

**Film Study Guide for “Dr. Seuss’ Horton Hears a Who”**  
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“*Dr. Seuss’ Horton Hears a Who,*” is based on the book published in 1954. It is an anthropomorphic tale; that is, it is written in a literary form in which human qualities are attributed to animals or non-humans. Having said this, we can then imagine these creatures as persons and make applications accordingly, as does the great Dr. Seuss himself.

Dr. Seuss was born Theodor Robert Geisel (1904 – 1991) and many of his books have been made into films or made-for-television specials. My favorite is the 1966 animated version of How the Grinch Stole Christmas and my least favorite is the live action 2003 version of The Cat in the Hat. We probably all have our favorite books or film/TV versions. Oh, The Places You’ll Go! is probably my all-time favorite of the Dr. Seuss books. What’s yours?

### **The Story**

Horton (voice of Jim Carrey) is an elephant who one day hears a voice from a speck of dust drifting through the air near his big ears. He realizes that there must be someone on that speck of dust and hurries to bring it to safety because, “A person’s a person no matter how small.” He places the speck on a clover and begins a conversation with the Mayor of Whoville (Steve Carell) who asks Horton to find a safe place for Whoville – and his 96 daughters and one son named Jo-Jo – or Whoville might be destroyed. The Kangaroo (Carol Burnett) scoffs at Horton and enlists Vlad (Will Arnett) the eagle to destroy the speck on the clover because, “If you can’t see it, it’s not there.” Vlad fails, so The Kangaroo hires the Wickersham monkey Brothers to thwart Horton on his odyssey. They cage him so they can kill him. Horton escapes, finds the clover with Whoville on it, and saves the day. While all this is going on, the Mayor has to convince the townspeople to listen to him, and get Jo-Jo, who is silent, to speak because he, his dad, believes in him. If the people of Whoville yell loud enough, The Kangaroo and all the other animals will believe that Whoville and its citizens do exist and deserve protection. The people raise their voices and make such a noise that the animals hear them and agree to protect Whoville and its people.

### **Themes**

- ◆ Horton as a Christ-figure: How are Horton and Jesus similar? Horton wants to save the people of Whoville who are so very small. He is captured and beaten because he believes in and wants to save the people of Whoville. He lays down his life for them.

- ◆ The Christian journey: How is Horton’s journey a metaphor for the Christian life? Everything is going along fine, and then he is asked to disrupt his comfortable life in order to help those who are weak and in danger. He sacrifices his comfort and is even persecuted for his beliefs. He perseveres even when the journey is hard. Why?
- ◆ Transformation: Which of the characters in the story change and grow as “persons” and spiritually? The Kangaroo? Her joey (in the film he seems to believe in Horton but in the book he actually changes from a non-believer to a believer)? Jo-Jo? The people of Whoville? The Mayor’s wife? Why are Vlad and the Wickersham Brothers weak? Why do they agree to do what The Kangaroo wants?
- ◆ Image of the Human Person: What do you think Horton means when he says, “A person’s a person no matter how small?” Think of all the ways people can be small: the unborn, babies, children who are growing up, people who are short. Are there ways we can make people feel small? For example: when we don’t respect them, or we make fun of them, or even bully them. Do you think that The Kangaroo, Vlad and the Wickersham Brothers are bullies? What would you do or say when bullies are making fun of people or being mean? (Know your school/religious education program’s policy on bullying so you can affirm it here.)
- ◆ Life-affirming: In what ways would you say that *Horton Hears a Who* is a life-affirming story? Which characters does Horton think have value? Why? Do you think Horton loves everyone, even those who try to hurt him and stop him from his mission?
- ◆ Faith: What do you think The Kangaroo meant when she said, “If you can’t see it, it’s not there.” Is that true? What made The Kangaroo a believer? How does the evidence we see around us in nature point to the existence of God? How can we “see” and “hear” God in nature and in others? (Depending on the age of your audience you may want to bring in – or adapt - St. Thomas Aquinas’ philosophical proofs for the existence of God, especially the fifth proof “from the order of things” <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/aquinas3.html>). How does the Mayor’s faith grow in the story?
- ◆ Peace-making: How does Horton make peace between the characters in the book? Is Horton ever violent? How does he react to those who are violent to him? (He educates the animals about the people of Whoville; he continually communicates and never gives up; he brings people together – both those who doubt and the citizens of Whoville – and helps them get to know one another.)
- ◆ Virtues and values: What ideals and characteristics do you find in *Horton Hears a Who*? Make a list and then explain how each of these is apparent in the story. (Faith, hope, love/charity, perseverance, constancy, self-sacrifice, patience, peace)