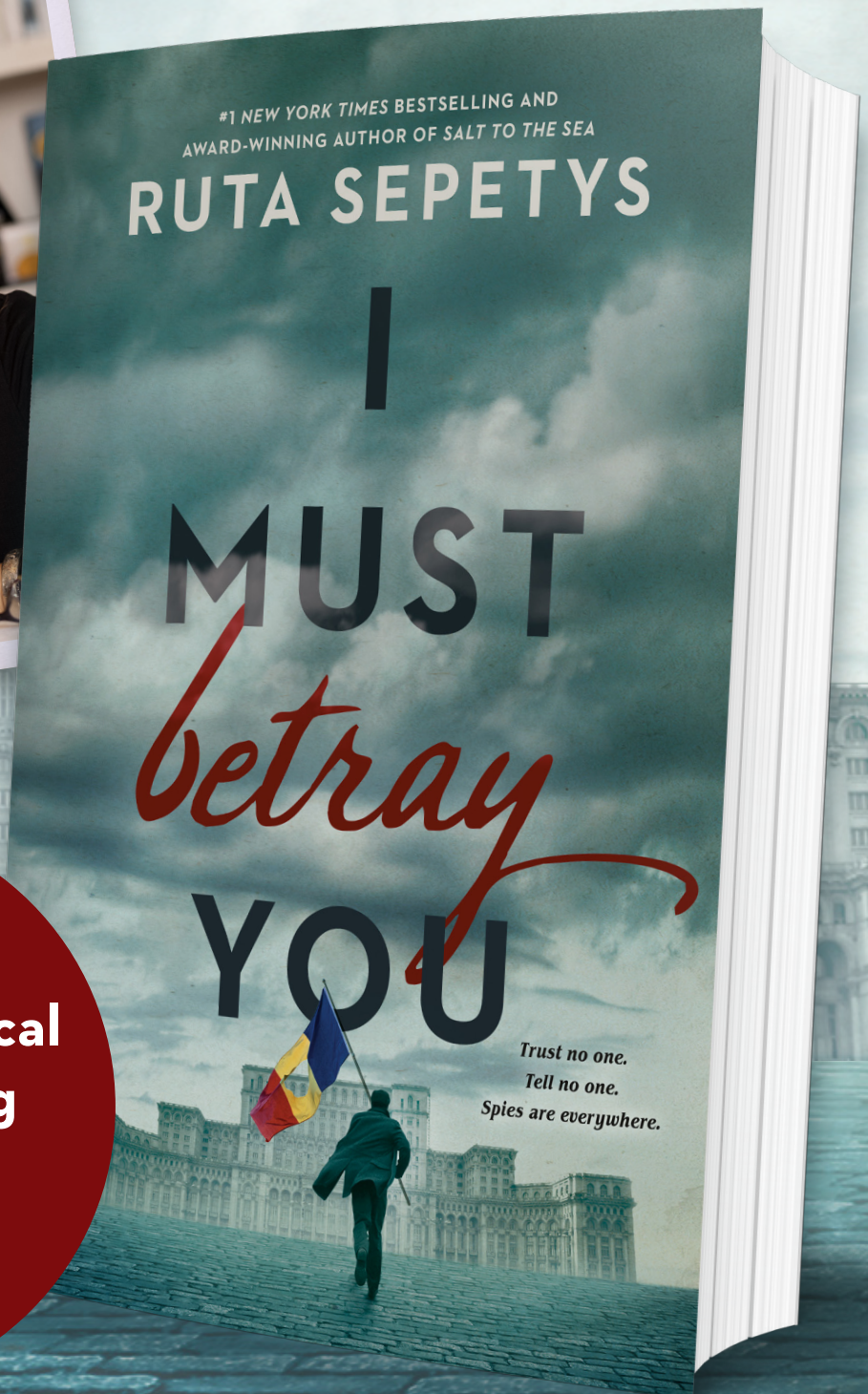


AN EDUCATOR'S GUIDE TO



**“The finest
writer of historical
fiction working
today.”**

**—The Wall
Street Journal**



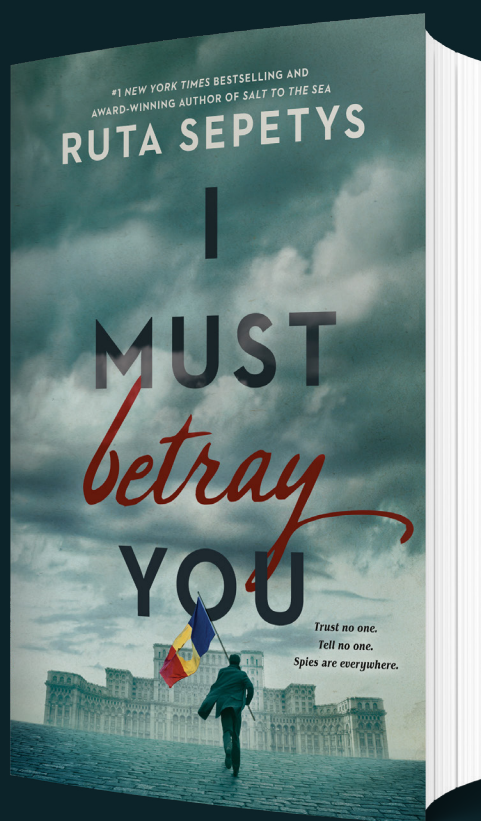
Penguin
Young
Readers

DEAR EDUCATOR,

Ruta Sepetys's novels are fantastic for introducing under-examined history and lost stories to young readers in engaging, informative, and page-turning stories that are both specific to their time period, setting, and characters but also universal in their appeal. *I Must Betray You* is no different and uniquely highlights teenagers who stood up to tyranny and fought for their freedom. We hope this guide allows you to dig deeper and bring this novel and historical moment to life for the young people in your class or library. As Ruta Sepetys says in her author's note, "History is the gateway to our collective story and the story of humanity." Thank you for sharing this history with your young readers.

Sincerely,

PENGUIN YOUNG READERS
SCHOOL & LIBRARY MARKETING



PRAISE FOR *I MUST BETRAY YOU*

IS YOUR STATE READING
I MUST BETRAY YOU?
28 STATE AWARDS
AND COUNTING!

5 STARRED REVIEWS! ★★★★★

★ "Compulsively readable and brilliant."

—*Kirkus Reviews*, starred review

★ "Sepetys once again masterfully portrays a dark, forgotten corner of history."

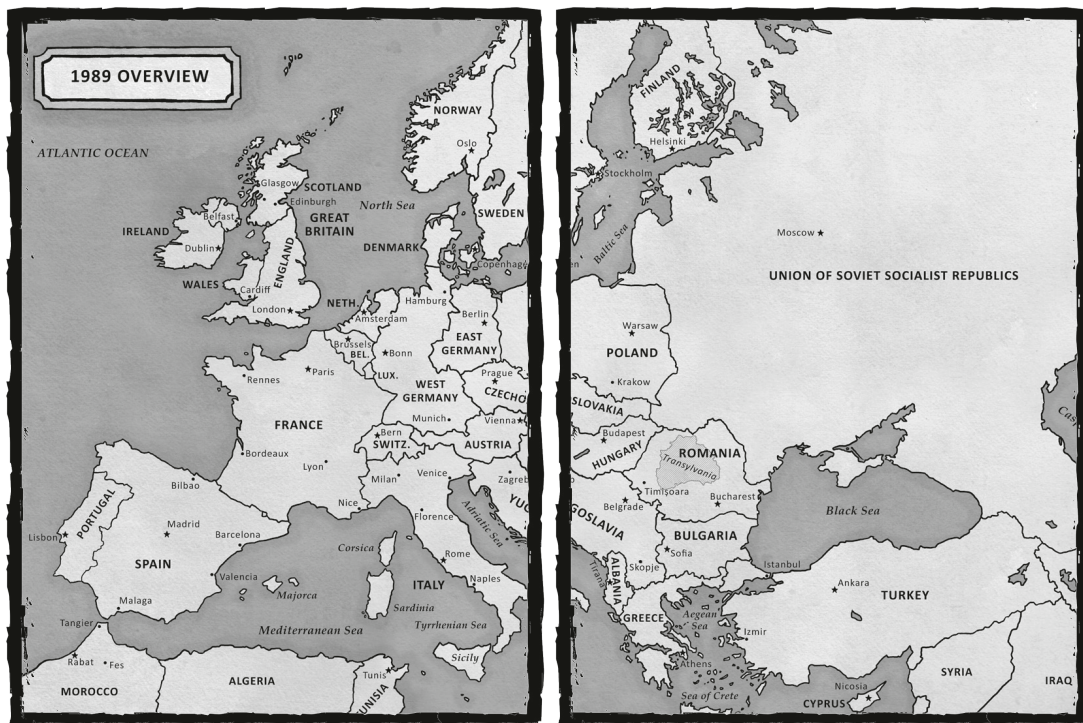
—*Booklist*, starred review

This guide was written by Angie Manfredi. Angie has worked in public, special, and school libraries for the past sixteen years. She is currently a middle school librarian in the Southwest and believes that every child deserves the right to access relevant and engaging literature that accurately reflects their lives and the world around them. She likes sending snail mail, world cinema, and adventures.

PRE-READING

Romanian history is a topic that not all young readers may be familiar with. Prior to reading, consider introducing the setting, time period, characters, geography, and other geopolitical events happening around Romania in 1989 during the novel.

WHERE IS ROMANIA?



CLICK THE BELOW TO READ MORE

KEY TERMS AND FIGURES TO HIGHLIGHT

COMMUNISM

NICOLAE CEAUȘESCU

RADIO FREE EUROPE

OTHER RESOURCES TO SHARE

ROMANIA'S REVOLUTION, THEN AND NOW

CIA REPORT ON ROMANIA POST WWII AND SOVIET UNION INVOLVEMENT

PRE-READING

DISCUSSION ON COMMUNISM

Communism is a big idea, theme, and nuanced topic, not just in the book, but in the world. Discuss the word, its history, and the permutations and interpretations with your students. For example: The word *communism* derives from the Latin *communis* meaning *shared* or *common*.

- How do you think that the word communism has been interpreted historically and in the present?
- How would you define communism during this time period, particularly Ceaușescu's communism?

WHAT'S THE 'ISM? COMMUNISM VS SOCIALISM VS TOTALITARIANISM

Have your students watch this [Crash Course on History video](#) on the difference between capitalism and socialism (*PBS LearningMedia has free accounts for teachers so you can share this in a Google classroom and build a lesson around it if you would like.*)

NOW HAVE THEM USE DICTIONARIES TO DEFINE THESE THREE TERMS:

COMMUNISM

SOCIALISM

TOTALITARIANISM

(If you are working with high school students, have them research the roots of each of these words. What do they derive from? What are their root words?)

PRE-READING

WHAT'S THE 'ISM? COMMUNISM VS SOCIALISM VS TOTALITARIANISM (*cont'd*)

Now do a quick think-pair-share/small group activity to have your students brainstorm what they might be able to infer about these systems through their definitions. What might life be like under each of them? Are there elements that sound positive about each? What might be misinterpreted or even misrepresented about each?

Now discuss with students that throughout the book, they will encounter many characters talking about these concepts of government and how societies are run. Ask them to keep in mind this pre-work and discussions and think about the way Ceaușescu and his regime tried to manipulate and control language and reality, including but not limited to even the very words used to discuss the systems of his government.

SUPPLEMENTAL

[Students of History](#) is a site run by a former history teacher and has a concise guide you can share with students.

Chuck Norris vs. Communism is a documentary about how movies being snuck into the country sparked a revolution. Before reading, to give students a sense and context of what life was like in Romania at the time, [watch the trailer](#) for this short documentary film and discuss with your students.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- On pg. 10, we learn it is illegal to even say the word *dollar* in Romania. Why do you think this is? What does this immediately tell us about the country?
- Ceaușescu bulldozed private homes, churches, and even trees to make more uniform housing. What were the immediate impacts of this decision? What were the larger and maybe unforeseen impacts? Where do you live? What would it be like if it was changed so quickly in such a significant way?
- Even though joking is illegal and can result in punishment, Bunu and Cristian enjoy joking with each other: “People told jokes anyway” (p. 29). What are some ways humor can be used as a coping mechanism? Do you think it’s worth the risk?
- Bunu says: “We can’t join together in solidarity because we never know whom we can trust or who might be an informer” (p. 60). What are some examples of how we see this truth play out in the book?
- Do you believe Cici when she says, “People in other cities and in the countryside have it easier . . . they have farms, more food, less restrictions. It’s the worst in Bucharest” (p. 69). Do you think that’s what everyone in Romania says about somewhere else? Is that intentional on the part of the regime? What are some reasons they would want everyone to think this? Why would the government make it harder in Bucharest?



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (cont'd)

- Cristian's mother becomes so scared she drops and loses their cooking oil (p. 99). How does the fear of the unknown and unseen make everyday life scarier and harder in Romania? What are some of the costs, like the cooking oil, that we see in the story?
- Cristian is shocked and upset when he finds out the leaders in the West believe Ceaușescu's propaganda and lies (p. 107). Why do you think world leaders were fooled? If they weren't totally fooled, what are some reasons you can think of regarding why they just "went along" with Ceaușescu's propaganda?
- Why didn't Bunu tell Cristian about the meetings he was called in for with the Securitate? Do you think he was trying to protect Cristian? Did Cristian feel like it was protection? Would you want to know if you were Cristian?
- Do you think the risk Cristian takes to deliver his journal, the "gift of truth," to Mr. Van Dorn is worth it (p. 168)?
- Once the revolution begins, Cristian and his family first hear word of it through their radio. What would it be like if you were someone without a radio? How do you think word spread of the protests? Imagine yourself in that scenario: Would you believe this news? How would you react?
- What does Cristian mean when he says, "We're more Romanian than those guards are!" (p. 244)?
- Reflecting on the revolution as well as the violence, Alex tells Cristian "No regrets in bravery" (p. 271). What regrets do you think people will have about this period, both in what they did do and what they didn't do? What glimpses of that do we get towards the end of the book?



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (cont'd)

- One of the last messages Cristian gets from Cici is “A revolution eats its heroes” (p. 280). Who would you define as a “hero” in this book? What about the real-life situations that happened in Romania in the 1980s?
- How did you feel about what happened to the Ceaușescus? What do you think a fitting punishment for them could be? Is there one? How did the outcome lead to closure for some people? How did it make finding closure harder?
- What is the significance of Ruta Sepetys labeling the chapter that begins with Liliana and Cristian wishing each other Merry Christmas as “Chapter Unu (One)” (p. 282)?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

SPEAK UP WITH POETRY

Cristian records fragments of feelings and words in his notebook, and they eventually come together to form a poem. Have your students select a few words from this word list to create their own poems in the style of Cristian’s poem. You can also have students randomly select a word and discuss how it relates to the book, using it as a central theme for discussion or free writing about it.

ALTERNATE IDEA

Print the following page out and use a sheet of magnetic paper or small magnets to turn these words into a small magnetic poetry kit. Encourage students to create with it.

SPEAK UP WITH POETRY

(PRINT OUT FOR ALTERNATE IDEA ACTIVITY)

LIBERTY	WHIMPER	ALIVE
TRUTH	WHISPER	BELIEVE
RESISTANCE	SHOUT	FAITH
INSIST	PROCLAIM	POWERFUL
STRIVE	DEFY	DARE
STRENGTH	ENDURE	UNITY
WISE	TIRELESS	REMEMBER
COURAGE	SURVIVE	PERSEVERE
BRAVE	DECLARE	BELIEVE
REVOLT	RISK	YEARN

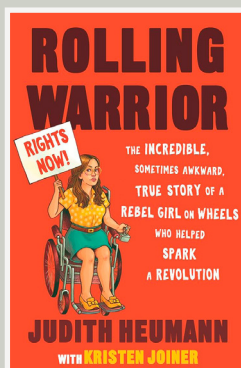
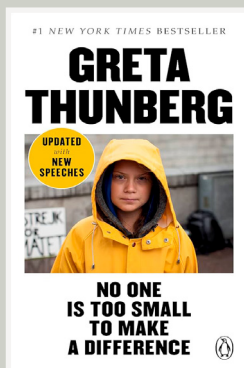
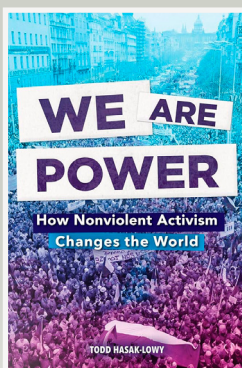
EXTENSION ACTIVITIES (cont'd)

YOUTH IN REVOLT: RESEARCH THE RESISTANCE OF YOUNG PEOPLE

The Romanian Revolution was led, in part, by young people just like Cristian, Luca, and Liliana. Revolutions and resistance are still being led by young people today. If you have access to databases, have your students use them to research more about the following contemporary resistance movements:

- *The death of Mahsa Amini and protests in Iran*
- *Autumn Peltier and water advocacy*
- *Mari Copeny and the Flint water crisis*
- *2020–2021 student protests in Thailand*

IF YOU DON'T HAVE ACCESS TO DATABASES OR WANT
TO SUPPLEMENT THEM, CHECK OUT THESE BOOKS:



EXTENSION ACTIVITIES (cont'd)

WHAT'S ON YOUR LIST?

Have your students break into small groups. Give each group a large sheet of paper. Use the examples from the book of contraband or hard-to-acquire items such as Coca-Cola, bananas, chocolate, Twinkies, VHS tapes, magazines, and even tampons. Now tell the groups to brainstorm a list of the physical items they would find it most difficult to live without or that they would most notice missing from their lives. Give each group five to ten minutes to discuss and write down their answers. Encourage them to explain their reasoning for each selection and to be prepared to present them to the class.

When the time is up, instead of having each group present, have them switch papers with the group to their left. Now tell them they will have only two minutes to discuss the other group's selections and present those to the class.

Once you have gotten through the presentations, ask your class to reflect. Questions to bring up for reflection may include: What was similar on the lists? What did they think the other group left off that was essential on their list? Was it hard or easy to understand the other group's choices?

Then have them take that connection to reflect on the book either in small group discussion or written reflection: How were young people like Cristian impacted by this constant deprivation? How would it shape their dreams for what was possible? What would their lives be like growing up? Would it be worse to grow up as Cristian had or as Bunu did, with memories of before?



EXTENSION ACTIVITIES (cont'd)

WHAT'S NEXT? A WRITING EXERCISE

Though this is a work of historical fiction, it doesn't take place in the distant past. If he were a real person, Cristian would have been born in approximately 1972, making it likely he would still be alive in 2023.

In the author's note Sepetys writes:

"After the execution, a replacement set of communists took over, and for many years, some of the preexisting networks remained supported. Some began to question the legitimacy of the revolution. As such, there was no clear or satisfying 'ending' to the period. Things were confusing, questions remained—and still remain. I've tried to reflect that in the epilogue. As a reader, unanswered questions and sadness may feel frustrating, but it's difficult to grasp how frustrating it must feel for those who actually experienced the events" (pg. 308).

First, have a discussion regarding how your students felt about the ending of the book. What questions did they expect to be answered? What were they frustrated to not get closure on? Then use Sepetys's note to have them reflect. What was intentional in the ending? Does it mirror how someone in Cristian's situation might feel?

Now encourage your students to write their own "what next" for characters in the book. It does not just have to be the scene of Paddle Hands opening the door to talk to Cristian. Make a list of multiple characters from the book and ask students to imagine what their "what next" was at the end of the book.

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES (cont'd)

GUIDEBOOK TO ROMANIA, 1989

Much like Cristian, we get only hints and bits of what the outside world thinks about Romania. Have your students use what they learned in the book, including details only someone living there might experience, like the rabid dogs or the economy of Kents, to write in guidebook style about the Romania Cristian experiences. Use examples from the book (pp. 8–9, 25) as model texts. What would they warn people about? How could they describe what Cristian and his friends and family have to live through?

EXTENSION ACTIVITY: Have half the students do the same assignment but from the perspective of the Ceaușescu or others who are promoting the official party line about Romania. Then have them switch and read each other's pieces. You could also make this an online design assignment, having students create tourism brochures in Google Slides, Canva, or another design program. What are the visual differences in the brochures? Now go online and see what contemporary images and descriptions of Romania you can find. (Start with <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/romania/>)

MAPPING A REVOLUTION

Refer to the map of Eastern Europe in the front of this guide. Take note of where Romania is located. Teachers, have small groups work together to create a chronological list of the countries Cristian hears about gaining their liberation. Now have your students refer back to the map and see where they are in relation to Romania. Lead a discussion or encourage small group conversation about how it might feel to hear word of so many revolutions happening around your home country. How would this be encouraging? How would it be frustrating? What are some connections Sepetys makes with the feelings of being trapped and the feelings of hearing about the spread of revolution?

ADDITIONAL IDEA: Make copies of the maps and have students color-code and label each country with the dates their revolutions began.

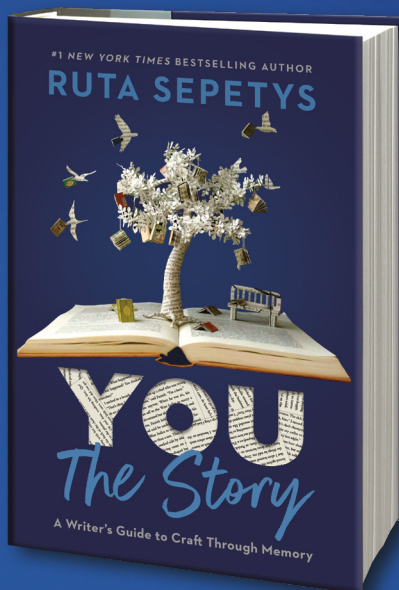
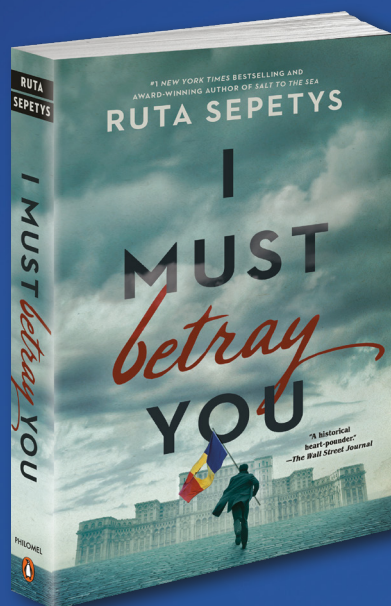


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—*The Wall Street Journal*

Bring
RUTA SEPETYS
into your classroom or library!

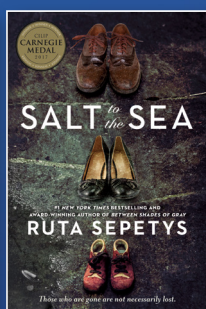
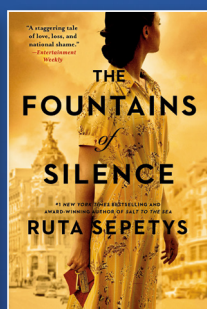
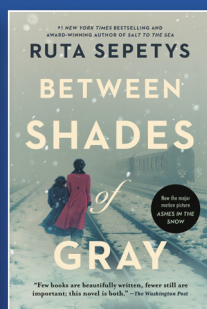
2x
Carnegie
Medal
Winner!

#1
New York
Times
Bestseller



Over
25
Starred
Reviews!

109
State Award
Reading
Lists!



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