



# Revisiting Dr. Seuss's *The Lorax* as Stimulus for Sustainable Development Goal 15

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## ABSTRACT

Dr. Seuss' vivid picture book *The Lorax* (1971) depicts the story of how the Street of The Lifted Lorax (setting) came to be. There is an air of mystery about the place as we wonder how the Truffula forest, once teeming with wildlife and the dominant presence of the Lorax (the titular character), grew into such disrepair. The disappearance of the Lorax is a puzzle which is solved as events within the story unfold. With the use of colorful pictures that visually appeal to the young audience, the book attempts to create a sense of responsible use of resources and sustainable development around the imagined world of Truffula trees. Through its perusal, Seuss evokes a sense of eco consciousness in the readers as they empathize with the displacement and helplessness felt by the protagonists. The text, while managing to convey the gravity of the situation, reiterates the urgency to 'promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems' as per the Sustainable Development Goal 15. This paper aims to discuss how *The Lorax* seeks to challenge the anthropocentric point of view by replacing it with a deep ecological stance. This will be done by critically examining the role of the protagonists and analyzing how key incidents of the text compare to the real-life developments and contribute to the present-day scenario, keeping Nature as the focus.

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Environmental crisis is one of the most important issues we are facing today. Joseph Meeker's *The Comedy of Survival* (1974) suggests that environmental crisis is caused by the separation of culture from Nature believing that the former holds moral predominance over the other. This idea of separation of culture from Nature bears much similarity to the anthropocentric point of view. Anthropocentrism is "oriented to the interests of human beings, who are viewed as opposed to and superior to nature, and free to exploit natural resources and animal species for their own purposes" (Abrams, 2008, p. 88). This worldview leads one to commodification of Nature disregarding the inherent worth of the organisms it encompasses.

We can no longer be anthropocentric as we recurrently encounter natural disasters and manifold threats to all living beings. From a vantage point of view, it is evident that if human species has to survive on this planet, we need to promote the attitude of coexistence and the awareness of interconnectedness as well as our dependence on other organisms. The Sustainable Development Goals adopted by the United Nations at the UN Sustainable Development Summit in New York in September 2015 in order to transform our world by 2030 must become a priority at all levels to counter the anthropocentric approach. Among all the 17 goals, goal 15, which strives to 'protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss', is our focus of discussion. We are certain that only a biocentric approach can help us achieve this goal.

It is of supreme priority that together with the world leaders debating on National Determined Contributions to curb global warming and the subsequent climate change, individuals also must play their role to overcome the environmental crisis. The suicidal effects of the crisis call for our immediate response. The urgency of the situation demands responsible and sustainable way of living on this planet. Even a small attempt in this line can contribute to the overall efforts to maintain a balanced lifestyle. Literature can aid us in this regard, as it offers different historical and cultural instances and perspectives of human interventions. Taking cues from this perspective, ecocriticism which "is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" can guide our investigations as "ecocriticism takes an earth-centered approach to literary studies" (Glotfelty, 1996, p. xviii). It also studies "the relationship between literature and the environment conducted in a spirit of commitment to environmentalist praxis" (Buell, 2001, p. 20). Ecocritics also consider deep ecology, "exploring the implications that its radical critique of anthropocentrism might have for literary study." (Glotfelty, 1996, p. xxiv). The paper focuses on this aspect of deep ecology.

Deep ecology, as proposed by Arne Naess (1995), promotes an egalitarian worldview of interacting with other organisms in a responsible manner respecting their inherent worth. It is a way of life. The first five organizing principles of deep ecology are:

1. The well-being and flourishing of human and nonhuman life on Earth have value in themselves (synonyms: inherent worth, intrinsic value, inherent value). These values are independent of the usefulness of the nonhuman world for human purposes.
2. Richness and diversity of life forms contribute to the realization of these values and are also values in themselves.
3. Humans have no right to reduce this richness and diversity except to satisfy vital needs.
4. The flourishing of human life and cultures is compatible with a substantial decrease of the human population. The flourishing of nonhuman life requires such a decrease.
5. Present human interference with the nonhuman world is excessive, and the situation is rapidly worsening. (p. 68)

An attempt is made in this paper to analyze *The Lorax* by Theodor Seuss Geisel, the prolific children's writer who is better known as Dr. Seuss, within the theoretical framework of deep ecology. Faced with the environmental crisis we revisit the text in the context of SDG 15. Just as SDG 15 aims to protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, *The Lorax* too invites us to the same by demonstrating the consequences of destructive industrial practices which are detrimental to the environment and encouraging the readers to take a stand.

The paper unearths the role of children in reestablishing the equilibrium and restoring balance in Nature as more than ever, the children of the present generation bear the brunt of environmental issues. We would like to argue that *The Lorax* seeks to challenge anthropocentrism and instead promotes the deep ecological stand as a corrective measure by emphasizing on children's pivotal role. Environmentalism has been a prominent theme of many works, which have, in turn contributed greatly to the movement. However, a look into how children's literature, in particular *The Lorax*, challenges anthropocentrism and endorses the deep ecological stand perhaps could be a new attempt. We focus on "The Lorax complex" which are the interdependent emotional, cognitive and philosophical dimensions "that provide the basis of biocentric or ecocentric deep green ecology perspective" from a pragmatic perspective (Kopnina, 2012). This is done by critically evaluating how various characters and events have been portrayed.

## ANALYSIS

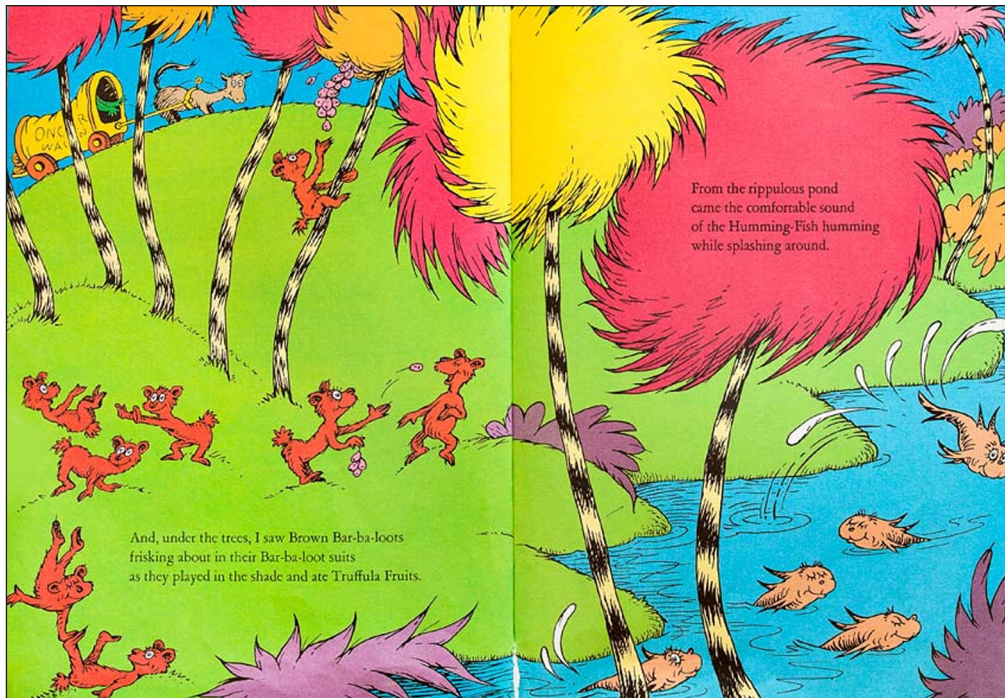
An analysis of *The Lorax* (1971) reveals the deep ecological stand. The text opens with a young child walking towards the far end of town, entering the Street of the Lifted Lorax, a desolate and barren piece of land. Geisel describes it as a place "where the Grickle-grass grows and the wind smells slow and sour when it blows" (p. 1). The imagery created through the words of the author as well as the illustrations evoke both unpleasant and jarring responses, while at the same time, serving as a warning. We argue that at the outset itself the author is foreshadowing the ultimate fate of our planet if we were to go on as we are now and invites the readers to a sustainable way of life. By portraying the child as the protagonist, it is evident that the author blatantly lays bare the far-reaching effects of the irresponsible actions and attitudes of adult generation. Here, children seem to be weighed down by the responsibility of redeeming Nature.

In this scene we are first introduced to the missing Lorax, the titular character. The way the mystery is centered around the Lorax is the first step towards challenging anthropocentrism. The initial invitation to the child to look deep enough in the Grickle-grass, to "still see, today, where the Lorax once stood/ just as long as it could/ before somebody lifted the Lorax away" points towards the human caused impacts on the Lorax, the setting (p. 2). The phrase "just as long as it could" is loaded with the history of "anthropogenic devastation that goes hand in hand with industrialization, capitalism, and urbanization" (Çetiner, 2020, p. 34). As the plot progresses to unravel the mystery of Lorax, the author states, "The old Once-ler still lives here. /Ask him. *He knows*" (p. 3). The reader begins to wonder how and why the Once-ler still decides to live in this deserted place while no one else lives there. The statement, 'He knows' with the emphasis on 'he' holds a subtle accusation, as if the Once-ler is to be blamed for the Lorax's disappearance thereby highlighting the anthropogenic disasters. The word 'knows' marks his deliberate irresponsible actions that led to the disappearance of the Lorax. "You won't see the Once-ler" appears to be the norm for the rest of the story, as we never once see the old Once-ler, not even through his retelling of the past (p. 4). This is indicative of how the Once-ler can represent anybody. Anyone knowingly making the wrong choices to harm the environment is choosing to play the Once-ler in reality. It is to be noted that throughout the story, all we see of the Once-ler are his hands. Moreover, all the human beings in the story of the past of the Lorax are illustrated by their hands. It is argued that the hands are emblematic of human attempts to make or mar things (in this case, Nature) to suit our own needs.

The 'still' in 'The old Once-ler *still* [emphasis added] lives here' becomes clearer as the story unravels further. He is ready to narrate the history of the Lorax, "if you're willing to pay." The fees in demand, namely, "fifteen cents/ and a nail/ and the shell of a great-great-great grandfather snail" are symbolic of economic, cultural and ecological dimensions (p. 6). Some things like the shell of the great-great-great grandfather snail that we accumulate are not essential for our survival. Yet we tend to destroy and possess them as if it is our right. Besides, money-mindedness seems to be a recurring theme with the Once-ler, and as we follow the story it is obvious that greed is the driving force behind most of his actions. In this instance, the portrayal of the Once-ler as a money-grabbing, greedy character is also indicative of how imperfect his character really is. The author, through such a depiction, proves that the Once-ler, or humans, in a broader sense, by nature are anthropocentric. That is the reason he still lives in the Street of the Lifted Lorax not concerned about the other organisms.

As we move forward, we see that the Once-ler resolves to share his secrets with the child. While the mystery behind the Lorax's disappearance unfolds, the message conveyed through its

telling also serves as a wakeup call to its readers. At the beginning of the Once-ler's narration, we are presented with an image of the Street of the Lifted Lorax as it was in the past, then known as the Truffula forest. It was full of life, teeming with flora and fauna, in harsh contrast to its present-day condition. The dichotomy between its past and present is only further highlighted as Geisel paints an unbelievably beautiful picture of the Truffula forest through his visual narrative (*Figure 1*).



**Figure 1** The pictorial representation of the Truffula forest. (Screenshot from *The Lorax*, 1971).

“Way back in the days when the grass was still green  
and the pond was still wet  
and the clouds were still clean,  
and the song of the Swomee-Swans rang out in space ...” (p. 12)

The verse narration goes on to express the joyous state of the biodiverse creatures occupying the Truffula forest:

“And, under the trees, I saw Brown Bar-ba-loots  
frisking about in their Bar-ba-loot suits  
as they played in the shade and ate Truffula Fruits.  
From the rippulous pond  
came the comfortable sound  
of the Humming-Fish humming  
while splashing around.” (pp. 13–14)

Everything seems to be right with the world, the forest flourishing and creatures content with their way of life. Renowned social activist Mary Davis's statement, “To walk in nature is to witness a thousand miracles,” perfectly sums up the emotion of the Once-ler at witnessing the beauty of the Truffula forest. He is filled with awestruck wonder at the sight, also at the sight of the Truffula trees, which he claims to have been searching for all his life. However, instead of enjoying its beauty his anthropocentric nature makes him figure out how to use it as a resource, exploiting it for his benefit. He then proceeds to set up a shop, chopping down a Truffula tree and knitting a ‘thneed’ with its yarn. The knitting of a thneed can also be symbolic of the origin



of the industrial revolution, especially the textile industry, which was when resources started to be exploited for commercial use on a major scale. Sidney Pollard's account of the competitions by countries like France and Britain in this field in the nineteenth century, may bear witness to anthropogenic interventions in exploiting natural resources and mass production textile industry: "Even in cottons, where the British lead was greatest, although the quantity of raw cotton consumed by Britain in 1836 was at least three times that of France, the output of French fabrics ...was worth three-fifths of that of the British" (1973, p. 641).

Moving on, we get to meet the Lorax in action. As the first tree is hacked, he comes up to resist and to warn: "I am the Lorax. I speak for the trees./I speak for the trees, for the trees have no tongues." (p. 23) And there we have it. The Lorax, by his own admission, is speaking as a representative of the trees. It is here that we observe the first major challenge to the anthropocentric viewpoint, as the Lorax stands up for the trees, being their voice. This challenge is delivered by the way the Lorax reacts to the situation, knowing the harm that the Once-ler can wreak upon the forest, if he continues in the same manner. The Lorax immediately stands up to the actions of the Once-ler and protests at the injustice that the trees are facing, mirroring the spirit of Nature.

After jumping out of the stump of the first Truffula tree chopped down by the Once-ler, the Lorax then goes on to say, "What's that THING you have made out of my Truffula tuft?" (p. 23). Another point to be noted here is the Lorax's use of the possessive pronoun, 'my', when referring to the tree's tufts. Due to the fact that this is also repeated throughout the story when the Lorax refers to the trees, or the animals living in the forest, one may assume that the Lorax plays more a role of a self-proclaimed steward over the forest, rather than just speaking on their behalf. However, we argue that this use of the possessive pronoun is not in any way a means to declare ownership over the forest, but it symbolizes that the Lorax considers himself to be part of the ecosystem comprising the Truffula forest. This is purely a deep ecological stand in accordance with the principles mentioned above.

Our point is further supported by a recent Dartmouth-led study published in *Nature, Ecology and Living* which proposes that the character Lorax, in *The Lorax* may be inspired by the patas monkey, found in Kenya, in a region which Geisel toured just a month before publishing and was also where he wrote 90 percent of the book. The co-author of the Dartmouth study, Donald Pease, states further:

The proposal that the patas monkey might be the real-life referent for Dr. Seuss's *Lorax* introduces an interpretation of the children's tale that undermines the core assumption of human exceptionalism. If we really want this biodiverse planet to thrive, we cannot consider ourselves as separate from the environment. This is the deep message of the Lorax: He is a part of the ecological system, not apart from it. (Dartmouth College, 2018)

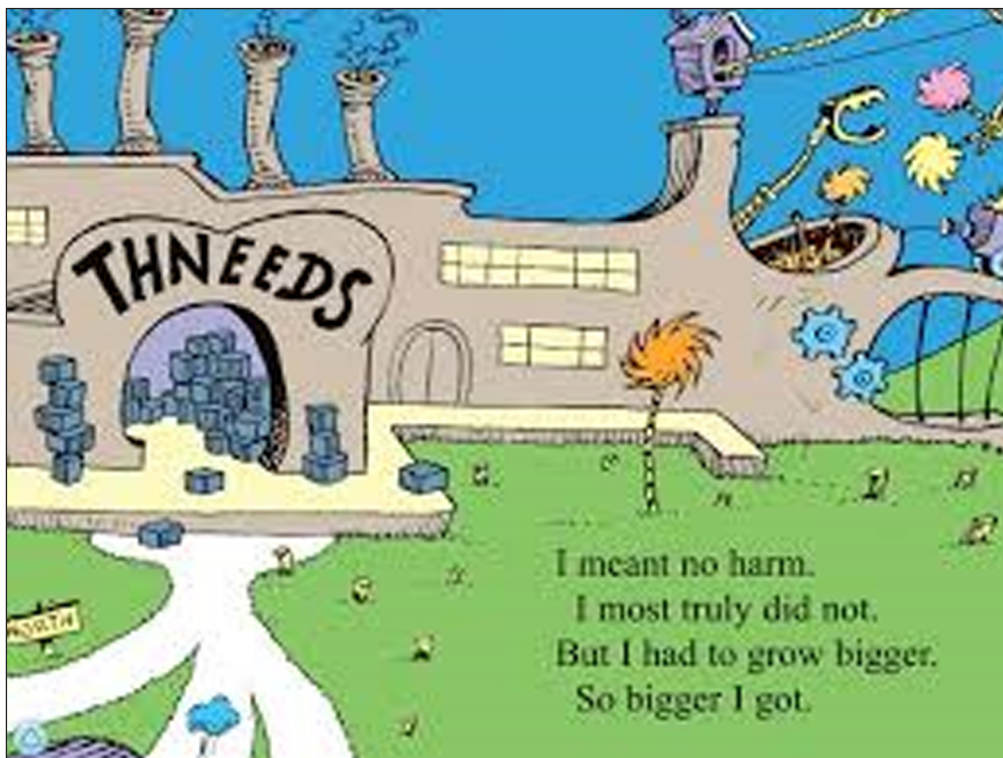
The Once-ler is dismissive of the Lorax's concerns, stating that he means no harm; it is only his intention to be 'useful.' The Once-ler's attitude portrays and is representative of the current lackadaisical state of corporate social responsibility, especially with respect to environmental concerns. This is indicative of the same careless attitude that our society adopted prior to the modern environmental movement originating in the late 1960s, and to some extent, still does to this day. The Lorax calls out the greed motivating the Once-ler's actions and claims that nobody would buy his knitted thneed. This is disproved in the next instance, as a chap comes along and buys the thneed. This is representative of the widespread growth of the industrial revolution, and also of the gaining popularity of the consumerist culture.

"You poor stupid guy!/You never can tell what some people will buy" (p. 26). This statement from the Once-ler seems to be hinting at the fast-blurring line separating wants from needs, a line which is difficult to distinguish between. Moreover, this is also indicative of a culture which promotes excessive materialism and unnecessary consumption. The tagline, 'You need a thneed,' on Once-ler's vehicles that sell thneed is symbolic of the consumerist culture of creating new needs to make people consume the products which they were hitherto unaware of. He explores the immense potential of the thneed, extending it from personal uses as clothes to that of a cover for bicycles:

"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!” (p. 25)



**Figure 2** Thneed factory set up by the Once-ler. (Screenshot from *The Lorax*, 1971).

Realizing that his products are well received and foreseeing the “wonderful chance for the whole Once-ler Family to get mighty rich!” he quickly expands his business, turning his shop into a factory by employing technology (p. 30) (**Figure 2**). He fells the trees on a large scale. Now he has to justify his insatiable greed:

“But I had to grow bigger. So bigger I got.  
I biggered my factory. I biggered my toads.  
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” (p. 39)

The Once-ler tries to be the voice of the entire humanity when he asserts that everyone needs money. Here, the author is challenging the self-assumed anthropocentric savior roles of the powerful in the pretext of being at the service of the entire humanity. His persistent efforts to expand his work to meet ‘everyone’s’ need for money also correlates to the spread of industrialization, as well as the growth in population and economy. The outlook of the Once-ler, who looks upon the environment as nothing but a business opportunity, can be likened to the same attitude that greedy corporates adopt towards environmental resources. Despite expressing a general appreciation for Truffula trees, the Once-ler is nevertheless primarily concerned with expanding his business and generating additional income. Thus, we can ascertain that the Once-ler can be considered to be a representation of capitalist greed. He is anthropocentrism personified when he utters the following in response to the Lorax’s plea for all the endangered species of the place Lorax:

“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!” (p. 49)

Here, the Once-ler reiterates that human needs are just money and materials. His headstrong attitude of asserting his rights at the expense of all the organisms of the Truffula forest has to be justified as everyone’s need. We can also see that two worldviews are at loggerheads here. The fact that the Once-ler addresses the Lorax, Dad, reveals the tussle between the anthropocentric worldview represented by the son, or by extension the younger or modern generation and the biocentric worldview represented by the father or the older generation. The Once-ler outrightly rejects the caring nature of the father figure by establishing his right and capitalistic greed to expand his business. The Once-ler wants to exploit the bounty of mother Nature without any concern for the other. The myopic vision of the Once-ler coupled with the desire for instant profit overrides the Lorax’s deep-seated wisdom and farsightedness for a sustainable universe.

We notice that the consequences of the Once-ler’s actions are slowly being felt as the Brown Barba-loots start going hungry because of the lack of sufficient Truffula fruit, the Swomee Swans are unable to sing due to the smog and the Humming Fish cannot live in the polluted water (pp 34, 40, 44). This in turn refers to diminishing natural resources because of deforestation. In addition, the Lorax has become a waste land due to air, water and soil pollution which are the effects of the poisonous emissions from the factory. It is to be noted that one human’s actions have caused the detrimental effects in all the three spheres affecting the flora and fauna, the aquatic beings and the avifauna. Lorax, the titular character, the caring father tries to send all these living beings to a ‘safer place.’ This is a subtle dig at the harmful and dishonest corporate strategies in practice today which are the major reasons behind the present scenario of displacement at the cause of development and the subsequent environmental crisis. This can also be connected to the extinction of plant and animal species as the effects of anthropogenic activities. As we notice in the text, the instinct to survive compels the animals to look for a better place which is yet uncertain. The following words of the Lorax mark the precarious nature of the nonhuman world that has to bear the brunt of callous human actions.

“They loved living here. But I can’t let them stay.

They’ll have to find food. And I hope that they may.” (p. 36)

When the Lorax is forced to send the swans away, he is quite helpless and hopeless:

“Where will they go? ...

I don’t hopefully know.

They may have to fly for a month ... or a year ...

To escape from the smog you’ve smogged-up around here.” (p. 43)

Finally, when the fish loses their beautiful habitat owing to the anthropogenic emissions, we see their predicament:

“You are glumping the pond where the Humming Fish hummed  
No more can they hum for their gills are all gummed.  
So I’m sending them off. Oh, their future is dreary.  
They’ll walk on their fins and get woefully weary  
in search of some water that isn’t so smeary.” (p. 47) (*Figure 3*)



**Figure 3** Thneed factory waste dumped into the water. (Screenshot from *The Lorax*, 1971).

The Once-ler, throughout all of this happening is hardly fazed. Though he does feel momentary remorse at the fate of the wildlife as the first group of inhabitants are displaced, he carries on doing his work, paying no heed to the repeated concerns of the Lorax. It all comes to a head as the Once-ler finally states his intention as to never stop, just as the last Truffula tree is chopped down. Subsequently, the Lorax too disappears leaving no trace. This is a clear call to the anthropocentric nature of the Once-ler, which grants intrinsic value and, in extension, rights and interests only to human beings, with no regards to other living beings.

The Once-ler's narration of the history of the Lifted Lorax comes to a conclusion with a shift from the anthropocentrism to deep ecological stand, thereby reinforcing the need for sustainable development. At the perishing of the entire ecosystem of the Lorax, the relatives of the Once-ler desert him driving away in his cars. These relatives are juxtaposed with the Lorax who is a 'relative' or part of the place Lorax. He does everything possible to save the ones he is in charge of. He wages a relentless war against the Once-ler to 'rescue' them. We see him remaining in the Lorax until the last tree is hacked hoping to protect it and he is the last one to leave. However, the profit-oriented relatives of the Once-ler are the first ones to leave and he is left alone. The author juxtaposes two conflicting values here. At the instant of the felling of the first tree itself, the Lorax senses the danger and reprimands the Once-ler. On the contrary, the myopic vision of the Once-ler is focused on the immediate profit. He fails to see the far-reaching impacts of his actions. The character Lorax represents the deep ecological stance as opposed to the Once-ler who is anthropocentric. However, the final gesture of the Lorax as he departs, leaves a lasting impression on the Once-ler.

“The Lorax said nothing. Just gave me a glance ...  
just gave me a very sad sad backward glance ...



as he lifted himself by the seat of his pants.

And I'll never forget the grim look on his face

when he heisted himself and took leave of this place,

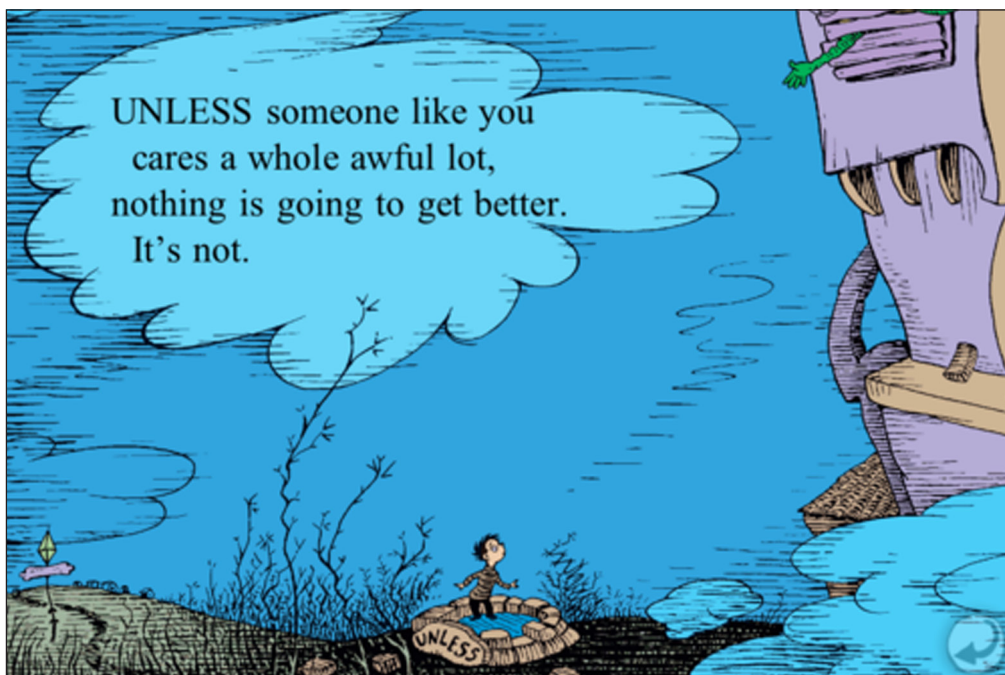
through a hole in the smog, without leaving a trace.” (p. 55)

The impression is culminated when the Once-ler transforms himself to the deep ecological stand point in the presence of the child. In the illustration of the pile of rocks that the Lorax leaves with ‘UNLESS’ engraved on it is foregrounded with the billboard ‘Thneed’ flat on the ground (*Figure 4*).



**Figure 4** The pile of rocks that the Lorax leaves with ‘UNLESS’ engraved on it. (Screenshot from *The Lorax*, 1971).

In the next illustration we see the child in the middle of the pile of rocks (*Figure 5*). This is the only scene we see the child again in full image after his entry to the Street of the Lifted Lorax. As the child has entered the pile of the rocks, the enigma of the Lorax’s word which the Once-ler “couldn’t guess” is unraveled (p. 56).



**Figure 5** The child in the middle of the pile of rocks. (Screenshot from *The Lorax*, 1971).

“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.” (p. 58)

Stemming from this realization flows his next action of dropping the seed. This action has to be taken note of. In the beginning of the text the child had to pay him his fees in a pail and he would count it to ensure that the payment is sufficient. Then he would hide it away secretly symbolizing his selfishness and greed. It was an upward movement to his private secluded house. On the contrary, now having narrated his role in the destruction of the Lorax, he opens his arms wide and drops the seed carefully into the hands of the child (*Figure 5*). Here we see the benevolent hands of the Once-ler. His introspection and the image of the sad look of the Lorax made him realize his responsibility. He recognizes the child as someone who can improve the current state of affairs.

“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.” (p. 61)

These verses sum up the Once-ler’s newly acquired deep ecological stance. His own mistakes have taught him that human life is dependent on other organisms. Now he knows that the last seed is to be handled with utmost care for the future generations. He finds the child the apt person to revive the forest that he destroyed through the assistance of technology.

The act of handing over the seed to the child also holds significance when examining the ecocritical text as children’s literature. It places the onus on the book’s readers- the children themselves and puts them in an active position- by teaching them how to tackle the problem. The responsibility of protecting the environment is thus summarily handed over to the next generation, via the events depicted in the book. The action itself stems from the realization that the future generations are now the only people in a position to bring about real change.

The crux of this realization is the acknowledgement that the ‘Truffula Trees are what everyone needs’ as opposed to materialism that he advocated in the past. His instructions to tend the seed come from his consideration of the intrinsic worth of the plant kingdom. What the hands have destroyed have to be replaced with the same hands. His hope that ‘the Lorax and his friends may come back’, signifies his awareness of the interconnection that the human world is built on.

If we look at the last words of the Once-ler, we can see they resonate with the sustainable development goal 15, namely, to protect Nature by combatting desertification, deforestation and the loss of biodiversity. This is where we propose Dr. Seuss's *The Lorax* as a stimulus for environmental protection. *The Lorax* proves to be an ecocritical text in its commitment to revive Nature by challenging the anthropocentric perspective to that of the deep ecological stance.

In addition to the thematic ecological concerns Dr. Seuss employed literary devices to drive home the ecological lessons to children. Although *The Lorax* is "full of nonsensical words and humor but all the same they are crammed with wisdom and seriousness" (Çetiner, p. 34). Dr. Seuss carefully named the characters, places, and the objects of the book. These names indicate his ecological concerns. The 'Narrative Glossary' defines the word 'Lorax' as "lower axe" (University of Pretoria, n.d., p. 5). However, we would like to argue that 'Lorax' means 'lore-axe' implying the end of a lore. The axe has hacked the entire lore which is about a distinct civilization of plenitude and bliss. By extension, Lorax would mean the end of that civilization as "somebody lifted the Lorax away" (p. 2). Besides, "What was the Lorax?/And why was it there?/And why was it lifted and taken somewhere..." (p. 3) proves it to be not just a place but something else that is loaded with deeper implications. The emphasis on *was* points to the being or the existence of the lore that once was. That lore is explored in the text and the younger generations must remember the same for the wellbeing of the remaining organisms on the universe. "Shell of a great-great-great grandfather snail" (p. 6) also alludes to the lore that once existed, inviting the readers to go deeper into one's own existence.

The name 'Once-ler' could be 'the lore of once' inferring from "the Lorax once stood" (p. 2). It is this lore that the Once-ler narrates to the child. The lore is about how the idyllic nonhuman world was destroyed through his meddling. Since the Once-ler alone has remained in the location, he has become the symbol of the anthropocentric destructive activities of the past. As discussed already, he expiates his wrongdoings by generously offering the seed to the child, and now the child has to continue the lore of reviving it to its pristine glory.

'Lerkim' is where the Once-ler resides. The word 'lerkim' evokes the danger of someone lurking inside to pounce on. In fact, 'lerkim' is the source of all devastations that lifted the Lorax, the setting. His dwelling itself is harmful and a threat to the nonhuman world around him. His callous intrusion into the nonhuman world wreaked havoc. The word 'Lerkim' is very apt to describe the indescribable effects of his actions.

The "Snuvv" and the "gruvvulous glove" (p. 9) might be the symbols of the Once-ler's greed. He still collects fees for narrating the story and he counts them carefully. 'Snuvv' is the place where he secretly hides the money thus collected. These nonsensical words evoke a sense of dark imagery wherein his hands which are in green colour appear to be gruesome with its filthy smell of greed.

Alliterative phrases like 'Grickle-grass grows' (p. 1) aid in creating the jarring effect of the bleak reality that is unraveled as the story proceeds. Repeated 'gr,' sounds rude and it takes effort to pronounce. The unpleasant sound it creates adds to the visual image of barren landscape of despair with the dark colours. That corresponds to his "grunts" (p. 9). Phrases like "miff-muffered moof" (p. 4), "skillful skill" and "speedy speed" (p. 18) besides catching the attention of children contribute to the overall atmosphere of the plot. As Çetiner iterates, "the atmosphere in the story reflects an effective narrative that points out the anthropogenic devastation that goes hand in hand with industrialization, capitalism, and urbanization, which can clearly be observed throughout the world" (2020, p. 34).

## CONCLUSION

The founder of the earth day, G. Nelson, urged the present generations to be willing to sacrifice something today for future generations though we will not be alive to know their gratitude. That's where *The Lorax* becomes relevant in the context of SDG 15. The test we face today is to act now, so that our planet earth does not end up the way Truffula forest did. It is this responsibility that the Once-ler hands over to the child, symbolic of how the new generation takes over the running of the world. By humanizing the struggles of the Lorax and the animals, by the Once-ler realizing his folly, and other such events, the text seeks to educate the younger generation to challenge the anthropocentric view, and in its stead, adopt a deep ecological

one. The clarion call is to regard humans as well as the flora and fauna not as isolated and separate entities, but as a part of the ecosystem and to recognize that humankind, wildlife and environment are just different parts of the whole. All our efforts of SDG 15 must stem from the acceptance of our interconnectedness and dependence on other organisms for our survival.

## COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Joan Ann Mathew wrote and presented the initial version of the paper at a national conference during the second year of her undergraduate studies under the supervision of Dr. Lillykutty Abraham. Both of them together edited this paper up to its final stage.

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