

To the Unicode Consortium

Proposal for a New Emoji: Cricket

Susan Burtner

<susan.burtner@gmail.com>

September 15, 2016

Abstract

The intention of this proposal is to advocate for the inclusion of a new emoji, the cricket, as a Unicode emoji character. The symbolic significance of a cricket is multicultural. To some it can be viewed as a symbol of illness, while to others it can be seen as a symbol of prosperity. In many forms of American media, the cricket, particularly the *sound* of a cricket chirping, implies an awkward silence. None of the current emoji can replace the varied symbolism implied by the cricket, or express the idea of “awkwardness” as clearly as the cricket does. The cricket emoji in its current design captures all of these meanings while still being versatile enough to stand for a normal cricket.

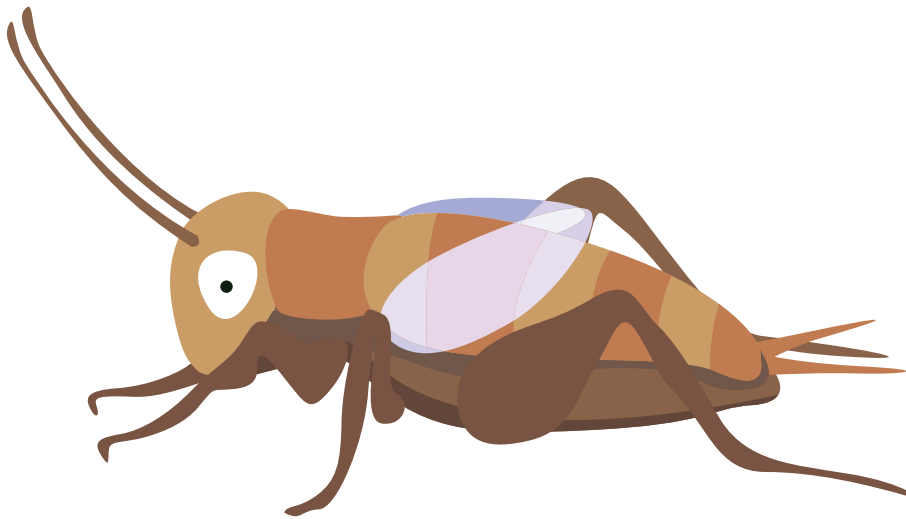


Figure 1: *A cricket created by Susan Burtner and Yohei Rosen, free for use and distribution by the Unicode Consortium*

1 Introduction

In many cultures around the world, the sound and sight of a cricket can indicate a variety of good and bad prospects. In Brazil, a cricket can be seen as a sign

of impending rain or a financial windfall. Depending on the color of the cricket, it can also imply illness, death, pregnancy, or forthcoming money.¹ In Chinese history, people often enjoyed the “song” of the cricket and kept them in small cages. In modern Chinese society, the cricket is a sign of good luck and prosperity.² Crickets often make appearances in Native American allegories, playing such important roles in lessons on morality that they have been seen on totem poles.³ The Disney corporation capitalized on the symbolism of a cricket early on and has included a cricket as primary characters in two prominent films: Jiminy Cricket in *Pinocchio* (1940), and Cri-kee in *Mulan* (1998).



Figure 2: *Disney characters Jiminy Cricket and Cri-Kee from Pinocchio and Mulan*

In American popular culture and beyond, the sound of a cricket chirping has long been used as an indication of silence, awkwardness, and discomfort in a situation. This may have been the result of being able to hear crickets chirp in the absence of dialogue in real life, and was carried over into numerous visual and audio media. The cricket could imply numerous ideas across cultures, and many people around the world would benefit from a cricket emoji.

2 Factors for Inclusion

2.1 Compatibility

Unfortunately, no emoji in the Unicode or any other system has created a cricket emoji like this. While this emoji cannot speak to the completeness and compatibility of other systems, it represents a unique opportunity to begin emoji representation for the ideas of “prosperity”, “luck”, and/or “awkwardness”.

¹“The Folklore and Mythology Surrounding Crickets”: <http://www.crystalwind.ca/mystical-magical/legends-fables-and-lore/folklore/the-folklore-and-mythology-surrounding-crickets>

²“Chinese Cricket Culture”: http://www.insects.org/ced3/chinese_crcul.html

³“Native American Cricket Mythology”: http://www.universalsky.com/Articles/Animals/cricket_intuition_power_belief.htm

2.2 Expected usage level

2.2.1 Frequency

It is the author's expectation that the cricket emoji will enjoy widespread use. As mentioned above, the cricket can symbolize a variety of things, from illness to prosperity as well as happiness from its singing presence. The cricket has long been a sign for things to come, and in conjunction with other emojis, could symbolize how one perceives a future outcome. In the same vein, a cricket emoji could be used to wish a friend luck or good fortune for a future event.

2.2.2 Multiple usages

One of the greatest strengths of the cricket emoji is that it can stand for a creature with mythological significance, an awkward situation, and as a normal cricket that you might see in your home. A particularly popular use of the cricket symbol in American media is its expression of awkwardness.

The cricket emoji could be used in situations in which no words or characters, in combination or otherwise, suggest that very common and distinct feeling of awkwardness. A search of "cricket" among the Unicode Code Chart reveals only one result: the cricket bat and ball. However, there are multiple references to the popular association of crickets and awkwardness online. Several memes and GIFs use the text "*crickets*" or "*cricket* *cricket*" to demonstrate the lack of dialogue in the image. A Google search for "crickets meme" yields 624,000 results mostly pertaining to this idea of awkwardness. When searching "awkward silence sound effect" in YouTube, 13 of the 20 results on the first page incorporate the sound of a cricket or crickets chirping. The sound is used in countless television shows and movies, and the image of a cricket can simulate that same effect for typed conversations.

The "awkward" element of the cricket can be broken down further into other usages as well. Two such ways are:

- 1) To imply that you are incapable of coming up with a proper response to a statement
- 2) To imply that you are still waiting for a response from someone, and on your end, you only hear "crickets". An example of this is given in **Figure 3**.

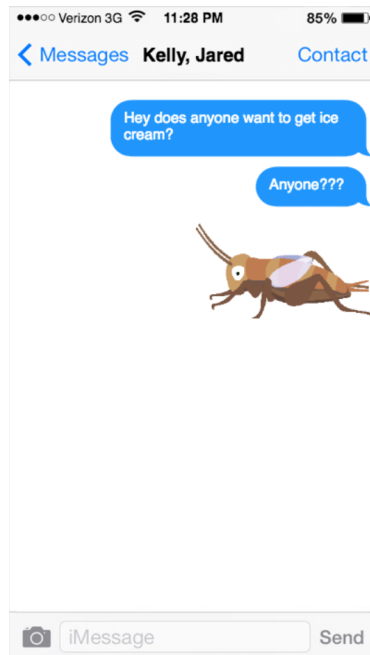


Figure 3: *An example of a conversation using the cricket emoji, made using iphoneyfaketext.com*

2.3 Image distinctiveness

People often confuse the cricket and the grasshopper. Some people assume that one or the other makes noises, and they both do, in fact. The cricket makes a chirping sound with its wings, and the grasshopper makes a similar chirping sound with its legs.⁴ Fortunately for this proposal, neither the grasshopper nor the cricket exists as an emoji. The other emoji that come close, such as bug, ant, honeybee, or lady beetle, could still not be used as suitable replacements for the cricket. A comparable emoji is the snail, since it is also a bug but with a more distinct shape and bodily characteristics. When the cricket is compared to a snail in a Google Search it can be seen that the two have decently similar popularity. A cricket search in relation to a snail search has a 39 to 69 ratio worldwide over the past five years (about 56.52%) but the cricket is experiencing somewhat of an upward trend. When compared to a spider (existing emoji) within the same time frame this ratio is 2/40 or about 5%, and compared to a lady beetle is 45/1 or about 4500%.

⁴“Grasshoppers and Crickets (Order: Orthoptera)”: <https://www.amentsoc.org/insects/fact-files/orders/orthoptera.html>

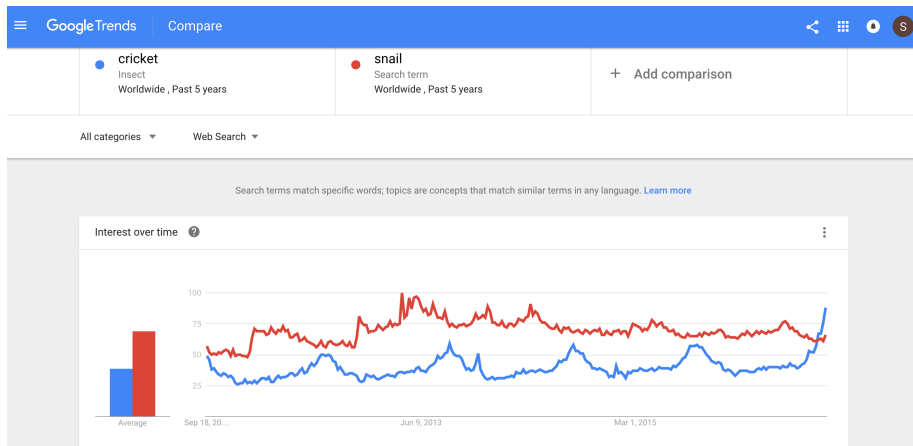


Figure 4: *The Google Trends search comparison between a cricket and snail worldwide over the last five years*

2.3.1 Completeness

It can be argued that the cricket emoji can help complete the insect group which include the snail, bug, ant, honeybee, ladybug, spider, spider web, and scorpion. While there is representation by many insects that can be seen on a day to day basis in one's home (like the ant or spider), the cricket can be heard on almost a nightly basis, and yet is excluded from this group.

2.4 Frequently requested

No mention of "cricket" is included in the any of the Unicode meeting minutes of proposed emoji from the last year. However anecdotal this example may be, several friends and colleagues have expressed excitement over the idea of a cricket emoji.

3 Counterarguments to Factors for Exclusion

3.1 Overly specific

The cricket emoji is not overly specific, especially since it can signify several different ideas. The cricket is at its core an insect, and despite there being hundreds of thousands more insects than mammals in the world⁵, the insect representation among the Unicode emoji is far less than that of mammal representation.

⁵ "Why Are There So Many More Species Of Insects? Because Insects Have Been Here Longer": <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2007/04/070403112553.htm>

3.2 Open-ended

The cricket is not one of many existing emoji in any sense, and even the grasshopper, the insect it is most often confused with, is not represented as a Unicode emoji.

3.3 Already Representable

The cricket cannot be easily replaced by any currently existing emoji. The bug is probably the most similar among the insect emoji, but the bug and the cricket are still quite different, and the bug is much more generic than the cricket. The speech balloon is probably the closest in regard to the idea of awkwardness, but while it communicates a hesitation to answer, it does not quite express a feeling of discomfort, or the expectation of an answer, like a cricket does. The popularity of a speech balloon Google search, in comparison to other ideas implied by a cricket, are seen in **Figure 5**.

3.4 Logos, brands, UI icons, signage, specific people, deities

This simple cricket emoji is not associated with any logo, brand, deities, or anything else. It is merely a cricket, albeit with a slightly open-eyed, anthropomorphic look.

3.5 Transient

The author feels like it is unlikely that the cricket emoji will become a fad. As seen by Disney’s use of the cricket in two prominent films, the symbolic significance of the cricket has persisted to this day. The idea of awkward silence will always be present as long as humans exist, and the cricket is particularly helpful towards this end since it is often hard to interpret intentions in written communication without someone’s voice to stress or not stress certain words in a sentence.

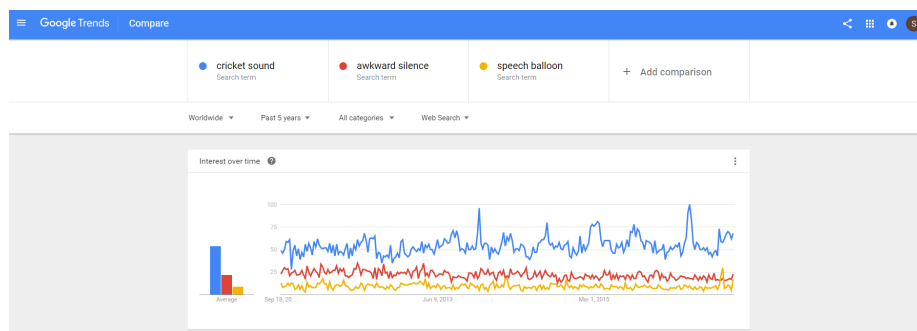


Figure 5: A Google Search comparison between “cricket sound”, “awkward silence”, and “speech balloon” (a ratio of 54/22/9)

The cricket has also been gaining in popularity in discussions of the environmental cost of red meat, with crickets being an alternative source of protein.⁶ If this reality comes true, and crickets become more prolific in food, then one day the cricket emoji may be an even more diversified symbol.

4 Emoji Ordering

The author suggests that the cricket be included in the **Animals & Nature** section, and within the **animals-bug** grouping. The cricket could be placed most anywhere in this group, but probably not between the spider and the spider web since that would break the continuity of the “spider” theme with that pairing.

4.1 Suggested Annotations

The author suggests the annotation “cricket” for this emoji, and other annotations may be “bug”, “insect”, “awkward”, “awkward silence” or “luck”.

5 Image

This cricket was created by Susan Burtner and Yohei Rosen using Adobe Illustrator CS6. The image and likeness of the cricket (in color and black and white) is free for use and distribution by members of the Unicode Consortium.

5.1 Color Image

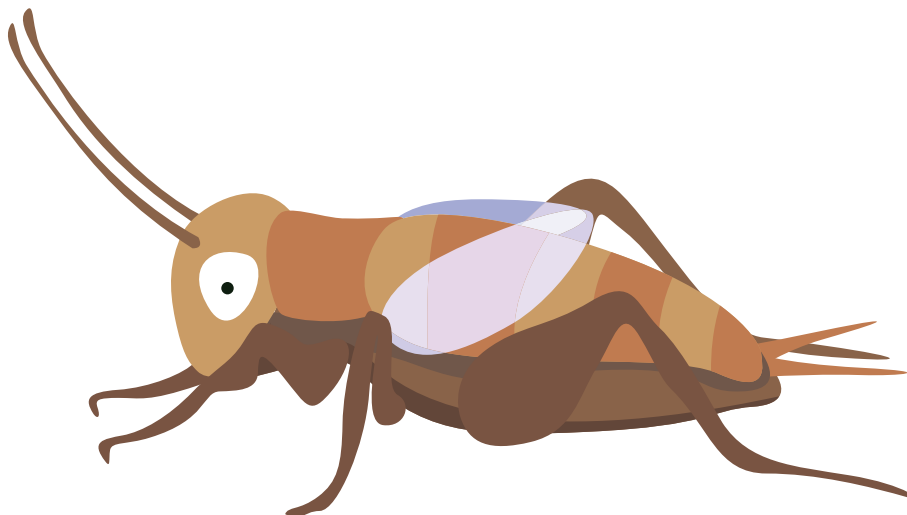


Figure 6: *The proposed cricket emoji in color*

⁶ “Fight World Hunger by Eating Bugs, Urges U.N.”: <http://newsfeed.time.com/2013/05/15/fight-world-hunger-by-eating-bugs-urges-u-n/>

5.2 Black and White Image

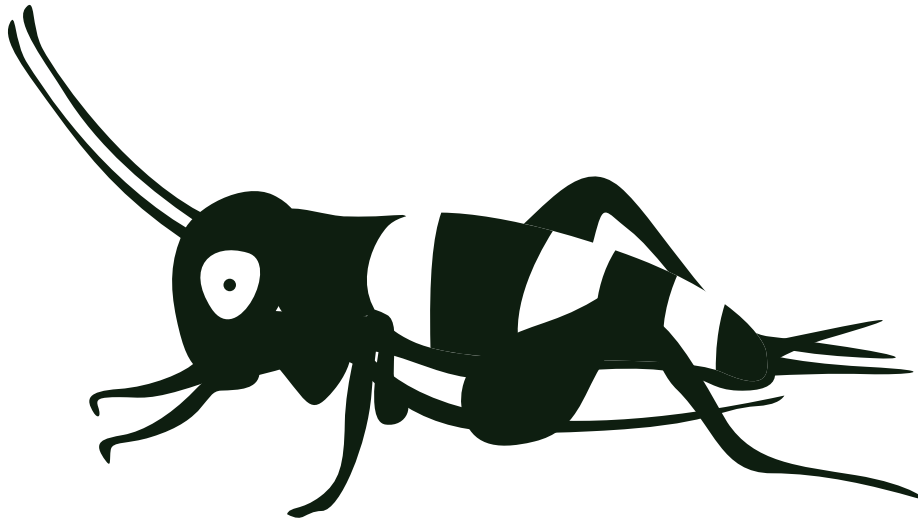


Figure 7: *The proposed cricket emoji in black and white*