

Who Speaks for the Trees?



1 Activity

Students read (or watch!) Dr. Seuss' *The Lorax* and examine the importance of the sustainable management of natural resources.

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Objective

- Students will discuss and analyze a fictional story related to natural resources.
- Students will determine whether the main ideas of the story build a case for the conservation and wise use of natural resources.

Assessment Opportunities

- Students' discussion question answers can be used to assess students' understanding of the environmental messages.
- Ask students to create a graphic organizer showing the main ideas presented.

Levels

Part A: Grades 2–8
Variation: Grades 4–6
Part B: Grades 6–8

Subjects

Science, Social Studies,
Language Arts

Concepts

- Our increasing knowledge of the Earth's ecosystems influences strategies used for forest management and environmental stewardship.
- Increased public knowledge of the environment and of the need for conservation of natural resources have resulted in lifestyle changes in many cultures.

Skills

Discussing, Forming Concepts,
Evaluating, Comparing and
Contrasting, Identifying Main Ideas

Technology Connections

Graphic Organizer Software

Materials

One copy of Dr. Seuss' *The Lorax*
(either the book or the movie)

Time Considerations

Preparation: 15 minutes
Activity: 50-minute period

Background

A quick look around the home or school reveals how many items are made from wood and other forest resources. Trees are important to us whether they are used for products or left in their natural environment where they provide oxygen, soil protection, beauty, and a habitat for plants and animals.



Humans have always depended on trees for firewood, shelters, tools, paper, and many other needs. In many parts of the world, trees are removed from forested areas without being adequately replanted.

Dr. Seuss' *The Lorax* presents an opportunity to have a conversation about the inherent value of forests and importance of sustainable management. Given the many threats to America's private and public forests due to climate change, pests, pathogens, and land conversion, the story of Dr. Seuss' *The Lorax* can start a dialogue about what is being done in America to protect the health and productivity of our forests now and for the future.

Getting Ready

Obtain a copy of Dr. Seuss' *The Lorax* to read aloud to your students, or consider showing the movie. For the Variation in Part A, write each question on an index card.

Doing The Activity

PART A: *Dr. Seuss' The Lorax*

1. Read Dr. Seuss' *The Lorax* aloud or watch the movie.
2. Ask students to list what they think the major ideas of the story are.
3. Have them think about and answer the following questions:
 - Why do you think the Once-ler did what he did?
 - What patterns of change in the environment did we observe?
 - What were environmental conditions like before the company started making "Thneeds"? What were they like afterward?
 - What was the author's message concerning what one person can do to save or destroy the environment?



DiscovertheForest.org/lorax

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Variation

1. Ask students to name things from nature (natural resources) that they use to live. Examples include trees, water, air, minerals, and so on. Read Dr. Seuss' *The Lorax* aloud or watch the movie.
2. Divide the class into six groups. Give each group a card with one of the sets of questions below written on it. Each group should discuss the questions, write down the answers, and be prepared to share them with the group.
 - How could the Once-ler have managed his company to protect natural resources and not run out of trees to manufacture "Thneeds"? Is it necessary to protect all trees "from axes that hack"?
 - What did the Once-ler mean by "UNLESS"? What responsibility does he seem to think "someone like you" needs to take? What kinds of things can we do today to ensure that trees will be available for all different purposes in the future?
 - Compare the Once-ler's attitude toward the environment at the beginning of the story with his attitude at the end.
 - The Once-ler explains his actions by saying, "If I didn't do it, someone else would." Is this a good excuse for doing what he did?
 - The Lorax says he speaks for the trees. What does this mean to you? What is the Lorax's attitude at the end of the story?
 - What seems to be Dr. Seuss' purpose in writing this fable? (A fable is a fictional story that teaches a lesson.)
3. After groups have had time for discussion, have each group read their questions and answers to the class. Students can agree, disagree, or add to the answers given by their classmates.

PART B—The Sequel

1. Either alone or in small groups, have students write and illustrate a sequel to Dr. Seuss' *The Lorax*. The sequel might explain how the Truffula Tree made a comeback through replanting and proper care or what the new managers of the Truffula Tree Company are going to do to maintain environmental quality and at the same time make Thneeds.
2. After the sequels are finished, ask students to consider the following questions:
 - Does either the original Dr. Seuss story or your sequel accurately portray industry?
 - Which version, the original or your sequel, appears to best describe people's attitudes in the region you live?
 - What social and economic implications will the actions suggested in your sequel have for ensuring a quality environment? For example, who will pay for the environmental protection?
 - Who will pay for the damage to the environment if these actions prove unsuccessful?
 - Who will provide Thneeds if the Truffula Tree Company doesn't?
3. Have students prepare a sequence for the key events in both Dr. Seuss' *The Lorax* and their sequel. Then, have students draw a diagram or flow chart showing the connections between characters in the story (Swomee-Swans, Bar-baloos, Lorax) and the natural resources (Truffula Trees, clean air, clean water). Do any new characters or natural resources emerge in the sequel? If so, how do they affect the outcome of the original story?

Reading Connections



Carson, Rachel. *A Sense of Wonder*. Perennial Library. 1984. Filled with words and pictures to help keep alive the sense of wonder and delight in mysteries of earth, sea, and sky. Grades 6+. ISBN: 006757520X.

Geisel, Theodor (Dr. Seuss). *The Lorax*. Random House. 1971. In this classic story, the Once-ler describes how his greedy actions destroyed a beautiful and thriving environment. Children will enjoy the colorful characters and rhyming verse. Also available in Spanish. Grades PreK-6. ISBN: 0394823370.

Giono, Jean. *The Man Who Planted Trees*. Chelsea Green Publishing Co. 1985. Jean Giono's beautiful allegorical tale is legendary. Written in the 1950's, its message was ahead of its time, inspiring readers to rediscover the harmonies of the countryside and prevent its willful destruction. Grades 4+. ISBN: 1570625387.

Leopold, Aldo. *A Sand County Almanac*. Oxford University Press. 1989. A Sand County Almanac combines some of the finest nature writing since Thoreau with an outspoken and highly ethical regard for America's relationship to the land. Grades 6+. ISBN: 019505928X.

McClure, Michael Robert. *Acorn Alone*. A.R.E. Press. 1994. A story of dramatic effects of deforestation and how the Earth reclaims and renews itself. Grades PreK-2. ISBN: 0876043260.

Van Allsburg, Chris. *Just a Dream*. Houghton Mifflin. 1990. When he has a dream about a future Earth devastated by pollution, Walter begins to understand the importance of taking care of the environment. Grades 1-5. ISBN: 0395533082.