

Parents' Guide to *I Must Betray You* by Ruta Sepetys

Grade Level: 9-12

Lexile Level: 850L

Genre: Historical Fiction/Thriller

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About the Book

I Must Betray You is a gripping historical novel set in 1989 Communist Romania during the final days of Nicolae Ceaușescu's dictatorship. The story follows Cristian Florescu, a 17-year-old boy who is blackmailed by the secret police into becoming an informant. As Cristian navigates a world of fear, suspicion, and propaganda, he must decide what it means to be loyal, truthful, and brave in a system built on betrayal.

Educational Value

This novel supports key literacy and social-emotional learning goals:

- **Literary Analysis:** *I Must Betray You* explores first-person narration and perspective, complex character development, motivation, tension, and suspense.
- **Historical and Cultural Context:** The story provides insight into life under a communist dictatorship and the Romanian Revolution of 1989.
- **Civic Understanding:** The book explores themes of freedom, surveillance, propaganda, moral courage, and the role of government.
- **Cross-Curricular Engagement:** This novel connects to world history (Cold War and Communism), religion (ethics and morality, human rights and dignity), media literacy (investigating information sources for bias), and science (forensics).

Discussion Topics for Home

- How does living under constant surveillance affect people's behavior and relationships? Do you behave differently if you think an authority figure is watching? Why?
- How do propaganda and misinformation shape what people believe? What strategies can we use to critically evaluate information?
- Fear controls much of society under Ceaușescu's regime. What message does [2 Timothy 1:6-8](#) give us about bravery in the face of fear? Where do we see moments of courage breaking through that fear in the novel?
- How do [Isaiah 10:1-3](#) and [Matthew 5:10](#) connect to the government system and its citizens in the novel? What does Catholic social teaching tell us about moral courage and the cost of silence?

Why We're Reading *I Must Betray You*

I Must Betray You offers students a compelling look at a lesser-known moment in world history while exploring timeless questions about integrity, courage, and freedom. Its brief chapters and fast pace engage readers of all levels. The novel encourages students to reflect on the value of truth and the responsibilities of citizenship, helping them better understand both past and present struggles for human rights.