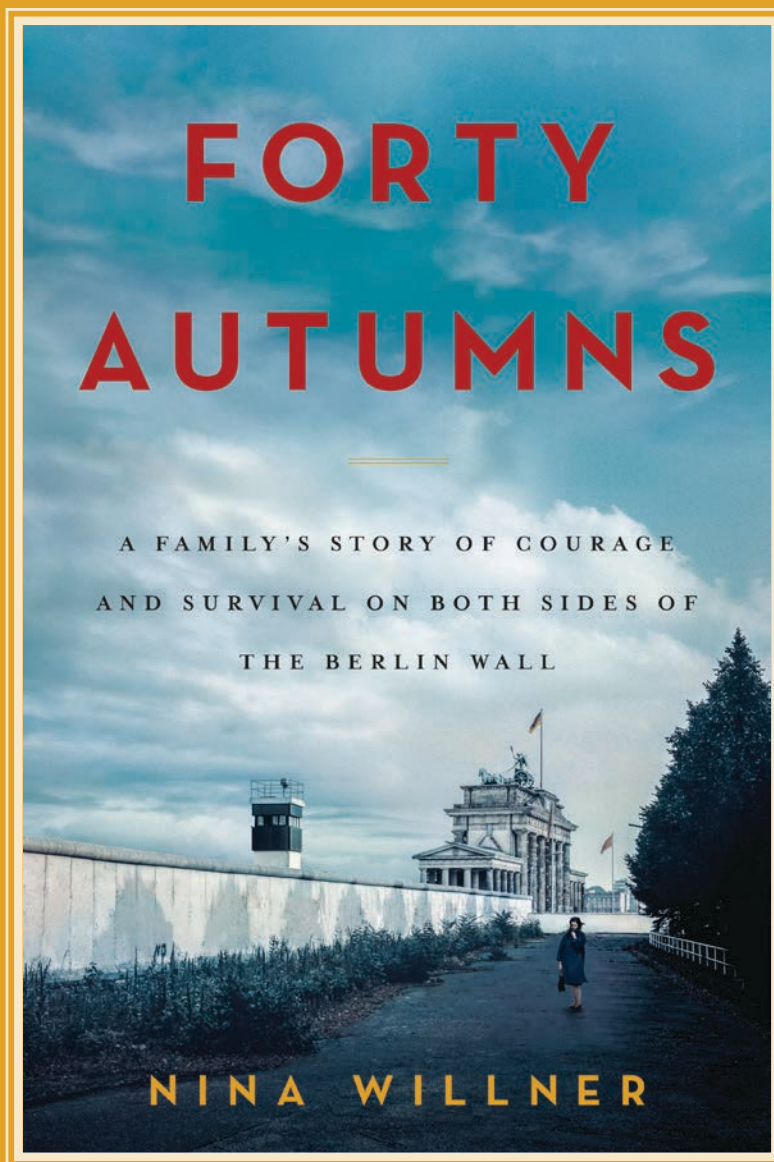


A TEACHER'S GUIDE TO



Written by Stephanie Schragger

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MORROW

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## Introductory Note for Educators

To students today, the Cold War is a distant memory, as the fall of the USSR occurred in 1991, before most high school and college students were born. It is easy to see the Cold War as an example of American fear and even paranoia, as it can seem unlikely to students that the threat of the USSR and the Eastern Bloc was real. Students can believe that spies, subterfuge, and secret missions are the inventions of Hollywood films and popular novels, but it can be hard for teachers to convey the real threats, fears, and casualties of the time from 1945-1991.

This book, *Forty Autumns*, manages to capture the experience of the Cold War in East Germany and the United States, told through the eyes of one family. It provides an accessible and readable way to teach students about the events of the Cold War, as well as the human cost of the astoundingly destructive and oppressive regime in East Germany.

Students can read this book as they learn about American and European history from World War II to the present, and the book clearly delineates the major world events. Moreover, the timeline at the start of the book connects the family's story to the broader Cold War. The chapter on the building of the Berlin Wall, for instance, details the reasons why the wall was erected as well as the impact that this barrier had on the actual citizens of East Germany. Furthermore, the author repeatedly comes back to the attempted escapes over the wall until it was opened in 1989. Overall, this book provides an excellent teaching tool, as it both humanizes the Cold War and offers a window into East Germany, which was for so long a deeply oppressive and extremely secret society. Students can learn about the reality of communism, the creation of a police state, and the dangers that Westerners faced as late as the 1980s in East Germany. *Forty Autumns* can also be used to discuss how the access to sources and the declassification of documents has had an impact on historiography and the telling of history.

Each chapter has discussion questions intended to provoke discussion or inspire writing assignments. There is a separate section with possible writing and research projects, and a list of suggested readings and websites to assist with the study of the Cold War.

## Discussion Questions

### CHAPTER 1

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1. At the start of the book, what conclusions can you draw about the economic and living conditions in Germany towards the end of WWII? What factors and events might have affected the German economy and society?
2. What were the social and economic implications of the tremendous gender imbalance that existed at the end of WWII?
3. The villagers feared the Soviets, whereas they welcomed the Americans. Why do you think the Germans feared the Soviets so much? What were the other historical conflicts between Germany and Russia/Soviet Union in the century before WWII? What were the outcomes of these conflicts?
4. At the end of the chapter, Oma sends Hanna away so that she can escape life under Soviet control. What factors could motivate a mother to take this type of drastic action? Do you agree with Oma's decision? Why or why not?

### CHAPTER 2

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1. Why were the German citizens inclined to oppose communism? In terms of political theory, what is the relationship between fascism and communism?
2. Why would the new mayor, Herr Boch, wear a red shirt?
3. How was the gathering of food and its supposed even distribution part of a larger Soviet ideal? In what ways do these actions seem similar to Stalin's 5-year plans in the USSR?
4. The Soviets forbid Oma to have a christening for her new baby, and they mandate that communism is taught in schools. What conclusions can you draw about the main tenets of Soviet communism?
5. By 1946, it is becoming even more difficult for able-bodied people to leave Soviet-occupied Germany. Why were the Soviets so opposed to any emigration?

### CHAPTER 3

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1. From 1946-1948, Hanna tries to escape from the Soviet zone twice; even though she succeeds the second time, her escape is temporary. What conditions in the East are driving Hanna's desire to escape?
2. Why do the Soviets oppose the Marshall Plan and force the Eastern zone to use old currency?
3. How does the Western Marshall Plan after WWII contrast with the way the Allies (England, France, Italy, US) treated Germany after WWI?
4. From the American perspective, the Berlin Blockade and Airlift of 1948 is seen as a great success, as it avoided war yet helped the citizens of West Berlin. What is Hanna's perspective on the Berlin Blockade and Airlift? What do these differences show?

## CHAPTER 4

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1. Hanna notes that Opa had always been on edge when Germany was under Nazi control, and that he was anxious again under Soviet control. What does this say about the nature of totalitarianism? The Nazis saw themselves as diametrically opposed to the Soviets, but was this characterization true?
2. Hanna is willing to risk her life in order to escape; what does this show about the deteriorating conditions in the East?
3. How have the Soviets adapted their tactics and punishments in order to keep control in the East?
4. What is the role of luck in Hanna's escape?

## CHAPTER 5

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1. Is it surprising that it was a crime for an "able bodied citizen" who could work to leave the zone? How could this action be justified as a criminal act?
2. What are the signs that the Eastern and Western zones were becoming more distinct?
3. Why did the West feel the need to create NATO? Was the creation of NATO prompted by any particular actions of the East?
4. Why did the Soviets want a youth movement in the Eastern zone? Can you draw any connections between this organization and the Nazi Youth during WWII?
5. The author draws contrasts between Heidelberg Castle and Hohenck Castle. What do these two edifices show about the changing ideology of the West and the East?

## CHAPTER 6

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1. After East Germany became a separate country, its government created the Stasi. What role did the Stasi play in allowing the Soviets to keep control?
2. How does the balance of power between the Germans and the Soviets shift after the new government of East Germany is formed?
3. The new East German government promotes massive spying throughout the country. What is the purpose of this spying? Is it practical? How does it affect Opa's family directly?
4. Why were there mass defections from East Germany between 1949-1952?
5. Why was the Inner German border built in 1952? What was its significance in the context of the Cold War?

## CHAPTER 7

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1. Why was there so much propaganda in East Germany by 1953, and why did the government want people to be "agitators" in their communities?
2. Why did the East German government focus on industrial development?
3. What political and economic factors led to the East German Workers Uprising of 1953?
4. Is it surprising that Oma was allowed to go and visit Hanna in the West? What do you think the police official meant when he said that Hanna would have to "do a few special things for her country"?

## CHAPTER 8

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1. What was the outcome of the Workers' Uprising of 1953 and how did the East German government explain these events to the public?
2. Why was the East German government concerned about its reputation in the Western world?
3. The author uses adjectives such as "confident," "warm," "open," and "carefree" to describe Hanna. Does Hanna seem different in the West? And why might she have developed these personality traits?
4. Should Oma have asked Hanna to return or to be a spy? Why didn't she do this?

## CHAPTER 9

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1. How did the structure of the Warsaw Pact differ from NATO? Does this change the meaning of "collective security"?
2. What actions did the East German government take after 1955 to make the country into a police state? Think about measures that affected the public and private lives of the citizens.
3. What lessons about communism did Heidi learn in the Young Pioneers and at school? How did this add Heidi's confusion about her sister Hanna's actions?
4. Why did the policemen take away Opa's books? What does this action indicate about the concerns of the government?

## CHAPTER 10

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1. How did the education system help to reinforce the Iron Curtain between the East and the West?
2. Why was it so difficult for people in the West to send information and objects to East Germany? What does this show about the fears of the East German government?
3. The BND (Bundesnachrichtendienst) had former members of the SS and Gestapo. Why do you think the BND allowed these people to join?
4. Hanna and Eddie's life in Heidelberg is markedly different from her parents' life in East Germany. Which differences stand out the most? Why?

## CHAPTER 11

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1. Why did the East German government continue to pursue the collectivization of agriculture? What had been the social and economic impact of collectivization in the Soviet Union under Stalin?
2. By 1960, there is tremendous tension between the US and USSR, both on the ground and in space. What measures do these countries take as the Cold War escalates?
3. Why did East Germany build the Berlin Wall in 1961? Which physical characteristics of the wall were the most striking?
4. How did East Germany justify the wall to its people?
5. What does the Family Wall illustrate about the tension between public and private behavior, as well as the need for individuals to preserve their own beliefs in an oppressive system?

## CHAPTER 12

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1. Why were Opa and Oma so upset that Kai was ordered to become a border guard at the Berlin Wall? What were the requirements of this position?
2. What role did the media play in exposing the tragic fate of people who tried to escape over the Berlin Wall?
3. By 1962, through events such as the Cuban Missile Crisis and the U-2 that was shot down, in what ways did the media have an impact on the Cold War?
4. Why did the informant program grow so much at this time? How did this change daily life in East Germany?
5. What is the significance of President Kennedy's visit to the Berlin Wall, as well as his speech? How do these actions illustrate the US's understanding of the Cold War?

## CHAPTER 13

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1. How did the family's banishment to Klein Apenburg affect Opa, Oma, and Heidi?
2. Why did the East German government focus on the Olympic Games as a way to improve the country's reputation? What measures did it take to achieve this goal?
3. Why was membership in the Communist Party a requirement for social and economic success in East Germany? How did Heidi's refusal to join the Party affect her life?
4. The author draws a contrast between Reinhard's application for a car with her own family's station wagon. What does this one story show about how different life was in the US and East Germany?

## CHAPTER 14

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1. How did Opa start to recover from his exile?
2. What is the definition of "consumer socialism," and how does this differ from capitalism?
3. Why did the East German government focus on consumer products as a way to gain the loyalty of the public? What comparisons can be made between the brands available in East Germany and those in the West?
4. Why was there still a shortage of basic products in East Germany? Is it possible that the government intended to deprive its citizens of these goods?
5. Is it surprising that the East German leadership owned goods from the West?

## CHAPTER 15

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1. How did détente on a global level affect the relationship between East Germany and West Germany? How did this affect Hanna's family in East Germany?
2. Did the fortification of the Berlin Wall and the Spree River seem to reflect the East German government's desire to have a better reputation in the West?
3. In what ways were the Stasi techniques of manipulation and control worse than direct police surveillance and violence? Why do you think that this was the preferred tactic of the East German government?
4. In what ways were Opa's rantings seen as a threat? How does his punishment reflect the fears and goals of the East German government?

## CHAPTER 16

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1. What is the significance of “the state” in socialist ideology? How did the celebrations of the Day of the Republic reflect this belief?
2. What are the possible reasons why East Germany was named the “German Democratic Republic,” even though it was a socialist country?
3. What is the significance of the hammer and sickle, as well as the phrase “Workers of the World Unite”? What message is East Germany trying to promote?
4. Why was it such a struggle for Oma and her family to preserve human dignity? What elements of the communist regime contributed to this difficulty?
5. Are Oma’s optimism and hope for her family surprising given her life experiences?

## CHAPTER 17

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1. Why was a diplomatic passport the key to Albert’s entry to East Germany?
2. Was Hanna’s family in East Germany overly fearful that Albert’s visit would lead to trouble?
3. How did excellence in athletics and the intense training program connect to the goals of the East German government? Was this the case in other communist regimes at the time? Is it true today?
4. What factors contributed to the economic decline of East Germany in the late 1970s?
5. How did the media open the door to the West for ordinary East German citizens?

## CHAPTER 18

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1. Why were Heidi and Reinhard so excited about receiving a plot of land for farming? To what extent did this program follow the economic plans of the Communist Party in East Germany?
2. What did the garden and Paradise Bungalow come to symbolize to Heidi and her family?
3. Why were East German products inferior to those found in West Germany? What economic factors contributed to this development?
4. How do Heidi and Reinhard define freedom? What are the different social, economic, and political meanings of freedom?

## CHAPTER 19

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1. What is most striking about the author’s description of West Berlin in the 1980s, especially in comparison to East Germany and East Berlin?
2. What is the official position of the Reagan administration about communist countries such as the USSR? How did the Cold War evolve in the 1980s?
3. Why was Berlin “the spy capital of the world” in the early 1980s? Think about geographic, military, and political factors.
4. What were some of the tactics that the American intelligence community used to spy on East Germany? What was the ultimate goal for the Americans?
5. Is it surprising that the Flag Tours were dangerous, even though they were technically allowed?



## CHAPTER 20

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1. Why did the East German government believe that celebrations and parades, such as the event for the 35th anniversary of East Germany, were so important for the country?
2. Why did Mikhail Gorbachev's reforms change the relationship between the USSR and East Germany?
3. Is it surprising that the East German government continued to pursue repressive tactics in the mid-1980s?
4. What directions did other countries in Eastern Europe pursue at the same time? Think about the changes in East-West diplomacy as well as the rise of resistance movements.

## CHAPTER 21

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1. How is it possible to reconcile the USSR's killing of Major Nicholson with the diplomatic idea that the Cold War could be coming to an end?
2. Does the East German athletic training regime reflect simple patriotism? Or are there other ideologies connected to the sports program?
3. Both the author and Cordula are in East Berlin at the same time; to what extent are their descriptions of the city similar or different?
4. How does the author's experience in Karlshorst reflect the continuing dangers of the Cold War?

## CHAPTER 22

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1. The author and her cousin were just miles apart in Berlin, but had no way of knowing of each other's location. What does this illustrate about the Cold War, even in the 1980s?
2. Why is the author's departure from West Berlin so difficult, both practically and emotionally?
3. How does this voyage reflect the ideology as well as the practicalities of the Cold War?
4. Is it surprising that the Soviets still had a presence in East Germany, even though the USSR had instituted some reforms?

## CHAPTER 23

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1. What aspects of the Italian society and economy were so striking to Cordula?
2. How are East German citizens learning about the West and the different reforms taking place?
3. What did the Michael Jackson concert symbolize about the perspective of the West about East Germany?
4. Increasingly, does it seem possible for East Germany both to remain so isolated from the West and to avoid the changes that are occurring in the rest of the Eastern Bloc? Why?

## CHAPTER 24

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1. What factors contributed to the destruction of communist regimes throughout Eastern Europe in the summer of 1989?
2. To what extent were Gorbachev and the USSR responsible for the uprisings in East Germany? To what extent might these rebellions have occurred independently?
3. Is it surprising that Heidi did not even believe that the rebellions were real?
4. What does Heidi's reaction illustrate about the world that the East German government had been able to create?

## CHAPTER 25

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1. How did the citizens of East Germany react to the announcement that the borders were open?
2. What were the factors that contributed to the rapid downfall of East Germany in November 1989?
3. Compare and contrast the changes in East Germany with those in the USSR and the other communist countries in Eastern Europe. Are there aspects of East German history that could have predicted the events of November 1989?
4. Why is Hanna so stunned by the news of the borders opening?

## CHAPTER 26

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1. Like most East German citizens, Heidi and Reinhard had almost never traveled beyond the Iron Curtain. Why it was so dramatic for them to be able to travel to West Germany without fear of violence or punishment?
2. How does the opening of the borders change the definition of freedom and the possibilities for East German citizens?

## CHAPTER 27

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1. In 1990, Hanna was reunited with her family after 40 years. What does this event illustrate about the destructive nature of the East German government as well as the strength of her Family Wall?
2. What is the symbolism of the 2013 Berlin Marathon for the author and her family? Why does it end at the Brandenburg Gate?
3. What is most striking about the transformation of Germany between 1990 and 2013?
4. Why did the family reunions seem so unimaginable during the Cold War?

## Research and Writing Projects

1. Research the conferences at Tehran, Yalta, and Potsdam. What was the guiding ideology of the Allies? What were their goals for Europe after World War II?
2. How do these two statements illustrate the policy of the US government towards East Germany during the time of the Berlin Wall: "Ich bin ein Berliner." (President Kennedy, June 26, 1963) and "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!" (President Reagan, June 12, 1987).
3. Compare the resistance movements in East Germany during the Cold War with those in another Eastern Bloc country, such as the USSR, Poland, or Czechoslovakia.
4. How did the US press cover the building of the Berlin Wall, and how did the Western description of the wall differ from what the East German government told its citizens? Use different historical newspapers to gather information.
5. Examine the philosophical differences between communism and fascism, and discuss why both of these political ideologies have often resulted in totalitarian regimes.
6. Explore the ways that *glasnost* and *perestroika* changed life in the USSR during the 1980s, and explain how these programs led to the collapse of the USSR.
7. Using declassified documents, research the goals, tactics, and efficacy of the Stasi.
8. Look at how Berlin and the former East Germany have been rebuilt and integrated into a unified Germany. Consider economic, political, and social issues, as well as the tremendous prosperity and popularity of Berlin today.
9. Research the Bridge of Spies and some of the events that occurred there. Think about why Germany, and Berlin in particular, was such an important location for intelligence communities in the West and the East.
10. Try to find other stories of individuals and families who fled East Germany during the Cold War. Discuss the ways in which their stories were similar and different to the experience of Hanna and her family.

## Additional Resources

### BOOKS

- Boyer, Paul. *Promises to Keep: The United States Since 1945*. Cengage Learning, 2004.
- Funder, Anna. *Stasiland: Stories from Behind the Berlin Wall*. Harper Perennial, 2011.
- Judge, Edward and Langdon, John. *The Cold War: A Global History with Documents, 2nd edition*. Prentice Hall, 2011.
- Le Carré, John. *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold (reprint edition)*. Penguin Books, 2013.
- Suri, Jeremy. *Power and Protest: Global Revolution & The Rise of Détente*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005.
- Wilentz, Sean. *The Age of Reagan: A History, 1974-2008*. New York: Harper Perennial, 2009.
- Zaretsky, Natasha, et. al. *Major Problems in American History Since 1945, 4th Edition*. Cengage Learning, 2013.

### WEBSITES/VIDEOS

- Nina Willner, author of *Forty Autumns*, talks about her book. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5FdEwPGwz1I>
- Making the History of 1989. <https://chnm.gmu.edu/1989/exhibits/intro/1989revolutions>
- Wilson Center, Cold War International History Project.  
[https://www.wilsoncenter.org/program/cold-war-international-history-project?fuseaction=topics.home&topic\\_id=1409](https://www.wilsoncenter.org/program/cold-war-international-history-project?fuseaction=topics.home&topic_id=1409)
- Wilson Center, Digital Archive. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/>
- Fordham University Modern World History Sourcebook:
- Eastern Europe since 1945 <http://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/Halsall/mod/modsbook50.asp>
  - Western Europe since 1945 <http://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/Halsall/mod/modsbook49.asp>
- DDR Museum, Berlin. <http://www.ddr-museum.de/en>
- Federal Commissioner for the Records of the State Security Service of the former German Democratic Republic.  
[http://www.bstu.bund.de/EN/Home/home\\_node.html](http://www.bstu.bund.de/EN/Home/home_node.html)

## About the Author of This Guide

Stephanie Schragger holds an A.B. in History from Princeton University and received a M.A. in History from Yale University. She previously taught at the Lawrenceville School in Lawrenceville, New Jersey, and she currently teaches American and world history at St. Ann's School in Brooklyn, New York. Over the past 15 years, she has also written several lesson plans for the PBS NewsHour, including ones on the State of the Union address and the Watergate scandal.

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