

3.1 THE BRANDENBURG GATE AS A WITNESS TO HISTORY

? FOCUS QUESTION:

- How are the values of a city reflected in its buildings and public sites?
- In what ways are city landmarks witnesses to history?

STANDARD #2 TIME, CONTINUITY AND CHANGE.

LESSON OVERVIEW:

Students will study visual documents (historical paintings, photographs and artifacts) that focus on the Brandenburg Gate as an example of a city landmark and as a means of comprehending important events in modern German history. By examining images of the Brandenburg Gate and its surrounding areas (for example: Unter den Linden and Pariser Platz) students in groups will have the opportunity to reflect on the different events that have occurred near this landmark.

TEACHER BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Designed by Carl Gotthard Langhans, the Brandenburg Gate was built between 1788 and 1791 at the behest of the Prussian King Friedrich Wilhelm II. Although it is now situated in the center of Berlin, it was originally one of several gateways through the city's tariff wall. A quadriga, or horse-drawn chariot, by sculptor Johann Gottfried Schadow was added in 1793. Driving the quadriga is a figure that was initially conceptualized as Eirene, the goddess of peace. Napoleon took the statuary to France after his army defeated the Prussians in 1806, and then in the aftermath of the Wars of Liberation, the quadriga returned to Berlin in 1814. An iron cross and Prussian eagle created by Karl Friedrich Schinkel was added to the sculpture at this time, and the goddess at its crest transformed into Victoria, a symbol of victory. Upon the quadriga's reinstallation, the square in front of the Brandenburg Gate



was renamed Pariser Platz in honor of a victorious Prussian battle near Paris. In 1933 the National Socialists marched through the gate in a martial torch parade, introducing a totalitarian chapter of German history that ultimately left the city destroyed and the country divided. By 1945, the gate was in poor repair and the quadriga lay in ruins. Located in the border strip between East and West Berlin from 1961 to 1989, the Brandenburg Gate represented a divided Germany. Since reunification, the gate has been restored to its landmark status. Note: The teacher might want to view the Transatlantic Outreach Program (TOP) DVD *Field Trip to Berlin* for background information on the city of Berlin. Available at www.goethe.de/top



🕒 TIME:

(2-3) 45 minute class periods

INSTRUCTIONAL RESOURCE:

- Brandenburg Gate PowerPoint (**PowerPoint 3.1.1 on Instructional Resource Disc**)

PROCEDURE:**DAYS 1-2:**

- **Anticipatory Set:** How might buildings and other public sites in the students' community reflect the values and history of the community? The teacher should begin with several chronological pictures of a local landmark so that students can analyze how it might have changed and/or remained the same over time.
- The teacher should inform the students that the Brandenburg Gate can serve as a witness to history so that the students will better understand certain events in modern German history as well as the role of landmarks in a city. This lesson requires students to research the historical context of some of the visuals. Students may need access to text materials and/or the Internet in order to complete this lesson. The teacher should remind students that there is no right or wrong answer to some of these questions, and that there may be disagreements within groups over the interpretations of the images.
- Divide the class into groups of three or four. Distribute three to four different images of historical paintings, photographs and/or artifacts to each group found on the Brandenburg Gate PowerPoint (**PowerPoint 3.1.1 on Instructional Resource Disc**). Groups can either work with images from a single time period (pre-1920, 1920s-1940s, post-World War II) or with a mixture of images from all three. The teacher should instruct students to:
 1. Study each photograph, historical painting, and/or artifact for 2-3 minutes. Form an overall impression of the image and then examine its individual parts. Next, divide the image into quadrants and analyze each section in order to see what new details become visible.
 2. Respond to the following questions:
 - What do you observe in the image? If there are people in it, who are they and what are they doing? Examining the Brandenburg Gate itself, what do you see?
 - How old is the image? When was it created?
 - What historical event is depicted in the image? How has the Brandenburg Gate been a witness to history?
 3. List the questions you had after examining each image.

DAYS 2-3:

- Each group should present its visuals to the class, providing a brief summary of the historical event depicted and an explanation of how the event is connected to the Brandenburg Gate. The teacher should facilitate the ensuing discussion, soliciting students' reflections on how the Brandenburg Gate has been a witness to history.

WHOLE GROUP REFLECTION:

- What events in German history are connected to the Brandenburg Gate? How are city landmarks tied to history and social values?

MODIFICATION:

- Rather than work in small groups, students may complete the assignment alone or in pairs. If this modification is used, the teacher may divide students into small groups after the research phase and have them discuss their findings before initiating the whole group reflection.

EXTENSIONS:

- Students may be assigned to research and write a brief essay on one of the following topics related to this lesson:
 - the classical architectural models for the Brandenburg Gate and the quadriga
 - Carl Gotthard Langhans
 - Prussia's role in the Napoleonic Wars
 - the Wars of German Unification
 - the uses of the Zeppelin
 - the Berlin Olympics of 1936
 - the Soviet invasion of Berlin in 1945
 - the division of Berlin by the Allied Powers
 - the June 17, 1953 Uprising in the GDR
 - the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961
 - the fall of the Wall in November 1989
 - the reunification of Berlin
 - the restoration of the Brandenburg Gate and the quadriga
- Students may select another example of public art/architecture in Berlin, research and prepare a PowerPoint presentation. Examples from which to select include: the Reichstag Building, the Neues Synagogue, the Berliner Dom, Unter den Linden Boulevard.
- Teachers might want to show excerpts from *Das Brandenburger Tor*, a film by Beate Schubert (in English), a New Media Communication production (www.n-m-c.tv) (80 minutes in length). This film uses historic paintings, scenes from German feature films, and documentary footage to trace German history from the perspective of the Brandenburg Gate.

Sources:

Klimm, W.C. (Producer), & Schubert, B. (Director). (2004). *The Brandenburg Gate: Central Stage of German History (Das Brandenburger Tor: Zentraler Schauplatz deutscher Geschichte)*. [Documentary]. Germany: Zebra. Available on DVD from <http://www.amazon.de>

Transatlantic Outreach Program (TOP), Goethe-Institut Washington (Producer), Manter, C. & Vautour, F. (Authors) *Field Trip to Berlin: Instructional Guide* for grades 6-12. [DVD]. Available from <http://www.goethe.de/top>