



June 2025

Dear Members of the MLHS Class of 2029:

Congratulations on your graduation from 8th grade, and welcome to Mountain Lakes High School!

In your English 9 classroom, the 2025-26 school year will begin with a study of a book assigned for required summer reading: *I Must Betray You* by Ruta Sepetys. Focus questions have been provided to help you think about some of the main ideas as you read. You will be given an assessment of your reading during the first few days of school in the fall, so you will find that taking notes, keeping track of your thoughts as you read, will be helpful. It would be best to purchase your own copy of the book so that you can take notes in the text to better support your review at the start of the school year. The book is widely available from bookstores and online booksellers.

Have an enjoyable summer. Happy reading, and we'll see you in late August!

Sincerely,

Paul Henry
Supervisor of English and Fine and Performing Arts
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***I Must Betray You* by Ruta Sepetys**

A historical thriller set in Romania, 1989, Sepetys examines the little-known history of a nation defined by silence, pain, and the courageous human spirit. Plot: Communist regimes are crumbling across Europe. Seventeen-year-old Cristian Florescu dreams of becoming a writer, but Romanians aren't free to dream; they are bound by rules and force. When Cristian is blackmailed by the secret police to become an informer, he's left with only two choices: betray everyone and everything he loves – or use his position to creatively undermine the most notoriously evil dictator in Eastern Europe. But at what cost?

FOCUS:

In a *New York Times* interview, Ruta Sepetys talks about the importance of storytelling. She states: "What I want to get across is the strength and fortitude of the Romanian people, particularly the young people... you can be the author of your own destiny... And also that, through story, we have an opportunity for connection. What do I mean? That sometimes, history, it's a bunch of facts, it's a bunch of figures. But when reading, if we have a moment of connection, I think our heart opens. And we have a chance to care for someone that we've never met..."

- How do the personal stories and struggles of the characters foster a sense of empathy and understanding for individuals from different cultural and historical backgrounds, particularly those of people living under oppression?
- Despite the acts of betrayal, how do the characters in the novel, in particular the younger generation, show courage in their pursuit of freedom? How do their experiences compare to your own understanding of freedom?

NOTE: Students seeking additional challenge and who are considering pursuing Honors-level English for grade 10 may choose to read a second historical fiction novel by Ruta Sepetys. Find titles here:

<https://rutasepetys.com/books/>