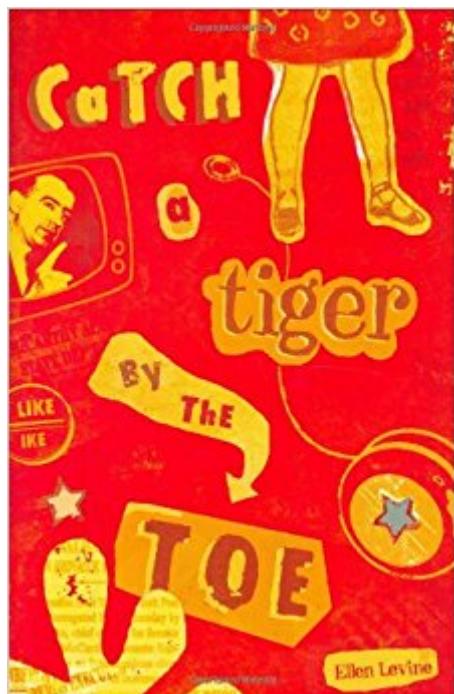


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# Catch A Tiger By The Toe



## **Synopsis**

Jamie is like most girls in the 1950s—she loves Hollywood movie stars and practicing her yoyo moves. But unlike those other girls, she has something to hide, a secret that is hurting her family. Jamie's father is a member of the Communist Party, and in 1953, that's the worst thing you can be. Senator Joseph McCarthy and his committee are throwing Americans in jail if they refuse to reveal the names of other Communists, and Jamie's dad won't. He's not a rat. When the truth comes out, and her dad loses his job, Jamie is ashamed to show her face in school. She's thrown off the school paper with no explanation, and all of a sudden Jamie knows how her father feels. Is there anything she can do to help her father? And what about herself?

## **Book Information**

Age Range: 3 - 8 years

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Hardcover: 176 pages

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Shipping Weight: 11.2 ounces

Average Customer Review: 5.0 out of 5 stars 4 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #319,645 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #26 in Books > Children's Books > Growing Up & Facts of Life > Friendship, Social Skills & School Life > Tolerance #325 in Books > Children's Books > Growing Up & Facts of Life > Difficult Discussions > Prejudice & Racism #407 in Books > Children's Books > Literature & Fiction > Historical Fiction > United States > 1900s

## **Customer Reviews**

Grade 6-8— From an author well known for her nonfiction on social and political issues comes a historical novel that explores a frightening yet important event in U.S. history: McCarthyism and the Red Scare. Jamie Morse, 13, lives in the Bronx in 1953. She loves Hollywood movie stars, the Dodgers, and practicing her yo-yo moves. But unlike most kids, she has a big secret. Her father is a member of the Communist Party. She never invites her friends to her apartment, and she lies to the FBI when asked what newspapers her parents read. Jamie's parents are portrayed as political

leftists who want economic and social justice. Her father, a high school math teacher, is called before the House Un-American Activities Committee and refuses to reveal the names of other Communists. He is sent to jail. Her mother also loses her job, bullies at school chase her brother, and Jamie is thrown off the school newspaper with no explanation. Levine portrays well Jamie's confusion, fear, anxiety, shame, and anger at her parents, yet her love for them. The times are captured perfectly, from Audrey Hepburn and Gregory Peck in the movies to the Rosenbergs' execution and the politics of fear. Jamie is a likable and believable heroine who grows into her own beliefs. Kids may well relate to the pervasive fear of the early 1950s as it resonates in our post-9/11 world. *Connie Tyrrell Burns, Mahoney Middle School, South Portland, ME Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.*

*\*Starred Review\* Gr. 5-8. Levine's excellent nonfiction works--among them, *Freedom's Children* (1992)--tell social and political history through the experiences of young people. In her first novel, which is set in the early 1950s at the height of the McCarthy witch hunts, she brings the politics up close through the voice of 13-year-old Jamie Morse, whose Dad is fired from his job and tried as a Communist. Jamie is sick of politics. She's furious with her parents, and she hates all the family secrets. She just wants to have fun with her best friend. Yet, she knows that politics is more than rhetoric, especially when it comes to civil rights issues and the hurt caused by the n-word. Some of the plot is purposive (a classroom discussion on freedom of expression), but the characters are drawn without reverence, and the scary history and the crucial debate will grab readers, especially given the sharp dialogue. Tension mounts to the very end: Will Dad name names? What is worse, dissent or betrayal? The warmth, sadness, and anger humanize the issues, which are sure to spark discussion about the meaning of patriotism--then and now. Hazel Rochman Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved*

Item was exactly as described and arrived to me in a timely fashion!

Jamie Morse lived with her family during the age of McCarthyism. Her father and mother were leftists: they believed in the ideas of communism, and during the age of McCarthy and the Red Scare, this was dangerous. When McCarthyism intensified, Jamie's parents both lost their jobs. Jamie was kicked off the school newspaper and was ignored and harassed by the other students. Jamie's father was subpoenaed to the McCarthy hearings, where he refused to give away the names of anybody he knew. He stood up for what he believed in, and Jamie was finally able to

appreciate his courage. Levine did an excellent job capturing the attitudes of people during this time period. The characters were all well developed and realistic. Each character has a distinct personality and opinion. Jamie's uncertainty and inability to appreciate her father's bravery seemed appropriate for a child of her age. Every aspect of the characters' lives was believable. An interesting addition to the novel was the blocks of text that acted as a movie that Jamie was continuously creating in her head. They were placed sporadically throughout the book, and seemed to add to the depth of Jamie's character. Each movie scene offered a different perspective on a situation that Jamie was dealing with in real life. This made Jamie seem alert and aware of what was going on around her, as many teenagers during this time must have been. The lack of participation in politics by teens today was made very obvious by how active the teens were during this time period.

Catch a Tiger by the Toe  
Ellen Levine  
Viking Young Readers Group  
345 Hudson Street, New York, N.Y. 10014  
HC 192 pages, \$15.99  
ISBN# 0-670-88461-8  
Thirteen-year-old Jamie Morse is like other kids her age in the 1950's, almost anyway. She lives in New York City, loves going to the movies and looking through magazines, works hard in school, and listens to special radio programs with her family at night. There is a difference though, and Jamie keeps this a secret for as long as she can until one terrible day. She's sick of hearing about politics, about "Commies," those "Reds," the "Moscow Menace," and phrases like "Got to get rid of the Commie traitors in our government." Her whole world turns upside down. Even her best friend won't talk to her. Jamie's story mirrors what many families faced during the "Red Scare." It isn't the only time principals in the American Constitution have been threatened and by one of its own. It surely won't be the last. 'Catch a Tiger by the Toe' stirs up conversation and debate, but that's okay. Americans have the right to exercise the Amendments and shouldn't be persecuted for assembling peaceably. Neither should they be punished for their ideas.  
Story Excerpt:(scene setter) Two men from the FBI have just stopped Jamie and begin asking her questions."It's a survey about newspapers. Does your Dad read the New York Times? The National Guardian? The Daily Worker?"These men must have thought I was real dumb. Sure, they're doing a questionnaire. My foot!"My foot!" I said. I startled myself as well as them. I ran around Mr. Talker, up the block, and headed for the playground. I wasn't going home with them following me."Levine knows how to write an opening. In this story she opens in such a way as to pull readers in quick. Before they know it readers have read a whole chapter, and then another, and then another.'Catch a Tiger by the Toe' is written in first-person through the main character's eyes, teaches as well as entertains, and is set at a time when McCarthyism has an affect on everyone.

Jamie is a well-developed protagonist reflecting her age so well in the way she loves and deplores her family. Levine has created an accurate portrayal of the McCarthy Era giving it an immediacy history books often miss. Readers will know about the tension and tragedy of that period in a personal way. The last chapter gave me goose-bumps and made me teary eyed.

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