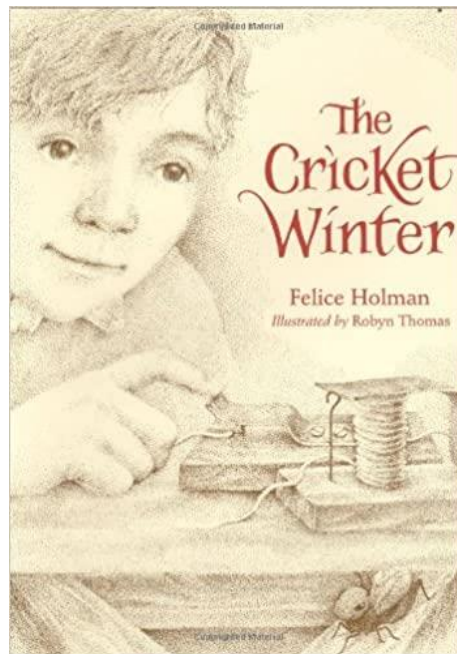


Jordan Fraterrigo
Book Discussion Guide

Introduction

The Cricket Winter, written by Felice Holman and illustrated by Robyn Thomas, is written for children, ages 8-12 years old. Felice Holman is the author of over twenty children's books. She is most known for her book *Slake's Limbo* and was the winner of the Lewis Carroll Shelf Award. *The Cricket in Winter* was originally published in 1966 by Eerdmans Publishing Company and was reprinted in 2006.



Summary

The Cricket Winter is a coming of age story about a boy named Simms and a cricket called Cricket. In the story, Simms Silvanus and Cricket are lonely. Simms is 9 years old and has big ideas that he tries to share with his parents. However, Simms' parents don't listen or pay attention to him. Simms is very lonely but will soon find help with an unlikely ally to help him with his family problems. Cricket is lonely because he had a fight with the female cricket that he was in love with. Cricket had prepared a nice place for them to live, but she has gone back to her family. Since winter has set in, Cricket is living under Simms' floorboards all alone. One day Simms, having nothing else to do, builds a telegraph and begins to practice morse code. The tapping of the telegraph is a language much easier for Cricket to understand. Interestingly, as Simms teaches himself morse code, Cricket learns it too. This leads to a friendship between Simms and Cricket.

Suddenly, Cricket's world begins to change. One day, a rat passes by Cricket. Cricket decides to follow the rat down into the basement. Cricket soon finds out that there are more

creatures living in the Silvanus' house. Cricket meets the other residents: the ants, Mr. and Mrs. Mus and their children, a spider, and a mole. All the creatures are friendly and welcoming with Cricket, but tell him of their problem with another resident, the rat. The very same rat that Cricket followed down to the basement. The rat is called Hostis by the residents and they do not have a good opinion of him. The rat is keeping the mice from being able to get food. This becomes a real dilemma for the mice when the snow piles up around the house and blocks the mice's entrance to the outside.

Meanwhile, Cricket and Simms begin to converse with one another, using the morse code. They begin to relay to each other the problems that are going on in their worlds. Cricket tells Simms about the rat and the boy realizes it is the same rat that his father has been setting traps for. However, the rat is very smart and has evaded all the traps set by Simms' father. Soon Cricket and Simms find themselves entangled in moral decisions that they must make in order to help their friends, which will forever change them. Will Cricket and Simms make the right decisions?

Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think Simms' parents don't listen to his ideas? How do you think this makes Simms feel?
2. Simms is able to talk to Cricket using morse code. If you could talk to a cricket, what would you tell it and what would you like to ask a cricket?
3. The author gave the name Hostis to the rat. What does hostis mean and why do you think the author gave this name to the rat?
4. What characteristics does the rat have that make him the antagonist of the story?
5. What role in the story do you think the minor characters (ants, mole, and spider) play?
6. Do you agree with Simms' decision to not tell his father about his good deed? Justify your reasoning.
7. The author describes Cricket as feeling sad after he saved the mice. Why do you think Cricket feels bad about his decision? Do you think Cricket made the right decision?
8. If you were Cricket, what solution would you have proposed to solve the mice's problem?
9. If you were the author of *The Cricket Winter*, how would you change the ending to the story?
10. Which character do you most identify with and why?