

GREENWorks

Ideas for a Cleaner Environment

A publication of the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services, Concord, NH (603) 271-3710

April 2012

New Lessons from the Lorax

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There are many ways to spread the message of environmental stewardship including through mainstream, block-buster movies like the recent release of *Dr. Seuss's The Lorax*. In the film, as in the 1971 book on which it is based, a character called the Lorax speaks for the trees and the creatures of the forest. He shows an over zealous entrepreneur, the Onceler, how his actions of cutting too many trees and polluting the air and water have created an unlivable environment. The Onceler ignores the warnings of the Lorax and continues with his unsustainable process until he completely depletes the trees on which his business depends and his operations collapse.

Many fans of the original book and its powerful message have been dismayed by the changes in the movie version. There is an additional plot complete with a villain and his henchmen, a new romance, suspenseful chase scenes, cheesy musical numbers and almost no reference to the classic rhymes which make Seuss books so popular. However, when viewed with an open mind, or by anyone unfamiliar with the original story, the movie has the potential to not only entertain, but impart some valuable messages.

One message is that human needs are not the only ones to be considered when utilizing natural resources. When we harvest trees, which we must do to provide the countless products which we have come to depend on, it is important to do so in ways that allow for the trees to grow back and forests to be maintained. Renewable resources can be utilized in sustainable ways, but they can also be rapidly depleted with devastating consequences, just ask the Onceler. Many business leaders are beginning to understand that paying attention to a triple bottom line which takes into account the planet and people as well as profits is the only way to have a truly sustainable business. Consumers who support those businesses help to strengthen and encourage that thoughtful strategy.

Another message is that it is important to speak up *and* take action. The Lorax was the voice for the trees and the environment. But words were not enough to stop the greed and short sightedness of the Onceler once he got the taste of "success". It took the actions of the boy Ted who pursued his goal against great odds, overcame powerful obstacles, dared to dream of bringing back real trees, listened to the wisdom of his grandmother and followed his heart. Toward the end of the movie he became a community organizer, gathering the town's people to help him enable the growth of a tiny seed, the beginning of a new generation of Truffula Trees.

The movie can help people think twice about where we are headed and ultimately provides a message of hope, determination and reconciliation. I believe it can provide inspiration for those who want to do good things for the planet. If this latest version of *The Lorax* prompts viewers, young or old, to say no to wasteful and unsustainable businesses, to use more renewable resources that are harvested responsibly, to use fewer resources in general and to remember we

are just one species among many on this planet, than it will be worth far more than the profit it has made at the box office.

For teachers who want to use lessons inspired by *The Lorax* visit: <http://www.plt.org/the-lorax-is-back->

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