

## Bookstorm™

*Catch You Later, Traitor*, written by Avi,  
Algonquin Young Readers, 2015



Twelve-year-old Pete Collison is a regular kid who loves Sam Spade detective books and radio crime dramas, but when an FBI agent shows up at Pete's doorstep accusing his father of being a Communist, Pete finds himself caught in a real-life mystery. Could there really be Commies in Pete's family? At the same time, Pete's class turns against him, thanks to similar rumors spread by his own teacher; even Kat, Pete's best friend, feels the pressure to ditch him. As Pete follows the quickly accumulating clues, he begins to wonder if the truth could put his family's livelihood--and even their freedom--at risk.

Avi's newest novel tells a funny, insightful story packed with realistic period detail of a boy in mid-twentieth-century America. Its unique look at what it felt like to be an average family caught in the wide net of the Red Scare has powerful relevance to contemporary questions of democracy and individual freedoms.

As a reviewer on Amazon.com said, "This is a perfect book to use as a catalyst to start conversations with students in classrooms and with family members around the dinner table about news like the NSA's surveillance of private citizens or how to balance personal freedom with society's larger protections."

There are connections here to be made to our current political atmosphere after 9/11 in which we seek terrorists and watch for Code Orange to turn to Code Red. Fear, politics, name-calling ... what can we learn from books and articles about this era in 1950s America?

### COMPLEMENTARY BOOKS, WEBSITES, AND VIDEOS

#### McCarthy Era

*Catch a Tiger by the Toe*, by Ellen Levine, Viking Juvenile, 2005. Jamie Morse lives in The Bronx in 1953 where she's afraid for her dad, who is suspected of being a Communist. What can she do to protect him ... and herself ... from people who are rabidly hunting Communists? Ages 12 and up.

*Loud Silence of Francine Green*, by Karen Cushman, Clarion Books, 2005. Francine doesn't speak up much: nobody is interested in listening. But when Sophie Bowman shows up at All Saints School for Girls, Francine is drawn to her and her way of saying what she

thinks, even to adults. Set in the 1950s when the House UnAmerican Activities Committee was blacklisting people, even people Francine knows in Hollywood, she is challenged to use her own voice to say what she believes in. Ages 10 and up.

*Scoundrel Time*, by Lillian Hellman, Little, Brown, 1976. This is one of the books on our list for adult readers who wish to familiarize themselves with this period of time and the issues from the viewpoint of someone who experienced them. Called before the House UnAmerican Activities Committee, Hellman refused to name names of people she knew to be affiliated with the Communist party. She reminded the committee that her responsibilities were "to tell the truth, not to bear false witness, not to harm my neighbor, to be loyal to my country." In spite of her courage, and although she was never tried or sent to jail, she spent years being shunned, not being hired, finally writing this memoir that helps all of us understand. For adults.

### **Nonfiction**

*America in the 1950s* by Edmund Lindop with Sarah Decapua. 21<sup>st</sup> Century Books, 2010. Chapters include topics such as the transition from WWII, the Korean War, the 50's economy and society, the Red Scare, and more.

*Apple Betty & Sloppy Joe: stirring up the past with family recipes and stories*, Susan Sanvidge, Diane Sanvidge Seckar, Jean Sanvidge Wouters, and Julie Sanvidge Florence, Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2006. Filled with home-cooked recipes of the 1950s, the Sanvidge sisters include memories, short essays, and family photos evoking the decade.

*Cold War* by Josepha Sherman. Lerner Publications 2004. Before focusing on the Cold War and the Red Scare, the author covers "The Rise of the Superpowers," including a brief rundown on both the US and Russian revolutions and the partitioning of Europe during and after World War II. Back matter includes glossary, timeline of Cold War events, maps, and reading list.

*Fabulous Fashions of the 1950s* by Felicia Lowenstein Niven. Enslow Publishers, Inc., 2011 photo illustrated, quick read, glossary and fashion timeline in back matter.

*Fifties Chronicle*, by Robert Rodriguez, Beth Bailey, PhD, and David Farber, PhD, Publications International, 2006. Wonderful tome filled with short articles, quotes, and

remembrances, organized by year, with plenty of photos and period book covers, movie posters, and headlines, ranging from pop culture to politics.

*Green Stamps to Hot Pants: growing up in the 50s and 60s*, by Genny Zak Keiley, Nodin Press, 2008. With specific memories from metropolitan Minneapolis, this is nonetheless a good guide to popular culture including hair-dos, drive-ins, music, and embroidered dish towels. Helpful for students writing about history and fun for those who lived through those years.

*Life : our century in pictures for young people* edited by Richard B. Stolley; adapted by Amy E. Sklansky. Little, Brown and Co., 2000. Before, during, and after the 1950s. With introductory essays for each decade written by notable children's authors, including Lois Lowry, Patricia and Frederick McKissack, Avi, and Katherine Paterson.

*New York Street Games*, a PBS video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tC3M2WNU23U> and then the documentary's website <http://www.newyorkstreetgames.com/home.html>

*Odd Man Out: a Memoir of the Hollywood Ten*, by Edward Dmytryk, Southern Illinois University Press, 1996. One of the Hollywood Ten reflects on events and his own life as they led up to the House UnAmerican Activities Committee's hearings to determine if Hollywood was harboring Communist party members. For older readers or educators wishing to gain background.

*Rise and Fall of Senator Joe McCarthy*, by James Cross Giblin, Clarion Books, 2009.

Looking at the Senator's childhood and rise to political position, as well as his focus on finding Communists in America, to his eventual disgrace, this book also talks about the people and organizations harmed by his singlemindedness and determination. Teen readers and older.

*Shadow of Red: Communism and the Blacklist in Radio and Television*, by David Everitt, Ivan R Dee publisher, 2007. Traces the hunt for communists and Soviet sympathizers back to its roots. For the older reader or an educator who wishes to gain background.

*Spy*, by Richard Platt, DK Eyewitness Books, 2009. Covering the topic of spying from Biblical times to the present, this visually stimulating, content-packed book will engage some of your readers who are captivated by the FBI aspect of *Catch You Later, Traitor*.

## Communism, Socialism in the United States

*Darkest Evening*, by William Durbin, University of Minnesota Press, 2011 (originally published by Random House). In the middle of America's Depression, a group of 6,000 Finnish-Americans travel to Karelia in northwestern Russia to establish a "workers' paradise," based on the socialist ideals that Stalin promised. Jake Maki, 13, is concerned that his father is being gullible. When the secret police begin targeting the Americans, Jake does his best to escape to Finland with his mother and sister. Based on true history.

## Witch Hunts

*Crucible*, by Arthur Miller, Penguin Classics, 2003. First produced in 1953, at a time when America was convulsed by a new epidemic of witch-hunting, *The Crucible* brilliantly explores the threshold between individual guilt and mass hysteria, personal spite and collective evil. It is a play that is not only relentlessly suspenseful and vastly moving but that compels readers to fathom their hearts and consciences in ways that only the greatest theater ever can.

"Two Reds Scare," *Collecting Children's Books*, by Peter Sieruta, 2010.

<http://collectingchildrensbooks.blogspot.com/2010/02/two-reds-scare.html>

*Witch of Blackbird Pond*, by Elizabeth George Speare, Houghton Mifflin, 1958. When Kit Tyler has to move from her life in the Caribbean to late 1600s Puritan Connecticut, her carefree behavior raises suspicions. In a community concerned about witchcraft, it's dangerous for Kit to make friends with the Witch of Blackbird Pond, but the woman is a kindred spirit. When Kit is accused of being a witch because a deathly illness befalls members of the community, she is faced with accepting who she is and relying on individuals within the community.

## Mid-Century United States

*Green Glass Sea*, by Ellen Klages, Viking Books, 2006. It's 1943 and 11-year-old Dewey Kerrigan travels to Los Alamos, New Mexico, to live with her scientist father and an entire encampment of scientists who are at work on a top-secret project. It's the Manhattan Project, of course, and in hindsight we watch as events unfold but the people at that time had no idea how their invention would change the world. It's a fascinating look at the dawning of the Atomic Age from a smart young girl's point of view. Ages 10 and up. Look to *The Ultimate Weapon* by Edward T. Sullivan or *Bomb* by Steve Sheinkin for the nonfiction side of this story.

*How I Discovered Poetry*, by Marilyn Nelson, Dial Books, 2014. Growing up in the 1950s, Ms. Nelson shares 50 poems that talk about growing up African-American, the Cold War, and the beginnings of feminism. For older readers.

*In the Unlikely Event*, by Judy Blume, Knopf, 2015. For older readers. Set in New Jersey in the early 1950s, we recommend this book for evoking an era with good detail that you can use to refresh your memory of, or learn newly about, the times before you discuss *Catch You Later Traitor* with your students. This tells the story of a woman who goes back to her hometown to commemorate a terrible year, when airplanes fell out of the sky and tragic deaths took place. For ages 16 and up.

*White Sands, Red Menace*, by Ellen Klages, Viking Juvenile, 2008. While not about the hunt for communists, this book is set in the aftermath of World War II, when scientists were reeling from the detonation of the atomic bomb at Los Alamos. Ex-Nazis, the questioning of scientific research ... this was the mood of America leading up to the 1950s. Ages 11 and up.

### **Baseball in the 1950s**

*Bat 6*, by Virginia Euwer Wolff, Scholastic, 1998. A softball game between rival 6th grade teams from nearby Oregon farming communities shows the aftermath of World War II and the resulting prejudices that arise from misunderstandings, stereotypes, fear, and grief. Told with 18 viewpoints, the cohesive whole blends into an outstanding story.

*Belles of the Ballpark: Celebrating the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League*, Diana Star Helmer with Thomas S. Owens, Summer Games, 2015. Well-written narrative nonfiction about the AAGPBL, professional women playing hardball around the United States, but particularly in the Midwest, from 1943 to 1954. You may be familiar with their story from the movie *A League of Their Own* but this book presents the factual story, often with interviews of the players themselves. Ages 10 and up.

*Keeping Score*, by Linda Sue Park, Clarion Books, 2008. It's 1951 and nine-year-old Maggie loves to hang out at the fire station listening to Dodgers games with the firemen. One of them teaches her how to score before he's send off to Korea. When he returns home, suffering from PTSD, she works hard to bring him back to his former self.

*Kid from Tomkinsville*, by John R. Tunis, Harcourt, Brace, 1940. The first in an eight-book series set among the Brooklyn Dodgers, this book is often cited as the best juvenile sports book read during childhood, an unforgettable book. When Roy Tucker begins with the Dodgers, he's determined to be a pitcher, but an accident finds him playing a different position instead. A classic of sports fiction. For ages 8 and up.

*We Would Have Played for Nothing: Baseball Stars of the 1950s and 1960s Talk About the Game They Loved*, by Fay Vincent, Simon & Schuster, 2008. If your students like baseball and they're wondering about the players mentioned in these novels, this oral history record of the players themselves will fill in the details. Middle grade and older.

*You Never Heard of Casey Stengel?!* by Jonah Winter, illus by Barry Blitt, Schwartz & Wade, 2016. Casey Stengel managed the New York Yankees through a record-breaking ten pennants and seven World Series. Joe DiMaggio and Mickey Mantle,

*You Never Heard of Willie Mays?* by Jonah Winter, illus by Terry Widener, Schwarz & Wade, 2013. Mays came up through the Negro Leagues, eventually playing center field for the New York Giants, the team to which Pete Collison switched allegiance when everyone else in his class followed the Dodgers. Pete would have known who Willie Mays was. It's not only a story about baseball but also about the racial inequality that laid heavily over the United States – and baseball--for many years.

### **Noir Detective Fiction**

*Big Sleep* by Raymond Chandler, Alfred A. Knopf, 1939. Set in Los Angeles in the 1930s, Philip Marlowe has become a classic detective in a classic genre. Famously played by Humphrey Bogart in the movies, Marlowe is hired to resolve a rich man's daughter's gambling debts but instead finds dead bodies, disappearing dead bodies, and a lot of fingers pointing at other people as the murderers. For ages 14 and up.

*Chameleon Wore Chartreuse: a Chet Gecko Mystery*, by Bruce Hale, Harcourt, 2000. The first of many in a series of noir detective, fourth-grade humor, beginners' mysteries. More about the humor than the mystery, these books are good for the reluctant reader who will enjoy the puns and pick up the noir detective style without realizing it. "She was the kind of girl I could have fallen for. If I liked girls." For ages 7 to 12.

*City of Spies* by Susan Kim and Laurence Klavan, illustrated by Pascal Dizin, First Second, 2010. Sent to live with her Bohemian artist Aunt Lia, Evelyn is often bored, filling her days with imaginary mysteries and idealized superhero versions of the men she knows. When she and her friend Tony, who lives in her building, stumble upon a real Nazi plot, they're determined to solve it with the aid of their other unconventional friends. The illustrations in this graphic novel are reminiscent of Hergé's *Tintin*, but this is a book that will be most appreciated by readers ages 10 and up.

*Joey Fly Private Eye in Creepy Crawly Crime*, by Aaron Reynolds, illustrated by Neil Numberman, Henry Holt, 2009. In the graphic novel area, Joey Fly is an insect with a nose for solving mysteries. His language is hard-boiled in the tradition of Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler, which may help young readers adapt to the style of stories for older readers. Ages 7 to 10.

*Maltese Falcon*, by Dashiell Hammett, Alfred A. Knopf, 1930. Considered a classic of detective fiction, Sam Spade is hired by a treacherous woman to find her sister, but that isn't what she's after at all. Spade's partner, Miles Archer, is shot while they're searching for the sister, and suddenly there's a mystery. What is the Maltese Falcon and why is it worth so much money and how many people are seeking it and what will they do to get it? For ages 12 and up.

For a multi-media experience of a noir detective, consider listening and watching Garrison Keillor and company read a [Guy Noir](#) episode on *A Prairie Home Companion*.

### **Old-Time Radio**

*Who Was That Masked Man Anyway?* by Avi, Scholastic, In a book constructed entirely from conversations, radio scripts, commercials, and fantasies there's plenty of humor and adventure, but there's also a flavor of the end of World War II seen through the eyes of a 12-year-old boy. Also good for Noir Detective Fiction.

One of the best ways to familiarize your students with old-time radio is to play the radio shows for them. You could do this in a serial fashion once each day or once each week to simulate what listening to the radio was like in the 1930s and 1940s.

Radiospirits.com has a wonderful selection of old time mystery and suspense radio programs. You can usually find these at your public library as well. If you can find

[“Old-Time Radio’s Greatest Mysteries,”](#) that would be a good collection of more than 20 shows that you could share with your students.

You might also consider listening online at [radiolovers.com](http://radiolovers.com) or [oldtimeradiofans.com](http://oldtimeradiofans.com).

To give your students an experience of what old-time radio was like, watch the show *Remember WENN* on YouTube. It was originally broadcast on the American Movie Channel as an original series. It’s set in a radio station that airs original comedy, drama, and advertising, read by the cast of characters.