

# DR. SEUSS BOOKS ISSUE – CONSIDERATIONS

## 03/02/2021



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### ORIGINAL MESSAGE POSTED TO PUBLIC LIBRARY DIRECTORS IN UTAH

On Tue, Mar 2, 2021 at 2:46 PM Juan Lee <[JLee@wasatch.utah.gov](mailto:JLee@wasatch.utah.gov)> wrote:  
Dear friends and colleagues,

This morning, I heard on the radio a piece titled [6 Dr. Seuss Books With Racist Imagery Will No Longer Be Published](#). Later, our children’s librarian Sherrie Mortensen shared with me the article [Dr. Seuss Enterprises Will Shelve 6 Books, Citing ‘Hurtful’ Portrayals](#). These sparked a conversation about having other “problematic” titles in library collections like *Little Black Sambo*, *The Five Chinese Brothers*, *Asterix*, and *Little House on the Prairie*. Many include imagery of gender, ethnic, or racial stereotypes.

**What is the best practice in a public library?** Do we acknowledge the problem and remove them from the collection? Some claim this approach slides into the realm of censorship. Do we, instead, acknowledge there is a problem with these classics but leave them in the collection so the user can decide for themselves? Some claim this reaction perpetuates the injustices our profession strives to eradicate.

I understand this may be a sensitive, passionate, even emotional topic to discuss. And I know it is probably best done with a cup of tea or hot chocolate, seating by the fireplace. But in the spirit of broadening the conversation in times of social-distancing, I encourage you to share your thoughts, opinions, or recommendations about what the library should do with problematic books in the collection.

NOTE: If this is not an appropriate discussion in this channel, I apologize. I can set up a private discussion group and try that instead.

Thank you,  
Juan

#### LINKS

Audio Segment: 6 Dr. Seuss Books With Racist Imagery Will No Longer Be Published  
<https://www.wbur.org/hereandnow/2021/03/02/dr-seuss-zoo-mulberry-street>

Article: Dr. Seuss Enterprises Will Shelve 6 Books, Citing 'Hurtful' Portrayals  
<https://www.npr.org/2021/03/02/972777841/dr-seuss-enterprises-will-shelve-6-books-citing-hurtful-portrayals>

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#### FURTHER READING

*Guide for Selecting Anti-Bias Children’s Books*  
<https://socialjusticebooks.org/guide-for-selecting-anti-bias-childrens-books>

# DR. SEUSS BOOKS ISSUE – TALKING POINTS

## 03/10/2021



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### INTRODUCTION

This month Dr. Seuss Enterprises announced that six books — “And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street,” “If I Ran the Zoo,” “McElligot’s Pool,” “On Beyond Zebra!,” “Scrambled Eggs Super!” and “The Cat’s Quizzer” will no longer be published. In addition to poor sales for these books they cited negative racial stereotypes. Media outlets have alternatively called their decision timely while other outlets have cited this as the last example of cancel culture. This decision made by the private corporation that publishes these books led to an influx of questions, calls, and worry by patrons of public libraries.

The most common questions are: What does the library think of this? Will the library pull these titles from their collections?

*Prepared by Sam Passey, Uintah County Library*

### INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM

- At the core of public libraries, is the charge to provide materials, programs, and services for all residents.
- Our residents have a wide range of interests, so our library strives to provide a wide range of materials, programs, and services.
- This effort will sometimes result in offering something that someone will not like or object to.
- A good library has something that will offend everyone.

### CENSORSHIP

- “Libraries are a legacy to each generation, offering the heritage of the past and the promise of the future.”<sup>1</sup>
- We acknowledge that these books include racial stereotypes that are demeaning and hurtful.
- We acknowledge that these books were created in a social environment different from our current milieu.
- The library subscribes to the principles that “materials should not be excluded because of origin, background, or views of those contributing to their creation”<sup>2</sup> and that “libraries should challenge censorship.”
- The library defends the rights of all individuals to use library resources and decide for themselves the value they may have towards enriching their own lives.
- In our current criteria for selection of children’s materials, the library strives to avoid works that use harmful or undermining stereotypes.<sup>3</sup>

*Prepared by Juan Lee, Wasatch County Library*

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Libraries: An American Value. ALA Council, 1999. <http://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/americanvalue>

<sup>2</sup> Source: Library Bill of Rights. ALA Council, 1996. <http://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/librarybill>

<sup>3</sup> Source: Guide for Selecting Anti-Bias Children’s Books. <https://socialjusticebooks.org/guide-for-selecting-anti-bias-childrens-books>

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### HOLDINGS AT WASATCH COUNTY LIBRARY as of 03/04/2021

#### **“And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street”**

- Book. Checked out. One hold.
- eBook. Checked out. 36 holds.
- eAudio. Checked out. 11 holds.
- Spanish Book. Available. Last checked out February 2018.

#### **“If I Ran the Zoo”**

- Book. Checked out. One hold.
- eBook. Checked out. 35 holds.

#### **“On Beyond Zebra!”**

- Book. Available. Last checked out January 2020.

#### **“McElligot’s Pool”**

- eBook. Checked out. 25 holds.

#### **“Scrambled Eggs Super!”**

- The library does not own a copy.

#### **“The Cat’s Quizzer”**

- The library does not own a copy.