



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on October 3, 2017

School Librarian Faces Backlash for Rejecting First Lady's Gift of Dr. Seuss Books

A school librarian is facing backlash for rejecting First Lady Melania Trump's gift of Dr. Seuss books because of their supposedly "racist" themes. Liz Phipps Soeiro, a librarian at Cambridgeport Elementary School in Cambridge, Massachusetts, who once dressed as a Dr. Seuss character for a school celebration, rebuffed the gift of 10 Dr. Seuss books, which the first lady gave in recognition of "National Read a Book" day, charging that illustrations in Dr. Seuss books are "steeped in racist propaganda, caricatures, and harmful stereotypes."



In a condescending open letter to Mrs. Trump, Soeiro wrote that her school's "beautiful and diverse student body is made up of children from all over the world, from different socioeconomic statuses, with a spectrum of gender expressions and identities, with a range of abilities, and of varied racial, ethnic, and religious backgrounds."

Noting that Cambridge, Massachusetts, "is an amazing city with robust social programming, a responsive city government, free all-day kindergarten, and well-paid teachers" where yearly "per-pupil spending in Cambridge is well over \$20,000," Soeiro gleefully informed Mrs. Trump that her school "doesn't have a NEED" for the Dr. Seuss books the first lady graciously presented.

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With tenuous grammatical style, Soeiro wrote that her students "were interested in reading your enclosed letter and impressed with the beautiful bookplates with your name and the indelible White House stamp, however, we will not be keeping the titles for our collection."

But the Cambridge librarian was not finished dressing down her president's wife. "You may not be aware of this," Soeiro instructed Mrs. Trump, "but Dr. Seuss is a bit of a cliché, a tired and worn ambassador for children's literature.... Another fact that many people are unaware of is that Dr. Seuss's illustrations are steeped in racist propaganda, caricatures, and harmful stereotypes."

Citing two classic Dr. Seuss titles, *If I Ran a Zoo* and *And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street*, Soeiro indicted Dr. Seuss for supposedly employing "racist mockery in his art." Turning to what is perhaps Dr. Seuss' most celebrated work, Soeiro suggested that *The Cat in the Hat* is filled with racist overtones, and its use in schools reinforced "systemic racism and oppression in education and literature." It was surprising, then, that Twitter geeks were able to uncover a 2015 post of Soeiro celebrating the birthday of Dr. Seuss by dressing up as the book's title character.

Opaquely revealing her underlying intent to denigrate Mrs. Trump and her gift, Soeiro concluded her letter: "I am honored that you recognized my students and our school. I can think of no better gift for children than books; it was a wonderful gesture, if one that could have been better thought out."



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The backlash over her letter probably made Soeiro wish she had politely accepted Mrs. Trump's gift. In Springfield, Massachusetts, hometown of Dr. Seuss (whose real name was Theodor Seuss Geisel), Mayor Domenic Sarno, a Democrat, scolded Soeiro with a Dr. Seuss inspired statement, saying: "One fish, two fish, red fish, blue fish — I think her comments stink and are ridiculous towards our beloved Dr. Seuss."

Sarno went on to say "kudos to First Lady Melania Trump for her generous offer to donate Dr. Seuss books to that Cambridge school library. They don't want them, we'll take them and would be honored to have the First Lady and President Trump visit the Amazing World of Dr. Seuss Museum, too."

Critics of the letter also took to Twitter to lambast Soeiro for her poor judgement and taste. "This isn't an issue of politics," read one tweet. "You take the books like you'd take any gift. Graciously. Find an appropriate home." Another read: "How rude of this librarian. Her priorities seem way off.... Just say 'Thank you' and let the kids read. Manners 101."

Soeiro's employer, the Cambridge, Massachusetts, school district, released a statement explaining that the librarian "was not authorized to accept or reject donated books on behalf of the school or school district.... We have counseled the employee on all relevant policies, including the policy against public resources being used for political purposes."

White House spokesperson Stephanie Grisham pointed out that the gift of books was part of an effort by the First Lady to use her platform "to help as many children as she can." She added that "turning the gesture of sending young school children books into something divisive is unfortunate, but the First Lady remains committed to her efforts on behalf of children everywhere."

Photo of Seuss Landing at Disney in Orlando: [David Bjorgen](#)



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