



The Cricket in Times Square

George Selden , Garth Williams (Illustrator)

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Tucker is a streetwise city mouse. He thought he'd seen it all. But he's never met a cricket before, which really isn't surprising, because, along with his friend Harry Cat, Tucker lives in the very heart of New York City—the Times Square subway station. Chester Cricket never intended to leave his Connecticut meadow. He'd be there still if he hadn't followed the entrancing aroma of liverwurst right into someone's picnic basket. Now, like any tourist in the city, he wants to look around. And he could not have found two better guides—and friends—than Tucker and Harry. The trio have many adventures—from taking in the sights and sounds of Broadway to escaping a smoky fire.

Chester makes a third friend, too. It is a boy, Mario, who rescues Chester from a dusty corner of the subway station and brings him to live in the safety of his parents' newsstand. He hopes at first to keep Chester as a pet, but Mario soon understands that the cricket is more than that. Because Chester has a hidden talent and no one—not even Chester himself—realizes that the little country cricket may just be able to teach even the toughest New Yorkers a thing or two.

The Cricket in Times Square is a 1961 Newbery Honor Book.

The Cricket in Times Square Details

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From Reader Review The Cricket in Times Square for online ebook

Heather Taake says

This is definitely meant for a younger reader, maybe 2-4th grades, but I thought it was such a cute, sweet story of friendship. Reminds me of Charlotte's Web and Stuart Little.

Dominick says

It would seem churlish to give this book two stars, but three seems generous. It's a pleasant enough diversion, I suppose, apart from its plausibility problems: Chester Cricket ends up travelling from Connecticut to Times Square in a picnic basket, gets claimed by a kid whose folks run a newsstand in the train station, and befriends a mouse who's a bit of a hustler (Tucker, the closest thing to an interesting character in the book) and a quiet, feral (in name only; he acts anything but feral) cat named Harry. If you can buy that a bug, a mouse, and a cat all are fast friends, you might like this book better than I did. I didn't dislike it, but its plot is superficial at best, its characters are more or less flat, and it uses some rather unfortunate racial stereotypes (even for 1960). The illustrations by Garth Williams were why I bought this in the first place and remain the book's chief distinguishing feature. Kids will probably enjoy it, but it's not one of those kids' books that stands up to adult scrutiny, I think. (And I say that as someone who even at 50 would list several kids' books as among his favourites.) It does touch, very gently, on the edges of some serious subjects, notably exploitation, but it lacks the depth and sophistication of the best children's literature. And given that the lifespan of a cricket is mere months--they die in the fall--the book's pretend happy ending of Chester going back to the Connecticut countryside seems disingenuous at best. The book doesn't even hint at this being allegorical of death. Give me *Charlotte's Web* any day--also illustrated by Garth Williams, by the way.

Pamela says

Charming, sweet, and endearing . . . a timeless juvenile classic celebrating friendship, and learning to embrace challenges by working together to rise above adversity - but yet staying true to one's roots.

Jen says

This book was dated, written in the 50s I believe, so the old Chinese man in Chinatown spoke with an "l" in lieu of "r"s ("velly" instead of "very", etc.). That was a bit on the not-so-good side and brought this book down a star, but the rest of the book was really quite sweet. There was one scene where I was actually tearing up, but mostly because I was imagining that scene actually happening, that people would all unite in silence and peace at the same moment, and be as one. It was really moving.

Cute book, that I could have sworn I read as a child, but remembered very little of it. There is another book with Chester, "Chester Cricket's New Home", that I could also swear I read as a child. The book cover is familiar at least, but the snippet of it in the back of this book wasn't familiar at all. (sigh) My brain is an

Etch-a-Sketch. Once good shake and whatever was in there is gone!

I would recommend this book, with the caveat of the less than PC writing of the old Chinese man. Not necessarily a deal-breaker, but best to know it's there going in. Four solid stars.

ABC says

I loved this book when I was a kid. It's a good book to read right now (early September) because it ends in September. (According to the book, crickets chirp most in late summer. This book spans from the beginning of summer to September.) It is also a good book to read if you are planning a trip to New York City, or even Connecticut (Chester's original home.)

The Chinese man's accent is just awful and I cleaned it up when I read this book aloud to my son, but basically it has a good depiction of Chinese people (and people in general) in this book. Everyone is so kind to Chester!

Lizzie says

Really glad to give this a reread. I read it in grade school, far away from NYC, long before I thought of living here. (Tangentially, I bought this copy at Half Price Books near Iowa City.) I know that absolutely none of the details of New York came through for me then, because they were entirely outside my frame of reference, so I was really curious about them now.

Well, 4 stars for the New Yorkiness! It really does a great job, and feels really *accurate*. A lot of the environment is completely recognizable, like the area in the Times Square subway station where Mario's family's newsstand is -- on the pedestrian level where the shuttle train is. And just as many things in the environment feel true but are long gone, like the same area of the station being filled with lunch counters (Nedick's is named) and "soda jerks". There's a fantastic illustration on p.33 of the scene where Harry the cat and Tucker the mouse (BFFs) bring Chester the cricket outside to see 42nd Street, and you can tell that that's accurate too. Ladies in hats and dresses, a big Chevrolet sign atop the crossroads, and the Hotel Astor, which I'd never even heard of, but there you go. (Sidebar for you other City History Clubbers, more exterior pictures from 1904-1967, and a super Time Magazine story not really about the hotel but whatever.)

The story itself of Chester and his music is nice. It's cute when you have animal characters that know all about humans and understand what they say, but of course we humans can't do the same. It wasn't an extraordinarily gripping story, but Chester is sweet. But my favorite parts were when he and Mario played games or went somewhere together, so more about their friendship would've probably helped me care more about the outcome of the plot. Mario's family is pretty nice, and I like that they're immigrants. (Acceptably white, European immigrants, but all the same.)

Because, I have to deduct major points for the entirely unfortunate Chinatown plotline, in which Mario learns that crickets are "sacred" in China and so finds a Chinese person who of course knows everything about crickets -- um, "clickets" -- and wants to give an unlimited number of free things to a random child, and acts like a crazy person a lot. The mispronunciation of Sai Fong's "accent" is just so overboard and not at all how a Chinese person has ever sounded. And at one point, speaking Chinese is described as sounding

"like the cheerful clicking of hundreds of chopsticks." It... what? No. It did not. Sadly, cutesy racism dates this story in a much less nostalgic way.

Harry the cat is totally the breakout character for me here, anyway. He knows everything about New York and goes everywhere through tunnels and pipes and under parked cars. He can get you to your train in Grand Central or take in an opera at the Met. I confess to being 100% interested in the sequel and the prequel about him. Thumbs up.

Jewell says

All of us writers have so much to learn from this book. If you are not a writer, skip this paragraph. If you are, or aspire to be, a writer, try this exercise: 1. Type out the first few paragraphs of *A Cricket in Times Square* as you read them. Feel the music in your fingers. Feel the light quickness of the sentences. 2. Turn to the end of the book (if you have read it before!), and type out the last few paragraphs. Take a moment to feel it again. You have just felt in your own fingers a little bit of magic.

I tried this exercise myself. As an author who previously wrote for adults, I had to learn how to capture the special voice-on-the-wind style that speaks so well for children. There is no better teacher than George Selden.

A cat, a mouse, and a cricket. All of them living in a nook at a newspaper stand in Times Square. This book speaks to us on so many levels. Cricket speaks to the child in us, the child that finds the most delight in the little things. (Read this book to a second grader—any second grader—and you'll see!) Cricket also speaks to the forests and rivers and natural wonders that we carry inside us no matter where we are. Even on the platform of one of the busiest subway stations in the world. Yet the book also speaks to we lovers of cities, with its great mix of cultures (a cat, a mouse, a cricket, all friends? Only in New York.) At last, the book has a lot to say about music. If a child you know is interested in music, give this book to them, and I guarantee a raise of spirits! Indeed, Selden writes so well, that if you listen, you can nearly hear the songs.

C.P. Cabaniss says

I remember reading this as a child and really enjoying it. When I saw the audio on overdrive, I decided that I wanted to revisit the story. And while I wasn't as enchanted by it as I remember my younger self being, it was still an enjoyable story.

Chester Cricket ends up in the Times Square subway station after being carried from his home in Connecticut. Here he meets Tucker Mouse and Harry Cat. The three become fast friends and adventures take place. They can also be quite humorous, particularly Tucker, who is obsessed with saving for his old age.

I can see why I would have enjoyed this so much when I was younger. It has interesting characters and moves at an excellent pace. It's not at all believable to my adult eyes, but it would have been a nice fantasy for my little girl self.

Overall I'm glad I gave this one a listen. It was nice to revisit a story that I had loved and to still be able to

appreciate it. The audio was enjoyable and well done. Harry was my favorite.

Christopher Bunn says

My wife and I are currently reading this book out loud to our little rascally offspring. When we started, I had a dim memory of the book from when I first read it as a child, ages ago. Selden's style and story stand both the test of time and the test of multi-generational readability.

Cricket is a delightful book, written with a gentle touch that shows both affection for the characters and readers. The characters, Chester the cricket, Tucker the mouse, Mario the little Italian news stand boy, etc., are wonderfully constructed with a sharp ear for dialogue.

Selden wrote a series of books about these same characters, continuing on with the trio of cricket, cat, and mouse friends. I'll proceed reading the next volumes as my villainous children are just as pleased with this story as I am.

By the way, Garth Williams is probably one of the best children's book illustrators in the last century. Though radically different in style, I'd put him in the same class as N. C. Wyeth (stateliness) and Quentin Blake (lovable goofiness). His illustrations in Cricket are a perfect compliment to the story.

As we're winding down into the last chapters, I'm perplexed and saddened that this sort of story is such a rare find these days. I don't mean stories about crickets and mice and all that. I mean stories for children that are so gently written and done with such a superb hand. We need more George Seldens.

Lata says

3.5 stars. Would have been higher but for the kind of painful portrayal of two Chinese gentleman and of Mario's mother; they felt rather like stereotypes.

This was one of my favourite stories as a kid. I read this and "Tucker's Countryside" several times over. The characters are gentle and kind, even somewhat greedy Tucker mouse. Harry cat remains sleek and cool on this reread, which doesn't surprise me as that's what cats are.

Mark says

A lot to like (loved the scenes that depicted NYC in all its glory), but several instances where characters' actions rang a sour note. They acted one way for chapter upon chapter then said or did something that rang completely untrue. Took you out of the story. In a way, it felt almost like a talented self-published author's first publication. There was a lot to like but it was marred by several glaring mistakes that should have been instantly recognizable.

Jessica says

I remember my third grade teacher reading this book aloud to us every day after lunch, and I remember really enjoying it, but I could barely remember the main characters when I recently picked it up again! I fell in love with it while reading it this time, it's such a charming story. I love this kind of children's book - a self-contained book with appealing characters you root for, amusing escapades, a unique and distinct setting that you grow to know and understand, and an overarching plot that keeps you hooked. This plot keeps the stories tied together, but the escapades are as intriguing and could be just as easily read on their own. In the vein of "Stuart Little," "The Wind in the Willows," "Ellen Tebbits," or the Ramona series.

Shiloah says

Very cute!

Cfkotula says

A truly delightful and heartwarming little tale for all ages. It touches upon themes of homesickness, prejudice, fame and friendship between Chester Cricket and his human and animal friends. The perfect story to read on the plane coming home from a New York City vacation!

N.N. Light says

This was one of my favorites growing up and I recently re-read it. Guess what? It's even better than I remember. A great adventure with engaging characters.

My Rating: 5 stars
