

I Must Betray You

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Seventeen-year-old Cristian lives in communist Romania, where secret agents are everywhere, and people are suppressed by a spy network. When an agent blackmails Cristian into becoming an informant, he has little choice but to agree to spy on a US diplomatic family, lying to his family and betraying those he loves. As communist regimes crumble across Europe, the youth of Romania rise up on a wave of solidarity and courage and Cristian joins the revolution and risks everything for freedom. This fast-paced novel deals with complex issues of responsibility, truth, loyalty, family, activism, advocacy, love and loyalty, justice, and power, and is suitable for literature circles or independent reading.

Subjects: English Language Arts, Social Studies

Grades 8-11

Evaluation Date: Sep 2022



Social Considerations

Resource Evaluation

CURRICULUM FIT

Does the resource support BC curriculum?



Extensively

This resource supports the Big Ideas in ELA 8-10. It invites students to deeply question the events in Romania in the 1980s and contributes to their ability to be educated and engaged citizens. Reading how Cristian grappled with his fear, loyalty, and outrage in the face of injustice, helps students deepen their understanding of diverse, complex ideas about identity, others, and the world. This resource also supports many SS12 electives, as it raises issues of power imbalance, social justice, political unrest, revolt and revolution, and contrasting political ideologies.

This resource supports the Core Competencies of the BC curriculum:

- Critical & Reflective Thinking
- Personal Awareness and Responsibility
- Social Awareness and Responsibility

SUGGESTED CLASSROOM USAGE

This book is suitable for literature circles or independent reading. It could be used to explore social justice themes of power, injustice, activism, advocacy, and conflict resolution. Students could discuss the lasting impacts of government policies and the role of the individual in society. It could also be used to explore personal journeys of growth, as readers follow how Cristian defines his values, discovers love and loyalty, and finds his courage in the face of unimaginable adversity.

SOCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Belief System

The book puts into stark question the beliefs of communism and its impact on the Romanian citizens in the 1980's. Cristian is critical of communist ideals and wonders, in disbelief, what it might be to live under capitalism in the USA. The book also alludes to religious persecution and harassment of Catholics, destroying churches and forcing citizens to pray in secret.

Socio-Economic

Cristian and his family live in abject poverty, crammed in a small apartment, suffering from severe cold and illness, waiting in line for meager rations, and bartering cigarettes for even essential items such as medicine. This is starkly contrasted with the lavish lifestyle of Ceausescu and his family.

Violence

Cristian's mother slaps him. A girl is viciously attacked by a wild dog in the street. Cristian's sister endures forced pregnancy checks. A beloved character is beaten to death. There are graphic depictions of government-led torture, beatings, head shaving, and humiliation. When the student uprising begins, there is mass violence in the streets, including sniper shooting, tanks driving over peaceful protesters, and shootings.

Ethical and Legal

Cristian grapples with what is "right". He is faced with many dilemmas including lying, betraying those he loves, and breaking the law by rising up against an unjust government.

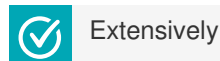
Safety

Cristian is forced to make dangerous decisions for his survival and that of his family. He hides from the government, lies to officials, participates in illegal protests, and breaks the laws.

Language


There is mild profanity.

Do the social considerations support, rather than detract from, student learning?




The social considerations are essential to the story to fully convey the repression, suffering, and bravery of the Romanian people.


Is the resource engaging?

 Extensively


Is the content current for the intended curriculum and grade?

 Extensively

Is the content accurate for the intended curriculum and grade?


 Extensively

Is the content relevant and important for student broad understandings?


 Extensively

Audience


Is the content appropriate to the emotional maturity and cognitive level of students?

 Extensively


Does the resource provide opportunities for creative and critical thinking?

 Extensively

Is the level of detail appropriate?

 Extensively

Is the language use appropriate to the emotional maturity and cognitive level of students?

 Extensively


This story is engaging, fast-paced, educational, and startling. Although the events take place in the 1980s, the story is timely because it raises questions of the role of the individual in the face of social injustice and asks hard questions about the role of government in relation to its people. Cristian is a relatable character who grapples to do the right thing. Students are invited to think critically about his choices, while comparing them to current events of their world.

TECHNICAL DESIGN


Does the resource make effective use of the medium?

 Extensively


Is the resource easy to use?

 Extensively

Is the use of font, text size and presentation suitable?


 Extensively

Are extraneous elements/illustrations kept to a minimum?


 Extensively

Each chapter is titled in Romanian. There are occasional interspersed secret police memos of the regime, which are clearly identified by a different font, layout, and diction.


Does the text show insight into the complexity of the human condition?

 Extensively

Does the text broaden students' experiences and understanding?

 Extensively

To what degree is this text stylistically rich?

 Extensively

Plot description

17-year-old Cristian lives in communist Romania. Secret agents monitor the people, and a complex citizen spy network suppresses all Romanians. When an agent blackmails Cristian to become an informer, he is left with few choices: he must protect his family and secure medicine for his grandfather. Reluctantly, Cristian agrees to spy on a US diplomat family, lie to his family, and betray everyone he loves by assisting the regime that oppresses them. Soon, Communist regimes begin to crumble across Europe and the Romanian youth take to the streets unarmed, rising up on a wave of solidarity and courage. Cristian and his friends join the revolution and risk everything for freedom.

Related Comments

I Must Betray You explores a myriad of sophisticated themes relating to personal responsibility, truth, loyalty, family, justice, and power. Cristian is a nuanced, flawed character who is called to take a stand even when his life is endangered. The secondary characters are equally nuanced. Grandfather Bunu is both rebellious and loving; Liliana is brave and gentle; Cristian's parents are frightened and brave; even Dan, the American boy at the embassy, is caught in the complexities of this regime. The conflicts and relationships are complex and create both intrigue and suspense.

Genre

- Historical

Literary Highlights

- Complex conflict(s)
- Rich characterization
- Well-developed themes

Type

- Novel

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Reading Level

- At intended grade level(s)

GRADES AND SUBJECTS

Subjects

- English Language Arts: 8-11
- Socials Studies: 10-12

ADDITIONAL INFO

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