

## After the Wall Teaching Materials

### *Alltag einer Behörde*

#### Resources

*Alltag einer Behörde* (2008), directed by Christian Klemke and Jan N. Lorenzen

#### Comprehension Questions

##### Excerpt One: The Opening Scenes

1. How does the music compare to the scenery at the beginning of the film? What message do you think this is intended to give the viewer?
2. How does the narrator describe the Stasi? What was its role in the GDR?
3. How does the Stasi's descriptions compare to those of the narrator?
4. Was the Stasi regulated by the state? Do you see this to be a problem? Why (not)?
5. Summarise Wolfgang Schmidt's narrative about his perceptions of the GDR. What is your opinion about his views? Do you think they would have been different if the GDR still existed? Give an explanation for your answer.

##### Excerpt Two: Bespitzeln und Erpressen

1. According to the former Stasi officers, why were members of the GDR population usually referred to them for surveillance?
2. What sort of information did the Stasi collect about the people it spied on? What are the reasons that the former Stasi officers give for needing this?
3. What were 'Inoffizielle Mitarbeiter'? Who often fulfilled these roles? Why were they so important to the Stasi?

4. How did the Stasi convince people to become IMs? Why do you think people agreed to take on the responsibility?
5. According to Gerhard Neiber, how was he seen by prisoners in the GDR? What reasons does he give for this perception? Do you agree with him? Why (not)?

#### Excerpt Three: Zersetzen

1. What did the method of 'zersetzen' involve? Who was this method intended for?
2. Why were these people seen as being a risk to the socialist state?
3. How were underground political groups treated in the GDR? What does this tell you about freedom of speech in East Germany?
4. What sort of methods did the Stasi use to torment its subjects psychologically? Name five methods.
5. The former Stasi officers claim that they did not carry out any crimes in their work. What is your opinion about this claim regarding the methods they used to spy on people? Do you think their actions should be seen in the context of the GDR or of unified Germany?

#### Excerpt Four: Festnahme und Verhör

1. What sort of 'criminals' were usually imprisoned in *Hohenschönhausen*?
2. How would you describe the conditions of the prison? Name three particularly striking aspects.
3. How were the Stasi's interrogation rooms laid out? What were the reasons for this?
4. Name four threats that the Stasi used during its interrogations.
5. According to Wolfgang Schwanitz, did the inmates usually resist or accept their punishment? Do you find this statement believable? Why (not)? Why do you think he makes this point in his interview?

## Discussion Questions

- What did you find most striking about the documentary?
- Who do you think the documentary was intended for?
- What impression did the documentary give you of the GDR? How does this impression stand alongside the rest of your knowledge about East Germany?

At the beginning of the film one former Stasi officer states that the Stasi is usually depicted as an organisation which worked against the population, but that this is completely untrue. Another former officer claims that, on the contrary, the Stasi was there for the population.

- Where do you stand on this debate?
- Why is the debate so contentious?
- In the context of the GDR, why do you think Stasi officers believed they were serving the population? How do you think they would describe their role?
- Do you think their perceptions are likely to have changed since unification? Why (not)?

One of the former Stasi officers describes the relationship between the Stasi and IMs as 'ein Verhältnis von Geben und Nehmen'.

- How do you understand this?
- Given the rest of your knowledge about the Stasi, do you think this is an accurate description of the relationship?
- Do you think that the description explains why people agreed to be IMs? What other explanations might there be?
- A large number of IMs were family members of those being spied on. Are there any circumstances where you believe that it was justifiable for IMs to spy on their friends and family? If so, what are the circumstances?
- What do you think you would have done if you had been approached by the Stasi and asked to become an IM? Give reasons for your answer.