

The Significance of Berlin - Activity 3

What can a Stasi prisoner tell us about life behind the Iron Curtain?

Aims

- To investigate life behind the Iron curtain in the cold War
- To evaluate a range of different types of information sources and evidence
- To reach a balanced conclusion on why the Wall fell in 1989.

Resources

coldwarBEA3.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.

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Step 1: A key source – A Stasi prisoner

LGfL has been fortunate enough to interview a man who was a prisoner of the Stasi (East German secret police).

We all know History is based on evidence, but sometimes this evidence can be firstly rather surprising, and secondly make you rethink your assumptions about an event or topic. These extraordinary interviews were made very recently, so have the advantage of hindsight. Nevertheless, they give us a terrific insight into one person's views and experiences of living in the GDR.

Watch the interviews - you will probably need to do this more than once. The first time, just listen for an overall impression. The second time, jot down notes under main headings suggested by your first listen. Thirdly, repeat and add any extra details. You might use the transcripts now to help you.

Note what Peter Wulkau's experiences reveal about:

- People's attitudes to Communism
- Freedom or lack of freedom
- Were people in the East any different to the West?

What did this man do to get arrested?

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Step 2: Taking care with the source

Look back over your notes from the interviews. Remember, they were recorded long after the events he describes. Ask yourself (or discuss) these questions about the source:

- Does this man seem a credible witness?
- Are there any things he says that surprise you? If so, is it because he is misleading/mistaken, or because you had the wrong impression about life in the GDR?
- What impression does he give of life in the GDR?
- What impression does he give of the Stasi, or Secret Police?
- How could this affect what he says about the GDR?

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