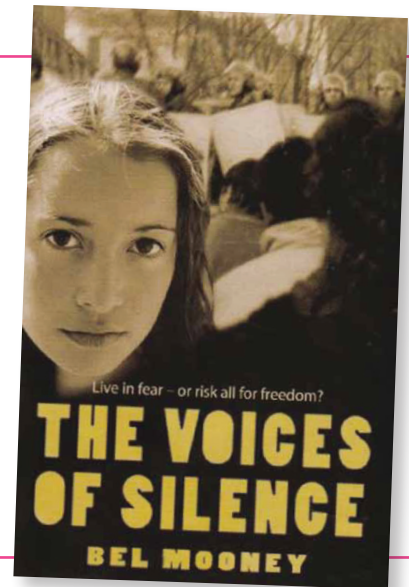


THE VOICES OF SILENCE

by Bel Mooney

Walker Books
(Lower secondary)



Flora Popescu's parents are planning to defect when daily life suddenly brings frightening changes – some linked to a friendship between Flora and a new boy at school. Unlike his poor classmates, Daniel dresses and eats well, and his father ranks high in the secret police. Flora slowly realises that her father is in danger and only she can save him from the secret police.

BACKGROUND

The Communist dictator Nicolae Ceausescu ruled Romania, a country in the Balkans, from 1965 until 1989. Ceausescu was feared and loathed as his rule became increasingly oppressive. People lived in fear of the secret police (Securitate) who had informers in workplaces, schools, universities and even among neighbours. Ceausescu's economic policies led to chronic food shortages and power cuts. He and his wife were executed on Christmas Day in 1989 following a national uprising.



QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. When Daniel Ghiban first arrives at school, what marks him out as different from the other students? **Possible answers:** Clothes (jeans/trainers), food in packed lunch (meat, cake, fresh bread), pencil sharpener
2. What are some of the hardships Flora and her family and others have to put up with in their daily lives? **Possible answers:** Shortages of good fresh food, queuing for everything, no new clothes, unreliable electricity supply, severe cold
3. What do you think would be the worst aspect of life in Romania before the revolution? **Think about:** The lack of everyday goods, having to be suspicious of everybody, being unable to speak freely or ask questions
4. What do you think about Flora telling Daniel about her father's plans? Can you understand why she did it?
5. When Flora and her mother emerge from their flat after Ceausescu's death, what changes do they notice? **Possible answers:** Fresh food for sale, newspapers available, people talking to each other, Daniel looking terrible

ROLE PLAY

- In groups, talk about your reactions to your new classmate Daniel.
- In pairs, create a conversation between Flora and Alys looking back at their experiences in Palace Square on the night of the revolution.

UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

- Article 12:** Nobody should try to harm our good name. Nobody has the right to come into our home, open our letters, or bother us or our family without a good reason.
- Article 14:** If we are frightened of being badly treated in our own country, we all have the right to run away to another country to be safe.
- Article 19:** We all have the right to make up our own minds, to think what we like, to say what we think, and to share our ideas with other people.
- Article 20:** We all have to the right to meet our friends and to work together in peace to defend our rights. Nobody can make us join a group if we don't want to.

FOLLOW UP WORK

Find out more:
You can learn about why Bel Mooney wrote this book, and discover her other children's books, at www.belmooney.co.uk

FIND OUT MORE

Further resources for teaching around human rights can be found at: www.amnesty.org.uk/education