



Harry S. Truman



## Teaching Guide

### SEGMENT 6, WEBISODE 13

Please note: Each segment in this Webisode has its own Teaching Guide



#### Segment Overview

The warning “better dead than red” was a familiar one for Americans of all ages living in the 1950s. The fear of communism and the cold war had reached epic proportions, so much so that some people, fearing that the Russians would launch an atomic bomb, built bomb shelters in their backyards. In schools across the United States, students dived under their desks and covered their heads with their hands during bomb drills. The red scare made neighbors suspicious of neighbors. Anyone might be a communist, even the little gray-haired lady next door.

Politically, President Truman remained committed to civil rights, instituting the Fair Deal, a program intended to assist minorities. Even though Truman had always been a staunch anti-communist, some Americans thought that he had drifted to the side of the enemy. In 1951, Ethel and Julius Rosenberg were convicted of selling atomic secrets to the Soviets. Alger Hiss, a state department adviser, lied under oath about affiliations with a known Communist Party member. In China, Mao Zedong took over control as a communist leader. In Korea, communist leader Kim Il Sung sent troops into South Korea, thus beginning the Korean War. And on the home front, Senator Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin began A Communist Witch Hunt, charging numbers of innocent Americans with being sympathetic to the communist cause. The early 1950s are remembered as an age of McCarthyism, madness, mistrust, and mayhem.

#### Teacher Directions

1. Students in their teams discuss the following situations.

- Imagine that you have been accused of something you did not do. You know the truth, but no one believes you.
  - How do you feel inside?
  - How difficult is it to convince people that you are telling the truth?
  - What advice would you give to friends facing this situation?
- Imagine that a friend of yours has been accused of stealing something from your school. You were seen with your friend right after the theft occurred.
- The principal of your school tells you that you will not be suspended if you just confirm that your friend is the thief. How will you deal with this situation?
  - How do you feel inside?
  - How difficult is it to convince people that you are telling the truth?



#### Let's Discuss

Let's Discuss, Cont.

— What advice would you give to friends facing this situation?

2. After a class discussion of the above situations, briefly explain the events of the McCarthy era to the students or students read Joy Hakim's *All the People*, Chapter 8, "Tail Gunner Joe."
3. Discuss the following questions with the students.
  - What if your next door neighbor told Senator McCarthy that your parents were communists? How would that accusation have affected your family's lifestyle?
  - What did Americans know about communism? Why were they so afraid of having communists in the United States?

4. Make sure students understand the following points.

Khrushchev warned that communists wanted to control the world. Americans began to believe that communist control of the United States was actually possible. Anti-communist hysteria resulted. Television and news reports revealed that communists held control of eastern Europe, China, North Korea, and ultimately Cuba, an island in the Caribbean very close to the Florida Keys. People who were considered communist sympathizers were referred to as members of the left-wing or leftists. Friends accused friends of being leftist.

Into this fray stepped Senator Joseph McCarthy, a senator from Wisconsin, who wanted to be re-elected. A man who liked attention, McCarthy made maximum use of the new medium of television, accusing many people, especially those in entertainment and the arts, of being communist sympathizers. The people he accused lost their jobs, their homes, and their friends. This 1950s witch hunt was similar in many ways to the days of the Salem Witch Trials.

5. Ask students to reflect on the spread of communism following World War II. Remind students about the actions of former communist leaders like Stalin, Ceasescu, and Milosevic.

### Teacher Directions

1. Explain to the students that many of the people Joseph McCarthy accused of being communists or communist sympathizers had connections to the media. They were actors, actresses, writers, and artists. McCarthy created a blacklist. If your name was on it, you probably lost your job.
2. Help the students understand the growing importance of media attention in the 1950s, a precursor to the media attention we see today. Note that McCarthy not only used the media (television, radio, and newspapers), but also attacked its major players as well.
3. Engage students in one or more of the following activities.



History Sleuth

**Exercise #1: Brainstorming (as a class)**

Why did McCarthy focus on so many people in the media: Hollywood stars, screenwriters, artists, and writers? What about the media industry caused McCarthy to zero in on media people?

**Exercise #2: In Teams**

Students read the First Amendment in the Bill of Rights. Joy Hakim states in Chapter 8, Book 10, *All the People*, that “If HUAC’s (House UnAmerican Activities Committee) members had read the Bill of Rights, they had forgotten what it says.” Teams consider: What does the First Amendment really say? What rights are we given?

**Exercise #3: As a Class**

1. It has been said that we have the freedom OF speech, but not the freedom TO speak. Students discuss the limits placed on freedom of speech. Urge students, as well, to consider why the freedom of speech is the first amendment?
2. Promote a discussion using the following guidelines:
  - We may have the freedom OF speech, but we do not have the freedom TO speak in the following ways:
    - Yell “Fire” in a crowded theatre
    - Threaten to overthrow the government
    - Appear on television or radio whenever we wish to promote our ideas
    - Automatically publish any of our writings in newspapers
    - Make false statements about people orally or in writing
3. Explain that the position of the freedom of speech as the first amendment in the Bill of Rights is incredibly important. Help students see that one of the first acts of communist dictators is taking control of the media. Why?
4. Students reflect and comment on the following statement.
 

Freedom of speech can only exist in a free society. Joseph McCarthy used the media to his own advantage.
5. Help students understand that McCarthy not only advocated stifling freedom of speech—a communist principle—but he also worked to use the media to his own advantage—also a principle of communism.



What do you  
Think?

### Teacher Directions

1. Help the students read, understand, and discuss the Student Sheets: *Lillian Hellman's Letter* and *The Media and Murrow versus McCarthy: The End of the Communist Witch Hunt*.
2. Explain that both Hellman and Murrow spoke out against McCarthy's communist witch hunt in the face of great personal and professional danger.
3. Assign a number of Hellman's quotations and Murrow's quotations to different teams. Working in their teams, the students rewrite each statement in their own words. Visit the teams to help as necessary.
4. Selected students read their team's responses to the class.
5. Ask students.
  - Do you think Murrow and Hellman were brave in making their statements? Why or why not?
  - Would you have the courage to stand up to someone making accusations against you? Why or why not?

### Teacher Directions

1. Students read the Student Sheet: *They Called Her a Witch: The Story of Rebecca Nurse*, a young woman who arrived in Salem, Massachusetts in 1640.
2. Discuss with the students the results of making up stories that are untrue.
3. Students read Lillian Hellman's comments in the Student Sheet: *Lillian Hellman's Letter*.
4. Help the students read and interpret Lillian Hellman's letter.
5. Explain that Rebecca Nurse and Lillian Hellman each pleaded their cases differently and in vastly different times (1692 and the 1950s).
6. Each student draws a Venn diagram to compare and contrast the two women, their individual circumstances, the accusations, their arguments, and the end results.
7. Engage the class in a discussion regarding the similarities and differences between these two brave women. Ask why we might refer to the women as brave. Ask the students how each of the two women moved us towards freedom.



Moving Toward  
Freedom



## Teacher Directions

Use the following activities with your students.

**Language Arts/Writing** — Students working in teams write a brief one-act skit based on the following prompt:

A teacher at a school in a particular city intercepted an unsigned note that made serious accusations against another student. This school has a Student Court. Student A (the person about whom the unkind things were said) has accused Student B of writing the note. Student B truly did not write the note. The case is taken to the Student Court composed of three students and the teacher. The Student Court asks questions of Students A and B trying to learn the truth.

Students write the questions and responses of Students A and B. They will then make a decision and announce it. Students will come to their own conclusions.

### The Rules of the Writing

- Students name the fictitious school and location.
- Students name all characters, including the teacher.
- The writing team gives the skit a title.
- Each actor has copy of the dialogue in order to read his or her lines.
- Students present their skits.

**Music/Art** — Students and parents today are very much aware of controversial song lyrics. Without actually playing any such music, discuss the lyrics contained in such contemporary music. Help students understand that during the McCarthy era such performers and songwriters would have been blacklisted. Note how times have changed with regard to our acceptance of what would have been unacceptable in the 1950s.

Use a similar approach in art class. Show appropriate but controversial pictures that would have been judged too avant-garde in the 1950s, possibly some Andy Warhol prints, for example. Discuss why those artists (of the teacher's choice) may have been blacklisted..... or possibly were blacklisted.

## *A Plan for Freedom*

### **The First Amendment**



**C**ongress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise hereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.



## *Lillian Hellman's Letter*



### **I Will Not Cut My Conscience to Fit This Year's Fashion**

Dear Mr. Wood:

...I am most willing to answer all questions about myself. I have nothing to hide from your committee and there is nothing in my life of which I am ashamed. But I am advised by counsel [lawyers] that if I answer the committee's questions about myself, I must also answer questions about other people.... This is very difficult for a layman to understand. But there is one principle that I do understand: I am not willing, now or in the future, to bring bad trouble to people who, in my past association with them, were completely innocent of any talk or any action that was disloyal.... I do not like...disloyalty in any form, and if I had ever seen any, I would have considered it my duty to have reported it to the proper authorities. But to hurt innocent people whom I knew many years ago in order to save myself is, to me, inhuman and indecent and dishonorable. I cannot and will not cut my conscience to fit this year's fashions.... I was raised in an old-fashioned American tradition and there were certain homely things that were taught to me: to try to tell the truth, not to bear false witness, not to harm my neighbor, to be loyal to my country, and so on.... It is my belief that you will agree with these simple rules of human decency and will not expect me to violate the good American tradition from which they spring.... I am prepared...to tell you everything you wish to know about my views or actions if your Committee will agree to refrain from asking me to name other people....

Sincerely yours,  
Lillian Hellman

## ***The Media and Murrow versus McCarthy: The End of the Communist Witch Hunt***

Edward R. Murrow once said,

*No man can terrorize a whole nation unless we are his accomplices.*

He also said,

*If none of us ever read a book that was 'dangerous', nor had a friend who was 'different', or never joined an organization that advocated 'change', we would all be just the kind of people Joe McCarthy wants.*

On March 9, 1954, Edward R. Murrow, CBS news correspondent made the following statement. Many other American citizens agreed with Murrow. So did writer Lillian Hellman and Senator Ralph Flanders of Vermont. Here is what Murrow said:

*We will not walk in fear, one of another. We will not be driven by fear into an age of unreason if we dig deep in our history and doctrine and remember that we are not descended from fearful men, not from men who feared to write, to speak, to associate and to defend causes which were for the moment unpopular. We can deny our heritage and our history, but we cannot escape responsibility for the result. There is no way for a citizen of the Republic to abdicate his responsibility.*

# ***They Called Her a Witch: The Story of Rebecca Nurse***

Rebecca Nurse was neither a nurse nor a witch. When she was born in England in 1621, her last name was Towne. After she arrived in Salem, Massachusetts in 1645, she married a man named Francis Nurse. Francis made things from wood, and he was the Salem town constable. Today, we would call him the police chief.

Amazingly, Rebecca was 71 years old when the town fathers of Salem accused her of being a witch. On March 23, 1692, she was arrested for witchcraft. Her accusers were people who disliked her.

After her arrest, Rebecca stated, "I am innocent as the child unborn, but surely, what sin hath God found out in me unrepented of that He should lay such an affliction on me in my old age?"

Rebecca was brave, but she was living during a time of hysteria and distrust. Neighbor turned against neighbor. Friends testified in court against friends. Rebecca, who had reared eight children, was brought before a court. A group of women, assigned by the court, said that her body bore the mark of the devil. Many people spoke in her defense, including her children and a few loyal friends.

At first, Rebecca was found not guilty, but later, during another trial, several women who also were on trial, said, "She is one of us." The judge reversed the verdict and sentenced Rebecca to be hanged. They sent Rebecca to the gallows. Her husband located her body in a common grave and gave his wife a proper burial. Later, a young woman, Ann Putnam, admitted that she had made up stories during the witch hunt.

In Salem during the late 1700s, twenty people were put to death for being witches. In the 1950s, in all parts of the United States, Senator Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin accused people of being communists. It took brave people like author Lillian Hellman, CBS correspondent Edward R. Murrow, Senator Ralph Flanders of Vermont, and others to put an end to the Communist witch hunt. Although no one went to the gallows in the 1950s, many Americans lost their jobs, friends, and reputations.