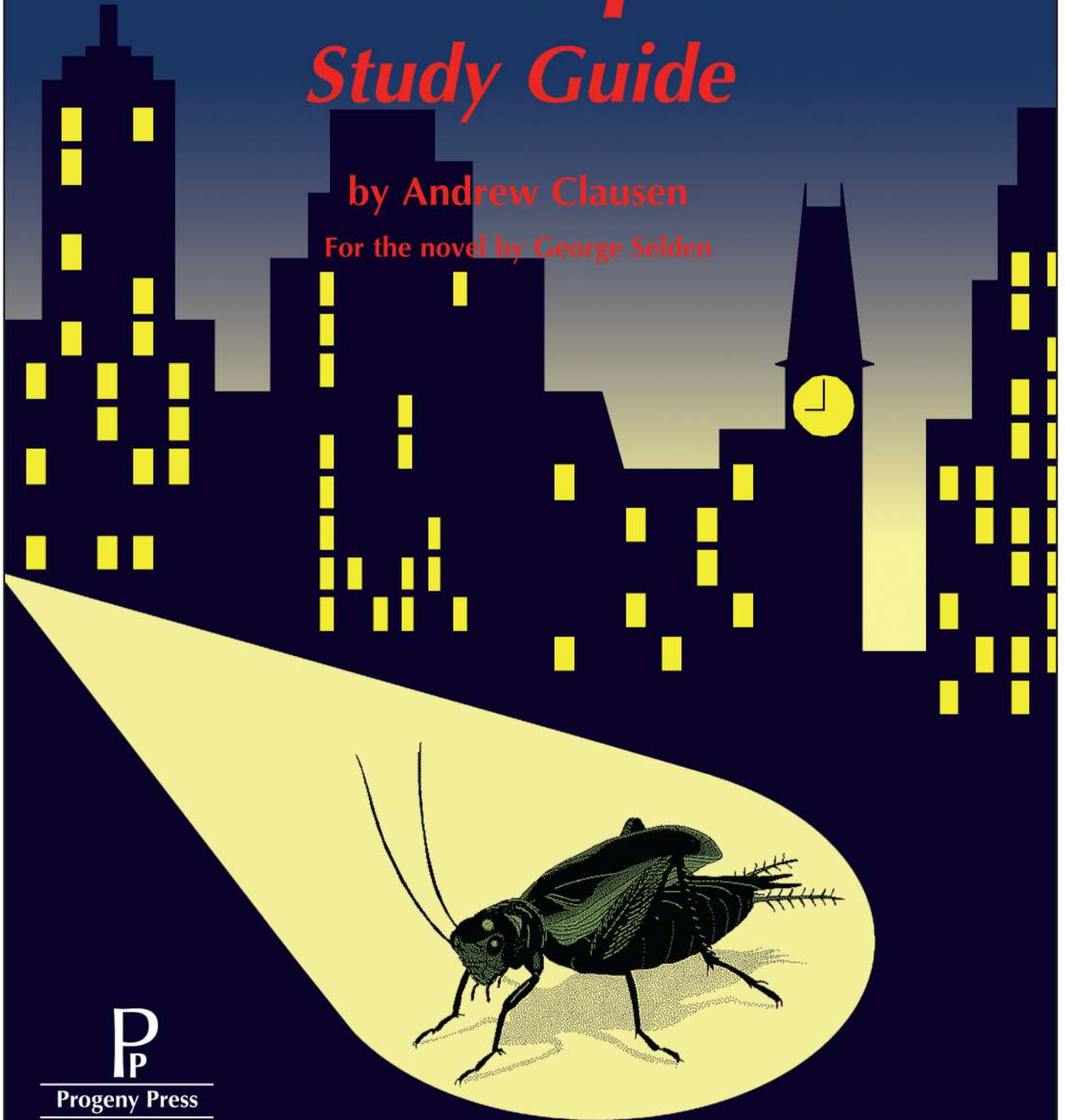


The Cricket in Times Square

Study Guide

by Andrew Clausen

For the novel by George Selden



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Synopsis

When Chester Cricket hops into a picnic basket in search of a quick meal, he becomes trapped under a bag of roast beef sandwiches. By the time he gets free, Chester discovers that he is far from his home in Connecticut, alone and afraid amidst the hustle and bustle of a New York City subway station.

Chester is discovered by Mario Bellini, a young boy whose family runs a small newsstand. Although his mother protests, Mario's father allows him to keep the cricket in the newsstand. Chester is also befriended by Tucker and Harry, a mouse and cat, who spend their days scrounging through the refuse of the subway.

Tucker and Harry decide to help Chester make the best of his situation and introduce him to city life. Soon, with the help of all his new friends, Chester begins to enjoy his adventure.

Mario has been told that crickets bring good luck. But when Chester accidentally eats half of a two-dollar bill, and Tucker nearly burns the newsstand to the ground, Mama Bellini believes the cricket has brought them bad luck.

Chester vows to do all he can to repay the Bellinis for their kindness toward him, but all he has to offer is the little song he makes by rubbing his wings together. Chester's musical talent, however, catches the ear of a music teacher who writes about it in the newspaper. Before long the Bellinis' newsstand has more customers than ever thanks to Chester's beautiful music.

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Questions:

1. What was Chester's diet before he came to New York? What new things to eat has he tried since coming to New York?
2. What talent does Mr. Smedley discover that Chester has?
3. Why does Mario go to Sai Fong's Chinese Novelties shop?

Thinking About the Story:

Foreshadowing:

4. *Foreshadowing* is a hint or clue an author gives about something that will happen later in the story. What is foreshadowed in the following passages from the story?
 - a. "That must have been awfully good playing," [Mario] said finally.
Mr. Smedley smiled. "It was," he said. "Perhaps some day your cricket will play as well. I prophesy great things for a creature of such ability, Mario."
Mario . . . remembered what Mr. Smedley had said later on that summer. But right now he had other things on his mind.

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7. Look at your list above. Do you think these things *really* bring good luck? Why or why not?

8. Read 1 Timothy 4:7. What do these verses tell us about believing such things?

9. In the story Sai Fong told Mario, why was Hsi Shuai a very honored man?

10. Do you think it's important to always speak the truth? Why or why not? Read Zechariah 8:16, 17 and Ephesians 4:25. What do these verses say about speaking the truth?

Optional Writing Assignment:

A *legend* is a traditional story or set of stories handed down from earlier times about a particular subject. Sometimes legends spring up around historical figures, such as the story of George Washington chopping down the cherry tree. Other legends attempt to explain the natural world or its origins, such as the legend Mario hears about how the cricket got its song. Different cultures often have very different legends to explain the same thing.

Write your own legend about how the cricket got its song, or choose something else from nature to explain in a legend.

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2. M; Chester is being compared to Orpheus.
3. M; Falling Chinese novelties are being compared to an avalanche.
4. M; The cage is being compared to a palace.
5. S; The dollar bill is being compared to a blanket.
6. S; The sound of laughing and talking is being compared to the sound of chopsticks.
7. S; Sai Fong's smile is being compared to a Halloween pumpkin's smile.
8. S; Papa Bellini's eyes are being compared to two hard-boiled eggs.
9. S; The stillness of Times Square is being compared to a meadow in evening.

Questions:

1. Chester has decided to leave New York City and return to his meadow.
2. Chester takes the bell from his cage.
3. Chester says he will know by the smell of the trees and the feel of the air.
4. At first, Mario is sad that Chester left, but he says he is glad. Answers will vary. He wanted Chester to be happy.

Thinking About the Story:

5. Traffic in Times Square comes to a standstill. Everyone stops and listens to Chester's music. No one moves. Times Square becomes as still as a meadow in evening.
6. Mr. Smedley had told Mario that when Orpheus played his music, all the people and animals, and even the rocks, trees, and waterfalls, stopped what they were doing to listen to the music. The whole world was silent. Mr. Smedley had predicted that one day Chester would play as well.
7. Chester's playing was like Orpheus's because everyone in Times Square stopped what they were doing to listen to the music. Mr. Smedley's prediction came true.
8. Answers may vary. They are both happy *and* sad. Sad, because they will miss their friend, but happy because Chester is happy.

Dig Deeper:

9. Answers will vary.
10. Answers will vary.
11. The writer of Ecclesiastes concludes that everything he had gained was meaningless.
12. These verses say that there is nothing better than to be happy in your work, and that happiness in work is a gift from God.
13. The writer concludes that the whole duty of man is to "Fear God and keep his commandments." Yes, you can do this even if you're not famous or talented. You don't need fame or talent to obey God's commandments.

Summary

Questions:

1. Answers will vary.
2. Answers will vary. Students may note that Tucker and Harry had to depend on each other to survive in the city.
3. Answers may vary. Some suggestions: Harry and Tucker help each other with their "scrounging." They share a home together. They tell Chester they will help him adjust to living in the city. They all share food with each other. Tucker and Harry help Chester pay back the Bellinis. They also help Chester develop his musical talent. They have a dinner party to celebrate two months of friendship. Tucker and Harry help Chester get back to Connecticut.
4. Answers will vary. The author may be showing the importance of friendship, especially in a new and potentially frightening place like a large, strange city. Some examples: The author shows how Harry and Tucker immediately befriend Chester, how they show him the city, and how they help him return home.
5. Tucker believes that one should save as much money as possible to avoid becoming poor. He doesn't like to spend his money. Some examples: Tucker relates how he risks his life to snatch money that has dropped to the ground. He is reluctant to part with it once he has it.
6. Answers will vary. The author is possibly suggesting that money is worthless unless one uses it, and a good use of money is to help others. Tucker parts with most of his money to help Chester pay back the Bellinis for the two-dollar bill he ate. Paul buys a newspaper from Mario and does not even wait for his change because he knows the Bellinis need the business.
7. Chester and Mario repeatedly take responsibility for their actions; people take responsibility for caring for the Bellinis