

EDUCATORS GUIDE

*The Loud Silence
of Francine Green*

KAREN CUSHMAN



Grades 7 up

Thematic Connections

Friendship • Family • Courage • Fear
Injustice • Bullying • Free Expression • Self-Discipline

Curriculum Connections

Social Studies: 1950s McCarthy Era
Language Arts • Art • Drama

About the Book

Set in Hollywood, California, in 1950s during the McCarthy era, 13-year-old Francine Green learns about free speech, sins of omission, and the true meaning of friendship.

Francine Green is in the eighth grade at All Saints School for Girls in Hollywood, California, when she meets Sophie Bowman, the only child of a widowed screenwriter. Unlike Francine, Sophie is fearless. She has already been kicked out of public school, and now the nuns at All Saints view her as “trouble” and a bad influence on her classmates. But Francine is intrigued by Sophie and soon becomes her best friend. The Bowman household is the opposite of Francine’s. Sophie calls her father Harry, and dinner table talk is about the atom bomb, Communists, free speech, and the government blacklist. Francine’s father expects her to conform to rules, and warns her, “Don’t get involved.” The friendship that develops between Francine and Sophie is short-lived because Sophie and her father are forced to leave town. But Sophie’s sudden departure shocks Francine into speaking out on important issues.

Pre-Reading Activity

Ask students to use sites on the Internet or materials in the library to find out about Senator Joseph McCarthy. Then have them write a headline news story called “McCarthyism Alarms America.”

Vocabulary/Use of Language

The vocabulary in the novel isn’t difficult, but there may be some words that students need to review. Ask them to jot down unfamiliar words and define them by taking clues from the context. Such words may include: *blasphemy* (p. 11), *impertinence* (p. 11), *pagan* (p. 12), *pious* (p. 18), *humiliation* (p. 32), *pungent* (p. 35), *trendsetter* (p. 51), *canonized* (p. 53), *deluded* (p. 83), *nonconformity* (p. 87), *subversive* (p. 105), *vigilant* (p. 106), *mutilate* (p. 107), *temporal* (p. 152), *invincible* (p. 158), *sacrilege* (p. 158), and *placard* (p. 185).

Thematic Connections

Questions for Group Discussion

FRIENDSHIP—Francine Green tries to be friends with Mary Agnes Malone. Explain why that friendship doesn't work. Ask students to explain Francine's fascination with Sophie Bowman. Why are they unlikely friends? What does Francine contribute to the friendship that Sophie cannot provide? What does Sophie offer Francine? Why does Mr. Bowman think that Sophie needs a friend like Francine? How does Sophie change the way Francine views friendship?

FAMILY—Contrast Francine's and Sophie's fathers. Ask students to discuss what Francine envies the most about Sophie's relationship with her father. Sometimes Francine feels that her mother shows favoritism to Dolores and Artie. Debate whether Francine simply suffers from being "in the middle." How is it apparent that Sophie misses having a mother?

COURAGE—Francine feels that she is a coward and that Sophie is brave. Debate whether Francine's search to be popular is about being a coward. Why does it take courage to be an individual? Explain Sophie's comment to Francine, "You're braver than you used to be." (p. 89) Debate whether it's courage or cowardice that causes Sophie and her father to leave town.

FEAR—Ask students to discuss how Sister Basil evokes fear in her students. Why does Francine feel it necessary to warn Sophie about Sister Basil? At what point is it obvious that Sophie is going to be the victim of Sister Basil's wrath? The fear created by Sister Basil seems small compared to the fear that Senator Joseph McCarthy creates among American citizens. Why does this fear seem larger and more real to Francine now that she knows Sophie Bowman?

INJUSTICE—Have the class discuss how Sophie helps Francine understand injustice. Discuss Mr. Green's statement, "Maybe a little unfairness is a small price to pay for security." (p. 192) How is this statement similar to the current arguments regarding airport security in the United States?

BULLYING—Discuss the various bullies in the novel. How is Senator Joseph McCarthy a bully? What about the F.B.I.? How might Sister Basil be considered a bully? Explain what Francine Green means when she says that she was "bullied into silence." (p. 216)

FREE EXPRESSION—Engage the class in a discussion about the difference between free speech and hate speech. How are Mr. and Mrs. Petrov victims of hate speech? Sophie Bowman confuses free expression and impertinence. Why is it important to know the appropriate time to express individual views? Before coming to All Saints School, Sophie was kicked out of public school for writing on the gym floor, "There is no free speech here." Francine Green explains to Sophie that at All Saints there is no free speech. Why might Sophie expect more free speech rights in a public school than in a parochial school?

SELF-DISCIPLINE—Mr. Bowman appreciates his daughter's intellectual curiosity, but he thinks that she should be more patient and practice self-control. Why is self-control so difficult for Sophie? Cite evidence that Sophie enjoys "causing trouble for the fun of it." (p. 89)



Connecting to the Curriculum

LANGUAGE ARTS—Francine Green is surprised when Harry Bowman asks her opinion about serious subjects like NATO, international peace, and security. Ask students to read the newspaper for a week and identify an issue of concern in their community. Then ask them to write an opinion paper about the issue. Consider these questions: Why is it an important problem? How does it impact the community? What is the best solution to the problem?

Francine is studying irony in school. Explain the irony in Francine's thank-you note to Aunt Martha and Uncle George for their Christmas gift. (p. 92) Have students find other examples of irony in the novel. Have them write a journal entry that is filled with irony that Francine might write on the day she discovers that Sophie is gone.

SOCIAL STUDIES—Sophie Bowman wants to organize a “Ban the Bomb Campaign.” Have students research *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent School District*, the 1965 Supreme Court case that addresses students rights in public schools.

Stage a debate that uses the *Tinker* decision to defend a public school student's right to organize such a campaign. Discuss why *Tinker* isn't a defense for students in private and parochial schools.

Francine's father gets several pamphlets from the Federal Civil Defense Administration: "*You Can Survive the Bomb If You Know the Dangers and How to Escape Them*," "*Preparing to Survive a Nuclear Attack*," and "*Building the Family-Sized Atomic Safety Shelter*." Ask students to find out the type of information in these pamphlets. Then have them select one pamphlet to write and illustrate.

ART—Have students draw a political cartoon that might have appeared in newspapers during the McCarthy era.

DRAMA—At the end of the novel, Francine pays a visit to Sister Basil the Great. Think about the many things that Francine wants to say to Sister Basil. Then ask for volunteers to dramatize the scene

Guide prepared by Pat Scales, Children's Literature Consultant,
Greenville, South Carolina.

Internet Resources

TRACKED IN AMERICA

www.trackedinamerica.org/timeline/mccarthy_era/intro

This site provides background information
about Joseph McCarthy

THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES

www.archives.gov/education/lessons/mccarthy-telegram

This site offers primary documents to set the tone
for the fear created by Joseph McCarthy in the 1950s.

Also Available on Audio



Listening Library CD: 978-0-7393-3717-2



A Conversation with Karen Cushman



PhotoCredit: Fred Metz

Q: Is Sophie Bowman based on a childhood friend of yours?

A: Sophie is not based on any childhood friend, but is mostly a creature of my imagination—and, to some extent, my better nature. In terms of her desire to fight for what is right and honest, however, she reminds me a lot of my husband.

Q: What were your greatest childhood fears?

A: When I was very young, I was afraid of clowns, and fireworks on the Fourth of July. When I was old enough to understand the world situation a little, I was afraid of bombs—like Francine, I scanned the sky and tensed whenever I heard a plane. I was afraid of doing wrong and getting into trouble and going to Hell. But maybe most of all I was afraid of calling attention to myself because that might mean . . . what? I never really knew. I just knew I was afraid so I stayed quiet and out of the way as much as I could. There are many real things in the world to be afraid of—war and disease and hatred—and Francine and I are both learning to separate those fearful things we can do nothing about and those we can take action against.

Q: What was it like growing up in the 1950s?

A: Growing up in the 1950s? I never knew anything else so it all seemed normal to me. I remember it as a cautious and conservative time, a time when people were not encouraged to disobey or protest or revolt. Rules were rules and I, like most people, never thought about ignoring or disobeying or fighting back. And the clothing styles were so unflattering to me that sometimes I was grateful for my school uniform.

Q: How did your parents react to Senator Joseph McCarthy's accusations against screenwriters and actors?

A: I don't remember my parents ever talking to me or even each other about Senator McCarthy. I am sure they were as worried and afraid of communists as most other people and supported his efforts, but knowing my parents, I would guess they thought McCarthy himself was a bit of a kook. It was not until I was in high school that I heard much about Senator McCarthy and not until college that I realized how dangerous he was.

Q: Describe your best and worst eighth-grade experience.

A: My worst memory of eighth grade is crying in the shower on many mornings because I hated school so much. I was shy and lonely and bored. Not getting into trouble was more important than learning, and we were not encouraged to challenge or be challenged. My best memory definitely is graduating.

Q: What do you most want students to know about free speech?

A: Free speech means being able to speak freely without fear of censorship, but it brings responsibilities as well as rights. Free speech means speaking up and telling the truth, but it also means listening to other people's points of view, even when we disagree. Especially when we disagree. It requires us to honor and respect each other. And free speech is not just words. Free speech is action—deciding what it is we believe and what we value, then speaking up and taking a stand.

In early 2004, a study of more than 100,000 high school students across the United States revealed that 75 percent didn't know how they felt about the First Amendment, and more than 33 percent of them thought it went too far. Just 50 percent of the students said newspapers should be allowed to publish freely without government approval of their stories, and only 83 percent said people should be allowed to express unpopular opinions. It is critical that our students know and understand free speech and the First Amendment and what they means to all of us.

Q: Sophie didn't know the proper times to exercise free speech. Explain how Sophie Bowman is a good example and a bad example for students who are struggling to understand the First Amendment.

A: Sophie thinks free speech means being able to say or do anything she wants, regardless of the consequences, because she believes that what she says is the right thing to say and what she does is the right thing to do. She gives no thought to the rights of others.

But she also reacts when she sees something dishonest or unfair. She knows what she believes and stands up for it, although usually not in the best way. While writing the book, I remembered the times I did not speak up: when someone told a hurtful joke or accused someone unfairly. I was shy and a bit of a coward and never spoke up in those situations, and I wish now I had.

Q: Do you see a connection between the effects of the McCarthy era and the current USA PATRIOT Act?

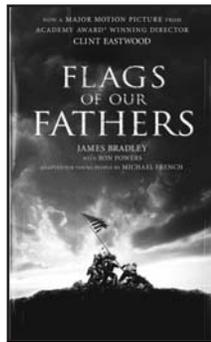
A: The words *USA PATRIOT* are an acronym for the Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism. The act's name is reminiscent of the House Un-American Activities Committee that flourished in the 1940s. Neither venture would have gotten as far if called the Surveillance Without Cause Committee or the Search and Seize Act. Both measures have been criticized for weakening protection of civil liberties, especially those secured through the First and Fourth Amendments. Both allow investigations of people not accused, or often even suspected, of a crime. Both would give investigators the right to examine our hospital and employment records, the books we read, the organizations we belong to, our blogs and journals and the Internet sites we visit. Both ask us to surrender rights in the name of security. Protecting America is important, but so are the rights and the responsibilities guaranteed by the Constitution. We must never surrender those rights.

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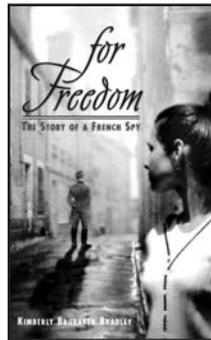
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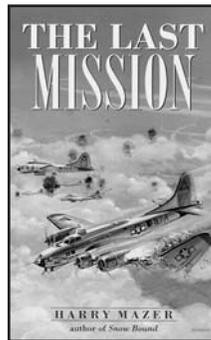
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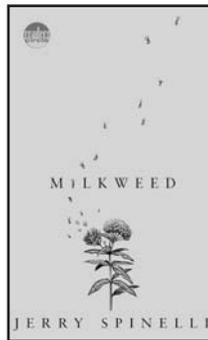
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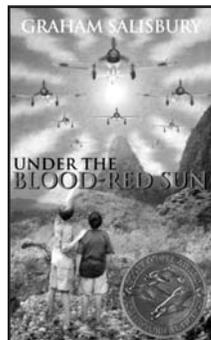


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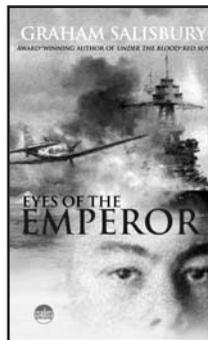


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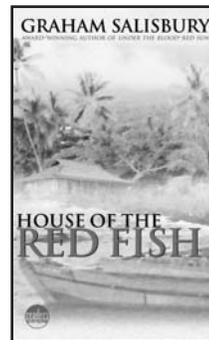
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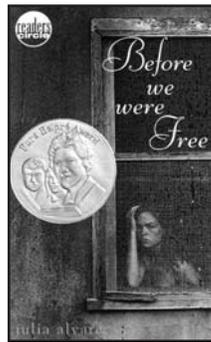
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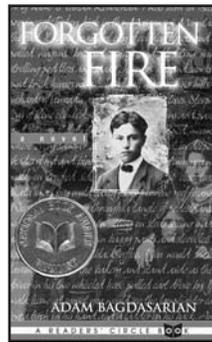
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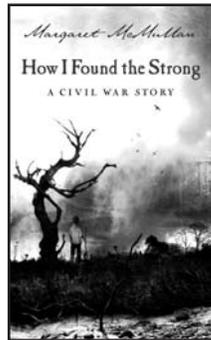
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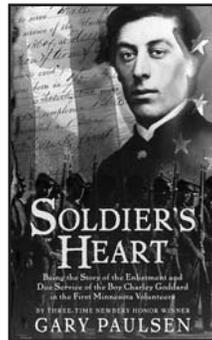
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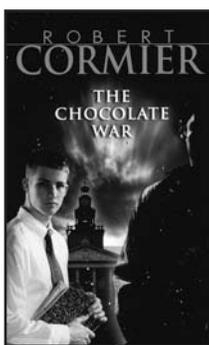
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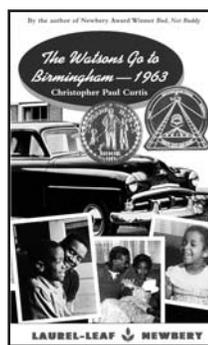
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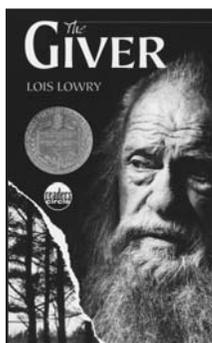
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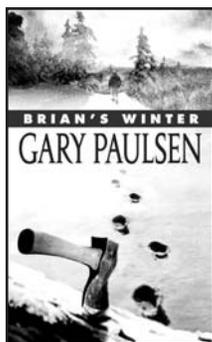
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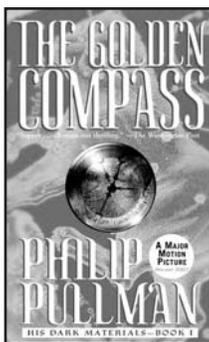
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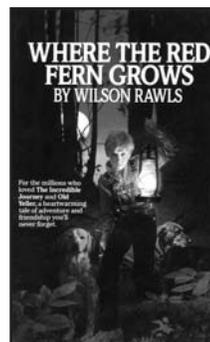
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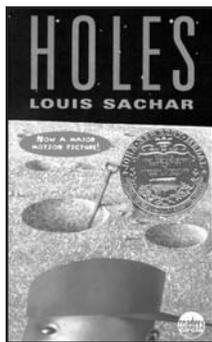
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