

# MUSIC AND THE BERLIN WALL DURING THE COLD WAR

Est. Time: 75 minutes

Subjects: ELA, Social Studies/History

Age Range: Middle & High School


View the classroom lesson [here!](#)

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What was the Berlin Wall and how did music respond to what it symbolized?

In this lesson, you will:


- Examine the history of the rise and fall of the Berlin Wall, and its impact on people living in Berlin
  - Identify how music helped connect a divided city and nation through a shared sense of fear, angst, and hope
  - Explain the Cold War tensions between the United States and Soviet Union
  - Listen to popular and underground music of the late Cold War Era, including pop, rock, and punk
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Have you ever wondered why the Berlin Wall was constructed and why it came down? Discuss what you know about the Berlin Wall with a friend, family member, or classmate. Use the questions in the next slide as prompts for your conversation.





Consider or ask a friend:

- What was the Berlin Wall and when was it constructed?
  - When did the Wall come down?
  - Why was the Wall built and why was it dismantled?
  - How effective might a wall be in stopping the movement of people or goods?  
What about the movement of ideas or culture?
  - What effects might a wall have, especially for those people who might live close to it?
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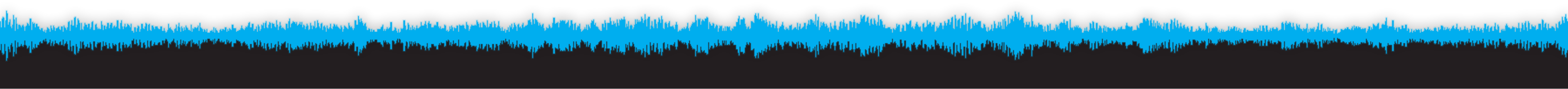



## CONSTRUCTING THE BERLIN WALL

Watch [this video](#) about why and when the Berlin Wall was constructed.



Consider or ask a friend:


- Why was Berlin a contested city after World War II?
  - Why was the Berlin Wall built?
  - What might have it been like to live in Berlin at this time?
  - How might the construction of the Wall change people's everyday lives?
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Examine this excerpt of Barb Dignan's memories of the Berlin Wall, and Tina Bain's account of the Berlin Wall on the following slide, then consider the questions that follow.

Excerpts from "Berlin Wall – Readers' Memories," *The Guardian*.

**Barb Dignan:** "I was a 14-year-old army dependant living in a German neighbourhood of Bad Kreuznach, Germany. My father was a major; my mother was German. No one had televisions on our street; news came by human contact, newspapers, and telephones. The night the Wall went up (the beginning of the process, anyway), my family was in our home. We began to hear people outside yelling, crying, louder and louder. We went into the street to witness tragic panic and fear. Neighbours were telling each other (and us) that they had relatives in East Berlin – they had tried to contact them, but couldn't – that no one knew what was happening. Rumours spread. Some thought their relatives had been killed, or would soon be killed. I had never witnessed anything like this. Everyone cried. As time went on, neighbours told us they thought their loved ones behind the wall were lost to them for good ... I'm sure some of those 'lost' relations died over that period. That night is etched in my permanent memory."



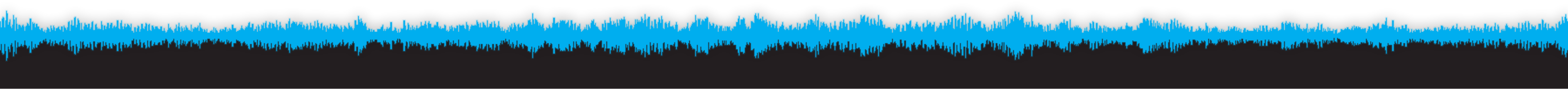


Examine this excerpt of Tina Bain's account of the Berlin Wall and consider the questions on the following slide.

Excerpts from “Berlin Wall – Readers' Memories,” *The Guardian*.

**Tina Bain:** “I came to Berlin as a 15-year-old girl visiting my German pen friend Elke. I stayed in Borsigwalde, in the then French sector. Many people were leaving the eastern part of Berlin and the authorities decided to stop this by closing the borders and then building the Wall. The whole atmosphere was one of fear and panic, people stocking up on food and worrying about loved ones on the other side. My parents back in the UK worried that I wouldn't be able to get out. I had never seen tanks in the streets before and I was very frightened.


I did get home and lost touch with Elke. In 1989 she advertised for me in a Manchester newspaper, saying we were together at the building of the Wall and she wanted to be reunited with me at the ending of it. I flew to Berlin in early 1990, had a great reunion with Elke and did my share of breaking down the Wall, crossed into the east at Checkpoint Charlie and met a young East German girl who then came to stay with me in England for a few months. I have been back in Berlin several times since and am here now for Elke's 70th birthday. It's a wonderful city and I am so glad to have had this 53-year relationship with it.”







Consider or ask a friend:


- What was Barb Dignan's experience of living in Berlin while the Wall was being built? What about Tina Bain's?
  - How are Barb's and Tina's accounts similar? How are they different?
  - What do these personal experiences reveal about life in Berlin in 1961?
  - How might you feel if you were in a similar situation as Barb and Tina?
  - In addition to not being able to communicate with friends and family, what other worries or concerns might have the people of Berlin had at this time?
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Examine this cartoon of Nikita Khrushchev, Premier of the Soviet Union and John F. Kennedy, President of The United States and consider the questions on the following slide





Consider or ask a friend:

- What are Khrushchev and Kennedy sitting upon?
  - What do you notice about their arms and how it relates to the bombs they are sitting upon? What do you notice about how their fingers are positioned?
  - What statement do you think the illustrator is trying to make in this cartoon?
  - How might have people living in Berlin been especially affected by the arms race during the Cold War? How might they have responded to this threat?
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## 99 LUFTBALLOONS

Watch [this video](#) about the song “99 Luftballons” (“99 Red Balloons” in English) and its message about the concern of nuclear war. After watching, [read the lyrics](#) to the song.



Consider or ask a friend:

- The cartoon you examined on a previous slide was published in the early 1960s. The protests in the clip come from the 1980s. What does this tell you about the proliferation of nuclear weapons during the Cold War?
  - Why were East and West Germans working together protesting for peace in the 1980s?
  - During the early 1980s, why were Germans “terrified” by the threat of nuclear war?
  - How did Nena’s “99 Red Balloons” reflect the tension and fear over nuclear weapons during the 1980s? What is the song about, based on the lyrics?
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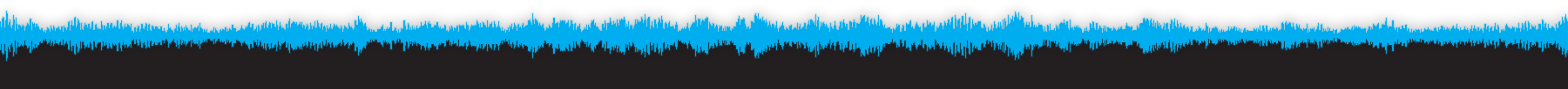


## THE FALL OF THE BERLIN WALL

Watch [this video](#) describing when the Wall began coming down in November 1989.



Consider or ask a friend:

- What was the decision by the East German government that initially led to the Wall being a “redundant structure”?
  - How did Germans at the Wall in Berlin respond to this new freedom of movement?
  - What did you notice about what was happening to the physical structure of the Wall in the video?
  - What were some of the words used by German citizens in the video to describe their experience of the Wall coming down?
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# SUMMARY

- The Berlin Wall was a guarded separation barrier that divided East and West Berlin from 1961 to 1989
- The Wall was erected in 1961 by the communist East German government to stop the rapid emigration of East Germans to West Germany
- East Berlin was at the center of the Cold War dispute between the United States and the Soviet Union
- Germans, and especially Berliners, were very concerned about the proliferation of nuclear arms during the Cold War and the possibility they be bombed during a crisis
- The East German government allowed for more freedom of movement between east and west Germany in 1989, leading the Wall to open in November 1989 and begin being dismantled



# BE CREATIVE

Examine these two **sets of images** from the East and West German punk scenes with attached quotes describing both scenes. After you have viewed all the materials, proceed to the next slide for instructions on how to share what you have examined.

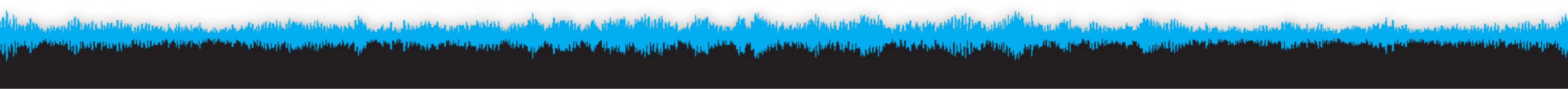


# BE CREATIVE

Draft a letter to a penpal on the other side of the Berlin Wall using the guidelines in the image above. Present your letter by either sharing it as a document, reciting it in an audio recording, or reading it out loud in a video.

If you are learning German, try to create the letter or video using the German language.

**Scenario:** You live on one side of the Berlin Wall, but are penpals with someone on the other side. Recently you attended a few punk rock shows on your side of Berlin. Write a short letter to your penpal about your experiences with this scene, being sure to mention the **music**, **fashion** and **politics** associated with it.



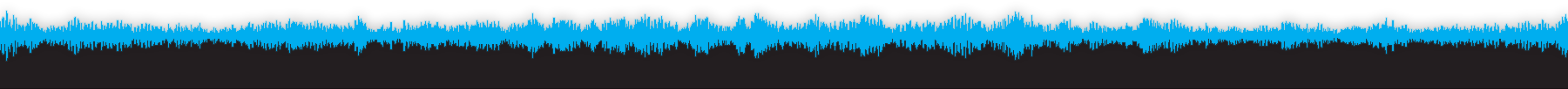
# BE CREATIVE

Imagine you are organizing a concert to be performed near the Berlin Wall today. Create an original concert poster for the event. Your poster must include artwork, a list of who is performing, the date (1961-1989), and a theme that relates the concert to the Berlin Wall. Share your work with your class either via a video presentation or as an image.



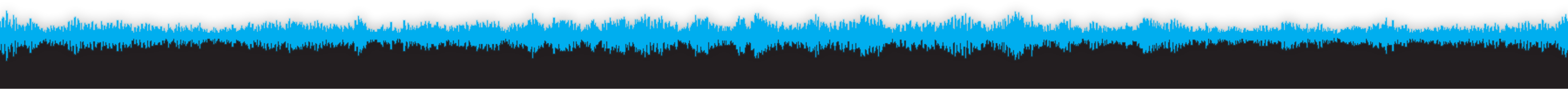
# BE CREATIVE

In the *Soundtracks* episode, Klaus Meine, singer of The Scorpions, says, “I was thinking about how [the song] ‘Wind of Change’ still has a strong impact. You know, with this crazy world we go through right now, we’re thinking about building walls again. We’re thinking about separation. I mean, it’s unbelievable. The world could need another wind of change.” Update the lyrics to “Wind of Change” to reflect current events related to constructing walls and creating divisions between people. Share your lyrics with your class via a video or audio recording.



# BE CURIOUS

Watch the **full CNN Soundtracks episode** on the Berlin Wall. Choose another musician or band featured in the episode, and conduct research about their history. Briefly journal your findings (artist, date, reaction to the performance by attendees and the larger Berlin community, etc.) about the event. Present your findings in summary form to your class via a video or audio recording.



# CONNECT

Share it with us! Either you or an adult in your life can share your work with TeachRock on [Instagram](#) or [Facebook](#), email to [info@teachrock.org](mailto:info@teachrock.org), or Tweet it to [@TeachRock](#)





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