

## 4.1 TIMELINE OF POST-WWII/COLD WAR GERMANY

### ? FOCUS QUESTIONS:

- What events are used to characterize a historic period?
- What is a turning point?

### STANDARD #2 TIME, CONTINUITY AND CHANGE.

#### LESSON OVERVIEW:

This lesson focuses on key events in Germany and Europe in the period following World War II until the reunification of Germany on October 3, 1990. Students will have the opportunity to review the chronology of events during the Cold War era as they affected the division of Germany into the German Democratic Republic (GDR, East Germany) and the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG, West Germany). They will be asked to create an illustrated timeline of ten events which, in their opinion, are significant in a particular theme. For example, the students may want to focus on the city of Berlin, or on just the GDR.

#### TEACHER BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

The conclusion of World War II in Europe saw the onset of what became known as the Cold War. As described in Winston Churchill's 1946 Iron Curtain speech (Churchill, 2003), Europe and the world became separated ideologically by the powers of the West, primarily the United States and its allies, and the East or the Communist Bloc, primarily the Soviet Union and its satellite states. Despite being allies against the Axis powers during WWII, the Soviet Union and the United States disagreed about political philosophy and the configuration of the post-war world while occupying most of Europe. The consolidation of the occupied areas of western Germany by the French, British and the Americans resulted in the establishment of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), whereas the eastern zone, occupied by the Soviets, became the German Democratic Republic (GDR). The capital city of Germany – Berlin – was also divided into East and West. The particular location of the two Germanys in central Europe often resulted in their pivotal roles during the Cold War.



According to the National History Standards, “Chronological thinking is at the heart of historical reasoning. Without a strong sense of chronology – of when events occurred and in what temporal order – it is impossible for students to examine relationships among those events or to explain historical causality. Chronology provides the mental scaffolding for organizing historical thought” (National Center for History in the Schools, UCLA, 2011, para. 1).

### 🕒 TIME:

(3) 45 minute class periods

**INSTRUCTIONAL RESOURCES:**

- Churchill’s Speech and Stalin’s Reply Handout (**Handout 4.1.1 on Instructional Resource Disc**)
- Gorbachev’s Speech and Article Handout (**Handout 4.1.2 on Instructional Resource Disc**)
- Post World War II Chronology Handout (**Handout 4.1.3 on Instructional Resource Disc**)
- Poster paper, markers, glue and other materials which students may use to create their timelines.

**PROCEDURE:****DAY 1:**

**ANTICIPATORY SET:** How is the passage of time graphically represented? What is a turning point? How are turning points responsible for changes in circumstances in a region’s or a nation’s history? Students should discuss key turning point events in United States history to illustrate their comprehension of the purpose of timelines.

As part of the discussion, the teacher should review with students the concept of historical periodization, the attempt by historians to categorize or divide time into discrete blocks for the convenience of study (Surhone, Timpledon & Marseken, 2010).

After completing the Anticipatory Set, the teacher should assign the two readings, Winston Churchill’s “Iron Curtain Speech” (**Handout 4.1.1 on Instructional Resource Disc**) and Josef Stalin’s “Response to Churchill” (1946) (**Handout 4.1.1 on Instructional Resource Disc**) as background to a discussion of the events that resulted in the Cold War era.

**DAYS 2-3:**

The major activity of this lesson is the student construction of an illustrated timeline of key events of the Cold War, as related to Germany. This should be an individual assignment. The teacher should explain that the students should select 10 key events of the Cold War period (**Handout 4.1.3 on Instructional Resource Disc**) that are thematically connected (e.g. culture, the solidification of communist rule in the GDR, etc.). The students may construct a conventional timeline on poster board, or they may be more creative (e.g. a timeline in the shape of the Brandenburg Gate).

**DAY 3:**

After completing a study of the events of the Cold War, the teacher should ask the students to respond to the following quote by Mikhail Gorbachev, former President of the Soviet Union, “*I do not regard the end of the Cold War as a victory for either side...The end of the Cold War is our common victory.*”

The teacher may also want to assign Gorbachev’s speech, “The River of Time and the Imperative of Action,” which the former Soviet premier gave in Fulton, Missouri in May 1992 to use as a basis of discussion on the end of the Cold War period, and the New York Times in response (**Handout 4.1.2 on Instructional Resource Disc**).

**WHOLE GROUP REFLECTION:**

- The students should present their completed timelines to the class for full discussion of the events. Each student should explain the theme/subtopic selected and the events and turning points which were included. As closure to the lesson, the teacher should ask the students to reflect on the concept of historic periodization regarding the Cold War.

**MODIFICATIONS:**

- For a greater overview, the teacher might want to show the Transatlantic Outreach Program (TOP) *Field Trip to Berlin* DVD and use parts of the accompanying Instructional Guide to enhance the students’ understanding of this historic period and various turning points. It might provide students with ideas for “themes” to use in their illustrated timelines.
- Rather than an individual learning activity, the teacher may decide to have students work in pairs on their timelines. For students with academic difficulties, the teacher may want to modify the timeline assignment by requiring fewer than 10 events or a broader topic (rather than a theme or subtopic).
- Computer software, such as TimeLiner, might be utilized to create custom timelines.

**EXTENSIONS:**

- The teacher may assign the following essay on the Churchill/Stalin perspectives on the Iron Curtain as homework before the first day:

Write a 300-350 word essay in which you *compare and contrast* Winston Churchill's "Iron Curtain Speech" (1946) with Joseph Stalin's "Response to Churchill," (1946). Your essay should have an introduction with a thesis statement, three body paragraphs, and a conclusion.

- The teacher may assign the following essay as a concluding exercise:

Write a 300-350 word essay in which you *compare and contrast* Churchill's "Iron Curtain Speech" (1946) and Stalin's "Response to Churchill" (1946) with "The River of Time and the Imperative of Action" speech by Mikhail S. Gorbachev (1992). Your essay should have an introduction with a thesis statement, three body paragraphs, and a conclusion.

**Sources:**

Churchill, W. S. (2003). *Never Give In!: The Best of Winston Churchill's Speeches*. New York: Hyperion.

National Center for History in the Schools, UCLA. (2011) *Chronological Thinking*. Retrieved October 11, 2011, from <http://nchs.ucla.edu/Standards/historical-thinking-standards-1/1.-chronological-thinking>

Surhone, L. M., & Timpledon, M. T., & Marseken, S. F. (2010). *Periodization*. Mauritius: Betascript Publishing.