

2.5 THE STASI FILES

How does a totalitarian regime control its people?

<p>C3 Framework Indicator</p>	<p>D2.Civ.13.9-12. Evaluate public policies in terms of intended and unintended outcomes, and related consequences.</p> <p>D2.His.1.9-12. Evaluate how historical events and developments were shaped by unique circumstances of time and place as well as broader historical contexts.</p> <p>D2.His.5.9-12. Analyze how historical contexts shaped and continue to shape people’s perspectives.</p>	
<p>Staging the Compelling Question</p>	<p>Students will study the effects of the <i>Stasi</i> on the lives of ordinary people living in the German Democratic Republic and examine the effects on people’s lives today.</p>	
<p>Supporting Question 1</p>	<p>Supporting Question 2</p>	<p>Supporting Question 3</p>
<p>What was the <i>Stasi</i>?</p>	<p>Who were East Germany’s ‘unofficial informants’ and what did they do?</p>	<p>What are the <i>Stasi</i> Files and why are they so significant to east Germans?</p>
<p>Formative Performance Task</p>	<p>Formative Performance Task</p>	<p>Formative Performance Task</p>
<p>Ask students to read the article <i>Stasi Tactics—Zersetzung</i> to answer the questions in the inquiry.</p>	<p>After reading the listed article, discuss who these ‘unofficial informants’ were, whom they betrayed, and the reasons why they might have done so.</p>	<p>In groups, students should write a short paragraph describing what the <i>Stasi</i> files are, also explaining why East Germans are still interested in reading their files.</p>
<p>Featured Sources</p>	<p>Featured Sources</p>	<p>Featured Sources</p>
<p>Source A: <i>Max Hertzberg</i></p> <p>Source B: <i>YouTube</i></p>	<p>Source A: <i>Spiegel Online</i></p>	<p>Source A: <i>BBC.com</i></p> <p>Source B: <i>CBSNews.com</i></p> <p>Source C: <i>Pacific Standard</i></p> <p>Source D: <i>DW News YouTube</i></p>
<p>Summative Performance Task</p>	<p>Argument: Construct an argument (e.g., detailed outline, poster, essay) that addresses the compelling question using specific claims and relevant evidence from historical or contemporary sources while acknowledging competing views.</p> <p>Extension: Watch the listed video, and discuss the question: “What is the most effective way to solve the puzzle of The <i>Stasi</i> Project?”</p>	
<p>Taking Informed Action</p>	<p>Understand: In today’s digital world, our every search and website visit is being tracked.</p> <p>Assess: Learn more about how companies and governments know what you are doing and saying on the web, and what you can do to limit the amount of information about you available online.</p> <p>Act: Research and implement ways to enhance your privacy settings and limit the amount of personal information that is available about you and/or your family online.</p>	

? COMPELLING QUESTION

- How does a totalitarian regime control its people?

INQUIRY OVERVIEW

Students who grow up in a democratic society may not be aware of how their lives would be scrutinized and restricted under a totalitarian regime. In this inquiry students will learn about the *Stasi* and its role as an East German surveillance force, study the effects of the *Stasi* on the lives and everyday people living in the German Democratic Republic, and examine the effects on people's lives today.

TEACHER BACKGROUND

The German Democratic Republic (GDR) was among the most closed and repressive of the Soviet Bloc countries. The *Stasi* (*Ministerium für Staatssicherheit*—Ministry of State Security) was the domestic and foreign intelligence body, secret police, and official investigation organization of the GDR. It was founded by the Communist Party on February 8, 1950, in order to protect and enforce the interests of the party. The main function of the *Stasi* was to eliminate political beliefs that opposed communist ideology and to detect politically unacceptable behavior among its citizens. In order to get as much information as possible, and to expose people who had thoughts and opinions critical of the regime, the *Stasi* spied on people and many homes were bugged. The *Stasi* also used heavy-handed methods such as intimidation and blackmail in order to demonstrate power and to make it clear that an adversarial attitude against the GDR would result in serious consequences. Political opponents were quickly imprisoned. From the West German perspective, the most obvious sign of the GDR's repressive system was its control of the freedom of movement. Even before the Berlin Wall was constructed in 1961, people who tried to cross the barbed-wire fence that ran the length of the country to get into West Germany were shot at.




With the fall of the GDR, the *Stasi* was dissolved, and *Stasi* employees began to destroy the extensive files and documents they held, by hand, fire, and with the use of shredders. When this became known, protestors surrounded *Stasi* headquarters and demanded access to the files. With little time left to destroy the material, employees started tearing pages by hand and putting them into bags to destroy later. However, there were nearly 16,000 bags left untouched.

In 1991, after heated debate as to whether the *Stasi* files should be made accessible to those affected by them, the *Bundestag* passed the *Stasi* Records Law, which stated that both citizens of the former East Germany as well as foreigners had the right to view their files. Thousands were horrified to find proof that they had been spied on by friends, family members, and lovers. By the end of the period of communist rule, it is estimated that the *Stasi* had nearly 100,000 employees, and as many as two million collaborators.

➤ Further Background

- “The Lives of Others (2006).” DW News. *YouTube*, 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ha1jM9HAs6c> (9:17).
- “Rule of Law: Country Studies—Germany.” *Democracy Web: Comparative Studies in Freedom*, 2011, <http://www.democracyweb.org/rule/germany.php>.

 **TIME:** 3–4 45 minute periods

CONCEPTS LIST

- *Zersetzung*
- *Volkspolizei*
- German Democratic Republic (GDR)
- Surveillance
- *Bundestag*
- *Stasi*
- Collaborators
- Dissidents
- Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED)
- Communist Party of Germany (KPD)
- Espionage

INSTRUCTIONAL RESOURCES

- Bowlby, Chris. “Stasi Files: The world’s biggest jigsaw puzzle.” *BBC.com*, BBC Radio 4, 14 September 2012, <https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-19344978>.
- Hertzberg, Max. “Stasi Tactics—Zersetzung.” *Max Hertzberg—Crime and Utopia*, 22 November 2016, <http://www.maxhertzberg.co.uk/background/politics/stasi-tactics/>.
- Lagorio, Christine. “Inside the Stasi Files.” *CBSNews.com*, 19 September 2007, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/inside-the-stasi-files/>.
- “Rule of Law: Country Studies—Germany.” *Democracy Web: Comparative Studies in Freedom*, 2011, <http://www.democracyweb.org/rule/germany.php>.
- “Secret Files: How shredded Stasi Files are reconstructed.” DW News. YouTube. 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GHDx0VJq37s>.
- “Stasi Training Video: Clandestine Apartment Search.” YouTube, uploaded by Act Natural, 4 August 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bba3tryTJbs>.
- Tatke, Sukhada. “The Minds Solving the Giant Puzzle the Stasi Left Behind.” *Pacific Standard*, 7 August 2017, <https://psmag.com/social-justice/the-giant-puzzle-the-stasi-left-behind>.
- “The Lives of Others (2006).” DW News. YouTube, 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ha1jM9HAs6c> (9:17).
- Wensierski, Peter. “East German Snitching went Far Beyond the Stasi.” *Spiegel Online*, 10 July 2015, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/east-german-domestic-surveillance-went-far-beyond-the-stasi-a-1042883.html>.

INTRODUCTORY QUESTION

Display the image of the poster ‘Big Brother is Watching You’ from George Orwell’s fictional novel *Nineteen Eighty Four*, about a fictional dictatorship, that can be found on the internet. Ask students what it means to them today. Do they feel ‘Big Brother’ is watching them? In what ways? Why?

In contemporary culture, the term is used to describe an abuse of government powers, particularly in respect to civil liberties, often specifically related to mass surveillance.

SUPPORTING QUESTION #1

What was the Stasi?

► Formative Performance Task

Ask students to read the article *Stasi Tactics—Zersetzung* to determine the following:

- What was the *Stasi* and what was their function?
- What harassment tactics did they use?
- Who were informants and how were they recruited?
- What are the stages of *Zersetzung*?
- How effective was the *Stasi* in: paralyzing individuals and groups; gathering and using intelligence?
- How did people resist the *Zersetzung*?

***Note:** Due to the length of the article, teachers may want to break it into sections, assigning sections to small groups to read. Each group would then report back to the class what they learned and the answers to any questions found in that section.

Teachers may also want to show the Stasi training video listed in the resources.

► Resources

- Hertzberg, Max. "Stasi Tactics—Zersetzung." *Max Hertzberg—Crime and Utopia*, 22 November 2016, <http://www.maxhertzberg.co.uk/background/politics/stasi-tactics/>.
- "Stasi Training Video: Clandestine Apartment Search." *YouTube*, uploaded by Act Natural, 4 August 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bba3tryTJbs>.



❓ SUPPORTING QUESTION #2

Who were East Germany's 'unofficial informants' and what did they do?

► Formative Performance Task

By 1989, when the Berlin Wall collapsed and communism in East Germany came to an end. It is estimated that the *Stasi* had 97,000 official employees as well as approximately 173,000 unofficial informers. Roughly this translated as a ratio of one agent per every 63 people in the population, a position far in advance of the Soviet Union's KGB, that even at its height could only manage one agent per 5830 people (Figures taken from *Stasiland*).¹

Read the article "East German Snitching Went Far Beyond the *Stasi*" as a class.

After reading the article, discuss who these 'unofficial informants' were, whom they betrayed, and the reasons why they might have done so. Ask, "What does this tell you about the climate of East Germany?"

► Resources

- Wensierski, Peter. "East German Snitching went Far Beyond the *Stasi*." *Spiegel Online*, 10 July 2015, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/east-german-domestic-surveillance-went-far-beyond-the-stasi-a-1042883.html>.



❓ SUPPORTING QUESTION #3

What are the Stasi Files and why are they so significant to East Germans?

► Formative Performance Task

Break the class into small groups and have each group read one of the articles from the resource list. As a group, they should write a short paragraph describing what the *Stasi* files are, also explaining why East Germans are still interested in reading their files (what might their personal motive be?).

As a class, you can also watch the clip "The Lives of Others" to better understand the details of the *Stasi* files.

► Resources

- Bowlby, Chris. "Stasi Files: The world's biggest jigsaw puzzle." *BBC.com*, BBC Radio 4, 14 September 2012, <https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-19344978>.
- Lagorio, Christine. "Inside the *Stasi* Files." *CBSNews.com*, 19 September 2007, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/inside-the-stasi-files/>.



¹ Funder, A. (2003). *Stasiland: Stories from Behind the Wall*. London: Granta Books.

- Tatke, Sukhada. "The Minds Solving the Giant Puzzle the *Stasi* Left Behind." *Pacific Standard*, 7 August 2017, <https://psmag.com/social-justice/the-giant-puzzle-the-stasi-left-behind>.
- "The Lives of Others (2006)." DW News. *YouTube*. 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ha1jM9HAs6c> (9:17).



✓ SUMMATIVE PERFORMANCE TASK

How does a totalitarian regime control its people?

Construct an argument (e.g., detailed outline, poster, essay) that addresses the compelling question using specific claims and relevant evidence from contemporary sources while acknowledging competing views.

⊕ EXTENSION (OPTIONAL) TASK

As a class, view the video by DW News. After viewing discuss the following:



- What is the project and its purpose?
- Is the end result worth the effort to complete the task?
- Who benefits from the project?
- Can you think of examples where this process/technology could be useful in the future (e.g. organizations and/or governments)?

If teachers prefer, students may read article "The Minds Solving the Giant Puzzle the *Stasi* Left Behind" instead of viewing the video.

➤ Resources

- Tatke, Sukhada. "The Minds Solving the Giant Puzzle the *Stasi* Left Behind." *Pacific Standard*, 7 August 2017, <https://psmag.com/social-justice/the-giant-puzzle-the-stasi-left-behind>.



★ TAKING INFORMED ACTION

UNDERSTAND In today's digital world, our every search and website visit is being tracked.

ASSESS Learn more about how companies and governments know what you are doing and saying on the web, and what you can do to limit the amount of information about you available online.

ACT Research and implement ways to enhance your privacy settings and limit the amount of personal information that is available about you and/or your family online.

This inquiry is based on a lesson from the 2009 TOP Fellow Jeanne Scheppach.