

The Significance of Berlin - Activity 4

Why did the Berlin Wall come down in 1989?

Aims

- Explore why the Wall came down in 1989
- Compare a range of different sources of information and use them as evidence

Resources

coldwarBEA4.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

If we take the evidence of the Stasi prisoner in the previous activity alongside the evidence presented by most textbooks and historians, then it is clear that the Wall came down in 1989 because it was a symbol of a regime which was widely feared and hated. Other factors of course had to come into play, like the actions of Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev. You can examine these in the Key Events section. Here we are going to look at how people felt about the Wall.

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Step 1: Usefulness and reliability of the Stasi prisoner evidence

There is no such thing a useful or useless source. There is no such thing as a reliable or unreliable source. For example, a Soviet Communist poster attacking the USA in the 1970s is very reliable evidence about what the Soviets thought of the Americans. It is very useful evidence of how the Soviets tried to attack the Americans. If you think a source is not useful (e.g. because it is biased against America), then you are using it to answer the wrong question. Look back at your notes from the previous activity and use these ideas to assess whether you think the Stasi prisoner is:

- A reliable and useful witness about his own experiences
- A reliable and useful witness about life in the GDR
- A reliable and useful witness about the Stasi

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Step 2: Was the prisoner typical?

The key here is whether the Stasi prisoner was typical of how East Germans felt about the Wall and the GDR. Use the resources at coldwarBEA4.lgfl.net and explore the new evidence. Again, you will probably need to do this more than once. The first time, just look and listen and build up a general impression. The second time, jot down notes under main headings suggested by your first trawl through the evidence. Thirdly, repeat and add any extra details. Highlight the similarities and differences to the prisoner interviews you used as evidence in Step 1.

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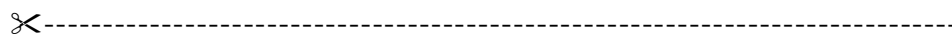
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Step 3: How to remember the Berlin Wall

In 1989, much of the Wall was destroyed very quickly; today, only sections of it survive. Some people want it completely removed – all traces of it. Others think it is important to keep sections of it as a reminder. What is your view? Write a report for the Berlin City Council arguing either that the Wall should be completely removed or that some sections should be preserved. The following points might be useful in your arguments, for or against.

- About 5,000 people managed to escape from East Berlin between 1961 and 1989. This is a reminder of how bad life in the GDR was.
- We need to move on and stop remembering the bad aspects of the past.
- Approximately 1,000 people died trying to escape. We should not be reminded of this as it is too upsetting.
- Approximately 1,000 died while attempting to escape either into West Berlin or West Germany. This should not be forgotten.
- The escapes and attempted escapes should be remembered because many of them were courageous and ingenious.

You could use Word or PowerPoint, or the LGfL Creative Toolkit at j2launch.lgfl.net (you may want to blog your work afterwards).



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