

Discussion Questions for 500 Hats of Bartholomew Cubbins

Dr. Seuss wrote only three non-rhyming books early in his career. These are longer, more didactic stories involving fantasy kingdoms. *The 500 Hats of Bartholomew Cubbins* is written in [prose](#) instead of [rhyming](#) and strictly [metered verse](#).

Although an early and atypical work, *500 Hats* includes many of Dr. Seuss' critical themes, including a rejection of absolute authority, the innocence of children, fantastic occurrences, and differing perspectives of the main characters.

The story overall expresses confidence that leaders—even non-elected leaders—will do the right thing.

In the first of Dr. Seuss's books about Bartholomew Cubbins, King Derwin, and the Kingdom of Didd, Bartholomew's hat mysteriously reproduces itself on top of his head, much to the king's displeasure.

The 1938 book, *The 500 Hats of Bartholomew Cubbins*, is not one of Dr. Seuss's controversial "message books"; however it does introduce some interesting themes of power and custom.

1. Why do the hats continue to appear on Bartholomew's head?
 2. Why do the last few hats become grander and grander?
 3. Why does the parade of hats finally stop at 500?
 4. What if the king did not have a rule that stated, that everyone must remove their hat before being punished?
 5. How does the story show that arbitrary rules can have conflicting purposes? (Obsolete rules often lead to unfair cruelty, yet the same arbitrary rules did save Bartholomew from the executioner's ax).
 6. Is there a need to look at rules to determine their validity in today's society?
 7. How do the story's themes of power, command, and obedience relate to historical figures and current leaders who hold power over others?
 8. Have you ever been subjected to rules or standards for decorum at school or at home that you questioned or against which you rebelled on the grounds that they "just don't make any sense"?
- What does the author want you to know about human nature?
 - According to the story, what human characteristics seem to be highly valued by the

author?

- Do any of the characters learn a lesson? Explain.
- Would this lesson help you in your life? Why or why not?
- The author's purpose is to... I know this because...
- You can tell from the story that the author thinks...
- What does the author mean when he says...?

ACTIVITIES:

1. Design and make your own hats.
2. Play "I Spy" using adjectives to describe someone's hat and they will take turns guessing.