

## **Lesson Plan: What On Earth Is Going On?**

### **K-2: Teacher Materials**

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#### **The Lorax By Dr. Seuss**

##### Overview

A boy (representing the reader) comes to a desolate corner of town to visit a being called the Once-ler (who is never shown throughout the book except for his green arms and green hands) and learns about the Lorax. After the Once-ler receives payment from the boy (consisting of 15 cents, a nail and the shell of a great, great, great grandfather snail) he recounts on how he first arrived where they now stand, back then a beautiful forest of Truffula Trees, colorful woolly trees that were spread throughout the area and supported an ecosystem of fantastical creatures.

##### The Story

As the Once-ler arrives in the area with his mule and cart, he takes in the sights; There are Bar-ba-Loots (resembling bears) that frolic about and eat fruit from the trees, Swome swans that fly through the air and sing as they go, and Humming fish that go swimming about in the ponds and humming as they swim. But the Once-ler is only interested in the beauty of the Truffula Trees. Taking a few samples of the Truffula tree, he decides to set up shop on the spot.

Enamored by these gorgeous trees, the Once-ler chops one down and uses its foliage to knit a "Thneed", an odd-looking but versatile garment that he insists "everyone needs." A strange creature called the Lorax suddenly emerges from the stump and protests, saying that he "speaks for the trees, as the trees have no tongues," but the Once-ler ignores him and, spurred by greed and the success of his first sale, begins a huge Thneed-making business that brings in his whole family, much to the Lorax's distress.

As the Once-ler's small shop grows into a factory and new equipment is being made to keep up with the demand for more Thneeds, signs of damage to the Truffula Forest become evident to the Lorax. The Lorax first complains to the Once-ler that the Truffula trees, being chopped down, were also the food source of the Bar-ba-Loots, who are now facing a terrible food shortage and a disease called "the Crummies because of gas and no food in their tummies." To save them, the Lorax sends them off to find another food source. At first, the Once-ler only shows a little remorse, but still focuses on expanding his business.

Soon, the Once-ler's Thneed-making business has expanded tenfold and now uses delivery trucks to take out the shipments. The Lorax eventually comes back complaining to the Once-ler that the factories are belching out so much "smogulous smoke" that it is giving the Swomee Swans sore throats, leaving them unable to sing. After the Lorax sends them off, he also complains to the Once-ler about his machinery making a goo by-product called "Gluppity Glup" and "Shloppity Shlop," and how it's being dumped into the ponds where the Humming Fish live, leaving them unable to hum and forcing the Lorax to send them away too.

The Once-ler, however, still dismisses the Lorax's pleadings and goes so far as to berate the Lorax for chastising his business practices. The Lorax's complaints are never heeded by the Once-ler. Instead, what thwarts the Once-ler is the fact that his business destroys absolutely all of the Truffula trees even while the Once-ler is proclaiming his intentions to expand his business further as he suffers from delusions. With all the trees gone, no more Thneeds can be made, so the Thneed factories close down and the Once-ler's family departs, leaving the Once-ler alone with the Lorax, who, looking back at the Once-ler sadly, picks himself up by the "seat of his pants" and floats away through a hole in the smog, leaving behind only a small pile of rocks with the word "UNLESS" inscribed into them.

The Once-ler alone remains, gazing upon the disintegrating ruins of his factories over the years and contemplating the meaning of this last message, perhaps with a sense of remorse. In the end, the Once-ler gives the boy the very last Truffula seed for him to plant and take care of, potentially regrowing the forest and resulting in the Lorax's return.

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### **Environmental Considerations in *The Lorax***

- Ecological warning that still rings true today
  - o Dangers of clear-cutting, pollution, and disregard for the earth's environment
  - o Industrialization, global warming, corporate waste, submission of nature
- There once was a beautiful place filled with natural beauty; however, greed overtakes the consumer and nature is destroyed for the produce and mass-production of "needs"
- Temptation to fool with mother nature; end result only hurts us
- Saving rests in the hands of the next generation

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### **Betsy Potter: Breaking Nature/Suggested Ideas/Themes**

#### Polar Bear and Man

- Confrontation between humankind and civilization
- Man (dressed in a powerful red tie) is violently confronting the elements of nature
- Equal halves split
- Left side features symbols and elements of unmolested nature
- Right side features examples of humankind's negative impact on nature
- Hands of the fighters are transplanted to each other
- Oil rig – crude oil's impact on nature and the necessity to civilization being lost
- Polar ice melt and global warming
- Objects floating with no direction into the water
- Adolescent girl is floating unaware in the open sea – innocence of the future

#### Looking for Niagara

- Inspired by a poem
- Beauty and fragility of the Niagara River
- Split strategically down the middle
- Post-humankind's impact is on the left – lack of waterfowl, bridge is unfinished/collapsed, impending storm approaching all symbolize nature's fury

- Right side represent pre-industrialization

### Round 7

- Confrontation between humankind and civilization
- Man's severed hand at the base of the tree has 6 fingers symbolizing mutation
- Tree, cut back to the trunk, has been mutilated
- Potential that battle between man and nature is a draw

### Yards

- Adolescent girl is now engaged with the viewer in direct eye contact; still an image of the innocence of the future
- Suburban areas have taken over the natural life, animals now just seem to float in and out of our world (the animal in the sky and cat in the trees)
- We worry more about the superficial looks of our yards and material outsides rather than the natural world and beauty that was already there

### On/Off Road

- The words around the boarder are how we tend to live our lives today
- The power, speed, money etc. all take over and take the place of the natural world
- In doing so, such natural objects (animals) are subject to the carelessness of our world (road kill); encroaching in on the natural habitat

### Schooner Michigan

- Real-life event occurring in 1827
- Hotel proprietors staged a gruesome tourist stunt with the Schooner Michigan at Niagara Falls
- Advertisement stated: "The Pirate Michigan with a cargo of ferocious wild animals will pass the great rapids and falls", schooner was decorated to look like a pirate ship with human-shaped mannequins tied to the dock
- 10,000 spectators watched as the Michigan was released into the current with a buffalo, two bears, two raccoons, a dog, two fox, fifteen geese and an eagle
- As it reached the rapids, the hull was torn open and began filling with water; the two bears jumped free and swam to safety
- Re-surfaced at the base of the falls only the goose had survived
- Aspect of humankind as a form of entertainment and an endless supply of animals for our amusement

### Digger

- Man has become so careless through industrialization
- Digging and building with total disregard for nature and natural objects in our world
- Carelessness of just toss the animals and trees etc. to the side; again encroaching in on the natural habitat

### Last Man

- Greed and money have taken over our preservation of nature and the natural world
- Mans arm in the air shows entitlement and power in the picture

- Humans are sitting on top of money in an animal-made (bear) vehicle of power; disrupted the natural world (skunk has a can for a head, one of the birds is enclosed in a glass covering)
- Below the surface is the natural world and habitat we have encroached on and taken over

**Various “how many” Questions and Answers and Shapes from the Besty Potter Collection**

| <u>Title</u>        | <u>How Many</u>   | <u>Shapes</u>   |
|---------------------|---|---|
| Yards               | Animals – 5<br>Humans - 4   | Rectangles – door, window, garden boarder<br>Circles – pool, dead dandelion, lawn mower wheels<br>Triangles - trees                                       |
| Looking For Niagara | Animals – 25<br>Humans – 2  | Rectangles – fence, road, power plant windows, tree trunks<br>Circles – oil can in water, binoculars<br>Triangles – metal structures, parts of the bridge |
| Schooner Michigan   | Animals – 10<br>Humans – 3  | Rectangles & Squares – boarder, boat<br>Circles & Triangles – boat  |
| On/Off Road         | Animals – 11  | Rectangles & Squares – boarder, vehicle<br>Circles – vehicle, animals (eyes)<br>Triangles – vehicle (rims)  |
| Polar Bear and Man  | Animals – 15<br>Humans – 4  | Squares – vehicle, awning over the baby<br>Circles – vehicle, eyes on people and animals, boat<br>Triangles – icebergs, fins on animals, seals coat       |
| Digger              | Animals – 4<br>Humans – 1   |   |
| Last Man            | Animals – 45<br>Humans – 2  |   |
| Round 7             | Animals – 65 ish (hard to have a distinct # for birds/fish)<br>Humans - 1 |   |