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# WRITING ON THE WALL

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AN INTERDISCIPLINARY UNIT ON LIFE IN THE GDR  
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### Summary

Being selected as a TOP study tour participant was an honor and a privilege. My trip to Germany was informative, thought-provoking, unpredictable, and even entertaining! The experiences on this educational adventure ranged from witnessing Germans celebrating victory after victory during the World Cup matches of 2010, to meeting the mayor of a small town in Northern Germany, to visiting with local students and teachers in an elementary school courtyard. The journey that started in Frankfurt (the “Manhattan” of Germany) led me to the quaint and rural areas, like Schwerin and Neukloster, and it gave me a taste of the energy and fast-paced lifestyle of the big city (Berlin). It was in Berlin that my eyes were opened to the reality of division between the two Germanies. Walking through the Brandenburg Gate and standing in places where the Wall once stood made history come to life for me. It is my hope that I can provide my students with a glimpse of this experience and leave them with a valuable impression of Germany.

The purpose of this unit is to provide the students with a background of Germany. Students will then concentrate more specifically on the GDR. They will read the true stories of people who experienced this time period from different perspectives. They will look at various iconic images from this time period, and they will use their background knowledge to describe what is happening in that photograph. In conclusion, they will predict what could have happened next.

Although this unit is designed for the Language Arts classroom setting, it can be used by history teachers as well. Good writing skills can be taught using any content because, in Language Arts, students are learning to write across the curriculum. In addition, these lessons are designed to follow the model for the gradual release of responsibility, with an emphasis on providing the students opportunities for students to collaborate with their peers. In this lesson, students will have the opportunity to apply what they are learning in all of the four language domains (listening, speaking, reading, writing). This will enrich their learning of the content as well as build their confidence in their abilities to achieve the required objectives.

Variations of the following strategies will be used to provide opportunities for interaction

- Anticipation Guide
- Gallery Walk
- Pass the Paper/Progressive Writing
- Think-Write-Pair-Share
- Golden Line Response
- Numbered Heads Together Strategy

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## WRITING ON THE WALL

### Intended Grade Level

This unit is designed to be used in a Language Arts classroom (6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup>), but it could be adapted to use as an interdisciplinary unit within history classes.

### Essential Questions

1. Why is important to study Germany?
2. What is communism and how did it affect Germany?
3. What was it like to live in the GDR, and how was life different for East Germans and West Germans?
4. What was the role of the Berlin Wall and how did its presence affect Germany and the world? Why did its destruction symbolize the end of the Cold War?
5. How has the (recent) history of Germany, shaped what it is today, and what it will be in the future?

### Standards

W.5.6.10	Write across the curriculum
W.4.6.1	Generate ideas for writing using such strategies as reading
W.5.6.8	Write responses to literature that demonstrate understanding or interpretation
W.7.6.1	Use figurative language purposefully, such as similes and metaphors, to shape and control language to affect readers
W.4.6.3	Demonstrate an awareness of purpose & audience for all types of writing
W.5.6.6.	Write to reflect ideas/interpretations of multicultural and universal themes and concepts
W.5.6.7	Write with a prompt for a sustained amount of time
W.4.6.2	Organize ideas by using graphic organizers
W.5.6.3	Create expository, narrative writings
W.7.6.6	Create a strong lead and conclusion
W.6.6.1	Use a variety of simple and compound sentences of varied lengths
W.4.6.8	Revise content for central idea, organization (beginning, middle, end), & elaboration
W.4.6.11	Edit in groups for appropriate grade-level conventions of grammar
W.4.6.14	Publish/share according to purpose and audience
R.10.6.10	Read a variety of literature, including historical fiction, autobiography, and realistic fiction
R.9.6.20	Evaluate personal, social, and political issues as presented in text
R.9.6.2	Analyze the interrelationships of text and world issues/events by applying connection strategies
R.9.6.11	Use text information and background knowledge to draw conclusions and make inferences
R.9.6.6.	Connect own background knowledge and personal experience to make inferences and to respond to new information presented in text
R.10.6.12	Explain the meaning of figurative language such as similes and metaphors
R.10.6.7	Select informational sources appropriate for a given purpose (differentiate between fiction and non-fiction)
R.9.6.4	Generate and revise questions relevant to text and topics
R.10.6.13	Read and utilize functional/practical texts, including ...timelines
R.9.6.16	Use skimming and scanning to locate specific info. to develop a general overview
R.10.6.14	Analyze message through pictures, images, and photographs
H.6.6.21	Explain the causes and effects of the Cold War... *role play major figures and events, incorporating reasons for the Cold War

## Anticipation Guide for *Germany: Overview*

### Overview

An anticipation guide is a strategy used before reading in which the teacher provides students with general statements related to the topic. Students infer by agreeing or disagreeing with the statements. In this introductory lesson, the students will read an article that provides a brief overview of Germany. Then, they will demonstrate their knowledge by sorting parts of a timeline (50 Years in Berlin).

### Objectives:

- 1) Students will locate Germany and its capital, Berlin, and they will explain why Germany's location is important.
- 2) They will identify the four sectors that made up a divided Germany: French, British, American, and Soviet.
- 3) They will also explain why the Berlin Wall was built and define the term "Cold War."
- 4) Students will name historic figures from Germany, such as Albert Einstein, and be able to identify what these figures contributed.
- 5) Students will describe some of the challenges Germany faces today, according to the information in the article.
- 6) Arrange captions and photos from a timeline ranging from 1950s to 1990s in Berlin.

### Standards

- H.6.6.21 Explain the causes and effects of the Cold War...  
\*role play major figures and events, incorporating reasons for the Cold War
- R.9.6.16 Use skimming and scanning to locate specific information to develop a general overview
- R.10.6.13 Read and utilize functional/practical texts, including ...timelines

### Materials:

Anticipation Guide

Article: *Germany: An Overview*

Timeline strips cut and ready to arrange (Each pair of students gets one timeline)

### Procedure:

Write 10 statements about key ideas in the text, some true and some false. Include columns following each statement for students' responses (i.e. Agree/Disagree). Introduce the text "Germany: An overview" and share the guide with the students. Model the process of responding to the statements. Read each of the statements and have students mark their responses. Provide the opportunity for discussion. Read the text aloud or have students read the selection. Now students will write the paragraph number that justifies their answer. Bring closure to the reading by revisiting each of the statements. Students will then work with a partner to arrange events in a timeline: 50 Years in Berlin.

## Anticipation Guide for *Germany: An Overview*

**Before reading:** In the space to the left of each statement, circle the letter “A” if you agree or think the statement is true or *circle the letter “D”* if you disagree or think the statement is false.

**During or after reading:** Correct your answers to statements that you have changed your mind. Use the space under each statement to note the page and paragraph(s) where you are finding information to support your thinking.

- |   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| A | D | 1. Germany has the second largest economy in Europe, and is the leading import nation in the world.        |
| A | D | 2. At the end of World War II, Germany was divided in two sections, Northern Germany and Southern Germany. |
| A | D | 3. The Berlin Wall was built to try to keep some people from having a better life.                         |
| A | D | 4. The Berlin Wall was built because the GDR found out that people were fleeing East Germany.              |
| A | D | 5. Some Disney movies would have never been created if it weren't for Germany.                             |
| A | D | 6. If it weren't for Germans, you wouldn't have had a ride to school this morning.                         |
| A | D | 7. Most of the people living in Germany migrated there from other countries.                               |
| A | D | 8. The Berlin Wall was easy to cross over.   |
| A | D | 9. The Cold War ended when global warming started.   |
| A | D | 10. Germany today is an aging society.   |

## Germany: An Overview

Germany is located at the very center of the continent of Europe and is home to more than 82 million people. It is bordered by Denmark to the north, and it also shares borders with the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxemburg, France, Switzerland, Austria, the Czech Republic and Poland. Its capital is Berlin. Its location makes it not only the center of Europe geographically, but also politically, economically, and socially. For example, Germany has the largest economy in Europe. In proportion to its size and population, it is the leading export nation in the world.

### German Division & Reunification

At the end of World War II, the occupying powers divided Germany. In 1949, the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany) was created. Supported by the Allied Powers after the war, this western half of Germany experienced what is called the *Wirtschaftswunder*, or economic miracle. This was led foremost by the coal and steel industries of the Ruhr Valley. The German Democratic Republic (GDR), or East Germany, was created by the Soviet Union in 1949. The Berlin Wall was built to divide East and West Germany. Berlin, the capital, was also divided up between the United Kingdom, France, the USA and the USSR, although it was in the Soviet area of the country. The Soviets found that many citizens living in their area of the city were fleeing to capitalist areas where they could have freedom and have a higher quality of life. To stop this happening, the USSR built an immense wall, surrounded by an area of cleared land. The Berlin Wall came to symbolize what the Cold War was really about. Hundreds died in an attempt to cross that desolate stretch, gunned down by the guards. The few families that made it into West Berlin were extremely inventive, coming up with unique ways to cross over to the other side. On the 9th November 1989, the government permitted the crossing of the Berlin Wall, and it was dismantled in the weeks that followed. Both halves of Germany were finally reunited on October 3, 1990, and the fall of the Berlin Wall. This is seen as the end of the Cold War.

### German Contributions to the World

Our understanding of the world, the arts and music, and science and technology, have been shaped significantly by Germany and other German-speaking countries. Composers Johann Sebastian Bach and Ludwig van Beethoven, and the famous scientist Albert Einstein are just a few of the many historic German figures. Fairy tales like Snow White and Hansel and Gretel were made famous by the Brothers Grimm. The achievements of men like these are the basis for much of American culture, not to mention that sixty million Americans have their origins in German-speaking countries.

Brands with German origin have prominent positions in just about every major market. Adidas, Heinz ketchup, Mercedes Benz, Volkswagen, and Hellmann's mayonnaise are just a few.

### **Diversity and Culture**

Germany today has very multifaceted art, music, theater and literary scenes. Its society is constantly in flux, and the age demographics are changing. People are living longer and fewer babies are being born. At the same time, Germany has developed into a country of immigrants in the past 50 years. Some 10 percent of people living in Germany don't have a German passport. Some 7 million are what as known as people with a "migration background," which means they may have been born in Germany but their parents are foreign immigrants, or the children of immigrants.



## Timeline: 50 Years in Berlin



The Cold War freeze begins in earnest on June 24, when Russia denies its former Western allies road and rail access to the sectors under its control in landlocked Berlin. The West responds with an immense airlift that, in the following year, delivers two million tons of provisions to Berlin's Tempelhof airport.



The German Democratic Republic (GDR) is formally created on October 7. Wilhelm Pieck is elected president of the socialist state.



After the closing of the border, there are only three designated crossing points between West and East Berlin. The checkpoints are assigned phonetic names: Alpha, Bravo and Charlie.



On June 26, President Kennedy visits West Berlin, famously mixing up his grammar to tell everyone he is pastry. Actually, that's an urban myth. There was nothing wrong with the declaration, "*Ich bin ein Berliner*" (I am a Berliner).

## WRITING ON THE WALL



Work begins on the “fourth generation wall”. Completed in 1980, it is 3.6m high, reinforced with barbed wire, mesh fencing, and lined with beds of nails.



Helmut Kohl becomes Chancellor of West Germany. Five years later, he receives the East German leader Erich Honecker. His subsequent meetings with Soviet leaders and Second World War allies pave the way for German reunification.



On June 12, in a speech made at the Brandenburg Gate, President Reagan challenges the Soviet leader: “Mr Gorbachev, open this gate. Mr Gorbachev, tear down this wall!”



On November 9, the party secretary for propaganda, Günther Schabowski, declares that East Berliners will be allowed to cross the border “with proper permission”. Tens of thousands of East Berliners flood the checkpoints in the Wall demanding entry to the West. In the face of a growing crowd, guards open the checkpoint. Pictures of celebrating Germans on the wall flash around the world.

*Timeline: 50 years in Berlin.* (2009, November 3). Retrieved from [http://women.timesonline.co.uk/tol/life\\_and\\_style/women/the\\_way\\_we\\_live/article6899902.ece](http://women.timesonline.co.uk/tol/life_and_style/women/the_way_we_live/article6899902.ece)

## True Stories from the GDR: An Exercise in Figurative Language

### Overview:

Imagine finding out that your country, as you know it, no longer exists and that the government's spies were your neighbors, family, friends, and co-workers. That's what East Germans have learned from Stasi documents, and they continue to confront issues associated with the bitter reality of their country's past.

The Australian writer Anna Funder began living in West Germany in the '80's, and eventually started working for the state television station answering inquiries from viewers. After the Berlin Wall fell in 1989, she took it upon herself to interview both former members of the Stasi, and the people on whom they spied. The result, *Stasiland: True Stories from Behind the Berlin Wall*, is a mixture of personal and investigative journalism. Anna Funder's observations are captured by her use of figurative language, which help paint a picture of life in Eastern Germany before, during, and after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

In this lesson, students will read passages from *Stasiland* which address topics ranging from the East Germany (GDR), to the role of the Berlin Wall, to the true stories of victims of the Stasi. The purpose of this lesson is three-fold:

- 1) Students will be able to recognize symbols of living in East Germany and the GDR through Anna Funder's writing,
- 2) Students will be able to identify various examples of figurative language, such as similes, metaphors, personification, and imagery, and add style to their own writing.
- 3) They will be able to reflect on the information they are learning through their written responses.

### Objectives:

The students will identify examples of figurative language (i.e. similes, metaphors, personification, and imagery) in *Stasiland: True Stories from Behind the Berlin Wall*. They will write responses to literature that demonstrate understanding of the vocabulary to which they have been introduced: Stasi, East Germany, Berlin Wall, etc. They will also be able to add style to their own writing by using various types of figurative language.

### Materials:

- excerpts from *Stasiland: True Stories from Behind the Berlin Wall*
- highlighters

### Standards:

- W.5.6.10 Write across the curriculum
- W.4.6.1 Generate ideas for writing using such strategies as reading
- W.5.6.8 Write responses to literature that demonstrate understanding or interpretation
- W.7.6.1 Use figurative language purposefully, such as similes and metaphors, to shape and control language to affect readers
- W.4.6.3 Demonstrate an awareness of purpose & audience for all modes of written discourse

## WRITING ON THE WALL

### Standards (continued):

- R.10.6.10 Read a variety of literature, including historical fiction, autobiography, and realistic fiction
- R.9.6.20 Evaluate personal, social, and political issues as presented in text
- R.9.6.2 Analyze the interrelationships of text and world issues/events by applying connection strategies
- R.9.6.11 Use text information and background knowledge to draw conclusions and make inferences
- R.9.6.6. Connect own background knowledge and personal experience to make inferences and to respond to new information presented in text
- R.10.6.12 Explain the meaning of figurative language such as similes and metaphors
- R.10.6.7 Select informational sources appropriate for a given purpose (differentiate between fiction and non-fiction)

### Procedure:

Activate background knowledge:

Use powerpoint slideshow as a guide when discussing the difference between literal and figurative. Review the purpose of using figurative language, and review the specific types. Figurative Language helps paint a picture in the reader's mind. It does not always mean what is being said or read, but it serves to make it more interesting.

Students' understanding of the academic vocabulary will be reinforced through reading various passages of literature. They will be asked to select the form of writing that the author used to address the intended audience as well as demonstrate an understanding of the message the author is trying to convey about East Germany, Berlin, etc. Students will be asked specific questions about the passages, including questions about whether the author is speaking literally or figuratively, and if so, what type of figurative language was used.

Key Academic Vocabulary:

Language Arts	History
descriptive writing	Berlin
figurative language	'The Wall'
similes	Stasi
metaphors	East Germany
personification	GDR
imagery	Socialist Unity Party
alliteration	Informer
hyperbole	Communism
repetition	Iron Curtain
	Cold War

## WRITING ON THE WALL

In the following passages, you may be asked to identify whether the author was writing to inform, to entertain, to persuade, or to describe. Is the author speaking literally or figuratively? What examples of figurative language does the author use and what is being compared? Write responses that demonstrate your interpretation or understanding of the passages.

*“The Stasi was the internal army by which the government kept control. Its job was to know everything about everyone, using any means it chose. It knew who your visitors were; it knew whom you telephoned...It was a bureaucracy metastasized through East German society; overt or covert, there was someone reporting to the Stasi on their fellows and friends in every school, every factory, every apartment block, every restaurant.”*

In the passage above, the author is writing:

- a) to inform,
- b) to entertain,
- c) to persuade,
- d) to describe

Is the author speaking literally or figuratively?

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Based on what you already know about the Stasi and from the information in this passage, explain what the Stasi was.

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## WRITING ON THE WALL

*In August 1961, a fresh Stasi recruit named Hagen Koch walked the streets of Berlin with a tin of paint and a brush, and painted the line where the Wall would go. He was twenty-one years old, and he was Secretary-General Honecker's personal cartographer. Unlike most heads of state, Honecker needed a personal cartographer, because he was redrawing the limits of the free world.*

*Koch's apartment is a cell in a honeycomb of high-rises where a lot of other former Stasi officers and their families lived before the Wall fell, and live still. The balconies have all been painted a pinkish color. On some of them sun umbrellas are rolled up in hibernation.*

*The man who opens the door has a sort of glow about him—a bright face, receding hair and soft brown eyes. Koch smiles broadly, and shakes my hand. He gestures around himself exuberantly, like a ringmaster. 'Welcome to the Wall Archive,' he says.*

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In this passage above, who was Hagen Koch and what was his one of his first responsibilities as a Stasi recruit? What is his job now?

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Use your highlighter to identify examples of figurative language, if any, in the passage above. What types of figurative language did you recognize? (similes, metaphors, personification, etc.)

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In the passage above, what type of writing is used to tell the story of Hagen Koch?

- a) expository
- b) narrative
- c) persuasive
- d) descriptive

*He is more than comfortable with the tiny microphone on my tape recorder. When I ask if I might clip it to his shirt he takes it from me and handles it like a rock star.*

*I ask him how he had applied to join the Stasi.*

*'Just a moment,' he says. It is hard for you to understand. Without understanding my childhood, you can't see why anyone would want to join the Stasi... 'My upbringing was so...' he searches for the words, 'so...GDR.' 'My father put me on this track.' He reaches into the box and pulls out a brownish photograph of his father in army uniform, with the expression men in armed services pictures often have, as if they are already elsewhere. 'You have to understand,' he says, 'in the context of my father, and of the propaganda of the Cold War-the GDR was like a religion. It was something I was brought up to believe in...'*

*I am mulling over the idea of the GDR as an article of faith. Communism, at least of the East German variety, was a closed system of belief. It was a universe in a vacuum, complete with its own self-created hells and heavens, its punishments and redemptions meted out right here on earth. Many of the punishments were simply for lack of belief, or even suspected lack of belief. Disloyalty was calibrated in the minutest of signs: the antenna turned to receive western television, the red flag not hung on May Day, someone telling a ...joke about Honecker just to stay sane.*

Based on what you know about Hagen Koch and the Stasi, why do you think he was “more than comfortable with the tiny microphone” that the journalist used to record the interview?

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Explain what you think the author means when she says that Communism was “a universe in a vacuum.” Is she speaking literally or figuratively?

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*After the Wall fell the German media called East Germany 'the most perfected surveillance state of all time'. At the end, the Stasi had 97,000 employees-more than enough to oversee a country of seventeen million people. But it also had over 173,000 informers among the population. In Hitler's Third Reich it is estimated that there was one Gestapo agent for every 2,000 citizens, and in Stalin's USSR there was one KGB agent for every 5,830 people. In the GDR, there was one Stasi officer or informant for every 63 people. If part-time informers are included, some estimates have the ratio as high as one informer for every 6.5 citizens.*

In the passage above, the author is writing:

- a) to inform,
- b) to entertain,
- c) to persuade,
- d) to describe

Is the author speaking literally or figuratively?

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Based on the information in this passage, under which of the following dictatorships had the highest ratio of "informers"?

- a) Stalin's USSR
- b) Hitler's Third Reich
- c) GDR (East Germany)



*In East Germany, information ran in closed circuit between the government and its press outlets. As the government controlled the newspapers, magazines and television, training as a journalist was effectively training as a government spokesperson. Access to books was restricted. Censorship was a constant pressure on writers, and a given for readers, who learned to read between the lines. The only mass medium the government couldn't control was the signal from western television stations, but it tried: until the early 1970s the Stasi used to monitor the angle of people's antennae hanging out of their apartments, punishing them if they were turned to the west.*

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What type of figurative language did the author use when she wrote: "In East Germany, information ran in closed circuit between the government and its press outlets."

- a) metaphor
- b) simile
- c) personification
- d) alliteration

In the United States, we have freedom of speech, which means that the government cannot limit what someone wants to say or write. Based on the passage above, what were some ways the government restricted the media?

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Do you think it was fair that the government could control or "censor" what news was being reported? Why or why not?

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## WRITING ON THE WALL

*Along with the Great Wall of China, it was one of the longest structures ever built to keep people separate from one another.*

Besides the Great Wall of China, what other structure is the author writing about in the above quote and which groups of people did this structure separate?

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In the following quotes, identify the type of figurative language and describe what two things are being compared:

*The Wall went through houses, along streets, along waterways, and sliced underground train lines to pieces.*

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*East Germany still felt like a secret, walled-in garden, a place lost in time.*

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*East Germany has disappeared, but its remains are still at the site.*

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*These handkerchief gardens are a traditional German solution to apartment dwellers' yearning for a tool shed and a vegetable garden. They make a patchwork of green in odd corners of urban land, along train lines or canals, or as here, in the shelter of the Wall.*

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*In the distance lies the city, the television tower at Alexanderplatz like an oversized Christmas bauble (ornament), blinking blue.*

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*There were, at least on paper, political parties other than the ruling Socialist Unity Party. But really there was just the Party, and its instrument, the Stasi.*

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*In the kitchen I make coffee directly in the thermos. What surprises me about living here is that, no matter how much is taken out, this linoleum palace continues to contain all the necessities for life, at the same time it refuses to admit a single thing either accidentally or arranged, of beauty or joy. In this, it is much like East Germany itself.*

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While you are reading the following passage, look for examples of figurative language.

*Stasiland: True Stories from Behind the Berlin Wall*

The following excerpt is taken from Chapter 2: entitled *Miriam*.

‘I became, officially, an Enemy of the State at sixteen. At six-teen.’ Miriam looks at me through her glasses, and her eyes are wide and blue. In her voice is a combination of pride in how she became such a fiend, and disbelief that this country created enemies of its own children. ‘You know, at sixteen you have this sort of itch.’

In 1968 the old University Church in Leipzig was demolished suddenly, without any public consultation. Two hundred and fifty kilometers away the Prague Spring was in full swing, and the Russians had not yet brought the tanks into the streets to crush the demonstrators for democracy. The demolition of the church in Leipzig provided a focus for the expression of a widespread (uneasiness) the Leipzigers had caught from their Czech cousins. Twenty-three years after the end of World War II, the next generation was asking questions about the way their parents had implemented Communist ideals.

The Leipzig demonstrations were interpreted by the East German regime as a sign of the times, a cinder likely to ignite. The police doused people with fire hoses and made many arrests. Miriam and her friend Ursula thought this was not right. ‘At sixteen you have an idea of justice, and we just thought it was wrong. We weren’t seriously against the state—we hadn’t given it that much thought. We just thought it wasn’t fair to rough people up and bring horses in and so on.’

The two of them decided to do something about it. At a stationer’s they bought a child’s stamp set with ink, small rubber letters and a rail to put them in.

‘You could buy that sort of thing?’ I ask. I know that roneo printers, typewriters and later photocopiers were strictly (if not particularly effectively) controlled by license in the GDR.

‘Not after what we did,’ she smiles. ‘The Stasi had them taken off the shelves.’

Miriam and Ursula made leaflets (‘Consultation, not water cannon!’ and ‘People of the People’s Republic speak up!’) They stuck them up around town one night. The girls wore gloves so as not to leave fingerprints. ‘We had read as many novels as the next person,’ she says, laughing. Miriam had the posters tucked in her jacket; Ursula had a tub of paste and a brush hidden in a milk crate. They were clever—they slapped the leaflets up in telephone booths over the instructions and at tram stops over the timetables. ‘We wanted to make sure people read them.’ They made a circle around the town, and then they went straight through it.

The girls passed the Communist Party Regional Headquarters. Things were going well. ‘We just looked at each other and we couldn’t resist.’ They marched in and told the guard on duty they were there to see Herr Schmidt, on the off-chance that someone by that name was in the building. They didn’t stop to think what they would have done had a Herr Schmidt come out.

The guard made a call. He put the phone down. ‘Uh no, Comrade Schmidt’s not here at the moment.’ The girls said they would come back the next day.

‘On the way out there were these beautiful smooth columns...’

Miriam is convinced, however, that had they left it at that they would have gotten away with it, but on the home stretch they went one step too far. Passing a building where some of their classmates lived, they put leaflets in the letterboxes of two boys they knew. The next day, one of the parents rang the police.

‘Why would you call the police about junk mail?’ I ask.

‘Because they were silly, or maybe they were in the Party, who knows?’

‘It seems so harmless,’ I say.

Miriam comes back quiet but strong. ‘At that time it was not harmless. It was the crime of sedition.

\*

Sedition was handled by the secret police, not the ordinary *Volkspolizei*. The Stasi were methodical. They questioned all the classmates of the boys who had received the pamphlets. They talked to the principal, teachers, parents. Several days went by. Miriam and Ursula agreed on an arrest and incarceration plan: neither would admit anything. The Stasi arrived at a shortlist of suspects. Men with gloves and dogs combed Miriam’s house.

‘And we thought we had been so careful, thrown everything out and destroyed all the evidence.’

The Stasi found some of the little rubber letters in the carpet. Miriam’s parents told the officers they did not know how such a thing could have happened in their house.

Both girls were placed in solitary confinement for a month. They had no visits from their parents or from lawyers, no books, no newspapers, not a phone call.

‘In the beginning they stuck to their plan. ‘No sir, I don’t know either how the leaflets got there, no, it couldn’t possibly have been her.’ ‘But eventually,’ Miriam says, ‘they break you. Just like fiction. They used the old trick and told each of us that the other had admitted, so we might as well too. After no visits, no books, nothing, you think: well, she probably did say it.’

The girls were let out to await their trials. When she got home Miriam thought, there’s no way they’re going to put me back in that place. The next morning she got on a train for Berlin. It was New Year’s Eve 1968, and Miriam Weber was going over the Wall.

*Stasiland: True Stories from Behind the Berlin Wall*

The following excerpt is taken from Chapter 3, entitled: *Bornholmer Bridge*

It takes less than two hours to get from Leipzig to Berlin but Miriam had never been there in her life. Alone in the big city, she bought herself a map at the station. ‘I wanted to have a look at the border in a few places. I thought: this cannot be for real, somewhere or other you just must be able to get over that thing.’

At the Brandenburg Gate she was amazed that she could walk right up to the Wall. She couldn’t believe the guards let her get that close. But it was too flat and too high to climb. Later she found out that the whole border paraphernalia only started behind the Wall at that spot. ‘Even if I had been able to get up there, I could only have put my head over and waved “Hello” to the eastern guards.’ She waves with both hands, and shrugs her shoulders.

By nightfall the chances were looking slim. ‘I hadn’t found any holes in it,’ Miriam says. She was cold and unhappy. She sat in the suburban train on her way to

Alexanderplatz station to catch the regional line home. It was dark and she was going back to prison. The train sluiced between buildings, high up on stilts. Buildings on both sides, flat concrete render facades with rectangular windows five stories high. Some lit, some dark, some with plants, some without. Then the vista changed. It took Miriam a moment to notice it in the dark, but suddenly she was going past high wire-mesh fencing.

'I thought: if I am travelling along here, and there's this big wire fence right next to me, then West Berlin would have to be just over there on the other side.' She got off the train, crossed the platform and caught another train back. It was as she had thought: a tall wire fence. She got off again and went back, this time getting out at Bornholmer Bridge station.

Later, I looked up at the Bornholmer Bridge on a street map. I had heard of it, and thought it might have been one of the places East and West Germany used to exchange each other's spies. Now, I see nothing but this bridge each time I open a street map. It is like once you notice someone has a cast in his eye, that's all you can see in his face.

A western train line and an eastern train line met rarely in divided Germany. At Bornholmer Bridge the western train line still swoops down from the northwest to the southwest, and the eastern one up from the southeast to the northeast. The shapes they make on the map are like figures in profile doing a Maori nose-kiss.

At Bornholmer Bridge the border ran, in theory, along the space between the tracks. In other places in Berlin, the border, and with it the Wall, cut a strange wound through the city. The Wall went through houses, along streets, along waterways, and sliced underground train lines to pieces. Here, instead of cutting the train line, the East Germans built most of the Wall's fortifications in front of the train line on the eastern side, letting the eastern trains run through the furthest wall at the end of the death strip.

'I had a look at the lie of the land and decided: not too bad.' Miriam could see the border installation, the cacophony of wire and cement, asphalt and sand. In front of where it began was a hectare or so of fenced in garden plots, each with its own little shed. These handkerchief gardens are a traditional German solution to apartment dwellers' yearning for a tool shed and a vegetable garden. They make a patchwork of green in odd corners of urban land, along train lines or canals or, as here, in the lee (shelter) of the Wall.

Miriam climbed through and over the fences separating the gardens, trying to get closer to the Wall. 'It was dark and I was lucky-later I learned that they usually patrolled the gardens as well.' She got as far as she could go but not to the Wall, because there was this 'great fat hedge' growing in front of it. She rummaged around in someone's tool shed for a ladder, and found one. She put it against the hedge and climbed up. She took a good long look around.

The whole strip was lit by a row of huge street lamps on poles, their heads bent in submission at exactly the same angle. Overhead, fireworks had started to fizz and pop for the New Year. The Bornholmer Bridge was about a hundred and fifty meters away. Between her and the west there was a wire mesh fence, a patrol ship, a barbed-wire fence, a twenty meter-wide asphalt street for the personnel carriers and a footpath. Then the eastern sentry huts stretched out about one hundred meters apart, and behind them more barbed wire. Miriam takes a piece of paper and draws me a mess of lines so I can see it too.

'Beyond all of that, I could see the wall I had seen from inside the train, the wall that runs along the train line. I assumed that there, behind it, was the west, and I was right. I

could have been wrong, but I was right.' If she had any future it was over there, and she needed to get to it.

I sit in the chair exploring the meaning of dumbstruck, rolling the word around in my mind. I laugh with Miriam as she laughs at herself, and at the boldness of being sixteen. At sixteen you are invulnerable. I laugh with her about rummaging around for a ladder in other people's sheds, and I laugh harder when she finds one. We laugh at the improbability of it, of someone barely more than a child poking about in Beatrix Potter's garden by the Wall, watching out for Mr. McGregor and his blunderbuss, and looking for a step-ladder to scale one of the most fortified borders on earth. We both like the girl she was, and I like the woman she has become.

She says suddenly, 'I still have the scars on my hands from climbing the barbed wire, but you can't see them so well now.' She holds out her hands. The soft parts of her palms are crazed with definite white scars, each about a centimeter long.

The first fence was wire mesh with a roll of barbed wire along the top. 'The strange thing is, you know how the barbed wire used to be looped in a sort of tube along the top of the fence? My pants were all ripped up and I got caught-stuck on the roll! I just hung there! I cannot believe no-one saw me.' A Pierrot doll hanging on display.

Miriam must have come unstruck, because next she got down on all fours and started her way across the path, across the wide street, and across the next strip. The whole area was lit as bright as day. 'I just got down on my knees and went for it. But I was careful. I was very slow.' After the footpath she crossed the wide asphalt road. She could not feel her body, she was invisible. She was nothing but nerve endings and fear.

Why didn't they come for her? What were they doing? She reached the end of the asphalt and they still hadn't come. There was a cable suspended about a meter off the ground. She stopped. 'I had seen it from my ladder. I thought it might be some sort of alarm or something, so I went down flat on my belly underneath.' She crawled across the last stretch to a kink in the wall and crouched and looked and did not breathe. 'I stayed there. I was waiting to see what would happen. I just stared.' She thought her eyes would come loose from her skull. Where were they?

Something shifted, right near her. It was a dog. The huge German shepherd pointed himself in her direction. That cable was no alarm: it had dogs chained to it. She could not move. The dog did not move. She thought the guards' eyes would follow the pointing dog to her. She waited for him to bark. If she moved away, along the wall, he would go for her.

'I don't know why it didn't attack me. I don't know how dogs see, but maybe it had been trained to attack moving targets, people running across, and I'd gone on all fours. Maybe it thought I was another dog.' They held each other's gaze for what seemed a long time. Then a train went by, and unusually, it was a steam train. The two of them were covered in a fine mist.

'Perhaps then he lost my scent?' Eventually, the dog walked away. Miriam waited another long time. 'I thought he would come back for me, but he didn't.' She climbed the last barbed-wire fence to reach the top of the wall bordering the train line. She could see the west-shiny cars and lit streets and the Springer Press building. She could even see the western guards sitting at their sentry posts. The wall was broad. She had about four meters to cross on top of it, and then a little railing to get under. That was all there was. She couldn't believe it. She wanted to run the last few steps before they caught her.

## WRITING ON THE WALL

'The railing was really only so high,' she says, putting an arm out to thigh height, 'all I had to do was get under it. I had been so very careful and so very slow. Now I thought: you have only four more steps, just RUN before they get you. But here'-she marks an X, over and over, on the map she has drawn me-'here, was a trip-wire.' The voice is very soft. She marks and re-marks the X till I think the paper will tear. 'I did not see the wire.'

Sirens went off, wailing. The western sentry huts shone searchlights to find her, and to prevent the easterners from shooting her. The eastern guards took her away quickly.

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What form of writing did the author use in Chapters 2 and 3?

- a) narrative
- b) persuasive
- c) expository
- d) descriptive

For what reason did the secret police, or Stasi, place Miriam and her friend Ursula in solitary confinement?

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Would you say this was a fair punishment that matched the "crime"?

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\*

On a separate sheet of paper, write a paragraph of reflection. What does Miriam's story reveal to you about what it must have been like living in East Germany during the 1960's and '70's? In your reflection, interpret the meaning of the following passage from *Stasiland*:

*The wall is the thing that defined him, and he will not let it go. I look up at the angel's long face, and I think of Miriam and Julia; lives shaped too, by the wall. Will they let it go? Or will it let them go?*

## The Berlin Wall: A Pictorial History

### Overview:

The Berlin Wall has been one of the most photographed structures in Berlin. Collected here in this “gallery,” are photos, both historic and recent, that capture the atmosphere and various attitudes represented during the 50’s, 60’s, 70’s, and 80’s in Berlin. Each image goes along with questions/prompts that encourage students to think more critically about the role of the Berlin Wall and its effect on the people of Germany and the world. Moreover, the students will continue to practice good writing skills in their responses.

### Objectives:

Student will generate ideas for writing by observing and discussing several photographs in a “gallery walk”. The students will gain a deeper understanding of what life was like in the GDR based on evidence in the photos. The students will extend their thinking in the following lesson, when they apply their understanding in the form of a narrative.

### Materials:

iconic photographs/images that “tell the story” of the GDR (included)  
poster or construction paper  
different color markers

### Standards:

- |           |   |
|-----------|---|
| W.5.6.10  | Write across the curriculum   |
| W.4.6.1   | Generate ideas for writing using such strategies as discussing, focused-free-writing, observing, and brainstorming. |
| W.5.6.6.  | Write to reflect ideas/interpretations of multicultural and universal themes and concepts                           |
| W.5.6.7   | Write with a prompt for a sustained amount of time  |
| R.10.6.14 | Analyze message through pictures, images, and photographs   |

### Procedure:

Activate background knowledge:

Review specific vocabulary from the previous lesson, such as GDR and Communism. Use “numbered heads together” strategy. Each student within a group is assigned a number, and each group has a letter (i.e. Group A, Student #1), so each student is responsible to share the meaning of the word when I randomly call out a Table Letter and Student #.

Display selected photos or images in stations around the classroom. Students will be paired strategically, and they will rotate through the stations to read the captions attached to the photos. After, they examine the photos, they will read the question/prompt and read their peers’ responses. Then, they will make their own observations. Feedback from each group should be written with different colored pens/markers.





West Berlin police hold back crowds of Germans coming from East Berlin for food and clothing in 1953.

**Before August 1961**

The border between East and West Berlin is open, and half a million people cross the border daily from one part of the city into the other. Many East Berliners go to the West to shop because certain foods like tropical fruits and other products are only available there. Some of them even work in the West, so they go out to eat there and to the movies.

**After August 12/13, 1961**

In the afternoon of August 12 at 4 p.m. Walter Ulbricht, the East German leader, signs the commands to close the border. Next Sunday at midnight the army and police begin to bolt the city. The wall is built and separates the city into two parts for more than 28 years.

Streets, the railway and the S-Bahn (city railway) are broken, stations of the U-Bahn (underground railway) are closed, and even cemeteries are not spared. Nothing is forgotten and the East Germans will not be allowed to free travel to the West until 1989.

<http://www.dailysoft.com/berlinwall/history/index.htm>

**Think-Write-Pair-Share**

Locate the symbol for the Berlin Wall on the key of this map. Now look at the red and blue map. Considering what you know about East Germany during 1949 and 1989, what was the purpose of the Berlin Wall surrounding all of West Berlin? Write a sentence using descriptive language describing Berlin's location on the map.



The photo is by West German photographer Peter Leibing, then working for Contiepress, in Hamburg.

This is a popular photo of an East German soldier, Conrad Schumann, who was assigned to shoot people trying to breach the wall to escape to West Germany. Instead, he decided to leap to freedom himself in August 1961.

An East German soldier, Conrad Schumann, leaps over a barbed wire barricade into West Berlin on August 15, 1961. Schuman made his break for freedom to join his family, which had fled earlier to West Berlin. The barbed wire barricade would soon evolve into a concrete wall, and eventually an elaborate series of walls and fences.

**Think-Write-Pair-Share**

Think about the risk involved in making this leap. What do you think this soldier had to leave behind? Do you think you would have the courage to do what this soldier did? Why or why not?



So many people jumped out of the windows on the first day of the Wall that the GDR bricked up all the windows (see photo below). Then escapees began tunneling, so the buildings were demolished permanently.



Berlin, Bernauer Strasse. The houses are situated in the East, the pedestrian is in the West. The windows were walled up to prevent people from escaping to West Berlin. (c) 2004 Heiko Burkhardt

**Think-Write-Pair-Share**  
**Describe these photos.**

# #4



West Berlin church members of the Church of Reconciliation could no longer enter the church (August 22, 1961).

### **Think-Write-Pair-Share**

Imagine if a wall was built in front of your church, preventing you from ever attending there again. Describe how you think you would feel in this situation.



[Express Newspapers/Getty Images](#)

A German woman hangs clothing out to dry on a line strung between a tree and the Berlin Wall, Nov. 13, 1963.

**Think-Write-Pair-Share**

How do you think life was different for people living near the Western side of the Wall and the Eastern side? Why do you think this West Berlin woman feels comfortable enough to hang her laundry so near the Wall?



The Berlin Wall separated families. A mother talks to her daughter through a crack in the wall.

**Think-Write-Pair-Share**

If this mother and her daughter could only talk to each other through a wall, what kinds of things do you think they talked about? How would you feel if a wall separated you from your parents?



The Berlin wall separated many families. In order for those on the other side to see their relatives, people would hoist the babies up over the top of the wall.

**Think-Write-Pair-Share**  
**Describe how this photo makes you feel.**





East German border guards look through a gap in the Berlin Wall two days after it was breached, on 11 November 1989. Photograph: Gerard Malie/AFP/Getty Images

**Think-Write-Pair-Share**

Look at the expressions represented in this photo. Compare and contrast the reaction of the people on both sides of the wall.

#9



A man hammers away at the Berlin Wall on Nov. 12, 1989, as the border barrier between East and West Germany is torn down after 28 years, symbolically ending the Cold War.

**Think-Write-Pair-Share**

The Berlin Wall didn't really "fall." It was literally hacked to pieces! Today, in most places in Berlin, all traces of the Wall have been removed and paved over. In the years following the "fall" of the Berlin Wall, some people in Germany wanted "their wall back." Why do you think this was?

#10



A boy waves to soldiers on the Berlin Wall in front of the Brandenburg Gate on November 10th, 1989. (John Tlumacki/Boston Globe staff)

**Think-Write-Pair-Share**

Children that lived in East Germany must have experienced such different lifestyles than children in West Germany like this boy in the photo. Make an inference about the way this parent must have felt when this photo was taken.

#11



East German border policemen refuse to shake hands with a Berliner who stretches out his hand over the border fence at the eastern site nearby Checkpoint Charlie on November 10th, 1989, after the borders were opened. (AP Photo/Lutz Schmidt, File)

**Think-Write-Pair-Share**

Why do you think the guards seem so unfriendly even though the borders had been opened?

Before...



After...



A before-and-after combination of two pictures shows West Berlin citizens continuing their vigil atop the Berlin Wall in front of the Brandenburg Gate in the photo above, taken November 10, 1989 photo (before)... and cars passing through the Gate on November 1, 1999 (REUTERS/David Brauchli [before]/Fabrizio Bensch [after])

**Think-Write-Pair-Share**

Compare and Contrast the two photos. Explain some of the ways that life was different after the Wall was removed.

## Narrative Essay: What Happens Next?

### Overview:

In this lesson, students will apply their understanding of people's personal experiences in the form of a narrative essay. They will use characteristics of descriptive writing, including figurative language, to add style to their essay.

### Objectives:

Student will choose a photograph or image portrayed in the "gallery walk," from the previous lesson. They will create a graphic organizer or "story map" for a narrative writing and draft a narrative essay based on predictions they make about the person or subject in the photo. They will revise/edit using various tools/methods, such as peer and/or teacher collaboration, and they will publish their writing according to purpose and audience.

### Materials:

Notebook paper

Writing Rubric

Iconic photographs/images that "tell the story" of the GDR (included)

### Standards:

- W.4.6.2 Organize ideas by using graphic organizers
- W.5.6.3 Create expository, narrative writings
- W.7.6.6 Create a strong lead and conclusion
- W.7.6.1 Use figurative language purposefully, such as similes and metaphors, to shape and control language to affect readers
- W.6.6.1 Use a variety of simple and compound sentences of varied lengths
- W.4.6.8 Revise content for central idea, organization (beginning, middle, end), & elaboration
- W.4.6.11 Edit individually or in groups for appropriate grade-level conventions of grammar
- W.4.6.14 Publish/share according to purpose and audience
  
- W.5.6.10 Write across the curriculum
- W.4.6.1 Generate ideas for writing using such strategies as discussing, focused-free-writing, observing, and brainstorming.
- W.5.6.6. Write to reflect ideas/interpretations of multicultural and universal themes and concepts
- W.5.6.7 Write with a prompt for a sustained amount of time
  
- R.10.6.14 Analyze message through pictures, images, and photographs

### Procedure:

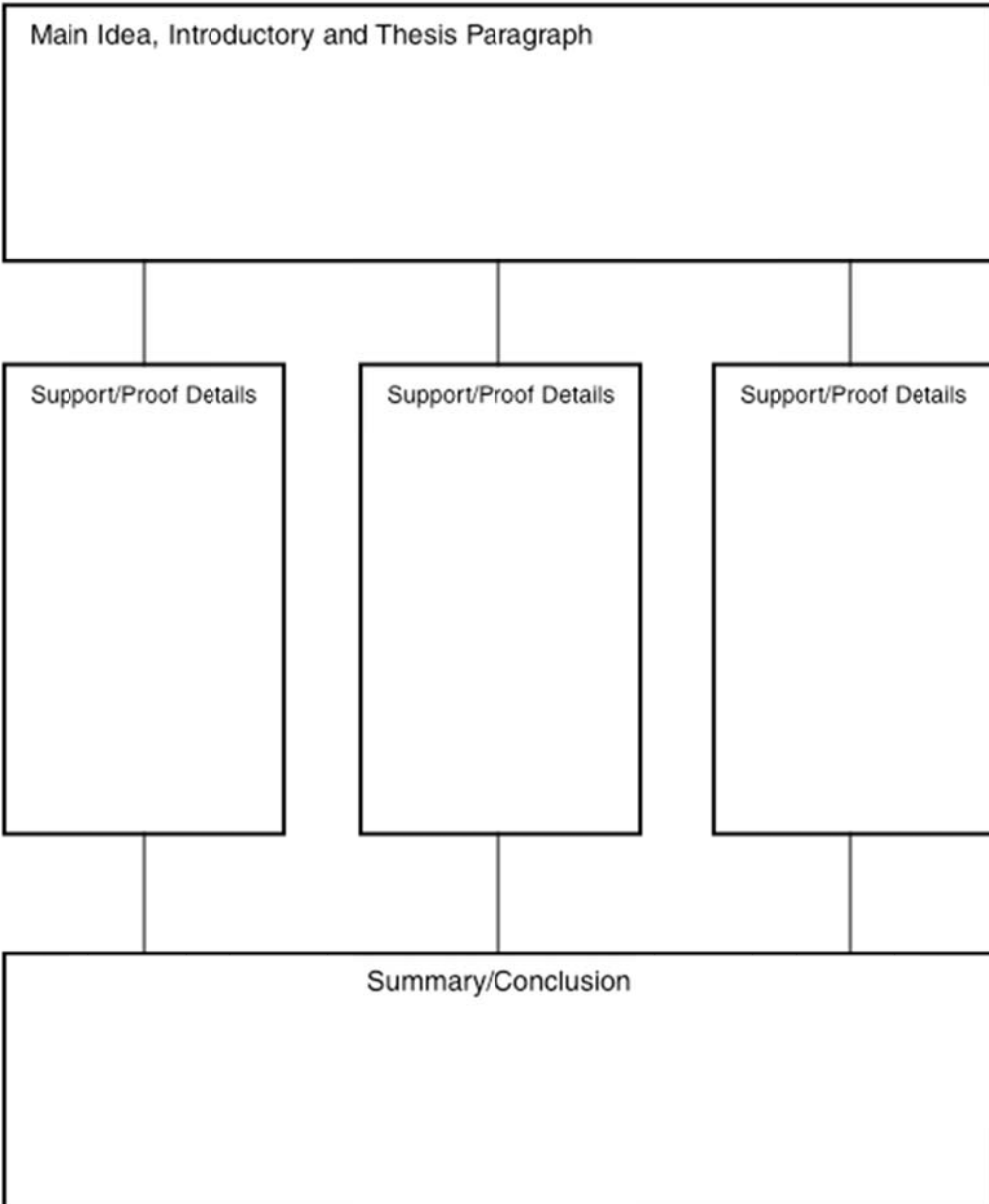
Encourage students to choose a photo from the gallery walk that sparks their interest or intrigues them. After they've chosen the photo, tell the students to imagine what could have happened next? Once they have generated ideas, students will use a 5-paragraph essay graphic organizer (provided) to organize their thoughts. Create a strong lead sentence, and topic sentences for each body paragraph. The students will create a narrative essay describing what they predict might have happened.

5-Paragraph Essay Graphic Organizer


<http://www.kimskome4teachertalk.com>

*In My Opinion . . . (Main Topics and Supporting Points)*

 **Five-Paragraph Essay** 





## “Golden Line Response”: True Stories from the Checkpoint

### Overview:

The purpose of this lesson is to read and respond to another example of a true story written in the form of a narrative. This particular story is written by Oliver August, whose father was fourteen when the WWII ended and the Allies drew a line across his family’s tree nursery. The main house was in the Soviet Zone, while some of the fields were in the British zone. When Oliver August himself was eighteen, the Germany he grew up in disappeared with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Students will interact with the material from this text by using the “Golden Line Response” strategy.

### Objectives:

Students will read excerpt from Oliver August’s *Along the Wall and Watchtowers: A journey down Germany’s divide*. Students will discuss one line, sentence, or phrase that resonates with them and write a short response in their writing journals.

### Materials:

Book excerpt (included)

### Standards:

- |          |   |
|----------|---|
| W.5.6.10 | Write across the curriculum   |
| W.4.6.1  | Generate ideas for writing using such strategies as discussing, focused-free-writing, observing, and brainstorming. |
| W.5.6.6. | Write to reflect ideas/interpretations of multicultural and universal themes and concepts                           |
| W.5.6.7  | Write with a prompt for a sustained amount of time  |
| R.       | Read a variety of literature  |

### Procedure:

1. Have students read an excerpt from *Along the Wall and Watchtowers* and highlights one line, sentence, sentence, or phrase that resonates with them.
2. In groups of four, instruct the first student to share their Golden Line. Other members respond with a question, comment, extension, or connection to something else they have seen or read in this unit.
3. Have the first student explain why they selected that line.
4. Repeat steps 2 and 3 with all group members.
5. Next, students will write in their writing journals a short paragraph responding to this discussion. The first sentence they will write in their journal should quote the “golden line” they chose.

Read the following excerpt from the prologue of *Along the Wall and Watchtowers: a journey down Germany's divide*, by Oliver August.

My most prized possession as a child was a rusty steel helmet with a bullet hole. It was heavy, with a sinister crack at the back. I imagined its last owner had suffered a demise of unspeakable horror. I was eight years old when I found the helmet on an Easter-egg hunt. I beat my younger brother to it. We were on a family holiday behind the Iron Curtain. Our parents had hidden the eggs in the dunes by the Baltic Sea. If I remember correctly, we were visiting relatives in this breezy part of East Germany. To celebrate Easter, my mother had brought West German chocolate eggs across the border. That way, we wouldn't have to eat our relatives' artificially sweetened East German chocolate. My mother seemed keen to shelter us children from the grim realities of the Cold War.

The helmet lay in a boggy pit, covered with dirt. Only someone searching for West German chocolate eggs as eagerly as my brother and me could have found it. The rusty brown was barely distinguishable from the dark soil. In jubilant triumph I raised the helmet above my head and abandoned the hunt. Clambering down to the beach to wash out the soil, I noticed the bullet hole. My father said it was the helmet of a Russian soldier. Rather unnecessarily, he added that the soldier had probably died. The state of the helmet left us in little doubt as to the soldier's death. We ended the day by walking along the beach collecting stones in the helmet.

The next day, we loaded up the car for the journey home. The helmet, still filled with stones, was packed into the boot between our suitcases. At the border, we encountered a longer wait than usual. Thousands of families from the west had been visiting relatives in the east. During the decades of division it had become a ritual: Easter in the east, a political act of fasting and atonement. Now we were all heading back to the land of real milk chocolate. One by one, East German border guards, known as Volkspolizisten or VoPos, stopped us and decided which cars to search. The VoPos took particular care when probing petrol tanks. Even to an eight-year-old it seemed incredible that a fugitive could hide there.

As we took our place in the queue of cars, my parents' thoughts turned to the helmet. 'I'm not sure it's a good idea to take it across the border,' my father said.

'Why not?'

'It's the helmet of a Russian soldier from the war. The VoPos will recognize that at once. Because they are like brothers to the Russians, they don't like admitting the Russian soldiers can get shot, too.'

I scowled at my own brother. We often had decidedly belligerent feeling towards each other. It can't have been easy explaining fraternal relations inside the Soviet bloc to us.

My mother was pragmatic. 'Let's just throw it our right here. We'll leave it in a roadside ditch.'

'But it's my helmet, not yours,' I sobbed, asserting my property rights.

'You can collect it when we come back next year. I'm sure it'll still be there.' But no amount of motherly reassurance could convince me to abandon my helmet. I began to punch the front passenger seat, at which point my parents realized they would have to risk a confrontation with the VoPos.

Sure enough, they singled out our car for inspection. 'To the right. Stop the car. Everything out.' My parents had to unload the entire boot and carry bags, half-eaten sandwiches, camping gear and left-over chocolate eggs into a small interview room. As he unpacked, my father whispered to us: 'Say nothing about the helmet.' After he had lifted the last suitcase out of the boot, he looked up at the VoPo and said: 'That's just stones. I won't bring them in,' and moved the helmet to the furthest, darkest corner of the boot.

In the interview room the VoPos sifted through dirty underwear. They tasted toothpaste and inspected personal letters. If this was meant to intimidate, they could not have failed more spectacularly. I grinned inanely. My helmet had made it through the world's most fortified border. Back in the car I celebrated, punching the front seats and howling with joy.

Further along the border on the West German side we stopped on a hill overlooking the fortifications. Down below, my father pointed out the East German village where he had grown up. It was a tantalizing 300 yards away. But we could not visit because it was too close to the border. The VoPos only allowed residents through.

My father had been fourteen when the war ended and the Allies drew a line across his father's tree nursery. The main house was in the Soviet zone while some of the fields were in the British zone. The border literally divided the property. Aged seventeen, my father hid a suitcase on a horsedrawn cart and drove west across the border on family property, leaving his parents behind. In the following forty years he was allowed to return only twice-for a maximum of three hours each time-for their funerals. He now pointed out the field where he had crossed the border.

When we arrived home from our Easter trip, the helmet took pride of place among my football posters. I would put it on my head occasionally to see if it was still too big for me. It would remain too big for many years to come. Slowly my enthusiasm for football faded, but the helmet remained on the shelf.

I was fascinated by the border. I listened to my mother's stories of her family's escape across borders. Her father, a German navy captain, had died towards the end of the war. His ship was torpedoed by a British submarine in the Mediterranean. His wife, my mother's mother, came from a Yorkshire family. When the Red Army advanced towards their Berlin residence, she decided to seek the relative safety of the British-occupied zone. During a dramatic flight she was captured and interned in a Russian camp. She managed to escape and eventually crossed the zonal border into what would become West Germany with her four-year-old daughter, my mother. Fifteen years later, my mother returned to West Berlin as a student. It was around the time the Wall went up. And as a naïve twenty-two-year-old, she participated in a mission to smuggle a group of East Germans across the fortifications.

The more I heard about the Wall, the more I viewed my rusty helmet as a family treasure. Sneaking it across the border was an early rite of passage...Then, in late 1989, the border disappeared. The monstrosity built in 1961 fell overnight. A popular uprising succeeded where hundreds of Cruise missiles had failed. The Berlin Wall simply crumbled. The Germany I had grown up in disappeared.

In 1981, as a member of the United States Air Force, I was able to walk through

Checkpoint Charlie, in my Air Force uniform, with no interference from the East German guards. I recall taking this walk one fine morning in an effort to see the wall from the communist side. Sometime during the day I removed my Air Force issue sweater because the sun was shining brightly, and I gave the sweater to a friend so he could take the sweater back home in his car. Well, unbeknownst to me when I walked through Checkpoint Charlie that fine morning the East German took photographs of me entering East Berlin. Upon my intended return back through Checkpoint Charlie, toward the West, I was greeted with the closing of gates, the raising of barriers, and immediate detainment by four East German guards (they came out brandishing weaponry - guns pointed at me). I was 'interrogated' regarding many, many non-pertinent issues such as what's your name, what's your function with the U.S. Air Force, what are you doing in the East... I played dumb and pretended I knew none of the German language. I'll admit that I was scared, frightened, and very curious about what was occurring. My only thought at the time was that perhaps our side had captured a communist spy and now I was going to be used as trading material. I was beginning to envision several days and nights in an East German cell, until I heard the guards discussing something about a sweater. I caught the word 'pullover' numerous times in their conversation (they were speaking freely around me due to my denial of the German language). Finally I realized what this situation was all about - they were wondering where was my Air Force sweater. They were theorizing that I could aid a potential East German escapee by providing him/her with military clothing. I began to smile as my fears subsided. Nothing nearly as dramatizing romantic as a spy swap was going to take place. There would be no international incident after all. I wasn't going to be telling stories to the Washington Post about my stay in an East German prison (where I would have undoubtedly been interrogated under bright lights, fed meager rations, and brave to the very end - not have revealed any information?). Upon understanding their conversation about the sweater my prior military training immediately returned to the forefront of my mind and I stated, in perfect German, "I demand to speak with a Russian officer right now. If I wanted to provide citizens in the East with clothing I'd probably mail it over". Suddenly all was quiet, the East Germans knew that they no longer 'had' me, but that they were the ones who had been 'had', the gates were opened wide and I walked back through to freedom in the West. It is nearly a fifty yard walk though, through no man's land, and my spine was tingling - waiting for that bullet in the back like they do in the movies.

I never reported this incident to my superiors because they would not have been happy, and I would have been reprimanded in some fashion for allowing the situation to occur. Until now I have kept the whole incident pretty much among close friends.

Tom K.

June 1, 2000

## WRITING ON THE WALL

	World War II is over and Berlin is divided into 4 sectors: the American, British, French in the West and the Soviet in the East
May 8, 1945	
June 30, 1946	At the instigation of the Soviet Military administration the demarcation line between East and West Germany is safeguarded
October 29, 1946	A 30 day valid <u>Interzone pass</u> is required to travel between the sectors in Germany
June 23, 1948	<u>Currency reform</u> in Berlin, Berlin is divided into two different currency zones
June 24, 1948	Begin of the Berlin blockade
June 25, 1948	<u>Berlin Airlift</u> begins
May 12, 1949	End of Berlin blockade
May 24, 1949	Federal Republic of Germany is founded (West Germany)
September 30, 1949	End of Berlin Airlift
October 7, 1949	German Democratic Republic is founded (East Germany)
May 26, 1952	Border between East and West Germany and between East Germany and West Berlin is closed. Only the border between East and West Berlin is still opened
June 17, 1953	Uprising of East Berlin building workers against the imposition of increased working norms, suppression by Red Army tanks
November 14, 1953	The Western Powers waive the Interzonen pass, the Soviet Union follows but East German citizen need a permission to travel to the West
December 11, 1957	Leaving East Germany without permission is forbidden and violations are prosecuted with prison up to three years
August 13, 1961	The Berlin sectorial border between East and West Berlin is closed, barriers are built
August 14, 1961	Brandenburg Gate is closed
August 26, 1961	All crossing points are closed for West Berlin citizens
June 26, 1963	President <u>J. F. Kennedy</u> visits Berlin and says: "Ich bin ein Berliner." ("I am a Berliner.")
December 17, 1963	West Berliner citizen may visit East Berlin the first time after more than two years
September 3, 1971	Four Power's Agreement over Berlin visiting becomes easier for West Berliners
June 12, 1987	President <u>Ronald Reagan</u> visits Berlin and urges Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev to tear down the Berlin Wall.
September 10, 1989	Hungarian government opens border for East German refugees
November 9, 1989	Berlin Wall is opened
December 22, 1989	Brandenburg Gate is opened
October 3, 1990	Germany is reunited

Additional resources:

Websites:

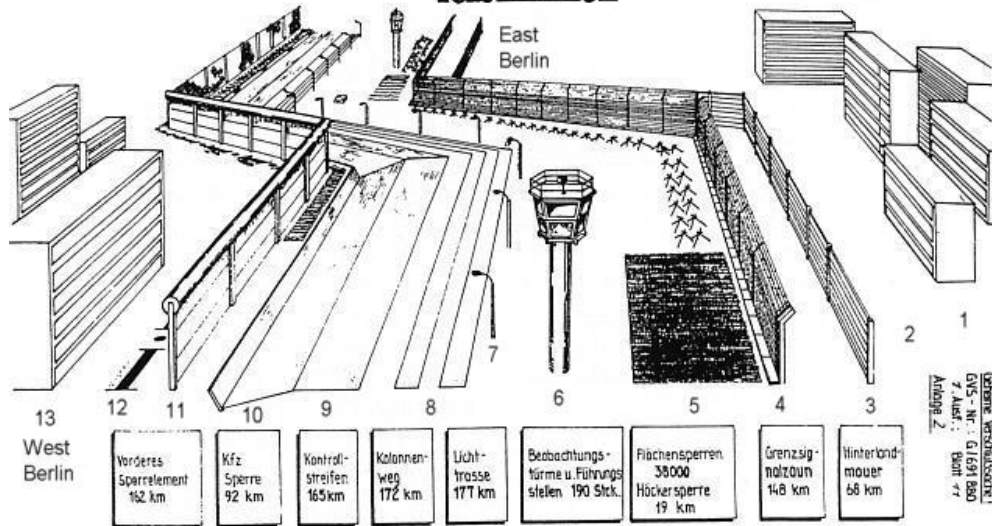
<http://www.time.com/time/daily/special/photo/berlin1/>

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[http://www.boston.com/bigpicture/2009/11/the\\_berlin\\_wall\\_20\\_years\\_gone.html](http://www.boston.com/bigpicture/2009/11/the_berlin_wall_20_years_gone.html)

[www.jfklibrary.org](http://www.jfklibrary.org)

**Pionier- und signaltechnischer Ausbau der Staatsgrenze zu BERLIN-West  
(gegenwärtig)**



**The system of the Berlin Wall at the end of the 70s**

From right to left:

- 1 - East Berlin
- 2 - Border area
- 3 - Backland Wall
- 4 - Signal fence
- 5 - Different kind of barriers
- 6 - Watch towers
- 7 - Lighting system
- 8 - Column track
- 9 - Control track
- 10 - Anti-vehicle trenches
- 11 - Last Wall, known as the "Wall"
- 12 - Border
- 13 - West Berlin

The whole border area was on the territory of East Berlin/East Germany. The border between East and West Berlin was after the last Wall. This last Wall is known as the Berlin Wall. However, the Berlin Wall was a complex system of walls, fences, watchtowers and barriers. The area between the Backland Wall (3) and the Last Wall (11) was the so-called death strip. The document is an original document of the East German border troops..

*Thanks to Hagen Koch for the copy of this document.*

[http://www.dailysoft.com/berlinwall/history/facts\\_03.htm](http://www.dailysoft.com/berlinwall/history/facts_03.htm)