



The Cricket in Times Square

By George Selden

Illustrated by Garth Williams

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Introduction

What makes a book last for fifty years? This is one of the topics we offer for discussion with your students. You'll know the answer to that question—as far as *The Cricket in Times Square* is concerned—by the time you've read the first chapter. This classic work of children's literature touches on universal themes of friendship, loyalty, honesty, and home; its fantasy is not tied to technology, but to imagination; the characters are as knowable today as they were when the book was first published and as they will be years from now; and the beautiful writing is timeless.

Whether you use the novel with your full class, with groups, or with individual students, we've provided this guide to offer ways of connecting to various curriculum areas and to meet language arts standards. You'll find literature, writing, reading comprehension, theater, music, art, science, and social studies activities. Most of all, you'll find a rich and lasting experience to share with your students.

This guide was prepared by Clifford Wohl, Educational Consultant



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Activities, Projects, Discussions

Language Arts – Figurative Language

Tucker is an observer. He loves to watch the people go by as they rush about the streets of New York City. Tucker is also a listener. George Selden tells us that he “heard almost all the sounds that can be heard.”

How well do your students listen? Have them sit still and listen intently. Then they should make a list of all of the different sounds they heard and identify where each sound came from.

Discuss with your class ways to describe sound. Introduce them to alliteration and onomatopoeia. For each of the sounds on their lists, they should come up with words and phrases that communicate what they heard. Then they should illustrate the sounds they heard.

Here are some examples of onomatopoeia and alliteration:

Onomatopoeia:

Traffic: car brakes “*screechhhh . . .*,” horns “*hhhonk . . .*,” sirens “*whiiine*”

Alliteration:

Weather: the wind whistles, the sun scorches, tornadoes twist

Language Arts – Music Vocabulary

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“It [Chester’s noise] was like a quick stroke across the strings of a violin, or like a harp that has been plucked suddenly.”

From the very beginning, musical imagery is very important in *The Cricket in Times Square*. As your students read the book, have them keep a list of the musical words and terms they come across. Include the words and terms they find on your classroom word wall.



Teachers' Guide

Science

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Mario tries to impress his mother with the usefulness of the cricket by telling her that you can tell the temperature by listening to a cricket's chirp by using this formula:

$$(\text{chirps/minute} \div 4) + 40$$

Mama is not impressed and says, "Bugs carry germs. He [the cricket] doesn't come into the house."

Mama is right. Bugs can carry germs, but do all bugs carry germs? Do crickets?

Your students should do research to find out the answers to these questions and to learn more about crickets. Helpful Web sites include:

<http://www.insecta-inspecta.com/crickets/field/index.html>

<http://insected.arizona.edu/cricketinfo.htm>

Language Arts – Literature: Theme

Friendship, loyalty, honesty, family, respect for elders, freedom, and home are themes that can be found in *The Cricket in Times Square*. Have your students explore these themes in writing, interviews, and group discussions. Here are some specific ideas to get you started:

Friendship

Ask each student to select one question from column A and one from column B to complete in a mini three-sentence essay:

Column A

Column B

The best thing a friend ever did for me was ____ The worst thing a friend ever did to me was ____

The best thing I ever did for a friend was ____ The worst thing I ever did to a friend was ____

Home

While Chester is enjoying his time in New York City, he yearns to return to his home in Connecticut. For Tucker and Harry, home is not just a drainpipe in the Time Square subway station, but all of the streets of New York City. All of us have our own concept of home. Have students conduct interviews about what home means. They can interview a relative, a teacher, a student from another class, or one of the characters from *The Cricket in Times Square*. They should report on their findings and compile a class list identifying the most often mentioned characteristics of what home means.



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Freedom

Mario felt good when he bought the cricket cage for Chester, but Chester felt as if he was in jail. When Harry opened the cage for him, he jumped out proclaiming, "It's a relief to be free. There's nothing like freedom." We rarely consider how a pet or an animal in the zoo feels about confinement. Conduct a group discussion on the subject of putting animals in cages. What are the pros and what are the cons?

Language Arts – Literature: Character

The three friends have unique characteristics. Have your students make a chart of them. The chart should include those traits that are particular to each type of animal and those traits that are out of the ordinary. An example of an unusual characteristic is that the animals can understand the humans' spoken language. See the sample chart below.

Animal Characters in *The Cricket in Times Square*

Name	Type of animal	Animal Traits	Unusual Traits
Tucker	Mouse	Scavenger	Likes stories
Harry			
Chester			



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Theater

Many of the scenes in *The Cricket in Times Square* are so vivid it seems as if they are being acted out right in front of you. This makes "Readers Theater" a perfect activity for your class. Pick chapters from the book that have lots of dialogue. Try Chapter 8, "Tucker's Life Savings," or Chapter 10, "The Dinner Party." Rewrite the chapter into play form, with stage directions and character speaking parts. Different groups of students can take turns acting out the scenes. They can even make scenery. Be sure to remind them they are acting as a mouse, a cat, or a cricket, and they should adjust their voices and mannerisms accordingly.

Social Studies

As your students read *The Cricket in Times Square* they will notice that life in America was quite different fifty years ago. For example, Mario is allowed to ride the New York City subway all by himself. Can your students imagine that their parents would permit them to do that? Have your students find other examples of how things are different now. Why are they different? Are kids less responsible now? Is it more dangerous now? Do people have different values? What about technology: How has it made the world safer or more dangerous?

Music Appreciation

Chester's musical repertoire includes operatic arias, concertos, popular music, hymns, marches, and folk music. The Bellinis enjoy it all. Use the music scenes to introduce the music that is mentioned in *The Cricket in Times Square* to your students. Play some of it in the classroom. Have the children close their eyes, the way Papa Bellini does, while they listen. What do your students imagine while listening? They can respond to the music by drawing, painting, or writing.

If you do not have musical recordings, check what's available online. To help you along, below are links to three of the songs that Chester plays:

- "The Grand March" from *Aida*
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bNEu09pVD8E>
- "Come Back to Sorrento"
http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x42clo_meat-loaf-come-back-to-sorrento_music
- "Stars and Stripes Forever"



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<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n9ePaETGQZO>

Art

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Tucker tells Harry and Chester, "New York is a place where the people are willing to pay for talent." As Chester's manager, it is Tucker's job to promote Chester's performances. What better way to do this than with billboard advertising right in Times Square subway station? Have your students design posters for Chester's next recital at the Bellini's newsstand.

Language Arts – Reading Comprehension

The Cricket in Times Square Quiz Show

The Cricket in Times Square Quiz Show is a great way to test your students' knowledge of the book and have fun at the same time. We have provided sixteen questions to start, arranged in order of difficulty. You can change the order, edit the questions, or add your own questions to suit your students' needs.

Answers to the questions are included, but use your judgment to decide whether a question is answered correctly. We suggest giving the students thirty seconds to write down their answers, but you might want to tailor the timing.

You'll need a supply of 4 x 6 index cards for each student and a timer. Have them stand at their desks ready to write their answers on the cards.

Read a question and give the students the allotted time to write down an answer. When time is called, the children hold up their cards with their responses. Check the cards. Children with correct answers remain standing. Children with incorrect answers sit down and are out of the quiz. (Be sure to collect unused cards for further use.) Continue with the quiz until there is only one student standing. He/she is the winner.

Quiz Show questions:

1. In what New York City subway station does Tucker live?
2. How did Chester end up in New York City?
3. Why didn't Mama Bellini want Mario to keep a cricket as a pet?



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4. In what country were Mario's parents born?
5. Why didn't Chester want to blame the missing two-dollar bill on the janitor or a stranger?
6. What is Chester's special talent?
7. What kind of leaf is Chester fond of eating?
8. How did the fire in the newsstand start?
 - A. Mario was playing with matches.
 - B. Harry lit a fire to keep warm.
 - C. Tucker knocked over a box of matches.
9. In what season does the novel take place?
10. Why did Mama Bellini insist that Mario work to pay back the missing two dollars?
 - A. He's the one who spent the money.
 - B. His pet ate the money.
 - C. He's the one who lost the money.
11. Where did Mario go to buy a cricket cage?
12. How did Tucker come to Mario's rescue?
13. What magazine did Mr. Smedley buy at the newsstand every month?
14. Who put out the fire in the newsstand? How did he know there was a fire?
15. What kind of music does Papa Bellini like to listen to?
16. What song is Mama's Bellini's favorite?



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ANSWERS:

1. Times Square subway station
2. He was trapped in a picnic basket that ended up on a train to Grand Central Station.
3. She thought bugs carry germs.
4. Italy
5. Chester was honest and felt he should take responsibility.
6. Chester can chirp beautiful music.
7. Mulberry leaves
8. Summer
9. C. Tucker knocked over a box of matches.
10. B. His pet ate the money.
11. Chinatown
12. Tucker used his life savings to help pay back the missing money.
13. Musical America
14. Paul the conductor. He smelled smoke and heard the alarm that Chester made.
15. Italian opera
16. "Come Back to Sorrento"

Language Arts – Literature Appreciation

In 1960, *Advise and Consent* by Allen Drury and *Hawaii* by James A. Michener were the top-selling books; *Psycho* and *Spartacus* were box-office favorites; westerns ruled the television airways with *Gunsmoke*, *Wagon Train*, and *Have Gun – Will Travel*; *The Flintstones* premiered on television; the Everly Brothers' "Cathy's Clown" was playing on the radio; Elvis was discharged from the Army; JFK was elected President of the United States; and *The Cricket in Times Square* was published. Fifty years later, *The Cricket in Times Square* is still a favorite with young readers. What makes this book a classic? Many of your students' parents have read this book when they were children. Have your students talk about it with their parents? Then open up a class discussion about why they think this book has such lasting powers.



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