

The story behind



Dr. Seuss™

THE CAT IN THE HAT




In 1954, many Americans were bemoaning rampant illiteracy in our schools and asking themselves: Why can't Johnny read? In an article in LIFE magazine, Pulitzer Prize-winning author, John Hersey maintained that American children couldn't read because their primers were boring and based on flawed pedagogy. Hersey challenged Dr. Seuss to write a story "first graders wouldn't be able to put down." And that's just what Dr. Seuss did, using a vocabulary of only 236 words. In 1957, Random House published THE CAT IN THE HAT, and ever since then, Dr. Seuss has been charming children everywhere into learning how to read.

Fifty years later, enormous strides have been made in support of literacy initiatives nationwide, but enormous challenges remain.

Ensuring children access to books remains essential to reading development.

-  Studies show that having access to a wide variety of reading materials is essential if a child is to develop into a strong reader. In fact, the only behavioral measure that correlates significantly with reading scores is the number of books in the home.
-  Children who are read to frequently are nearly twice as likely as other children to show three or more skills associated with emerging literacy.

Children in poverty are the most at risk. Of the 35.6 million Americans currently living below the poverty line, 40% are children.

-  Children from low-income families enter school at a disadvantage. The gap in reading scores between children from low- and high-income families is more than 40 points.
-  On average, children from low-income families have far fewer literacy and language experiences at home than their classmates.
-  A team of researchers recently concluded that nearly two-thirds of low-income families owned no books for their children.

In honor of the 50th birthday of THE CAT IN THE HAT, we invite you to participate in Project 236, a nationwide literacy effort which asks educators, librarians, and other book lovers . . . **WHAT CAN YOU DO** to support literacy in your classroom and community?

