

The Berlin Wall for GCSE Modern World History and AS History



Created by Paul Hallett



This resource pack covers GCSE Modern World History B and OCR AS History

For AQA – Topic 5 Crisis in the Cold War and Détente 1960-1980.

For OCR - AS Democracy and Dictatorship in Germany 1933-1963.

Museum task

Go to the Berlin Airlift and Berlin Wall 'hotspot' on the lower level of the National Cold War Exhibition. Watch the video clip and read the boards before making appropriate notes.



This resource pack covers GCSE Modern World History B and OCR AS History

For AQA Exam Board Topic 5, The Cold War and Détente.

How close to war did the building of the Berlin Wall bring the USA and the USSR?
(In the style of AQA Exam Board)

Why was the Berlin Wall Built?

There are several causes behind the creation of the wall that not only separated East and West Berlin, but also East and West Germany.

The creation of a separate West Germany (FRG or BDR) in May 1949 was followed in October by the creation of East Germany (GDR or DDR). The 1950s saw the Cold War deepen and any hope of the reunification of East and West Germany faded.

This resource pack covers GCSE
Modern World History B and OCR AS History

Konrad Adenauer – Chancellorship democracy and the ‘magnet theory’

In September 1949 Adenauer became West Germany’s first Chancellor and rapidly became seen as a ‘safe pair of hands’ by the West German’s. Adenauer believed that any reunification of the FRG and the GDR could only be on the basis of a Capitalist democracy. While he always stated that reunification was an issue close to his heart he was determined not to make any concessions towards Communism.

In the 1950s West Germany entered a period of economic recovery thanks to the Marshall Plan which poured millions of dollars into the West German economy. The ‘Clever Policies’ of Adenauer’s finance minister Ludwig Erhard, wanted to create a free market economy aimed at creating limited state control.

This resource pack covers GCSE Modern World History B and OCR AS History

By 1955, the situation had changed. West Germany was becoming a booming consumer economy. Meanwhile East Germany was engaged in a Soviet style 'Five Year Plan' (1951-55). In some ways this was a great success as production in heavy industry doubled. However, this led to even more ambitious targets being set by Walter Ulbricht and the East German Communist Government. While heavy industry had benefitted there was a lack of consumer goods and East Germans suffered from poor housing, food shortages and low wages. A temporary boom in the late 1950s saw the end of rationing for East Germans, but this only had limited success.

This resource pack covers GCSE Modern World History B and OCR AS History

A second East German 'Five Year Plan' began in 1956 and in 1959 a second wave of collectivisation started. This meant East German farmers' had to give up their family farms and enter a state run 'collective' farm. Many farmers refused to do this and simply walked away from their farms. This led to food production falling and the reintroduction of rationing in 1961.

It is easy to see why so many East German's felt disenchanting. By 1961 nearly three million East German's had fled to West Germany. The avenue to the West was through Berlin itself. The German's could walk easily from East Berlin straight into West Berlin.

This resource pack covers GCSE Modern World History B and OCR AS History

This endless flow of East German's into West Germany was not openly encouraged or supported by Konrad Adenauer (West Germany's Chancellor). He saw unification coming through a collapse of the East German state as their most talented and ambitious workers fled West, lured by the prospect of freedom and higher wages. Adenauer coined this as the '**Magnet Theory**'.

Krushchev's Ultimatum

This can also be seen as a contributor to the building of the Berlin Wall. At the Vienna Summit in June 1961, Soviet Premier Khrushchev openly demanded that the USA leave West Berlin within six months. His reasons were the numbers of 'defector's' fleeing to the West and his view that West Berlin was the centre of espionage (spying) designed to undermine Communism.

This resource pack covers GCSE Modern World History B and OCR AS History

By 1961 the situation in Berlin was reaching crisis point. In April of that year, 30,000 East German's fled to the West via Berlin as rumours that Walter Ulbricht (leader of East Germany) was about to close the border between East and West Berlin. This was despite his statement at the time that **'No one intends to build a wall'**.

Secret negotiations between Khrushchev, Ulbricht (and the SED) and other Warsaw Pact leaders rapidly concluded that closing the border in Berlin was the only way to end the threat posed to East Germany by the large numbers of German's fleeing West. Preparations were made in great secrecy and on the 12th and 13th of August 1961; East German Security forces and the police sealed off the Western sectors of Berlin with barbed wire and barricades. Over the following months not only was a 45km 'wall' built between East and West Berlin but a 160km 'perimeter' surrounded the whole of West Berlin, isolating it from the rest of East Germany.

This resource pack covers GCSE
Modern World History B and OCR AS History

Exam style question

West Germany's prosperity and the 'Magnet Theory' were the main reasons why the Berlin Wall was built. How far do you agree with this assertion?

Top tip – to answer this question you must not only refer to the reason given in the question but you must also look at the other factors covered in this booklet.

Remember to come to a considered and reasoned judgement, not just 'I agree' or 'I disagree'.