

The Significance of Berlin - Activity 1

Why was the Berlin Wall built in 1961?

Aims

- Find out what life was like in East Germany in 1960/61
- Find out who ordered the Berlin Wall to be built
- Find out why the Berlin Wall was built

Resources

coldwarBEA1.lgfl.net is your one-stop link to curriculum resources for this activity; you will find videos, photographs and links to the relevant main Cold War sections.

Introduction

In 1958, Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev demanded that the West remove all troops from West Berlin within six months. This led to three years of increasing tension and crisis in Berlin. The Vienna Summit between Khrushchev and Kennedy ended in chaos; tensions continued to rise. Seemingly overnight, in August 1961, the city of Berlin was split in two by a 96-mile long wall. East Berlin was split from West Berlin, and West Berlin was sealed from East Germany. There were few crossing points, and travel between the two was very restricted. Why did the GDR find it necessary to build this wall, in the words of Khrushchev, 'to guard the gates of the socialist paradise?' An initial barbed wire barrier was quickly replaced by a concrete wall, complete with watchtowers, killing zones and border patrols.

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Your task

In this activity, your task is to build a profile of the people leaving East Berlin in 1961. Use the resources at coldwarbea1.lgfl.net to find out the following information:

- What kind of people were leaving East Berlin?
- How many were leaving?
- Why were they leaving?
- Where were they going?
- Was it 'push' factors encouraging refugees to leave, or 'pull' factors? Were conditions in East Germany and East Berlin so bad that people were leaving, or was it just that life in the West was so much better?
- Was it political (freedoms under capitalism) or economic (low wages and poor housing) under communism? Use the evidence to decide for yourself why so many East Germans were fleeing.

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