

Oh, the Places You'll Go! Rhetorical Criticism

Samantha Schaffer

Department of Communication Studies, University of Nevada Las Vegas

COM 711: Rhetorical and Critical Research Methods

Dr. Emma F. Bloomfield

December 11, 2020

Introduction

Oh, the Places You'll Go! was written in 1990, by Theodore Seuss Geisel, also known as Dr. Seuss, the famous children's book author. *Oh, the Places You'll Go!* was Seuss's last book before he passed away in 1991 (Seuss, 1990). *Oh, the Places You'll Go!* has continued to be one of Seuss's most revered books of all time. Based on an article by Time, *Oh, the Places You'll Go!*, currently ranks 73rd for the bestselling books of all time (D'Addario, Nathan, & Rayman, n.d.). The jacket of the book welcomes a diverse audience by arguing that this book is for "anyone embarking on the Great Balancing Act that is life" (Seuss, 1990). While many people receive this book at moments of transition, such as college graduation, I primarily approach the book as an opportunity for parents to use it as a communicative tool to introduce young readers to complex emotions as well as symbolically send them off on their journey. In this paper, I argue that, *Oh, the Places You'll Go!* creates an approachable way for mental health messages to be conveyed and understood to a younger audience. I will use a metaphor analysis informed by the second persona to rhetorically criticize *Oh, the Places You'll Go!* in hopes of illuminating the underlying messages about mental health and the book's potential use as a communicative tool for parents.

Children's books are important to study because of their ability to impact children's perception of reality. Schrag (1991) argued that the stories that we hear as children are often how we come to accept what is true throughout our entire lives. Stories are powerful ways of communicating; they are particularly powerful to children, who absorb their messages. Understanding the impact that books can have on children, I propose that the messages in *Oh, the Places You'll Go!* present parents with the chance to teach their children about mental health in ways that will stick with them throughout life. Not only does children's literature impact an

individual over the course of their lifetime, but VanderHaagen (2018) has also found there are larger societal implications. VanderHaagen (2018) calls attention to the multitude of ways that children's literature can be impactful, arguing that it can even impact public memory.

Understanding how children's books help create larger discourses that permeate over an individual's lifespan will enlighten the potential perspective that children's books can be powerful communicative tools. Moreover, VanderHaagen (2018) discusses how children's literature can impact sensitive subjects. This article offers the option to see children's literature as an opportunity to discuss emotionally charged messages through children's books (VanderHaagen, 2018). This article also shows the potential negative impacts of children's literature can have when it is inaccurate (VanderHaagen, 2018). Children's books have much more influence than they initially appear to have, making them a powerful rhetorical artifact to analyze.

I choose to analyze *Oh the Places You'll Go!* because I received this book for my high school graduation in 2015, as many young adults do. I have since started reading *Oh, the Places You'll Go!* to my son as part of our bedtime routine. This sparked my initial interest in the book because of the book's ability to be relevant at different stages in life. By capturing a wide audience, *Oh, the Places You'll Go!* establishes its legitimacy as a classic children's book. The actual words illuminate the diverse situations an individual may encounter in life such as depression, success, failure, and opportunity. However, it is the words in conjunction with the illustrations that make *Oh, the Places You'll Go!* a powerful rhetorical artifact. While I think that every page is valuable in the telling of this story, I will only examine the pages where the clearest examples of metaphor and the second persona are present in my focus on mental illness. To begin, I will generally describe the book. Then I will give a brief description of a metaphor

analysis and give examples throughout the book. After I will describe the second persona and connect it to the metaphors used in the book. I will then use the metaphor criticism and the second persona to analyze potential mental health messages that parents could use in the book. To conclude I will analyze potential areas of future research that could be looked at in *Oh, the Places You'll Go!* that this paper uncovers.

The version of *Oh, the Places You'll Go!* I will be analyzing is a hardcover book with a paper jacket. *Oh, the Places You'll Go!* is a story of the trials and tribulations one can experience in life, making it perfect for anyone entering a new stage in their life. The story takes the reader on a journey through the yellow-clothed character's adventurous day. The character encounters themes of success, failure, happiness, sadness, depression, and opportunity, ultimately making it through all of the ups and downs. The front-page pictures a Caucasian character that is dressed in a yellow outfit with a yellow hat on. The yellow clothed character is standing on what looks to be an upside-down rainbow funnel. The title, *Oh, the Places You'll Go!*, and "By Dr. Seuss" are colored teal and stand out from the other colors on the page.

At first glance, this book is a typical optimistic, cheerful children's book. On the inside of the jacket, there are questions and answers for the reader, as well as a two-paragraph dedication to Seuss. *Oh, the Places You'll Go!* has forty-four pages worth of content for the reader. Some pages have pictures and words while others include just pictures or just words. There is a whimsical feel to the entire book. Because of the book's popularity, there have been many versions of the book published including anniversary editions and softcovers that may have subtle differences, but the words and pictures are the same. Now that I have provided a brief description of the book I will expand on my methodologies, where they can be seen in the book and their power in creating a communicative tool for parents.

Metaphor

The understanding of underlying meaning in *Oh the Places You'll Go!* is enhanced with a metaphor criticism of the artifact. There are an abundance of opportunities throughout the book where Seuss's (1990) words convey overt metaphors to strategically speak to his audience. Furthermore, the claim I intend to make is that children's books like *Oh the Places You'll Go!* act as tools for parents to speak to their children about difficult emotions. I reason, Seuss (1990) uses metaphors in language, images, and themes that parallel intense emotions like success, failure, depression, and fear to express those difficult concepts clearly for young readers.

Two key theorists that enlighten my metaphor criticism are Lakoff and Johnson (1980). Lakoff and Johnson (1980) propose that the world as we know it is constructed through metaphors. Metaphors are anything that makes a comparison out of two seemingly unlike things (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Lakoff and Johnson (1980) further their argument by proclaiming that metaphors are common and are used in our everyday thoughts in order to relate to people. They conceptualize these metaphors that are used every day, that sometimes happen subliminally, as "conventional metaphors" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 453). Another important scholar who informs my metaphor criticism is Black (1970). Black (1970) describes conventional metaphors as those that are in our everyday life and act as an extension of our societal beliefs (p. 113). Conventional metaphors are often cliché and not something that is immediately identifiable (Black, 1970, p. 113)

Conventional metaphors are powerful because they are used often without the realization of the power of the message they are communicating. Lakoff and Johnson propose a few metaphors that are used frequently, often without the knowledge of the comparisons that are being made. One example of a metaphor proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) is seeing an

argument as a war with a winner and loser. As a society, we use this metaphor regularly, without understanding the impact this language has on our relationships. Another metaphor frequently used in individualistic cultures is the concept of time as money (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). We often speak of our time as a tangible resource, that is scarce and valuable. It is important to understand the impact of relating a commodity like time to a resource like money. These conventional metaphors offer insight into societal structures and personal frame of thought.

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) categorize conventional metaphors into three categories. First, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) describe conduit metaphors which relate ideas to objects through language. These are powerful because they relate ideas to tangible objects that can be imposed on individuals, taken from individuals, and conveyed to an individual. Then, there are physical metaphors that aim to quantify, identify, and motivate action (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 461). These metaphors are useful because of their ability to relay more factual information in a relatable format. Orientational metaphors are another type of conventional metaphor that identify wholistic pictures of reality and relates them to an idea (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, pp. 461-462). Orientational metaphors are unique because it relates an idea to a structural system in society. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) provide the example of up-down as an orientational metaphor and explain its use in conveying cultural experience. These three types of conventional metaphors function to build the receiver's understanding of the message while simultaneously constructing their reality. In my analysis, I will identify all three types of conventional metaphors that are proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980).

In addition to Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) conventional metaphors, I will analyze specifically light and dark metaphors in *Oh, the Places You'll Go!* Light and dark are used throughout the book to symbolize emotion. Osborn (1967) argues that light and dark metaphors

evoke strong positive and negative associations and that this is preferred due to its simplicity. Osborn (1967) argues that light typically signals safety, information, and enduring power. Dark tends to symbolize danger, vulnerability, and fear (Osborn, 1967). Furthermore, Osborn (1967) argues that light and dark metaphors are rooted in the chronological process where an individual sees the present as dark and the future as light. Light and dark metaphors are frequently associated with a vertical scale where darkness is down, and lightness is up (Osborn, 1967).

To understand the metaphors seen in *Oh the Places You'll Go!* I will also discuss the tenor and vehicle of those metaphors. Richards (1936) originally proposed that tenors are the subjects of the metaphor which the attributes are ascribed to (Osborn & Ehninger, 1962). The vehicle of the metaphor was described by Richards (1936) as the interpretant of the items or the attributes that are borrowed from an object (Osborn & Ehninger, 1962). Understanding the tenor and the vehicle of the metaphors that are described will help assert the importance of this book as a communicative tool parents could use to discuss mental health. They also display the societal importance of certain metaphors and root them in cultural ideals of success and failure.

Seuss's (1990) use of conventional metaphors incorporates messages about mental health while appropriating the message for a younger audience. By using a metaphor criticism I argue Seuss's (1990) words in *Oh the Places You'll Go!* have underlying implications on communication about mental health. Because metaphors are how we understand and interpret the world (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), a metaphor criticism offers the opportunity to highlight key facets of *Oh, the Places You'll Go!* and its potential to be a useful tool for parents. By identifying prominent metaphors in *Oh, the Places You'll Go!* I offer the opportunity to see this book as more than just a children's book, but a useful tool for anyone who is grappling with intense emotions.

Metaphor analysis

Light and dark metaphors are seen throughout *Oh, the Places You'll Go!*. The first prominent example is on page twelve. Seuss repetitively uses the vehicle of lightness to talk about the tenor of success. The colors are vibrant consisting of pastel yellows, pinks, blues, and greens. The light colors are accompanied by vertical scale language. Seuss extensively uses the vehicle of the verticality to talk about the tenor of success. The twelfth page says, "You'll be on your way up!/ You'll be seeing great sights!/ You'll join the high fliers/ who soar to high heights." (Seuss, 1990, p. 12). The use of the word "up" and "high" in conjunction with the visually vibrant color scheme affirm Osborn's (1967) claim about light and dark metaphors. I believe as Osborn (1967) alluded to, that the use of color and verticality aid in the simplicity of the message. Simplicity in children's books is key to ensure their understanding of the messages the book is providing. I propose that Seuss's use of light and dark colors throughout the book offers the reader a more simplistic understanding of complex emotions by relating emotions to conventional metaphors. Osborn (1967) asserts that conventional metaphors such as lightness and darkness are so engrained into our society that they are more easily understood by a younger audience. Seuss's choice to associate certain messages with lightness and darkness allows for the audience to glean underlying messages about mental health. Another consideration to make is how these emotional themes of success and happiness on the page are associated with these themes of lightness and upward momentum. Society's view of success and happiness are tied with these broader themes of lightness and upward movement. These things could have broader and possibly negative implications that are far too complex for this paper but could be studied in a future paper.

Page twelve also offers a powerful orientational metaphor, explained by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) as a metaphor that illustrates a larger experience that is happening. The use of upward movement in the illustrations on page twelve displays this societal concept of up being a sign of happiness, life, and success (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Seuss uses the word “up”, balloons that symbolize upward movement, and the lightness metaphor conveying emotions of success. I argue that this communicates to readers that upward movement feels good and is good. Success is lightness and feelings of happiness arise. This page gives the reader an idea of what success might feel and look like through the use of metaphors. There are implications that success is related to upward movement, lightness, and good feelings. Failure is then the opposite of those qualities. I draw the conclusion that these metaphors are helpful for younger readers who may not understand elaborate words like success and failure. Rather Seuss uses conventional metaphors to discuss success and failure in ways that young readers would comprehend. For example, a young child may not know what the word success means, but they can associate that word with feelings of happiness, lightness, and upward movement. Therefore in the future when they encounter such feelings, they will be able to liken it to success and label those feelings more efficiently.

Another example of the visual metaphors of lightness and darkness can be seen on page eighteen and nineteen. Aesthetically, these pages are noticeably different from the others. There are only four colors including the yellow clothed boy. Previous pages I have spoken about typically have a rainbow of colors. On these pages, there are dark blue and purple hills that lead off a cliff into a black scribbly lined abyss. It has a darker more serious feel to it. The visuality of a dark environment adds to the emotion of depression that I argue Seuss is displaying. The page reads “You’ll come down from the Lurch/ with an unpleasant bump./ And the chances are, then/

that you'll be in a slump" (Seuss, 1990, p. 18). Page nineteen continues "And when you're in a Slump,/ you're not in for much fun./ Un-slumping yourself/ is not easily done." (Seuss, 1990, p.19). Again considering Osborn's (1967) article, darkness represents fear and vulnerability. Furthermore, the use of the word "down" and "unpleasant" confirm the use of downward verticality in conjunction with darkness to symbolize dread.

Again considering the orientational metaphors offered by Seuss, I argue this page describes depression as a downward movement. Downward movement symbolizes sadness, sickness, and even death (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). This page has the potential to spark conversations about depression, what it looks like, how it feels, and the difficulties surrounding treatment. Young children may not be able to label depression easily, but labeling feelings of darkness and downward movement may be easier as these are prominent conventional metaphors used in society. Seuss's depiction of depression on this page displays how depression can be hard to handle, it can be dark, painful, and not fun. This page is one of the more powerful pages in the book because of the seriousness of the message that it is conveying. Parents could use pages like this to explain to children in more simplistic terms what depression might look or feel like for them. A child may not be able to label a complex emotion like depression easily. They may be more capable of labeling feelings of darkness or even feelings of downward movement. Even the word "slump" offers children an easier way to understand and explain their feelings. That way when the child feels like they are in a "slump" they can verbalize this and get help.

On pages twenty and twenty-one, Seuss actually uses the words light and dark conveying danger and uncertainty. Page twenty reads:

You will come to a place where the streets are not marked./ Some windows are lighted.

But mostly they're darked./ A place you could sprain both your elbow and chin!/ Do you

dare to stay out? Do you dare to go in?/ How much can you lose? How much can you win? (Seuss, 1990, p. 20)

The use of the word dark in tandem with elements of danger like physical harm conveys uncertainty to the reader. Seuss asks four questions that enhance the effectiveness of the darkness metaphor being used to emulate precariousness. When I read the series of questions provided by Seuss I get a sense of uncertainty. This page offers the idea that in dangerous situations, you must carefully evaluate the circumstances. Seuss provides the reader with the opportunity to take a valuable life lesson without having to actually encounter a dangerous and uncertain situation. This lesson and the emotional message is conveyed primarily through the conventional metaphor of darkness.

Pages twenty and twenty-one offer the opportunity for parents to communicate about dangerous situations. These pages convey a sense of self-determination to the reader. When Seuss discusses the contemplation of going in or staying out, he displays a choice that the reader must make when faced with danger. This page can communicate how to identify danger based on light and dark metaphors, and what to do when faced with choices that could lead you to a dangerous place. The element of confusion and uncertainty that this page displays can help parents communicate about different emotions that can contribute to mental health. These pages encourage the reader to assess the risk of any situation and make sure it is the right decision for them. Being able to identify complex emotions like fear and uncertainty can contribute to the betterment of an individual's mental health. Parents can use these examples, to help their children label complex emotions and cope with them better.

Another example of darkness used to symbolize unpleasant emotions can be seen on page thirty-four and thirty-five. Visually, page thirty-four and thirty-five are similar to the pages on

depression. These pages are dark blue, dark yellow, black, and purple. There are three leafless trees, four circular shapes with green glaring eyes, and a black ominous archway. The boy is standing under the arch on page thirty-five in between these green-eyed monsters that are much larger than he is. The juxtaposition of the darker scene with this lavender purple colored road insinuates to the reader it is not the path that is scary, but the surroundings that are scary. Readers may also gather that there are certain times in life where you will be scared, but persistence is key. There are underlying implications of danger as darkness which communicate clearly what danger may feel like making it a powerful message parents can convey through Seuss's illustrations on this page.

Page thirty-four says "All Alone!/ Whether you like it or not,/ Alone will be something you'll be quite a lot." (Seuss, 1990, p.34). Page thirty-five continues:

And when you're alone, there's a very good chance/
you'll meet things that scare you
right out of your pants./ There are some, down the road between hither and yon,/ that
will scare you so much you won't want to go on. (Seuss, 1990, p. 35).

This page conveys possible themes of loneliness and fear. Again coinciding with Osborn's (1967) claims that darkness is associated with downward momentum. Osborn's (1967) argument sheds light on the conventional metaphors associated with lightness and darkness. All of the examples identified of light and dark metaphors used in *Oh, the Places You'll Go!* symbolize a greater pattern of emotional communication. As mentioned before each one of the examples represents a complex emotion like success, depression, fear, or loneliness. Seuss does use words to describe these emotions but based on Osborn's (1967) analysis of lightness and darkness it can be interpreted through Seuss's use of color. Osborn explains that using a contrast of light and

dark simplifies the message for the audience. This is a strong point of affirmation of why this book could be used to talk about complex emotions to a younger audience.

Page thirty-four and thirty-five allow for parents to communicate about loneliness. In one study they found that there was a correlation between loneliness and depression (Hagerty, 1999). Building off the pages on depression, these pages offer the potential to communicate how feelings of loneliness can contribute to a sense of helplessness and not wanting to go on. Interconnecting visual themes of darkness on pages about depression and loneliness offer a way to unpack complex emotions. Parents can show the page on depression and explain how it is similar to loneliness by the visual metaphors that are offered by Seuss using darkness.

Darkness and lightness are not the only conventional metaphors in *Oh the Places You'll Go!* There are also plenty of other conventional metaphors used throughout the book. Conduit metaphors are one type of conventional metaphor that can be seen throughout the book. An example can be seen on page two when Seuss (1990) says "You're on your own. And you know what you know." (p.2). I argue this is a conduit metaphor because it is relating the concept of retrieving and using one's own knowledge. Seuss positions knowledge as a possession the reader can have. There are many possible implications of this conduit metaphor, such as conveying to young readers that knowledge is powerful, or even that they can only trust what they have learned for themselves. Either way parents can use sentences like this one to declare the importance of knowledge and education in life.

Another example of conventional metaphors can be seen when Seuss (1990) says "Today is your day." And "You're off to Great Places!" (p. 1). Because the day cannot literally be in your possession and you cannot literally be going to "Great Places", both being compared to real-life attributes, I consider these metaphors. Furthermore, both of these conventional

metaphors are physical metaphors because they are relating an idea to an actual place. When Seuss (1990) says “Today is your day”, he is likening the day to an object one can obtain. I argue “Great Places” is actually a metaphor for opportunity. One of the more prominent conventional metaphors in *Oh the Places You’ll Go!* is “Great Places”. I interpret “Great Places” as the vehicle to talk about the tenor, success. The term “Great Places” is used twice in the book, on the first page, and the last page. There is significance in these words being one of the first things read and one of the last things read. By introducing and ending the book with these metaphors it offers the opportunity for parents to convey the message that no matter what issues their child encounters they will go to “Great Places” and every day is a new opportunity. Regardless of what happens in the middle second of the book, the character started at “Great Places” and is going to “Great Places” communicating messages of optimism to the young audience.

One last metaphor I would like to touch on is on page forty. This page reads:

You’ll get mixed up, of course,/ as you already know./ You’ll get mixed up/ with many
strange birds as you go./ So be sure when you step./ Step with care and great tact/ and
remember that Life’s a Great Balancing Act./ Just never forget to be dexterous and deft./
and *never* mix up your right foot with your left. (Seuss, 1990, p. 40)

This page has one of the most important metaphors of the book. That is that life is a “great balancing act”. This metaphor epitomizes a common theme of the book seen both in the words and illustrations, and that is that there are ups and downs in life. The light and dark illustrations and up and down language add to the unbalanced theme of the book. When Seuss says life is a balancing act, he is not saying that you will actually have to balance, but that there will be good and bad things that happen in life. It is all about how you handle it. When Seuss advises the

reader to step with care and tact, I argue that he is not talking about actual steps. I argue these steps are metaphors for the choices that we make in life.

Considering the unbalanced nature of the book and how Seuss bounces back and forth between good and bad emotions, I believe that these messages also add to the overall message that life is a “great balancing act”. Lake (1984) discusses the value of ascent and descent metaphors and how they pertain to the “recurrent rhythm of life” (p. 426). The ascent and descent metaphors are similar to Osborn’s (1967) use of lightness or darkness metaphors. Lake (1984) however, relates ascent and descent to moral and life. Taking Lake’s (1984) understanding of ascent and descent metaphors I argue that Seuss’s back and forth movement between emotions signifies the larger message of life and its topsy-turvy nature. Seuss bounces back and forth between ascent and descent metaphors such as up and down, lightness and darkness, and happiness and depression to signify the overall message that life is a “great balancing act”.

Parents can use this page as a way to communicate and make sense of the previous pages on emotion. This page places the previous pages into a broader context of life. Parents can use this page to communicate about and normalize complex emotions as a way to educate the turbulent nature of mental health and emotion. This page offers the opportunity for parents to communicate the importance of balance. This could spark conversations about what it means to be unbalanced and how that can impede an individual’s mental health. Conversations about what it means to get mixed up might also arise generating insight on mistake-making in life. It also normalizes imperfection by suggesting that mix-ups happen.

Building off the words from page thirty-four, page thirty-five depicts the yellow clothed character in the top right-hand corner. There are rows of blue birds walking in opposite

directions against a black background. Considering how the color yellow is a neutral color and the words that life is a “Great Balancing Act”, I argue Seuss’s use of the color yellow parallels the balance discussed on page thirty-four. The visual comparison of the yellow clothed character to the blue birds suggests that he is unique and different from the sea of sameness depicted on page thirty-five. This could initiate conversations about what it means to be different from others around you. Parents can use this page to demonstrate the value of uniqueness and the possible detriment of getting mixed up with the “strange birds” depicted.

All of the examples I have provided in the metaphor analysis section have been conventional metaphors. This means that they are not often spoken about as metaphors because they are not easily recognized. These metaphors are powerful because of their ability to blend into our everyday language without much recognition. I postulate that the metaphors present in Seuss’s language, themes, and illustrations enhance the messages about emotion. These metaphors offer a way for parents to communicate about complex emotions more subtly since Seuss does not outwardly say words like “depression”, “fear”, or “success”. Conveying these powerful metaphors in a more subtle understandable way allows for parents to talk openly and realistically about mental health messages. The effectiveness of the metaphors is enhanced by Seuss’s use of the second persona.

Second persona

To build off my metaphor criticism I will use the second persona. Black (1970) proposes the concept of the second persona. The second persona is a rhetorical strategy that suggests the author of the publication is writing to a second person who they intend to judge and interpret their work (Black, 1970, p. 111). Black (1970) describes the second persona in terms of the “implied auditor” (p. 111). An implied auditor can be thought about as the audience that the

speaker is imagining, or a possible audience the speaker wishes to address (Black, 1970).

Children can be seen as Seuss's implied auditors as the book is intended for a younger audience as a children's book. Using the second persona to have an implied auditor is a rhetorical skill that generates a wide audience. There are many instances in *Oh the Places You'll Go!* where I argue there is an implied auditor.

Another article writes about the second persona and how an author can use a fictional character to personify elements of the audience so that they can relate more to the story (Leff & Utley, 2004). Leff and Utley (2004) describe the strategy behind using a story to allow for "eavesdroppers" to identify with elements of the main character. Eavesdroppers are individuals who are listening in to the conversation even though they are not directly addressed (Leff & Utley, 2004). Leff and Utley's concept of "eavesdroppers" allows for the proposition that parents are co-listening to the messages in *Oh the Places You'll Go!*. The ambiguity of a character and the relation to an audience is a rhetorical strategy that connects the self with the message (Leff & Utley, 2004). The article by Leff and Utley (2004) makes a strong argument for the strategic utility of the second persona to appeal to a diverse audience. They argue that Martin Luther King Jr. uses the second persona as a rhetorical strategy in his speech to allow anyone "eavesdropping" into the conversation to be able to envision that he is talking directly to them. Seuss (1990) uses a similar strategy in *Oh the Places You'll Go!* so this article acts as a powerful addition to my argument. By looking at the instances where *Oh the Places You'll Go!* uses both the second persona and metaphor I proclaim that this book is a powerful tool that parents can use to discuss mental health.

Second persona analysis

Another dominant theme that can be seen used strategically throughout the book is the “second persona” (Black, 1970). Seuss’s (1990) intended audience is vast, as the book jacket argues, the book is intended for anyone “embarking on the Great Balancing Act that is life” (Seuss, 1990). I argue that Seuss(1990) uses the words “You’ll” and “You’re” to call upon the book’s character while actually intending the words to be for the reader. There are a variety of examples of the second persona being using in the book, I have chosen a few of the prominent ones to analyze.

The second persona can be seen on the first page which begins by exclaiming “Congratulations!/ Today is your day./ You’re off to Great Places!/ You’re off and away!” (Seuss, 1990, p.1) inviting the reader on a journey of opportunity. There is a little boy who is dressed in yellow from head to toe, smiling as he appears to be in starting to walk somewhere. Seuss’s use of the word “your” and “you’re” are clear examples of the second persona. I argue these as examples of the second person because his words are seemingly directed toward the yellow clothed character yet allow for the eavesdropping reader to read these as if Seuss was speaking directly to them. Seuss never explains who the “you” is in “You’re”, allowing for interpretation of an implied auditor. Seuss’s use of the words “your” and “You’re” could have easily been “his” and “He is” I argue that this choice invites a completely different interpretation of the book. Using “your” and “You’re” allows the audience to develop a deeper connection to the words. I am not reading the story of a boy; I am reading the repetitive words of “your” and “You’re” which is much more relatable.

The presence of the yellow clothed character makes it appear that Seuss is talking to this character, but the message is being directed toward a much larger audience. By using the second persona to analyze this page the meaning of the words is enhanced. The use of the second

persona on page one allows for the parents to read the book that conveys powerful mental health metaphors as their child, the eavesdropper, listens to it. It also offers the ability to spark conversations about similar emotions that the yellow clothed character and the child are experiencing. Even if the child is not actively experiencing the emotion being depicted the second persona allows for the child to envision themselves going through this emotional journey.

The second page goes on by saying:

You have brains in your head./ You have feet in your shoes./ You can steer yourself any direction you choose./ You're on your own. And you know what you know./ And YOU are the guy who'll decide where to go (Seuss, 1990, p.2).

Seuss capitalizes the word "YOU" in the last sentence calling for the reader to apply these following lessons to themselves through the second persona. As previously mentioned this excerpt contains powerful metaphors. Considering how Seuss uses the second persona to imply an auditor, there is a sense of determinism and culpability presented on this page. You, the reader, are the one who is in control of where you end up going. The use of the second persona here offers parents a way to again communicate the message more clearly to their child. The word "You" here is much more relatable for young children and makes it easier for them to see themselves as the main character.

The twelfth page says, "You'll be on your way up!/ You'll be seeing great sights!/ You'll join the high fliers/ who soar to high heights." (Seuss, 1990, p. 12). When considering the fact that You'll is short for "You will", one can interpret that the book is telling the reader over and over "you will", almost as an affirmation. Seuss, through the second persona, is telling the listener that "you will". The repetition of the word "you'll" throughout the book, not only

exemplifies the second persona and encourages the reader. This offers parents the ability to communicate messages of empowerment to their children through the repetition of “you’ll”.

Seuss concludes the book in a similar way to the beginning. The forty-fourth and final page reads “So.../ be your name Buxbaum or Bixby or Bray/ or Mordecai Ali Van Aleen O’Shea,/ you’re off to Great Places!/ Today is your day!/ Your mountain is waiting./ So...get on your way!”(Seuss, 1990, p. 44). The use of these seemingly made-up names is to create ambiguity and allow the reader to envision that this is a dedication to them. The ambiguity in names could also communicate that one’s name does not matter in terms of reaching success. This is another example of the second persona in the book. Parents can use the ambiguity created by Seuss to communicate the premise that this book is made for everyone, including them.

Furthermore, the second persona is being used throughout the book when Seuss (1990) depicts the yellow clothed character. The character is strategically ambiguous and allows for the reader to imagine that Seuss is speaking directly to them. I argue that Seuss (1990) deliberately uses yellow as a gender-neutral color to allow for any reader to relate to the main character. The ambiguity created adds to the argument that Seuss is using the second persona. Seuss chose to make the character wear yellow clothes. There is power in this choice as it conveys gender neutrality. If Seuss had used a blue-clothed character instead this could have possibly restricted his audience or reduced the effectiveness for female readers who identify with the color pink, which are societally disciplined gender norms. The use of yellow communicates to the audience that you too could be this character going through the “Great Balancing Act” that is life. The yellow clothed character offers the reader a placeholder in which they can envision themselves going on the journey Seuss is describing.

The metaphors that are seen in the book are intertwined with the second persona. Part of the reason that these metaphors are so effective is because there is an implied auditor. In many of the examples of metaphor that I provide, there are also examples of the second persona being used by words like “you’ll”, “you’re”, “you”, and “your”. Using “you’ll” in conjunction with metaphors like the ones seen on the dark pages of depression allows for the reader to relate to the messages differently (Seuss, 1990, pp. 18-19). I argue that the second persona enhances the metaphors in the book and create a space of relatability for the reader.

Conclusion:

A strength of this approach is that it allows the reader to generate their own interpretation based on the language provided by Seuss (1990). By understanding how metaphors are used in everyday language, the reader can then understand the possible impact of Seuss’s (1990) words. Lakoff and Johnson’s (1980) assertion that it is through these metaphorical connections that we are able to relate to people, offers a strong basis on which I can build my argument off of. I only analyzed a few examples of metaphor and the second persona in this paper. There is ample room for future analysis of other metaphors in the book, as well as other applications of the second persona.

While a metaphor criticism allows for a broad understanding, it does not account for nuanced differences in audience members. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) describe the flaw of the metaphor criticism and its inability to account for cultural differences (p. 462). Seuss (1990) talks about the danger of the “Waiting Place” which is a very individualistic cultural idea (pp. 24-25). The “Waiting Place” emphasizes the importance of time which is a very individualistic cultural ideal (McGrath, 1991). Seuss’s discussion about how the “Waiting Place” causes you to waste time and is dangerous could be analyzed further using cultural norms. Using a metaphor

approach informed by the second persona misses the variety of interpretations that other cultures may provide that might be better informed by an ideological criticism that focuses more on dichotomies created in ideals.

Another issue is that by using the second persona, I risk generalizing the audience to a level that removes individual experience. For example, taking this approach will not account how males or females may view *Oh the Places You'll Go!* differently. The seemingly Caucasian yellow clothed character who is referred to as "guy" may not resonate the same way with female readers (Seuss, 1990, p. 2). This piece offers the opportunity for feminist critics to analyze these different perceptions closer in future research. The question becomes, who is Seuss's "implied auditor", and does this inherently exclude a certain group of people such as women or people of color. Another limitation of my approach is the inability to describe and highlight racial inequality. The main character is white, which could be analyzed for its rhetorical power. The fact that Seuss (1990) chooses not to depict a person of color who will embark on a journey of opportunity may have larger unrecognized implications. Despite the possibility of over-generalizing, metaphorically analyzing *Oh the Places You'll Go!* informed by the second persona is still beneficial to my overarching argument that parents should use the book as a communicative tool.

Future scholarship would benefit from looking at how culture, race, and gender are communicated about in children's books like *Oh the Places You'll Go!* Seuss's construction of the main character as a masculine white character suggests that the second persona and the implied auditor are meant to be a white males. Even if this is not what Seuss intended, the use of the yellow clothed character narrows the scope of the implied auditor by not accounting for other

racers or genders. It is interesting that this character has a skin color because in many of Seuss's books, Seuss depicts the main character as an animal, or non-human being.

Oh, the Places You'll Go! guides the reader through a variety of experiences that can be likened to emotions such as loneliness, excitement, uncertainty, fear, perseverance, bravery, depression, and ultimately success. There are dominant elements in the book such as opportunity, the words "You'll" and "You're", emotional undertones, and the yellow clothed character. Seuss uses metaphors that appeal to a younger audience while still being relatable to an older audience. The rhetorical analysis of this book illuminates the importance of children's literature, especially *Oh, the Places You'll Go!*, in educating children and preparing them for the array of emotions one may encounter on their journey to "Great Places" (Seuss, 1990).

For this paper, I analyzed *Oh, the Places You'll Go!* through metaphorical criticism informed by the second persona. Metaphors offer critical insight into the underlying meaning in *Oh, the Places You'll Go!*. One of the most prominent metaphors used was light and dark metaphors. I argue that one of the reasons that these metaphors were impactful was because of the appeal to the second persona. The second persona offers an explanation for Seuss's word choices and contextualizes the messages in *Oh, the Places You'll Go!*. Books with powerful messages in them like *Oh, the Places You'll Go!* serve as an opportunity for critical messages to be taught. Many of the messages in *Oh, the Places You'll Go!* provide a starting point for mental health conversations. Parents can use *Oh, the Places You'll Go!* as a communicative tool to begin paramount conversations about mental health by building off the interrelation of metaphors and the second persona provided by the book.

References:

- Black, E. (1970). The second persona. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 56(2), 109-119.
doi:10.1080/00335637009382992
- Caraway, K., & Caraway, B. R., (2020) Representing ecological crises in children's media: An analysis of the Lorax and wall-e, *Environmental Communication*, 14:5, 686-697, DOI: [10.1080/17524032.2019.1710226](https://doi.org/10.1080/17524032.2019.1710226)
- D'Addario, D., Nathan, G., & Rayman, N. (n.d.). The 100 best children's books of all time. Retrieved November 18, 2020, from <https://time.com/100-best-childrens-books/>
- Hagerty, B. (1999). The effects of sense of belonging, social support, conflict, and loneliness on depression. *Nursing Research*, 48(4).
- Lake, R. A. (1984). Order and disorder in anti-abortion rhetoric: A logological view. *The Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 70(4), 425–443. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00335638409383708>
- Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1980). Conceptual metaphor in everyday language. *The Journal of Philosophy*, 77(8), 453. doi:10.2307/2025464
- Leff, M. C., & Utley, E. A. (2004). Instrumental and constitutive rhetoric in Martin Luther King Jr.'s "letter from Birmingham jail". *Rhetoric & Public Affairs*, 7(1), 37-51.
doi:10.1353/rap.2004.0026
- McGrath, J. E. (1991). Time, interaction, and performance (TIP): A theory of groups. *Small Group Research*, 22, 147-174.
- Osborn, M. M., & Ehniger, D. (1962). The metaphor in public address. *Speech Monographs*, 29(3), 223–234. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03637756209375346>
- Richards, I. A. (1936). *The philosophy of rhetoric*. London: Oxford University Press.

Schrag, R. L. (1991). Narrative rationality and "first stories": Pedagogical implications for children's television. *Communication Education*, 40(4), 313–324.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/03634529109378857>

Seuss, T. S. (1990). *Oh, the places you'll go!* New York, NY: Random House.

VanderHaagen, S. C. (2018). A tale of two wheatleys: The biographical fiction of Shirley

Graham and Ann Rinaldi. *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, 43(3), 240–262.

<https://doi.org/10.1353/chq.2018.0033>