

Julia Hypatia Orth

Essay

Julia used the following essay in her application to new College of Florida. New College asked for four different one-page essays—this is her favorite.

Recommend a book to us and tell why you are recommending it.

Many books have touched my life and changed my perspectives, and choosing a single one to recommend seems not difficult so much as unfair to all the others. Jim Nollman's *Spiritual Ecology* has been the source of a great deal of enthusiasm, frustration, and irritation for me. Grace Llewellyn's *The Teenage Liberation Handbook* set me free. Even a few well-written textbooks, like Hopkins' *Ka Lei Ha'aheo: Beginning Hawaiian* and Haviland's *Cultural Anthropology* have inspired me to learn about worlds of knowledge I hadn't even been aware of before. That's not to mention the works of new and classical fiction (*Nineteen Eighty-Four*, *Portrait of Jennie*, *The Catcher in the Rye*, and *Dandelion Wine* being particular favorites) that I spent most of the summer afternoons devouring in full. Yet...a book recommendation should be more than personal fancy, something that one feels compelled to share particularly with the recommendee(s). As I am quite unfamiliar with you, I wish to come up with something of fairly general interest as well as something that excites me. To my surprise, a particular book has presented itself to me for just such a purpose I recommend *The Lorax*, by Dr. Seuss.

I can't in good conscience recommend it and be done with it though. This journey to "the far end of town where the Grickle-grass grows" with its environmental message might seem a touch moralistic or naïve, out of context. Besides, Dr. Seuss wrote poetry, and it is poetry meant to be read aloud. I recommend that you do just that. I recommend that you check this book out of a library and take it outside. Stand on a hill-top or by the edge of a forest or in the middle of a park, perhaps under whatever local vegetation resembles *Truffula Trees*. Don't go alone. Bring your best friend or your younger brother or your cat or whatever neighborhood children are willing to listen. Dr. Seuss wrote *stories*, and stories are meant to be told to people. Chant the story with your best story voices to whomever will listen, and I can all but guarantee that bits of rhyme will lodge themselves in your head like the choruses of popular songs. Whiter you do, don't forget to look at the pictures.

The story itself is told by and about the Once-ler, the well-meaning antihero who chops down trees for his business. He means no harm, but undoubtedly causes much—a familiar situation indeed. (In the famous words of Walt Kelly's Pogo: "We have met the enemy, and not only may he be ours, he may be us.") The Lorax, defender of the trees, also does not follow any sticky-sweet good-guy stereotypes. He's "...shortish. And oldish. And brownish. And mossy", and speaks with a voice that is "sharpish and bossy." Finding himself entirely at odds with the Once-ler and his business, all the Lorax can do is shout out warnings and remonstrations at the top of his lungs. The perception gap between the two is tragicomically familiar, and leads exactly where one might expect. We would do well to learn not only from the Lorax's message, but also from the failure of his method of communication to result in anything but opposition.

It's food for thought, but don't get your thinker too excited. This is, after all, a children's story. It is my hope in recommending it that it will at worst provide you with a pleasant addition to your day, spent under the sun with a friend or two and a book that is, in the end, a great deal of fun... and that at best, it will provide you with inspiration – to plant a tree, to create and share your own artistic or literary worlds (a skill at which Dr. Seuss was adept), to spend more time outside, or more time reading to young friends, or perhaps even "only" to remember to not take even the most serious subjects *too* deadly serious (again a bittersweet Kelly-quote comes to mind: "Don't take life too serious... it ain't nohow permanent.") Enjoy!