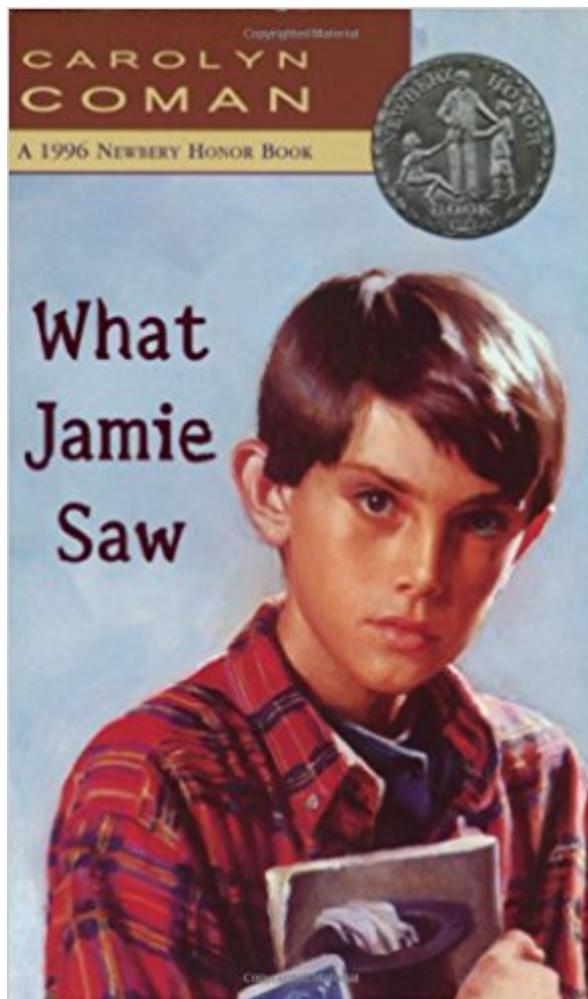


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# What Jamie Saw



## **Synopsis**

A 1996 Newbery Honor Book follows the survival story of nine-year-old Jamie, his mother, and his baby sister Nin, who leave the abusive Van and move to a small trailer in the woods, where they slowly learn how to trust again. Reprint. AB. NYT. H. K. SLJ. PW.

## **Book Information**

Age Range: 8 - 12 years

Lexile Measure: 1010L (What's this?)

Paperback: 128 pages

Publisher: Puffin (March 1, 1997)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0140383352

ISBN-13: 978-0140383355

Product Dimensions: 4.4 x 0.3 x 7.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 2.9 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.7 out of 5 stars 38 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #986,241 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #127 in Books > Children's Books > Growing Up & Facts of Life > Difficult Discussions > Dysfunctional Relationships #259 in Books > Children's Books > Growing Up & Facts of Life > Difficult Discussions > Abuse

## **Customer Reviews**

In a starred review of this "heartwrenching" 1996 Newbery Honor book about escaping domestic violence, PW said, "This work seems to spring directly from Coman's heart into the reader's own."

Ages 9-up. Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Grade 6-9?With wrenching simplicity and mesmerizing imagery, Coman articulates nine-year-old Jamie's baffled, stream-of-consciousness observations of a violent act that robs him of his security, but not his innocence. Awakened in the middle of the night by some primal sense of alarm, the sleep-disoriented boy watches his stepfather reach into his baby sister's crib and throw her across the room. And then he watches his mother step into the bedroom doorway and catch her flying baby. Patty deposits her pajama-clad children into the safety of her rusty old Buick, collects the bare necessities, and leaves. With the help of her friend Earl, Jamie's teacher, and even her mother-in-law, Patty finds her way back to work and into a support group for battered wives. In a trailer out in the middle of nowhere, she and Jamie tough it out, slowly reinventing their lives.

Revealed through the boy's clear, unprejudiced eye, characters, though rough and uneducated, are not stereotyped. It is Jamie who is most delicately and lovingly wrought. His love of magic tricks, illusion, and sleight of hand sustains him through the bad times. Shocking in its simple narration and child's-eye view, *What Jamie Saw* is a bittersweet miracle in understated language and forthright hopefulness. Alice Casey Smith, Sayreville War Memorial High School, NJ Copyright 1995 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to the Library Binding edition.

If there is one thing that middle grade books struggle with it's the subject of family abuse. Middle grade boundaries prohibit addressing certain realities, and as a result, sometimes draw an overly nuanced or distant approach. Not so with *What Jamie Saw*. In this compact book, the subject is explored in an age appropriate manner without pulling punches or ignoring the intricate complexities of the subject. Carolyn Coman offers an opportunity to connect with Jamie's situation in a heartfelt way, and draws out understanding, empathy, and caring for kids and families suffering in similar circumstances. In addition, it hopefully tosses a lifeline to kids silently enduring such fear and stress.

I loved this book and finished it in one day. I love the way she writes. I'm a fan and will look for more of her books.

I felt strongly that the author should have stated near the beginning that the thrown baby was okay. Great ending for abused woman to take charge of situation and to resolve it.

Sad book, but beautifully written.

I think the narrative is very descriptive and lets me picture everything that Jamie sees and experiences. Bronson Pinchot does an excellent job narrating this story.

A little third grade boy named Jamie suddenly wakes up one night to see his half-sister being propelled across the room by her father in *What Jamie Saw*. Immediately afterward, Jamie's mom takes them out of that environment and they eventually relocate to a trailer in the mountains. During this period, Jamie has grown into a responsible, yet very scared little man. The book's lack of illustration allows its readers to use their imagination more actively. I do not necessarily think of this book as a piece of children's literature because of its detrimental contents. Its detrimental contents

include child abuse and harsh language which should not be viewed by children. Not only does this book deal with child abuse and harsh language, but it also deals with an overwhelming fear experienced by the family. Even so, this book has received a Newbery Award for children. John Newbery, founder of the Newbery Award, often had a theme that "reading and learning are intimately connected to financial and social advancement," as stated in the article "American Girls Collection: Barbies with a Sense of History." Another theme dealt with the innocence of youth. These themes are not quite consistent with that of *What Jamie Saw*. The only mention of learning or reading in this book dealt with a magic book and Jamie's interest in his school. As for social or financial advancement, the opposite actually occurred. The whole family isolated themselves from society for a bit and they became broke. The theme of this book dealt with the changes in Jamie's (the protagonist's) life and how he matures throughout it. In the article, *The American Girls Collection* is said to portray girls, or children in general, that are growing up at the perfect rate. Little Jamie was forced to grow up rather quickly though, unlike the sheltered girls in *The American Girls Collection*. If Jamie did not mature at the rate in which he did, his half-sister may not have been saved from her father, Van, and their mother may not have been as competent as she was in raising the two children on her own. Maturation is situational and through Jamie's experiences, it was suitable for him to mature quickly. Though receiving a Newbery Award, the theme from *What Jamie Saw* was not consistent with many of the other themes of the books that also received it. Also, the theme of Jamie's maturation was much unlike the maturation rate for the girls in *The American Girls Collection*. Although these rates were different, they were also suitable for their environments. Jan Susina, author of "American Girls Collection: Barbies with a Sense if History," did not consider the fact that some children have to grow up faster than others. For this reason, I personally disagree with Susina's theories on how children are growing up too fast.

Coman, Carolyn. *What Jamie Saw*. Arden: Front Street, 1995. Gross, Melissa. "The Giver and Shade's Children: Future Views of Child Abandonment And Murder." *Children's Literature in Education* 30 (1999): 103-117. The mother-son relationship in Carolyn Coman's novel, *What Jamie Saw*, is stronger and much more stable than Clay's relationship with his mother in *Monkey Island*. In *What Jamie Saw*, Jamie, his mother, and his baby sister, Nin, move into a trailer after Nin's father attempts to hurl Nin across the room. Jaime and his mother face many struggles, and their relationship is threatened several times by emotional outbursts resulting from anger and frustration. However, their love for each is evident, and they are able to overcome their fears together. Throughout the novel, Jaime's reaction to the tone of his mother's voice indicates that they have a

loving relationship. For example, as they are leaving Nin's father's house, a frightened Jamie asks his mother if she remembered to bring his magic. She answers, "Yes," and her one word quickly stops the ferocious pounding in his heart (Coman 18). In another instance, Jaime becomes scared while he is staying with his mother's friend because he does not recognize his surroundings and feels lost. As he runs into the house, his mother reaches for him and inquires, "Oh honey, what is it?" Just the sound of her voice makes all the difference and calms him down (29). These situations illustrate the bond that Jaime and his mother share and how easily Jamie is soothed by his mother's concern. On the other hand, after Clay's mother leaves him, he no longer trusts her and cannot be completely comforted by her kind words and gestures. Jaime's mother also seems more concerned for the welfare of her children than Clay's mother. Jaime's mother left Nin's father to protect her children, while Clay's mother abandoned her son to "protect" herself. The primary reason for child abandonment is economically related. The parents are usually facing a condition of poverty, lack of food, or other kind of scarcity situation (Gross 103). This is true of the problems that Clay and his mother faced in Monkey Island. Although Clay's mother has her reasons for leaving, the sense of betrayal that Clay feels toward his mother is strong and will always burden their relationship.

Jaime's mother, however, never abandons her children when life gets tough. She gets angry and takes her frustration out on Jamie at times, but she always puts her children's needs in front of her own and does everything she can to comfort them. While I was reading *What Jamie Saw*, the relationship between Jamie and his mother stood out because I have read many novels in which the mother-child relationship is emphasized in the plot. *Monkey Island* came to mind in particular because the situation of both families is somewhat similar. In both books, a single mother must support her children on a low income during a stressful time in her life. It was interesting to compare the way in which each mother handled the situation and how it affected the relationship she shared with her son.

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