

**Title:** *I Must Betray You*  
**Author:** Ruta Sepetys  
**Genre:** Historical Fiction

Reviewer Name and Grade: Allie H., 8th grade

Date Reviewed: June 3, 2023

In the book *I Must Betray You* by Ruta Sepetys, Seventeen-year-old Cristian Florescu is living in Romania in the year 1989, during a time when Communism reigned. He and other Romanians had to stand in line for hours each day just to get the barely enough food to live off of, they lived in tiny apartments where heating and electricity shut off at frequent but unpredictable intervals, and any connection to the West was strictly prohibited. Worst of all, it was illegal to complain or go against anything to do with Romania or its government—and if anyone did, they would risk being caught by an informer, and the consequences would not be good.

Cristian, like most, is unhappy with the Romanian government, and finds small ways to rebel. He keeps a notebook full of all his woes, stored safely in his closet away from the cameras. He listens to an illegal radio, and hears news that other Communist countries are having revolutions, being freed at long last—but never anything about Romania. His mother cleans the house of an American family living in Romania, and Cristian even gets the chance to befriend their son, Dan, which gives him an insight into what life is like outside the oppressive country he has always lived in. Dan's family has plenty of food, and lives in comfort and ease.

Although it may seem that things can't get any worse for Cristian, they do. One day, the government discovers an American dollar he had, and the only way for him to stay out of trouble is to betray a good friend. The stakes are high—if Cristian complies, his grandfather will receive medicine for the leukemia that is slowly killing him, but at the cost of betraying another and constant secrecy. If he doesn't, it will land him in serious trouble. And all the while, the seeds of revolution are being planted. It will only take some time and care for them to take root and flourish into something much more meaningful—freedom.

*Did the plot keep you interested?*

Yes, the plot was very interesting. I couldn't put the book down!

*Was the pace of the book too fast, too slow, or just right?*

The pace of the book was fast, but I thought it was enjoyable. If you prefer to read slower-paced books, this may not be the one for you. However, it was perfect in my own opinion.

*What grade level(s) is this book appropriate for?*

This book is appropriate for seventh, eighth, or ninth grade readers.

*What type of reader would you recommend this to?*

I would recommend this book not only to those who enjoy historical fiction, but to anyone who likes reading at all. I usually read fantasy books, but I found *I Must Betray You* to be a great read nonetheless. If you are discouraged by books that are overly long, this novel is a good choice as well, because it is only 292 pages.

*What other information do you think would be helpful for teens to know about this book?*

I think it would be helpful for teens to know that this book may be historical fiction, but actually takes place quite recently, in 1989.

*I rate this book 5 stars: I'm really glad I read this book; it was awesome!*

I gave this book a five star rating because it was a fast-paced, heartfelt book that was a perfect balance of emotion and action. Each character had well-developed personalities, for example, Cristian's grandfather was rebellious, and his mother was anxious, but they always had more depth to them as well. The plot of the story was

multi-layered, including romance, friendship conflicts, internal conflict, and tension in society that finally bursts towards the end in a wonderfully written climax.

Reviewer Name and Grade: Jake S., Grade 11

Date Reviewed: 9/28/23

This story takes place in Bucharest, Romania in 1989. At this time Romania is a communist country whose leader Nicolae Ceausescu and his wife Mother Elena led a leadership which was tyrannical and oppressive to the Romanian people. This book is about a boy named Cristian Florescu, who is 17 and attends MF3 High School in Romania. He lives in Salajan sector three in an apartment that is described as no bigger than a matchbox with his mom, dad, older sister CiCi (Cicilia) and his grandfather Bunu. In the apartment building across from him lives his friend Luca and his love interest Liliana Pavel. They all live in dire conditions with limited electricity, barely any heat, and food rations. Everyone had to stand in line for food and even after waiting they were not given much. In Romania, it was hard to trust anyone because someone might be working as an informer who secretly informed the Securitate (secret police) on the private lives of others.

Cristian's mom works as a cleaning women for an American ambassador Mr. Van Dorn and his family. Cristian gets tasked or you can say blackmailed by the Securitate into informing on Mr. Van Dorn by picking up his mother from work and spending some time with Mr. Van Dorn's son Dan so that he can give information. Someone had told the Securitate that Cristian had a stamp collection and had an American Dollar which was forbidden. Cristian did not want to become an informer but when they said they would provide medicine for his grandfather who he though was dying of leukemia he agreed to inform. Cristian's grandfather Bunu, was a dissident he did not believe in the communist government that was oppressing the Romanian people, he was very influential in Cristians life. Cristian liked to write and kept a notebook of his writings and feelings on Romanian life and government. In Romania, you can only watch certain shows, and you never know who is listening or spying. Cristian even thinks that one of his family members is a spy that gave information on him. The story is told from Cristian's point of view, we learn a lot about Cristian and the other characters in the story. They embark on getting liberated and all that entails, Cristian even takes a gamble with anonymously turning over his notebook to Mr. Van Dorn in hopes it will help. In the end Cristian finds out answers like what really happened to Bunu and who was the real spy in the family.

*Did the plot keep you interested?*

Yes, the plot kept me interested. This book was very interesting and the plot was very good and informative at the same time.

*Was the pace of the book fast, too slow, or just right?*

For the most part the pace of the book fast. Something was always happening.

*What grade level(s) is the book appropriate for?*

The grade levels this book is appropriate for would be 8th grade and up.

*What type of reader would you recommend this book to?*

The type of reader I would recommend this book to is someone who likes historical fiction and likes to learn and be entertained all in one book.

*What other information would be helpful for teens to know about this book?*

The chapter titles are in another language but that did not really have any effect on understanding the book. Also there is more information at the end of the book if you read the Epilogue and look at the pictures and captions that follow.

*I rate this book 5 stars: I'm really glad I read this book; it was awesome.*

I gave this book this rating because it was a really great book that was very well written. I feel like I learned a lot and enjoyed myself at the same time. So this book is a win!

Reviewer's Name and Grade: Nitya M., 9th Grade

Date Reviewed: March 23, 2024

*I Must Betray You* by Ruta Sepetys is a young adult historical fiction book. The book starts out a long time ago, 1989 Romania. As communism is on the rise in eastern Europe and almost the entirety of Europe Romania is in tension on whether to join the communist party or stay independent. Struck with decisions they must make one. The story revolves around Christian Florescu, a brave young boy who aspires to become a writer one day. The writing is an escape for Christian in the harsh realities of his day-to-day life. This is because Christian lives under a totalitarian government which restricts his opinions and his overall freedom. His grandfather tells him about the days before the strict government formed which makes him even more encouraged to have a freer life. Although he is living quite a normal life one day everything changes when Christian is blackmailed by the secret police and forced to become a spy and informant. This heartbreaking news gives him two choices, either to betray his friends and family or to get captured by the police and face life in prison or even worse get a death penalty. As he becomes more desperate to escape this risky life as a spy, he figures out something clever. He finds the idea to become a double agent and destroy the government by revealing secrets to oppositions. The book then shows the terror of Christian as he lives his day to day with constant fear that one day he might get caught living this double life and the punishment he might receive if he is caught. As the days go by the situation in Romania changes as well. Christian finds himself stuck with a life-or-death situation picking between loyalty or betrayal. *I Must Betray You* is a great story showing the life of a normal person as his life changes in one moment.

***Did the plot keep me interested?***

Not really.

***Was the pace of the book too fast, too slow, or just right?***

It was just right.

***What grade level(s) is this book appropriate for?***

I think this book is appropriate for grade levels 7 and up.

***What type of reader would you recommend this book to?***

I would recommend this to someone who likes history as the book contains a lot of true historical events and is a historical fiction book.

***What other information do you think would be helpful for teens to know about this book?***

I would not read it if you were not very interested in history.

***Rating: 3 stars***, because I don't really like to read history, but the rating could be higher if someone likes history.

Reviewer name and grade: Kaileen C., Grade 8

Date reviewed: April 6, 2024

*"I Must Betray You"* by Ruta Sepetys is a historical fiction novel set in Romania during the 1980s. The story is about 17 year old Cristian Florescu, a man living under the oppressive regime of Nicolae Ceaușescu. Cristian's father has been arrested for speaking out against the government, leaving Cristian torn between his loyalty to his family and his desire for freedom. When Cristian is recruited by the Securitate, a secret police force, he sees an opportunity to save his father and protect his family. However, as Cristian becomes increasingly entangled in the web of mischief and betrayal, he must deal with his conscience and the consequences of his actions. Against

the force of political and social unrest, Cristian navigates a dangerous world where trust is rare and betrayal is a constant threat.

*Did the plot keep you interested?*

Yes, the plot of *I Must Betray You* kept me really engaged with its suspenseful storyline and cool characters. For example, the tension builds as Cristian wrestles with his moral dilemmas and navigates the treacherous political state of Communist Romania.

*Was the pace of the book just right?*

Yes, the pace of the book was super consistent, with a steady buildup of tension and suspense that kept me turning the pages. Ruta Sepetys effectively balances moments of quiet reflection with high-stakes action scenes, keeping the momentum of the plot.

*What grade level(s) is this book appropriate for?*

This book is appropriate for middle schoolers and above, specifically those interested in historical fiction and thrillers.

*What type of reader would you recommend this book to?*

I would recommend this book to readers who enjoy fast and thought-provoking plots referencing real historical events. Fans of Ruta Sepetys previous works or readers interested in exploring lesser-known periods of history would likely like this novel.

*What other information do you think would be helpful for teens to know about this book?*

Teens should know that "*I Must Betray You*" contains themes of political oppression, violence, or betrayal, which may be disturbing for some readers. Additionally, the novel gives you insight into the harsh realities of life under a totalitarian society, shedding light on an important but often overlooked chapter of history.

Rating: 3 stars

*Explanation:* I enjoyed *I Must Betray You* and found it to be a fascinating yet also fun read. The novel offers a great exploration of loyalty, sacrifice, and the cost of living under a repressive regime. The author's well-researched historical details bring the story to life, immersing readers in the world of Communist Romania. However, there were moments where I felt the words were lacking emotion, and I couldn't fully imagine the pages. But overall this book could be great for others, not for me.