

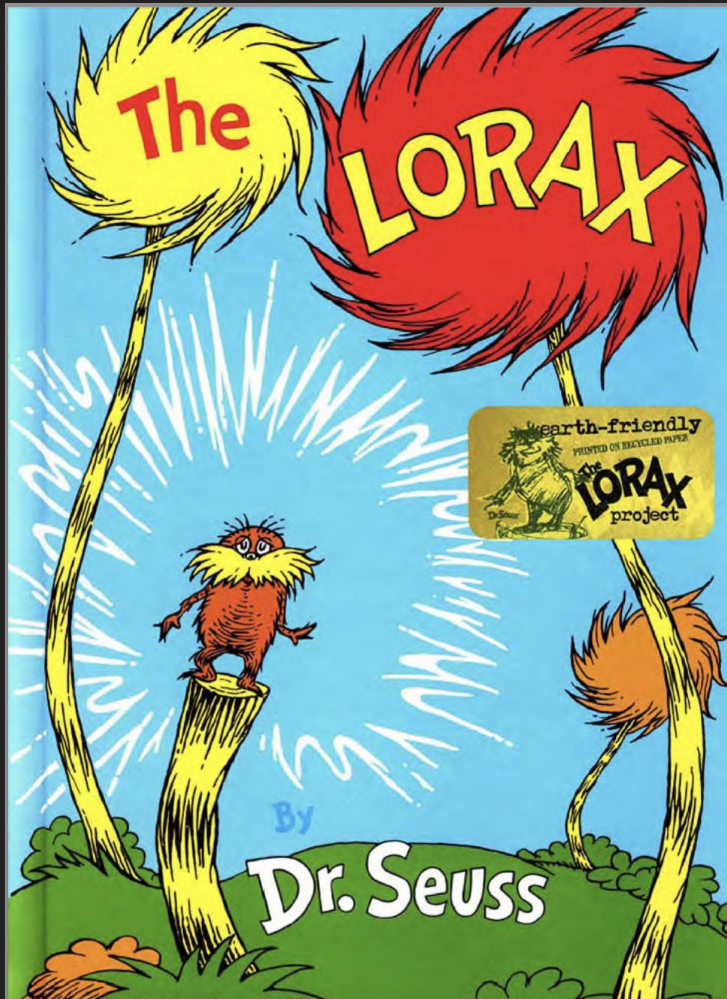
How to 'Speak for the Trees' so Others Listen: Rhetorical Lessons from "The Lorax"



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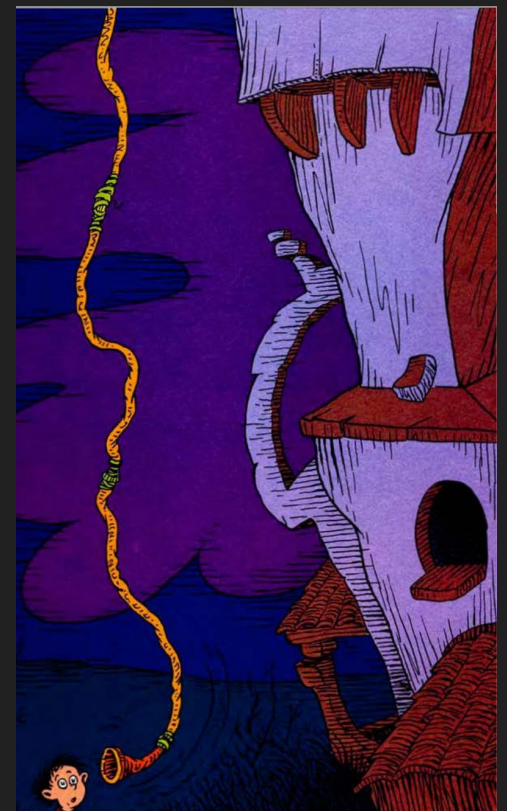




Learning Objectives

- Evaluate the assumptions of a position
- Historically contextualize a problem as an initial step in solving it
- Recognize benefits of rhetorical listening and perspective taking

Summarize “The Lorax” book... not the movie :]



The frame story offers allows the Onceler to tell *his* story

The Onceler contextualizes his problems



Historical, Environmental



He was shortish. And oldish.
And brownish. And mossy.
And he spoke with a voice
that was sharpish and bossy.

Rhetorical

What is a “close reading” of the text?

“Look, Lorax,” I said. “There’s no cause for alarm.
I chopped just one tree. I am doing no harm.
I’m being quite useful. This thing is a Thneed.
A Thneed’s a Fine-Something-That-All-People-Need!
It’s a shirt. It’s a sock. It’s a glove. It’s a hat.
But it has *other* uses. Yes, far beyond that.
You can use it for carpets. For pillows! For sheets!
Or curtains! Or covers for bicycle seats!”

The Lorax said,
“Sir! You are crazy with greed.
There is no one on earth
who would buy that fool Thneed!”



Explain the POV of each character: “...I’m asking you, sir, at the top of my lungs”

What is 'Rhetorical Listening'?

Krista Ratcliffe, a Composition and Rhetoric scholar, describes it as making a “conscious choice to assume an open stance in relation to any person, text, or culture” (p. 26).

Ratcliffe theorizes rhetorical listening entails **four moves**:

- (1) promoting an understanding of self and other
- (2) proceeding within an accountability logic < “**suggests an ethical imperative that, regardless of who is responsible for a current situation, asks us to recognize our privileges and nonprivileges and act accordingly**” (31-32). Avoids an unproductive rhetorical stance like guilt/blame logic.
- (3) locating identifications across commonalities and differences
- (4) analyzing claims as well as the cultural logics within which these claims function (p. 26).

Rhetorical Listening Moves - **Take a photo of this slide!**

- (1) promoting an understanding of self and other
- (2) proceeding within an accountability logic
- (3) locating identifications across commonalities and differences
- (4) analyzing claims as well as the cultural logics within which these claims function

What is the result of no rhetorical listening or perspective taking?



But the very next minute I proved he was wrong.
For, just at that minute, a chap came along,
and he thought that the Thneed I had knitted was great.
He happily bought it for three ninety-eight.

I laughed at the Lorax, "You poor stupid guy!
You never can tell what some people will buy."





Perspective Taking: What does each side want? Has each presented their case?

Close reading: And that Lorax?...*He* didn't show up any more.

But the next week
he knocked
on my new office door.

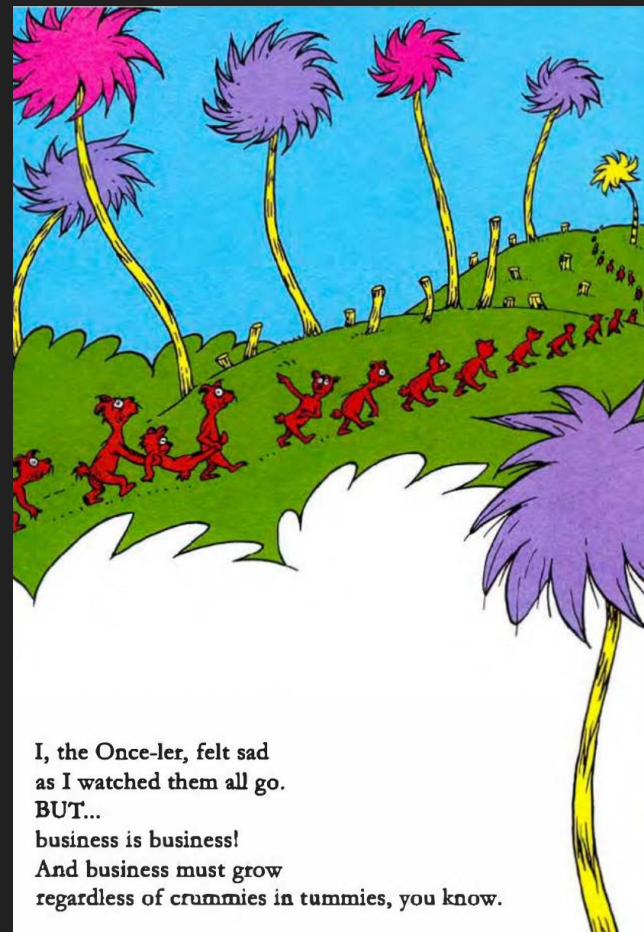
He snapped, "I'm the Lorax who speaks for the trees
which you seem to be chopping as fast as you please.
But I'm *also* in charge of the Brown Bar-ba-loots
who played in the shade in their Bar-ba-loot suits
and happily lived, eating Truffula Fruits.

"NOW...thanks to your hacking my trees to the ground,
there's not enough Truffula Fruit to go 'round.
And my poor Bar-ba-loots are all getting the crummies
because they have gas, and no food, in their tummies!





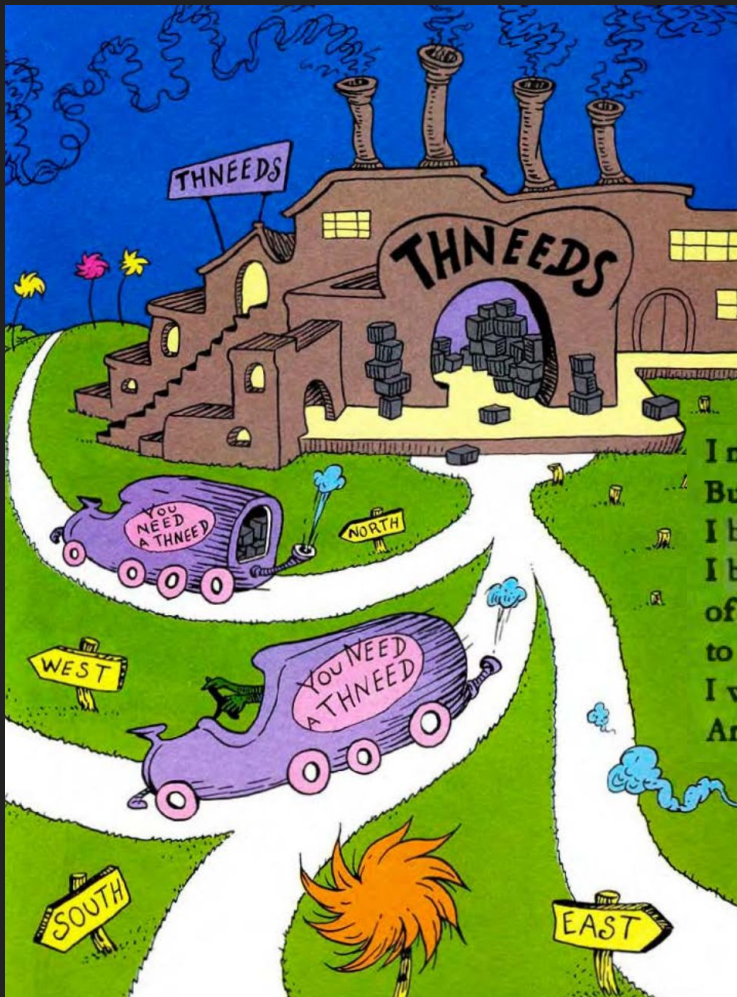
"They loved living here. But I can't let them stay. They'll have to find food. And I hope that they may. Good luck, boys," he cried. And he sent them away.



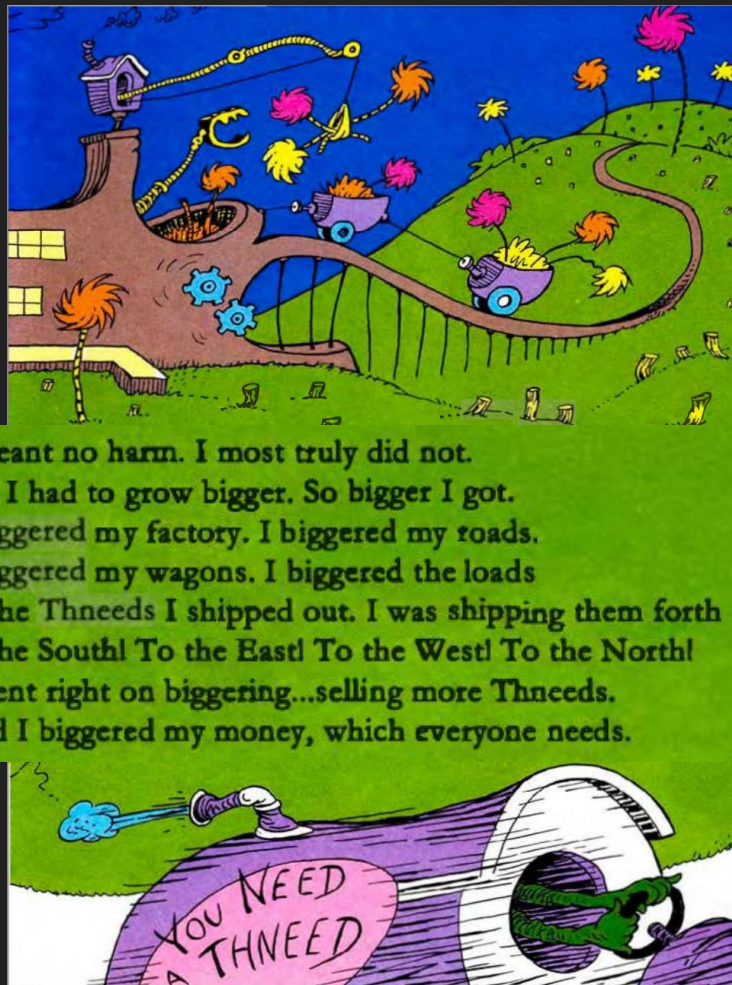
I, the Once-ler, felt sad
as I watched them all go.
BUT...
business is business!
And business must grow
regardless of crummies in tummies, you know.

Think of the frame story. How does the Onceler *shape the reader's* view of him?

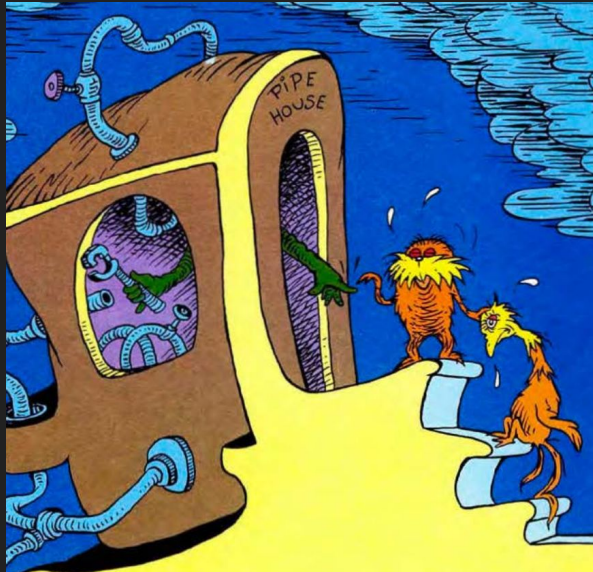
Read
this
passage
from
a child
vs.
adult
POV



I meant no harm. I most truly did not.
But I had to grow bigger. So bigger I got.
I biggered my factory. I biggered my roads.
I biggered my wagons. I biggered the loads
of the Thneeds I shipped out. I was shipping them forth
to the South! To the East! To the West! To the North!
I went right on biggering...selling more Thneeds.
And I biggered my money, which everyone needs.



What does the Lorax expect from the Oncler? What's an alternative approach?



Then *again* he came back! I was fixing some pipes when that old-*nuisance* Lorax came back with *more* gripes.

"I am the Lorax," he coughed and he whiffed. He sneezed and he snuffled. He snarggled. He sniffed. "Once-ler!" he cried with a cruffulous croak. "Once-ler! You're making such smogulous smoke! My poor Swomee-Swans...why, they can't sing a note! No one can sing who has smog in his throat.



"What's *more*," snapped the Lorax. (His dander was up.) "Let me say a few words about Gluppity-Glup. Your machinery chugs on, day and night without stop making Gluppity-Glup. Also Schloppity-Schlopp. And what do you do with this leftover goo?... I'll show you. You dirty old Once-ler man, you!





And then I got mad.

I got terribly mad.

I yelled at the Lorax, "Now listen here, Dad!

All you do is yap-yap and say 'Bad! Bad! Bad! Bad!'

Well, I have my rights, sir, and I'm telling *you*

I intend to go on doing just what I do!

And, for your information, you Lorax, I'm figgering
on biggering

and BIGGERING

and BIGGERING

and BIGGERING,

turning MORE Truffula Trees into Thneeds

which everyone, EVERYONE, *EVERYONE* needs!"

Close reading: "Now listen here, Dad!" and "...I have my rights, sir"

Rhetorical Listening Moves

- (1) promoting an understanding of self and other
- (2) proceeding within an accountability logic
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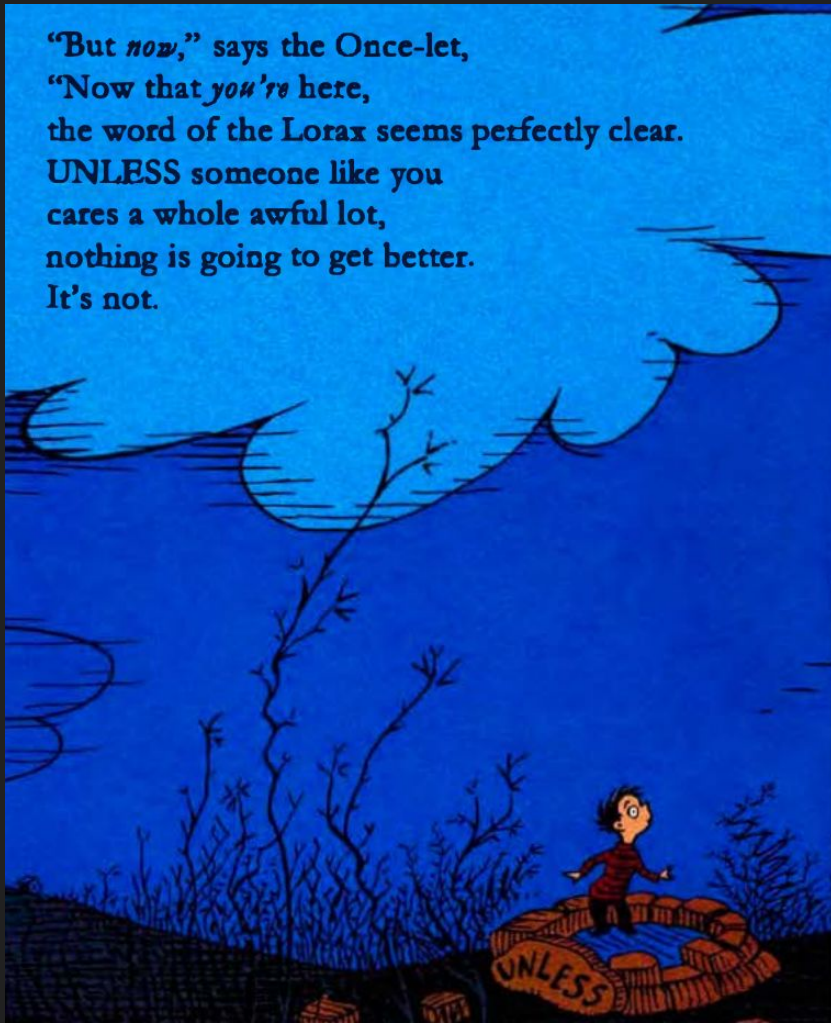
Close reading: “And all that the Lorax left here in this mess”

And all that the Lorax left here in this mess
was a small pile of rocks, with the one word...
“UNLESS.”

Whatever *that* meant, well, I just couldn't guess.



"But *now*," says the Once-ler,
"Now that *you're* here,
the word of the Lorax seems perfectly clear.
UNLESS someone like you
cares a whole awful lot,
nothing is going to get better.
It's not.



Close reading: "UNLESS someone like you cares a whole awful lot..."

From the Onceler's POV

From the boy's POV

From the young reader's POV

From the adult reader's POV



“SO...

Catch!” calls the Once-ler.

He lets something fall.

“It’s a Truffula Seed.

It’s the last one of all!

You’re in charge of the last of the Truffula Seeds.

And Truffula Trees are what everyone needs.

Plant a new Truffula. Treat it with care.

Give it clean water. And feed it fresh air.

Grow a forest. Protect it from axes that hack.

Then the Lorax

and all of his friends

may come back.”

Session Learning Objectives

-Evaluate the assumptions of a position

Today's students need to look unflinchingly at the fables they've been told to understand how the problems today are often the result of the 'fairy tale' solutions of yesterday. The boy in this story goes to the far edge of town to learn why his town lacks the vibrant wildlife, fresh air, and water from an earlier time. Even though he is a resident, he is unfamiliar with his town's history. The Onceler both caused the damage and now controls and profits from the narrative.

-Historically contextualize a problem as an initial step in solving it

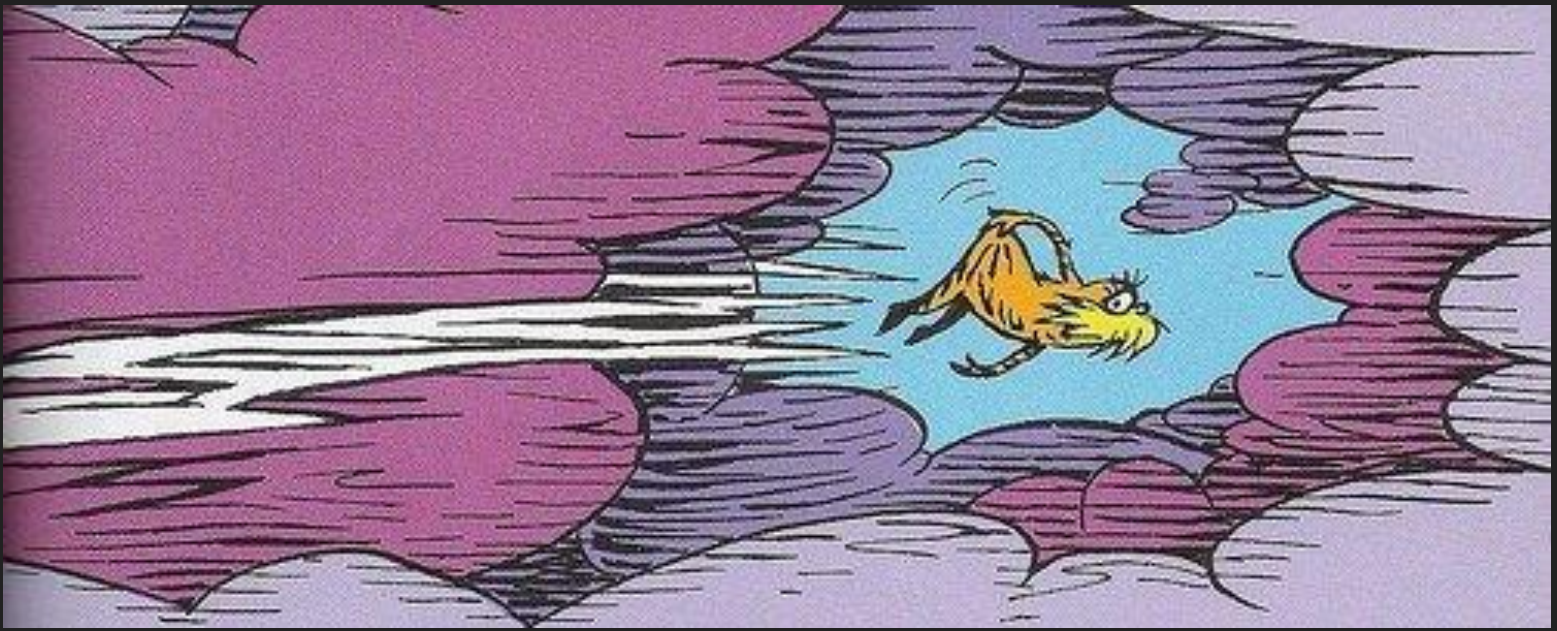
For young people who often feel like "nothing has even been done about X", this workshop walks participants through the importance of historically contextualizing a problem as an initial step in solving it.

-Benefit from rhetorical listening and perspective taking

Neither Once-ler nor Lorax get what they want, and the book ends with a surprising reversal of opinion from the Once-ler that misses the message of sustainability for one of overly optimistic hope. Reframing the Lorax's approach as rhetorically unsuccessful offers students an example of how both parties (the "good" and "bad") are responsible for compromise.



As students, you are agents of change, but sustainable change is only possible through compromise. As students identify problems they hope to solve during and after college, they will need to practice the iterative process of engaging the stakeholders of an issue, listening to their needs, and working through a problem to reach a mutually beneficial solution. These steps are applicable throughout life.



Thank you! Comments + Questions?

Ratcliffe, K. *Rhetorical Listening: Identification, Gender, Whiteness*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois Press, 2006.

Suess, Dr. "The Lorax". Random House. 1971.