

# Comprehension

## Genre

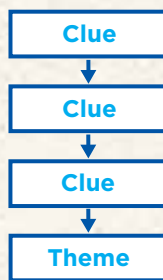
**Fantasy** is a story with invented characters, settings, or other elements that could not exist in real life.



## Analyze Story Structure

### Theme

As you read, fill in your Theme Map.



## Read to Find Out

What happens when a country cricket winds up in a big city?



THE **CRICKET**  
IN TIMES SQUARE

By *George Selden*



DRAWINGS BY

*Garth Williams*

# Chester

Tucker Mouse had been watching the Bellinis and listening to what they said. Next to scrounging, **eavesdropping** on human beings was what he enjoyed most. That was one of the reasons he lived in the Times Square subway station. As soon as the family disappeared, he darted out across the floor and scooted up to the newsstand. At one side the boards had separated and there was a wide space he could jump through. He'd been in a few times before—just exploring. For a moment he stood under the three-legged stool, letting his eyes get used to the darkness. Then he jumped on it.

“Psst!” he whispered. “Hey, you up there—are you awake?”

There was no answer.

“Psst! Psst! Hey!” Tucker whispered again, louder this time.

From the shelf above came **scuffling**, like little feet feeling their way to the edge. “Who is going ‘psst?’” said a voice.

“It’s me,” said Tucker. “Down here on the stool.”

A black head, with two shiny black eyes, peered down at him. “Who are you?”

“A mouse,” said Tucker, “Who are *you*?”

“I’m Chester Cricket,” said the cricket. He had a high, musical voice. Everything he said seemed to be spoken to an unheard melody.

“My name’s Tucker,” said Tucker Mouse. “Can I come up?”



“I guess so,” said Chester Cricket. “This isn’t my house anyway.”

Tucker jumped up beside the cricket and looked him all over. “A cricket,” he said admiringly. “So you’re a cricket. I never saw one before.”

“I’ve seen mice before,” the cricket said. “I knew quite a few back in Connecticut.”

“Is that where you’re from?” asked Tucker.

“Yes,” said Chester. “I guess I’ll never see it again,” he added **wistfully**.

“How did you get to New York?” asked Tucker Mouse.

“It’s a long story,” sighed the cricket.

“Tell me,” said Tucker, settling back on his haunches. He loved to hear stories. It was almost as much fun as eavesdropping—if the story was true.

“Well it must have been two—no, three days ago,” Chester Cricket began. “I was sitting on top of my stump, just enjoying the weather and thinking how nice it was that summer had started. I live inside an old tree stump, next to a willow tree, and I often go up to the roof to look around. And I’d been practicing jumping that day too. On the other side of the stump from the willow tree there’s a brook that runs past, and I’d been jumping back and forth across it to get my legs in condition for the summer. I do a lot of jumping, you know.”

“Me too,” said Tucker Mouse. “Especially around the rush hour.”

“And I had just finished jumping when I smelled something,” Chester went on, “liverwurst, which I love.”

“You like liverwurst?” Tucker broke in. “Wait! Wait! Just wait!”

In one leap, he sprang down all the way from the shelf to the floor and dashed over to his drain pipe. Chester shook his head as he watched him go. He thought Tucker was a very excitable person—even for a mouse.

Inside the drain pipe, Tucker’s nest was a **jumble** of papers, scraps of cloth, buttons, lost jewelry, small change, and everything else that can be picked up in a subway station. Tucker tossed things left and right in a wild search. Neatness was not one of the things he aimed at in life. At last he discovered what he was looking for: a big piece of liverwurst he had found earlier that evening. It was meant to be for breakfast tomorrow, but he decided that meeting his first cricket was a special occasion. Holding the liverwurst between his teeth, he whisked back to the newsstand.

“Look!” he said proudly, dropping the meat in front of Chester Cricket. “Liverwurst! You continue the story—we’ll enjoy a snack too.”

“That’s very nice of you,” said Chester. He was touched that a mouse he had known only a few minutes would share his food with him. “I had a little chocolate before, but besides that, nothing for three days.”

“Eat! Eat!” said Tucker. He bit the liverwurst into two pieces and gave Chester the bigger one. “So you smelled the liverwurst—then what happened?”



### Theme

What is the author’s message about different types of characters becoming friends?



“I hopped down from the stump and went off toward the smell,” said Chester.

“Very **logical**,” said Tucker Mouse, munching with his cheeks full. “Exactly what I would have done.”

“It was coming from a picnic basket,” said Chester. “A couple of tuffets away from my stump the meadow begins, and there was a whole bunch of people having a picnic. They had hard boiled eggs, and cold roast chicken, and roast beef, and a whole lot of other things besides the liverwurst sandwiches which I smelled.”

Tucker Mouse moaned with pleasure at the thought of all that food.

“They were having such a good time laughing and singing songs that they didn’t notice me when I jumped into the picnic basket,” continued Chester. “I was sure they wouldn’t mind if I had just a taste.”

“Naturally not,” said Tucker Mouse sympathetically. “Why mind? Plenty for all. Who could blame you?”

“Now, I have to admit,” Chester went on, “I had more than a taste. As a matter of fact, I ate so much that I couldn’t keep my eyes open—what with being tired from the jumping and everything. And I fell asleep right there in the picnic basket. The first thing I knew, somebody had put a bag on top of me that had the last of the roast beef sandwiches in it. I couldn’t move!”

“Imagine!” Tucker exclaimed. “Trapped under roast beef sandwiches! Well, there are worse fates.”





“At first I wasn't too frightened,” said Chester. “After all, I thought, they probably come from New Canaan or some other nearby town. They'll have to unpack the basket sooner or later. Little did I know!” He shook his head and sighed. “I could feel the basket being carried into a car and riding somewhere and then being lifted down. That must have been the railroad station. Then I went up again and there was a rattling and roaring sound, the way a train makes. By this time I was pretty scared. I knew every minute was taking me farther away from my stump, but there wasn't anything I could do. I was getting awfully cramped too, under those roast beef sandwiches.”

“Didn't you try to eat your way out?” asked Tucker.

“I didn't have any room,” said Chester. “But every now and then the train would give a lurch and I managed to free myself a little. We traveled on and on, and then the train stopped. I didn't have any idea where we were, but as soon as the basket was carried off, I could tell from the noise it must be New York.”

“You never were here before?” Tucker asked.

“Goodness no!” said Chester. “But I've heard about it. There was a swallow I used to know who told about flying over New York every spring and fall on her way to the North and back. But what would I be doing here?” He shifted uneasily from one set of legs to another. “I'm a country cricket.”

“Don't worry,” said Tucker Mouse. “I'll feed you liverwurst. You'll be all right. Go on with the story.”

“It's almost over,” said Chester. “The people got off one train and walked a ways and got on another—even noisier than the first.”

“Must have been the subway,” said Tucker.

“I guess so,” Chester Cricket said. “You can imagine how scared I was. I didn’t know *where* I was going! For all I knew they could have been heading for Texas, although I don’t guess many people from Texas come all the way to Connecticut for a picnic.”

“It could happen,” said Tucker, nodding his head.

“Anyway I worked furiously to get loose. And finally I made it. When they got off the second train, I took a flying leap and landed in a pile of dirt over in the corner of this place where we are.”

“Such an introduction to New York,” said Tucker, “to land in a pile of dirt in the Times Square subway station. Tsk, tsk, tsk.”

“And here I am,” Chester concluded forlornly. “I’ve been lying over there for three days not knowing what to do. At last I got so nervous I began to chirp.”

“That was the sound!” interrupted Tucker Mouse. “I heard it, but I didn’t know what it was.”

“Yes, that was me,” said Chester. “Usually I don’t chirp until later on in the summer—but my goodness, I had to do *something!*”

The cricket had been sitting next to the edge of the shelf. For some reason—perhaps it was a faint noise, like padded feet tiptoeing across the floor—he happened to look down. A shadowy form that had been crouching silently below in the darkness made a spring and landed right next to Tucker and Chester.

“Watch out!” Chester shouted, “A cat!” He dove headfirst into the matchbox.



# Harry Cat

Chester buried his head in the Kleenex. He didn't want to see his new friend, Tucker Mouse, get killed. Back in Connecticut he had sometimes watched the one-sided fights of cats and mice in the meadow, and unless the mice were near their holes, the fights always ended in the same way. But this cat had been upon them too quickly: Tucker couldn't have escaped.

There wasn't a sound. Chester lifted his head and very cautiously looked behind him. The cat—a huge tiger cat with gray-green eyes and black stripes along his body—was sitting on his hind legs, switching his tail around his forepaws. And directly between those forepaws, in the very jaws of his enemy, sat Tucker Mouse. He was watching Chester curiously. The cricket began to make frantic signs that the mouse should look up and see what was looming over him.

Very casually Tucker raised his head. The cat looked straight down on him. “Oh, him,” said Tucker, chucking the cat under the chin with his right front paw, “he's my best friend. Come out from the matchbox.”

Chester crept out, looking first at one, then the other.

“Chester, meet Harry Cat,” said Tucker. “Harry, this is Chester. He's a cricket.”

“I'm very pleased to make your **acquaintance**,” said Harry Cat in a silky voice.

“Hello,” said Chester. He was sort of ashamed because of all the fuss he'd made. “I wasn't scared for myself. But I thought cats and mice were enemies.”



“In the country, maybe,” said Tucker. “But in New York we gave up those old habits long ago. Harry is my oldest friend. He lives with me over in the drain pipe. So how was scrounging tonight, Harry?”

“Not so good,” said Harry Cat. “I was over in the ash cans on the East Side, but those rich people don't throw out as much garbage as they should.”

“Chester, make that noise again for Harry,” said Tucker Mouse.

Chester lifted the black wings that were carefully folded across his back and with a quick, expert stroke drew the top one over the bottom. A *thrummm* echoed through the station.

“Lovely—very lovely,” said the cat. “This cricket has talent.”

“I thought it was singing,” said Tucker. “But you do it like playing a violin, with one wing on the other?”

“Yes,” said Chester. “These wings aren't much good for flying, but I prefer music anyhow.” He made three rapid chirps.

Tucker Mouse and Harry Cat smiled at each other. “It makes me want to purr to hear it,” said Harry.

“Some people say a cricket goes ‘chee chee chee,’” explained Chester. “And others say, ‘treet treet treet,’ but we crickets don't think it sounds like either one of those.”

“It sounds to me as if you were going ‘crik crik crik,’” said Harry.

“Maybe that's why they call him a ‘cricket,’” said Tucker.



They all laughed. Tucker had a squeaky laugh that sounded as if he were hiccupping. Chester was feeling much happier now. The future did not seem nearly as gloomy as it had over in the pile of dirt in the corner.

“Are you going to stay a while in New York?” asked Tucker.

“I guess I’ll have to,” said Chester. “I don’t know how to get home.”

“Well, we could always take you to Grand Central Station and put you on a train going back to Connecticut,” said Tucker. “But why don’t you give the city a try. Meet new people—see new things. Mario likes you very much.”

“Yes, but his mother doesn’t,” said Chester. “She thinks I carry germs.”

“Germs!” said Tucker **scornfully**. “She wouldn’t know a germ if one gave her a black eye. Pay no attention.”

“Too bad you couldn’t have found more successful friends,” said Harry Cat. “I fear for the future of this newsstand.”

“It’s true,” echoed Tucker sadly. “They’re going broke fast.” He jumped up on a pile of magazines and read off the names in the half-light that slanted through the cracks in the wooden cover. “*Art News—Musical America*. Who would read them but a few long-hairs?”

“I don’t understand the way you talk,” said Chester. Back in the meadow he had listened to bullfrogs, and woodchucks, and rabbits, even a few snakes, but he had never heard anyone speak like Tucker Mouse. “What is a long-hair?”



Tucker scratched his head and thought a moment. “A long-hair is an extra-refined person,” he said. “You take an Afghan hound—that's a long-hair.”

“Do Afghan hounds read *Musical America*?” asked the cricket.

“They would if they could,” said Tucker.

Chester shook his head. “I'm afraid I won't get along in New York,” he said.

“Oh, sure you will!” squeaked Tucker Mouse. “Harry, suppose we take Chester up and show him Times Square. Would you like that, Chester?”

“I guess so,” said Chester, although he was really a little leery of venturing out into New York City.

The three of them jumped down to the floor. The crack in the side of the newsstand was just wide enough for Harry to get through. As they crossed the station floor, Tucker pointed out the local sights of interest, such as the Nedick's lunch counter—Tucker spent a lot of time around there—and the Loft's candy store. Then they came to the drain pipe. Chester had to make short little hops to keep from hitting his head as they went up. There seemed to be hundreds of twistings and turnings, and many other pipes that opened off the main route, but Tucker Mouse knew his way perfectly—even in the dark. At last Chester saw light above them. One more hop brought him out onto the sidewalk. And there he gasped, holding his breath and crouching against the cement.



They were standing at one corner of the Times building, which is at the south end of Times Square. Above the cricket, towers that seemed like mountains of light rose up into the night sky. Even this late the neon signs were still blazing. Reds, blues, greens, and yellows flashed down on him. And the air was full of the roar of traffic and the hum of human beings. It was as if Times Square were a kind of shell, with colors and noises breaking in great waves inside it. Chester's heart hurt him and he closed his eyes. The sight was too terrible and beautiful for a cricket who up to now had measured high things by the height of his willow tree and sounds by the burble of a running brook.

"How do you like it?" asked Tucker Mouse.

"Well—it's—it's quite something," Chester stuttered.

"You should see it New Year's Eve," said Harry Cat.

Gradually Chester's eyes got used to the lights. He looked up. And way far above them, above New York, and above the whole world, he made out a star that he knew was a star he used to look at back in Connecticut. When they had gone down to the station and Chester was in the matchbox again, he thought about that star. It made him feel better to think that there was one familiar thing, twinkling above him, amid so much that was new and strange.



### Theme

How does the author use his characters to express the theme?



# On a Journey with George and Garth



**George Selden** wrote this story after he heard a cricket chirping in the Times Square subway station. Chester's whole story came to George immediately. The cricket reminded George of his home in the countryside where he used to live.

**Other books** by George Selden and Garth Williams



**Garth Williams** worked very hard to make the creatures in this story look and act like real people. First he started with an actual photograph of the animal. Then he drew and redrew until the animal seemed to have human qualities.



Find out more about George Selden and Garth Williams at [www.macmillanmh.com](http://www.macmillanmh.com)

## Author's Purpose

Why did George Selden write *The Cricket in Times Square*? Was his main purpose to explain, entertain, or persuade? What details help you to know?

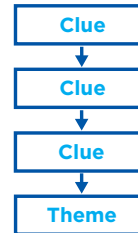


## Comprehension Check



### Summarize

Summarize *The Cricket in Times Square*. Tell about the main characters, the most important events in the story, and the theme.



### Think and Compare



1. New York City is filled with people from many different backgrounds and countries. What message do you think the author is sending by making a cricket, a cat, and a mouse his main characters? Use your theme chart to answer the question. **Analyze Story Structure: Theme**
2. Reread page 708 of the story. How do you think Chester feels about New York after he sees Times Square? Use story details to support your answer. **Analyze**
3. If you could be a character in the story, which character would you choose to be, Chester or Tucker? Explain your answer. **Apply**
4. Tucker advises his new **acquaintance** Chester to give the city a try. How would you decide if this is a good idea? Support your answer with details from the text. **Evaluate**
5. Read “The Country Mouse and the City Mouse” on pages 690–691. How is Country Mouse’s experience similar to Chester’s on pages 701 to 704? How is it different? Use details from both selections in your answer. **Reading/Writing Across Texts**