

Green Eggs and Ham: A Literary Analysis

Green Eggs and Ham, the charming and elementary story by Dr. Seuss may be one of the world's best known stories. Dr. Seuss, whose real name was Theodore Geisel, wrote about 60 books under the Doctor's pen name, as well as "Theo Lesieg". The "Lesieg" was his real last name backwards. The story, published in 1960, starts out as a basic tale about trying new things. An un-named character is asked to try green eggs and ham, and when he refuses, a character by the name of Sam suggests all sorts of ways the unknown character could try the dish in an attempt to make it seem more appetizing. At last, he tries it, (if only to stop Sam's bothering him) and finds that he likes it.

However interesting the story might be, even more fascinating is how the theme is cleverly and subtly presented. Is the story really about trying new things, or is there a deeper meaning? To understand the true theme, we must establish some context. When the book was written, there was great turmoil in American society. The Civil Rights movement was gaining serious momentum and more and more African Americans and whites joined the fight. But what were they fighting? Not just racism; prejudice. Prejudice is defined as "a feeling of like or dislike for someone or something, especially when it is not reasonable or logical" (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary). Prejudice is found in the second line of *Green Eggs and Ham*. The unknown character says:

"That Sam-I-am!

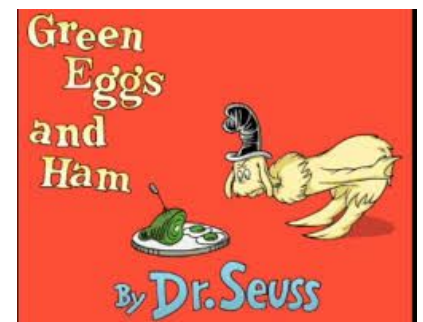
That Sam-I-am!

I do not like that Sam-I-am!"

This would not seem unusual, except for the fact that Sam has not even said anything to him, yet he immediately says that he dislikes Sam. He also announces his dislike of green eggs and ham before he tries them. Seuss was trying to show how ridiculous some prejudices can be by having the mystery character refuse to try something as simple as ham and eggs. But why is the mystery man unnamed? Perhaps it was a commentary on how prejudice can come from anyone, including ourselves! How often do we find ourselves in the position of having an unreasonable feeling of dislike or hate towards a person or thing? Seuss uses only a few simple words, but he conveys a huge message.

That, perhaps, is the essence of children's literature. While it entertains children, it also teaches important life lessons in simplistic ways. However, as children's authors go, it must be conceded that in every way, Seuss was a master.

By:



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