

# SUSPECT RED

## As Canon Companion Text

Set during the Red Scare and Senator Joseph McCarthy whipping up Americans' suspicion of one another, SUSPECT RED offers a **contextual companion read** for study units on:

**Banned Books** and ***Fahrenheit 451***

***The Crucible***—which Miller wrote as *allegory for McCarthyism's political witch-hunt.*

**Media literacy**

Politicians using fear-mongering and demeaning labels; mob mentality and “tribal loyalties;” peer pressure; innuendo taken as fact; xenophobia. Dissent and 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment-guaranteed protest labeled as disloyal and Un-American. Guilt by association. Naming names to get out of trouble. Blacklisting. Censorship.

SUSPECT RED explores the effects of this national atmosphere on two teenage boys from opposite sides of the 1950s political spectrum. Richard is the son of an FBI agent, an All-American WWII veteran who sincerely wants to protect democracy from Soviet Russia espionage. His new best friend, Vlad, is the son of a career diplomat with the State Department (McCarthy's primary target) and a Czech immigrant, artist, and liberal thinker. The high school freshmen connect over their mutual love of books and music. But when Richard overhears things at Vlad's house that he knows McCarthy and FBI director Hoover would label “subversive” things go seriously wrong between the two friends.

SUSPECT RED opens with Richard's mother yanking *Robin Hood* away from him because the classic has been banned. (“Robin Hood robbed from the rich and gave it to the poor. That's the Communist Line. It's just a smearing of law and order,” said the textbook commissioner who set off the ban.) Librarians immediately pulled the Merry Men from shelves, knowing colleagues had been fired before for not removing books and magazines censored by McCarthyites.

Progressing by month, each chapter in SUSPECT RED opens with factual headlines and events that affect the characters, giving readers surprising primary documents to consider, (promoting analytical reading of media), and insight as to why *The Crucible* and *Fahrenheit 451* were so explosive in their time.

Miller's use of the Salem witch-hunts as allegory for McCarthy-era blacklisting—brought by unsubstantiated accusations, loyalty review boards, guilt by association, and finger pointing betrayal from friends to save their own skin—was a powerful and dangerous message during the play's premiere. (Miller lost his passport for being “a Communist sympathizer” as a result.) Limiting study of *The Crucible* to the 1692 Salem witch trials misses an opportunity to address the insidious, day-to-day poison of suspicion fueled by political rhetoric, of a nation accepting innuendo, labels, and viral gossip as fact. SUSPECT RED helps illuminate those kinds of pressures on ordinary high-school students at the time Miller wrote his seminal work as well as today.

*Fahrenheit 451* is also potent allegory—for fearing books might spark opposition to the status quo. But what does censorship mean in a less dystopian world, when being labeled a “subversive” or “fellow traveler” with ideologies condemned by national leaders might cost you friends and your job. In McCarthy's time some Americans even burned books—like Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath*, damned as “Un-American” for its realistic portrayal of the plight of the poor in our nation.

See attached study guides or go to the teachers/librarians link at [www.lmelliott](http://www.lmelliott)

**A NCSS/CBC NOTABLE  
and TLA 2018 TAYSHAS READING LIST recommendation**

"Riveting... *Suspect Red* takes us on a rough ride through one thorny year in the life of adolescent Richard Bradley...a fourteen-year-old Washington D.C. resident faced with the dilemmas and demons that would haunt any teenager whose father, whom he idolizes, is an FBI agent... during those dangerous and desperate months of June 1953 to June 1954.

The entire country suffers the ravages of virulent anti-communist fever. Every next-door neighbor perhaps a commie spy. Every immigrant a likely suspect. Every person to the political left of Senator Joseph McCarthy almost surely a communist dupe.

(Elliott) begins each chapter...with a detailed description of actual events from that month: the rise of McCarthy and McCarthyism; examples of the cruelty, hypocrisy, and power of J. Edgar Hoover; the persecutions of writers, performers, and artists; the shock of the Soviets' first successful H-bomb test. And seamlessly winding through the novel are the associated stories of real people who become important novel characters — Hoover, McCarthy, Paul and Jane Bowles, Nixon, LBJ, and even that most celebrated "Inquiring Camera Girl," the newly married Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy.

Lessons for all of us abound: ...of the use of fear tactics to motivate destructive behaviors; of the all-too-tempting trap of fighting tyranny with tyranny; of the tragically unfortunate effects of herd mentality — ethno-tribal hatreds, bigotry, stereotyping; and perhaps most significantly of all, the incredibly difficult task of balancing the virtues of liberty on the one hand with the desire for security on the other."

*The Huffington Post*

"This historical novel revisits the anxious, fearful time of the Cold War, when blacklists, political profiling, and guilt by association ruined the lives of thousands of innocent people and deeply divided the nation. A tense, engrossing story that effectively captures the suspicion and paranoia that prevailed during American history's darkest chapters."

*Kirkus Review*

"Filled with Richard's naïve, offbeat humor...Richard's literature-driven ideas, his awkward intimacy with his sister Ginny, and his rare friendship with Vladimir make his experiences as memorable as they are painful."

*School Library Journal*

"Chillingly relatable... Photos and political cartoons sprinkled throughout add even more depth to the layered tale."

*Barnes & Noble Blog*

*New York Times* best-selling author **L. M. Elliott** was a longtime Washington magazine journalist, covering women's issues, health, and education, before turning to fiction. Elliott is best known for the WWII story *UNDER A WAR-TORN SKY* and its two companion novels. Her other works include *DA VINCI'S TIGER*, a biographical fiction about the young poet in Leonardo's first portrait; *GIVE ME LIBERTY*, about a 2<sup>nd</sup> VA Regiment fifer and his best friend, an enslaved servant who must run away to the British for freedom; and her latest, *HAMILTON AND PEGGY! A REVOLUTIONARY FRIENDSHIP*, a biographical fiction about the youngest Schuyler sister known to fans of the Tony-winning musical only as that tantalizing "And Peggy!" She can be reached at [laura@lmelliott.com](mailto:laura@lmelliott.com)