The Cricket in Times Square
By George Selden

TEACHERS GUIDE

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Chester, a cricket from Connecticut, takes a ride in a picnic basket and winds up in a Times Square subway station. Mario Bellini discovers him beneath the papers in his father's newsstand, and pleads with his parents to let him adopt the bedraggled creature. Mario places his cricket in a matchbox lined with tissue and keeps him on a shelf among the magazines and newspapers. One lonely night, Chester encounters unlikely pals, Harry Cat and Tucker Mouse, who make their home in a nearby drainpipe. Together the three friends embark on an adventure that capitalizes on Chester's musical ability and helps turn the Bellini's unsuccessful newsstand into an overnight success.

TEACHING IDEAS

Suggested Classroom Activities

The Cricket in Times Square entertains and provokes thought about the true meaning of friendship; the book is ideal for classroom read-aloud or a novel study. Along with the theme of friendship, the author explores important issues such as loyalty, family, and dealing with fame and fortune. Teachers who are interested in using the book as an interdisciplinary novel study will find connections to the language arts, social studies, science, art, music, and drama curriculum.

Pre-Reading Activity

Students who are unfamiliar with New York City will need an introduction to the city and the concept of subways. Find a map of Manhattan and display it for study. Point out Times Square and Chinatown as significant locations in the setting of the book. Have students go to the library to locate books on New York City that have pictures of the subway, Times Square, and Chinatown. You can also try the Internet to find out more information. To find a map of New York City click here. Display your findings in the classroom for quick reference.

Thematic Connections

Friendship
Ask students to define friendship. Everyone looks for different things in friends, but there are some universal characteristics of true friendship. Have the class list these qualities on a chart. How do Chester, Tucker, and Harry demonstrate their friendship? What is strange about Tucker and Harry's friendship? How does Sai Fong befriend Mario?

Loyalty
Loyalty is one quality of a good friend. How is Mario loyal to Chester? Describe Chester, Tucker, and Harry's loyalty to one another. Ask students to discuss how Mario's loyalty to Chester allows him to let Chester return to Connecticut.

Family and Relationships
The Bellinis make their living by operating a newsstand. How is it truly a family business? Ask students to discuss how the author describes Mr. Bellini, Mrs. Bellini, and Mario. Divide the class into small groups and ask each group to find five adjectives that might best describe each member of the Bellini family.
Dealing with Fame and Fortune
Chester's ability to make music brings him much fame and the Bellinis some fortune. Ask students to list the pros and cons of Chester's growing fame. There are those who try to use another person's fame to their benefit. Have students make a list of every character in the book. Then ask them to discuss how each person or animal uses Chester's fame. Divide the class into small groups and instruct them to devise a plan that would allow Chester to live a less famous life and remain in New York with his friends.

Interdisciplinary Connections

Language Arts
Read aloud or tell the fable The Town Mouse and the Country Mouse. Ask students to compare and contrast the fable with The Cricket in Times Square.

Invite students to research the mythical character Orpheus. Discuss why George Selden titled Chapter 14 "Orpheus."

Social Studies
Mario goes to Chinatown to buy a cricket box for Chester. There is a picture of Mr. Fong's shop in Chinatown on page 47. Ask students to research the many things that Mr. Fong might sell in his shop. What is the significance of a cricket box in Chinese culture?

Science
Ask students to write down as many facts about crickets as they can find in the novel. Have students verify the facts by using reference materials at the library. What is the life cycle of the cricket? What does Chester mean on page 132 when he says, "I'm just feeling Septemberish"? Ask students to discuss why Mario feels okay about Chester returning to Connecticut. Is it because he fully understands the life cycle and life span of crickets, or are there other reasons?

On page 15, Mario says that one can tell the temperature by the number of chirps made by crickets. Is this fact or fable? Ask students to support their answer with documented fact.

Art
Most important performances have posters advertising the event. Ask each student to design an appropriate poster for Chester's musical performances. Some students may enjoy writing and illustrating a newspaper ad for Chester's concerts.

Music
Ask students to identify the types of music in Chester's repertoire. Divide the class into small groups and ask them to select one type of music and research it. For example: One group may research waltzes, another opera, and another religious music. Each group should also find an example of their type of music to play for the class.

Drama
The Cricket in Times Square contains a lot of dialogue, making it perfect for Readers Theater. Ask for volunteers from the class to develop a significant scene in the book for Readers Theater. Allow them time to perform for their class as well as for other classes in the school.

Teaching Ideas prepared by Marilyn Carpenter, Education Consultant, Tucson, Arizona.
VOCABULARY

The vocabulary that Selden uses is simple and easily understood by students in upper elementary school. The class may enjoy using books, encyclopedias, or a musical dictionary to identify terms that might be applied to Chester's music. For example, Mr. Smedley, the musician, uses the word "phrasing" (page 114) when he describes Chester's music. Words that they might include are pitch, tone, and crescendo.

AWARDS

A Newbery Honor Book

REVIEWS

"The story has spontaneity and such engaging nonsense that it should make delightful reading for the whole family."--Horn Book

"Most appealing whimsy, with beautiful illustrations." --Library Journal

"As cheering reading as we have met in some time."--New York Herald Tribune Book Review

FURTHER READING

The Grand Escape by Phyllis Reynolds Naylor [0-440-40968-3]
HARRY KITTEN AND TUCKER MOUSE by George Selden [0-440-40124-0]
The Incredible Journey by Sheila Burnford [0-440-22670-8]
Wanted...Mud Blossom by Betsy Byars [0-440-40761-3]

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