

DR. SEUSS

And to Think
That He Saw It
on Mulberry
Street

There really is a Mulberry Street. It runs through Springfield, Massachusetts, the hometown of Ted Geisel—better known to the world as Dr. Seuss. It was in Springfield that Ted first learned to write, draw, and rhyme in his distinctive style. It was also where he learned an important lesson about discrimination.

From the beginning, Ted Geisel loved two things more than anything: funny animals and silly words.

When Ted was a boy, he lived six blocks away from the town zoo. On summer days, when school was out, he'd head over there and spend hours gazing at the monkeys in their monkey house and the lions in their cages. Then he'd rush home and—with his parents' permission—draw pictures of the animals in crayon on his bedroom walls.



The surprising thing was that Ted's animals looked nothing like the real ones. They were, cartoonish creatures—a duck with angel wings for example. He labeled each one with its own nonsensical name. One of his favorite imaginary beasts was an elephant with nine-foot-long ears, which he called a Wynnmpf.

Ted's love of inventive words and funny sayings ran in the family. His grandfather had immigrated to America from Germany in the mid-1800s. Together with a man named Christian Kalmbach, he founded a brewery, Kalmbach and Geisel, or "Come Back and Guzzle," as it came to be known. By the time Ted was born in 1904, his grandfather's brewery was one of the largest and most successful in New England. It's beer was delivered all over Springfield in a black and gold wagon pulled by Clydesdale horses.

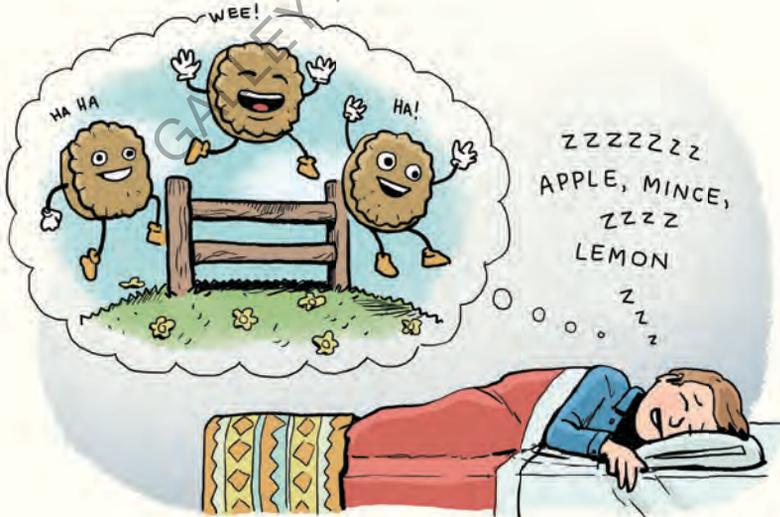


Ted's father helped run the business, and in his spare time he invented things and gave them funny names. His inventions included a machine for strengthening the muscles in a person's forearm, a device that prevented flies from getting into beer barrels, and—Ted's favorite—a mysterious contraption called the Silk-

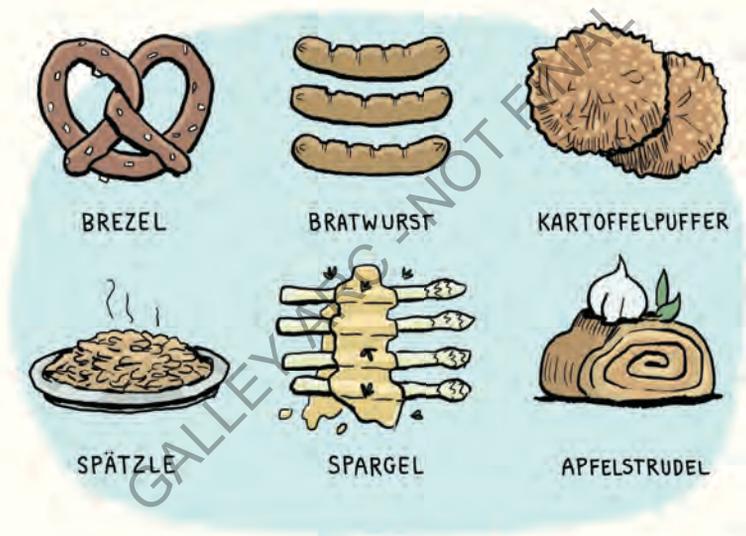
Stocking-Back-Seam-Wrong-Detecting Mirror.

Ted's older sister also shared his love for weird words. Her name was Margaretha, but she insisted that everyone call her Marnie Mecca Ding Ding Guy. No-body knows why.

Ted's mother's specialty was stringing words into a rhythm called a meter. Back when she was young, Henrietta Seuss Geisel had worked in her family's bakery. Later, after she married Ted's father, Henrietta would sing her infant son a lullaby about the pies she used to sell: "Apple, mince, lemon...peach, apricot, pineapple...blueberry, coconut, custard, and SQUASH!" The meter stuck in Ted's head, helping him remember all the different kinds of pies.



Besides his love of wordplay, Ted had another reason for being fascinated with language. He was bilingual—his parents had raised him to speak German as well as English. At Christmastime, the family sang “Stille Nacht” instead of “Silent Night” and “O Tannenbaum” instead of “O Christmas Tree.” For dinner, Ted ate German sausages, and he learned to appreciate the many varieties of liverwurst.



Ted never thought much about his heritage, or how it made him different from other kids in Springfield. But then, all of a sudden, he found out.

The year Ted turned thirteen, the United States went to war with Germany. During that time, a patriotic fervor took hold in America. Many people directed their anger about Germany toward the German Ameri-

cans in their communities.

Families like the Geisels became objects of suspicion. People feared they might be spies or traitors secretly loyal to the German ruler, Kaiser Wilhelm. Government officials encouraged such anti-German sentiment. A special committee of Congress officially renamed frankfurters “hot dogs,” and sauerkraut became “liberty cabbage.”

Town leaders in Springfield ordered that all German-language books be removed from the public library. The Springfield Symphony stopped playing music by German composers. The pastor at the local Lutheran church started preaching in English instead of German.

Some of Ted’s classmates teased him for speaking German at home. They called him the “Kaiser’s Kid” and threw stones at him.



Ted refused to be bullied. Over the next few months, he set out to prove that German Americans could be just as patriotic as anyone else—even more so. He collected scraps of tin for the war effort and planted a victory garden in his yard.



When his Boy Scout troop asked for volunteers to sell war bonds, Ted was among the first to sign up. For the next several weeks, he went door to door, up and down Mulberry Street, convincing the citizens of Springfield to buy bonds to support American soldiers fighting in the Great War. Ted even persuaded his own grandfather to pledge \$1,000.

Ted was so successful that he was named one of Springfield's top ten Boy Scout war bonds salesmen.

To honor the boys, a special ceremony was scheduled for the town's auditorium. Presenting the awards was a very special master of ceremonies: former U.S. president Theodore Roosevelt.

On the day of the event, thousands of townspeople packed the auditorium. Ted took the stage along with his scoutmaster and the nine other honorees. As patriotic music played, President Roosevelt approached the podium. He delivered a rousing welcome speech and then sauntered down the line to pin a medal on each boy's chest.

When he got to Ted, however, he had no more medals to pin.

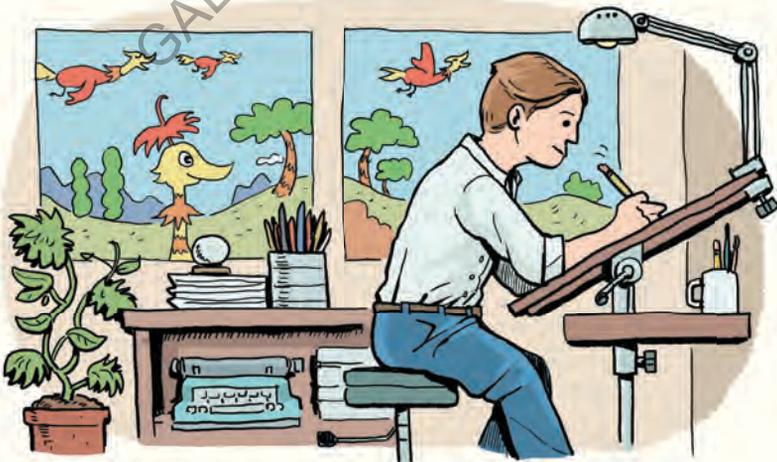


WHAT'S THIS
LITTLE BOY
DOING HERE?

As it turned out, Ted's scoutmaster had miscounted, giving the president only nine medals instead of ten. Ted had the misfortune of being last in line.

The scoutmaster hastily whisked Ted off the stage. Ted was mortified. Even though it was just bad luck, he felt like he was being punished yet again for being German. The memory of this embarrassing moment never faded. For the rest of his life, Ted had a terrible fear of appearing onstage in front of large crowds.

By the time the War ended, Ted was a sophomore in high school. Springfield's German American citizens returned to their normal lives. Few in town spoke of the discrimination they had suffered during the war. But Ted never forgot. He began drawing cartoons for the school newspaper. The drawings combined his love of wordplay and fantastic creatures with his strong opin-



ions about injustice and inequality.

To protect his true identity, Ted signed his cartoons “T. S. LeSieg”—LeSieg was Geisel spelled backward. In time, he would adopt the more famous pen name by which we know him today.

In 1921, Ted left Springfield to attend Dartmouth College in New Hampshire. Even though Ted was becoming an adult, memories of his hometown and the people there continued to influence his writing and his art. Characters and places inspired by Springfield appear in Ted’s first book, *And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street*, and animals inspired by the zoo that he used to visit populate books like *Horton Hears a Who*. Two of his most famous characters, the Grinch and the Cat in the Hat, were based on the person he knew best of all—himself!

No matter how fanciful his stories, to Ted they seemed as familiar as the town square or the shop around the corner. “Why write about Never-Never Lands that you’ve never seen,” he once remarked, “when all around you have a real Never-Never Land that you know about and understand?”

A strong sensitivity to social injustice remained an important part of Ted’s work as Dr. Seuss. In such stories as *The Sneetches* and *Yertle the Turtle*, he warned about the dangers of discrimination, using words that everyone could understand. It was a language he had

developed all by himself—and a lesson he had learned firsthand—as a kid growing up on Mulberry Street.

