

<p style="text-align: center;">After the Wall Teaching Materials</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Literature about conformity and opposition</p>

Resources

Daniel Wiechmann (2004) *Immer bereit! Von einem Jungen Pionier, der auszog, das Glück zu suchen* (Munich: Droemer), pp. 67-69.

Claudia Rusch (2003) *Meine freie deutsche Jugend* (Frankfurt: Fischer), pp. 35-39.

Comprehension Questions: *Immer bereit!*

1. How would you describe the narrator's childhood from his story about his schooldays?
2. Why do he and his friends decide to go on strike?
3. How does the leader of the after-school club react to the strike?
4. With reference to the strike, the narrator claims, 'in der klassenlosen Friede-Freude-Eierkuchen-Gemeinschaft des Ostens machte man so etwas nicht' (p. 68). What does this statement tell you about the official way of thinking in the GDR?
5. Read the fourth paragraph on p. 68. How does the narrator use his story about the strike to explain his experiences of the GDR? Describe his feelings about the socialist state.
6. What do you think Wiechmann is saying about conformity and opposition in the GDR through the story of the strike?

Comprehension Questions: *Meine freie deutsche Jugend*

1. What difficulties did Rusch face as a child because of her parents' opposition to the GDR?
2. What symbol does her mother sew onto her jacket for school? What is the meaning of this symbol? What happens when she gets to school?
3. How do the other children react to the teacher's speech? What does this tell you about childhood experiences of growing up under socialism?

4. How does Peggy help the situation? How does the teacher respond?
5. What does the headteacher do to Rusch's jacket? How does this make her feel? Do you think you would feel the same way? Why (not)?
6. How have Rusch's perceptions of opposition changed since she became an adult?

Comparing the Texts/Questions for Discussion

1. What are the main differences between Rusch's and Wiechmann's perceptions of the GDR?
2. What insights does each of the texts give you into life in the GDR? Think specifically about the political understanding that you gain from each of the works.
3. From reading the extracts, it seems that Wiechmann's narrator had a more carefree childhood than Rusch. Rusch claims, however, that her experiences stood her in better stead after unification in comparison to those who did not have oppositional parents. Whose position would you prefer to be in? Why?
4. Why do you think so many younger east Germans have published texts about their childhoods? Do you think these texts are useful? Why? What advantages and limitations do they have in presenting an image of the GDR?

Activities after Reading

Writing to people from the past

Put yourself in the shoes of either Wiechmann's narrator or Rusch in contemporary Germany. Write a letter to either the leader of the after-school club or Herr Petzke, explaining how the experience described in the extracts has affected you. Think about the following questions:

- Why is the memory so important?
- Are you grateful for the experience? Why (not)?
- Do you wish that the teacher/leader had reacted differently? How and why?

- How has the experience shaped you today?

Childhood idols

'Ernst Thälmann war für DDR-Kinder so etwas wie Robin Hood und Superman in Personalunion' (Rusch, p. 38).

Use the internet to find out more about Ernst Thälmann, and why he was so important for children in the GDR. Consider:

- Who was Ernst Thälmann?
- Why was his legacy so important, and how did it feed into everyday life in East Germany?
- Why was he particularly relevant to children in the GDR?
- Can you think of any equivalent idols in British society?