

The Grinch who saved Christmas

by

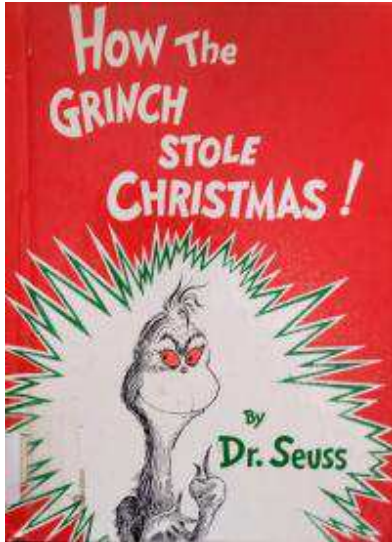
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Next to biblical nativity stories, *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* by Dr. Seuss is one of my favourite seasonal tales. We read it as a family every Christmas Eve.

While we typically view this vintage Dr. Seuss yarn as a reminder that there is more to Christmas than its trappings, it offers something unexpected too. It shares an example of restorative justice at work.

The story begins when the Grinch steals holiday embellishments from the Whos down in Whoville in an attempt to thwart Christmas. He soon learns that the Whos are undaunted by the loss of gifts, decorations and food. The Grinch waited to hear the boo-hoos of the Whos, but instead, he heard something unexpected.

...the sound wasn't sad!

Why, this sound sounded merry!

It couldn't be so!

But it WAS merry! VERY!...

With the Whos' surprising response, the Grinch experiences conversion and enlightenment. As the Whos stand together, holding each other's hands singing, the Grinch slowly realizes that Christmas is about more than stuff; it is about a community of people who are thankful for what they have and for each other.

His conversion or enlightenment illustrates the widely accepted moral of the story: Christmas “doesn’t come from a store” and “Maybe Christmas... perhaps... means a little bit more!”

But the story doesn’t end with that revelation. After his epiphany about the purpose of Christmas, the Grinch’s heart “grew three sizes that day.”

This growth is actually a change of heart that makes him appreciative and stirs his desire to alter the way he acts. As a result, he returns everything he had stolen. The story ends with the Whos sitting side-by-side with the Grinch carving roast beast for the merry Whoville feast.

As remarkable and miraculous as the Grinch’s repentance is, so too is the Whos’ response. They warmly accepted the change that takes place in him. They forgive him for his offenses and welcome him into their community. They even give him the honour of carving the roast beast. What a surprising and revolutionary response!

The response of the Whos to the Grinch, unfortunately, does not often get much attention. Yet without their response, the damaged relationship they have with the Grinch could not be restored.

As light-hearted as this Dr. Seuss tale may seem, the lesson is profound. The Grinch as an offender takes responsibility for his actions and, in his desire to repent, assumes a different way of being, living in an alternative way. Those who were harmed by the offender’s actions accept his repentance. In doing so, they restore the broken relationship between them. Relationships cannot heal or be restored without both of these components. Instead of depicting a retributive or punitive understanding of justice, Dr. Seuss teaches the logic of restorative justice.

This story, although fictitious, reminds us that the meaning of Christmas is indeed not found in stores, boxes, or bags. It also reminds us that communities who seek to live in right relationships must repent for wrongdoings as well as extend forgiveness and embrace those who actively seek restoration. This pursuit of reconciliation gives witness to *shalom* – the embodiment of peace and justice.

Merry Christmas, Mr. Grinch!

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