. Seuss's life and morals. When showing the cartoons in the documentary, we can use this article to delve into the deep meaning of Seuss's political views

Theodor Seuss Geisel Award. Image. Accessed January 18, 2024. https://www.ala.org/alsc/awardsgrants/bookmedia/geisel.

This is a secondary source showing an image of the Theodore Seuss Geisel Award, which is given to an author who recognizes the author(s) and illustrator(s) of a book for beginning readers who, through their literary and artistic achievements, demonstrate creativity and imagination to engage children in reading. We used this to showcase Dr. Seuss's influence and Legacy.