



Read Across America Day Has Moved Beyond Seuss, but Why Haven't Some Teachers?

By Educator Barnes – March 1, 2021

The National Education Association's Read Across America Day happens annually on March 2. This is the day Theodor Geisel, known as Dr. Seuss, was born. The mascot for the day used to be The Cat in the Hat. However, a few years ago, [NEA distanced itself](#) from Seuss after conversations about Geisel's racist cartoons become more prominent.

I have written about this topic previously. Now, I'm wondering why Geisel was picked in the first place. Should NEA have ever picked one author and centered a reading day around that author and his books? Since my answer to that question is no, it was easy for me to accept the new theme for Read Across America which is "celebrating a nation of diverse readers."

Controversy can spur change and push us in the right direction; however, some educators do not want to let the days of yore go by and adjust to the changes NEA made to be more inclusive. Before anyone gets my words twisted, I am not saying ban Dr. Seuss or his books. I am saying that Read Across America Day must be more than a focus on Dr. Seuss and his books. Educators who are still pulling out their old "Green Eggs & Ham" lesson or a "Cat in The Hat" activity, need to think about why they are fiercely holding on and not willing to expand their thinking especially when Dr. Seuss Enterprises has announced that it will no longer publish six of Geisel's books due to racist imagery.

What I appreciate most about the shift are the resources to build a love of reading throughout the year. Read Across America Day should be a springboard to inspire students to love reading. I believe this goal should be accomplished by sharing as many books and authors as possible and letting students choose what they want to read. One year, my son was not permitted to read his graphic novel on Read Across America Day. Banning books is a quick way to kill or diminish the joy reading can bring.

With older students, this day could be an opportunity to discuss the racist cartoons Geisel made and the many books he wrote which are childhood favorites. It would be an opportunity for them to process their thoughts and think about how we should deal with prominent figures who have something controversial in their past.

With cancel culture, a thing gets flagged, and we are supposed to throw it away. I do not believe having a Seuss book burning is the answer, but I also don't believe we should ignore the changes NEA has made. We should all strive to expand our horizons and our students' opportunities to learn about other authors and texts.

Note: This piece has been updated to reflect that six of Dr. Seuss's books will no longer be published.