

Enrichment: The Berlin Wall

Directions Read the article below. Answer the questions that follow.

After World War II, Germany was divided into two countries. East Germany was communist, while West Germany was democratic. The division caused many Germans to be separated from family members. The city of Berlin was located deep inside East Germany. Berlin was divided into two zones. East Berlin belonged to East Germany, and West Berlin belonged to West Germany. People from West Berlin could travel freely to the West.

Between 1949 and 1961, about 2.5 million people left East Germany by going to West Berlin. Among those who escaped were skilled workers, professionals, and educated people. As a result, East Germany lost skills and knowledge. That hurt the economy. To stop further escapes, the East German government built a temporary wall between the two halves of the city. The wall went up on the night of August 12–13, 1961.

Over time, the government replaced the temporary wall with a permanent wall. It stood 15 feet high in places. The wall between the two parts of the city was 28 miles long. The government also built a 75-mile wall all around the outside border of West Berlin. In spite of the wall, about 5,000 people managed to cross to freedom. However, guards arrested another 5,000 and killed 191 people trying to escape.

Democratic revolutions swept Europe in 1989. In response to protests, the East German government announced it would open borders with West Germany. Germans rushed to the wall and began to tear it down with pickaxes. The government sent bulldozers to knock part of the wall down. For the first time in 28 years, Germans from both sides of the border could cross freely. Soon afterward, the countries reunited.

1. Why did the East German government want to stop people from migrating to West Germany?

2. What does the high number of people who left East Germany tell you about the quality of life there?

3. Why do you think Germans were so eager to tear down the wall that they started to dismantle it themselves?
