

2.6 OSTALGIE—ROMANTICIZING EAST GERMANY

How does nostalgia help people cope?

<p>C3 Framework Indicator</p>	<p>D2.Geo.7.9-12. Analyze the reciprocal nature of how historical events and the spatial diffusion of ideas, technologies, and cultural practices have influenced migration patterns and the distribution of human population.</p> <p>D2.His.14.9-12. Analyze multiple and complex causes and effects of events in the past.</p> <p>D2.Psy.2.9-12. Investigate human behavior from biological, cognitive, behavioral, and sociocultural perspectives.</p> <p>D2.Psy.12.9-12. Explain how social, cultural, gender, and economic factors influence behavior and human interactions in societies around the world.</p> <p>D2.Soc.14.9-12. Explain how in-group and out-group membership influences the life chances of individuals and shapes societal norms and values.</p>	
<p>Staging the Compelling Question</p>	<p>Students will study the current wave of <i>Ostalgie</i> (a combination of the German words for “east” and “nostalgia” referring to a cultural phenomenon present in the former GDR).</p>	
<p>Supporting Question 1</p>	<p>Supporting Question 2</p>	<p>Supporting Question 3</p>
<p>What is <i>Ostalgie</i>?</p>	<p>Why do some products, symbols, smells, etc. trigger nostalgia?</p>	<p>Why did the reunification of East and West Germany cause nostalgia for the ‘way things used to be’?</p>
<p>Formative Performance Task</p>	<p>Formative Performance Task</p>	<p>Formative Performance Task</p>
<p>As a class, watch the listed video, and have students determine a definition of <i>Ostalgie</i> in their own words.</p>	<p>Pairs should research a GDR product/ symbol and create a PowerPoint slideshow of 3-4 slides maximum, using the criteria found on the handout.</p>	<p>Student will watch a video, and briefly note some reasons former East Germans remember their past positively.</p>
<p>Featured Sources</p>	<p>Featured Sources</p>	<p>Featured Sources</p>
<p>Source A: <i>BuzzFeed</i> Source B: <i>Al Jazeera</i></p>	<p>Source A: <i>Ostalgie</i> PowerPoint Directions (Handout 2.6.1)</p>	<p>Source A: <i>Us Europeans.com</i> Source B: <i>Reuters.com</i> Source C: <i>DW News YouTube</i> Source D: <i>Website of the Ohio State University</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: Students can visit a local senior citizen facility and ask the residents what items or products they remember from their childhood that bring back pleasant memories and why.</p>	
<p>Taking Informed Action</p>	<p>Understand: Think about something from your childhood that instills a sense of nostalgia in you and your classmates. Is that product still available now?</p> <p>Assess: With a partner, discuss the different associations you have with that product.</p> <p>Act: Design a poster intended to awaken that same sense of nostalgia for other people in your school.</p> <p>Reflect: Consider how you would feel if not a single one of those products were available for purchase now.</p>	

? COMPELLING QUESTION

- How does nostalgia help people cope?

INQUIRY OVERVIEW

This inquiry explores nostalgia—its meaning and effects. Students will study the current wave of *Ostalgie* (a combination of the German words for “East” and “nostalgia” referring to a cultural phenomenon present in the former GDR). After reading several articles discussing the reunification of East and West Germany, students will list off the reasons for this nostalgia and its dangers.

By the end of this inquiry, students should be able to understand the difficulties that Germany has faced in reuniting two similar—yet distinctly different—countries and the need for people to reminisce about the past, even if many aspects of it were marked by hardship.

TEACHER BACKGROUND

Commonly referred to as *die Wende* or “the turning point”, the world witnessed the euphoria of the West and East German people atop the Berlin Wall on November 9, 1989, celebrating the collapse of the structure that had been the best-known symbol of the Cold War. This event marked the end of the East German communist dictatorship (GDR). “What belongs together, will now grow together,” said former German Chancellor Willy Brandt on November 10, 1989.

It is estimated that 4.3 million people visited West Germany in the first four days after the *Mauerfall* (fall of the Wall). “*Wir sind ein Volk*” (“We are one people”) was heard throughout Germany. On October 3, 1990, Germany was officially reunified.


However, the jubilation was soon overshadowed by uncertainty about how the reunification would be implemented, which side would benefit and which would be disadvantaged. Decades-held values and ideologies on both sides took time to evolve and change. Equal parties did not form the reunification through cooperation; instead the West German government simply arranged for East Germany to be absorbed under West Germany’s existing constitution. Moreover, an almost exclusively “West-to-East” transfer of currency, ideology, regulations, and institutions occurred. Thus, the process of integration has been significantly more challenging for East Germans. The whole process of reunification left no political room to keep any positive aspects of life in East Germany, even though there are arguments that can be made in favor of East Germany’s accommodating childcare systems and its fostering of gender equality.

Despite high expectations after the reunification, Germany still remains somewhat culturally divided. Especially during the 1990s, East Germans were often derogatorily referred to as *Ossis* (“Easties”) accusing them of being provincial, unintelligent, and lazy, while West Germans were referred to as *Wessis* (“Westies”) stereotyping them as arrogant, selfish, and obsessed with materialism.

While disturbing and potentially shameful aspects of the GDR, such as the role of the *Stasi*, continue to be examined (refer to Inquiry 2.5), one can identify a perceptible shift in the last decade toward a decidedly nostalgic view of the East German past. The release of Wolfgang Becker’s 2003 film *Goodbye Lenin!* coincided with an *Ostalgie* craze in Germany which is still apparent today. The establishment of the GDR Museum in Berlin, the prevalence of certain former East German symbols, such as the *Ampelmann* (traffic light man) and *Sandmännchen* (little sandman), as well as the reappearance of certain food products, such as *Spreewälder Gurken* (pickled cucumbers) are examples of the phenomenon of *Ostalgie*. Long the object of affection as well as frustration in East Germany, the *Trabi* (or *Trabant*), a small boxy car made of fiberglass and pressed cotton, quickly became a



key symbol, not only of the German Democratic Republic, but also of socialist inefficiency and backwardness. In the mid-1990s, however, the *Trabi* reemerged as an evocative symbol of East German distinctiveness and post-socialist nostalgia.

 **TIME:** 3–4 45 minute periods

CONCEPTS LIST

- Nostalgia
- Reunification
- *Ostalgie*
- Reminisce
- *Mauerfall*
- Ideologies
- *Ossis*
- *Wessis*
- *Aufbau Ost*
- *Stasi*
- *Ampelmännchen*
- *Sandmännchen*
- *Spreewälder Gurken*
- *Trabi/Trabant*

INSTRUCTIONAL RESOURCES

- *Ostalgie* PowerPoint Directions (**Handout 2.6.1**)
- “11 Items that Will Give You a Taste of *Ostalgie*.” *BuzzFeed*, 21 November 2014, <https://www.buzzfeed.com/germanyinusa/11-items-that-will-give-you-a-taste-of-ostalgie-fr91>.
- “Berlin gripped by ‘Ostalgie’ for communist past.” *YouTube*, uploaded by Al Jazeera English, 28 April 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D4-x0WMYII>.
- Grieve, Martin. “We have to expect prosperity differences.” *Die Welt*, 5 May 2014, <https://www.welt.de/politik/deutschland/article127588072/Wir-muessen-Wohlstandsunterschiede-hinnehmen.html>.
- “Growing up in the DDR.” *Us Europeans.com*, <http://www.photologix.nl/useuropeans/index.php?post=338>.
- Kirschbaum, Eric. “The Dark Side of German Reunification.” *Reuters.com*, Global News Journal, 29 September 2010, <http://blogs.reuters.com/global/2010/09/29/the-dark-side-of-german-reunification/>.
- “*Ostalgie*: Many Eastern Germans Still Mourn the Demise of Communist East Germany.” *YouTube*, uploaded by DW News, 13 July 2009, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BTG4RKcUix0>.
- Porter, Tiffany and David Maldonado. “Effects of Reunification of Germany: Effects on the Citizens.” *Website of the Ohio State University: Fisher College of Business*, <https://u.osu.edu/eng4400portermaldonado/psychological-effects-on-citizens/>.
- “Why do we feel nostalgia?” *YouTube*, uploaded by Clay Routledge, 21 November 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WiTgn5QH_HU.
- Wolfgang, Dick. “*Ostalgie*: Romanticizing the GDR.” *Deutsche Welle*, 3 October 2014, <https://www.dw.com/en/ostalgie-romanticizing-the-gdr/a-17959366>.

All handouts
can be found at
[www.goethe.de/
germanyinfo](http://www.goethe.de/germanyinfo)

INTRODUCTORY ACTIVITY

Post the word ‘nostalgia’ on the board and ask students for their understanding of what it means. As a class view the TED-Ed YouTube video “Why do we feel nostalgia?” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WiTgn5QH_HU (4:09) and discuss the reasons why people sometimes feel nostalgic.



Briefly discuss the following quote from the video, “Instead of being a cause of mental distress, nostalgia can be a restorative way of coping with it.”

❓ SUPPORTING QUESTION #1

What is Ostalgie?

► Formative Performance Task

Their country no longer existed. The products they bought were no longer sold. There was no going back to visit. Everything they had known suddenly was part of West Germany.

View the video clip “Berlin gripped by ‘Ostalgie’ for communist past” as a class and have students determine a definition of *Ostalgie* in their own words.

Use the buzzfeed.com website to examine examples of *Ostalgie*.

► Resources

- “11 Items that Will Give You a Taste of *Ostalgie*.” *BuzzFeed*, 21 November 2014, <https://www.buzzfeed.com/germanyinusa/11-items-that-will-give-you-a-taste-of-ostalgie-fr91>.
- “Berlin gripped by ‘Ostalgie’ for communist past.” *YouTube*, uploaded by Al Jazeera English, 28 April 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D4-x0WMYyII>.



❓ SUPPORTING QUESTION #2

Why do some products, symbols, smells, etc. trigger nostalgia?

► Formative Performance Task

Assign student pairs a GDR product or symbol from the list on **Handout 2.6.1**. Pairs should research the product/symbol and create a PowerPoint slideshow of 3-4 slides maximum, using the criteria found on the handout. If possible, assign all the GDR products/items on the list.

Combine the individual PowerPoints into one. Share with the class discussing what the GDR product/item is and why it inspires *Ostalgie*.

► Resources

- *Ostalgie* PowerPoint Directions (**Handout 2.6.1**)

❓ SUPPORTING QUESTION #3

Why did the reunification of East and West Germany cause nostalgia for the ‘way things used to be’?

► Formative Performance Task

As a class view the YouTube video *Ostalgie: Many East Germans Still Mourn the Demise of Communist East Germany* (listed below in resources). After watching, ask students to take a few minutes and briefly note some reasons former East Germans remember their past positively.

Divide the class into 4 groups assigning one article (from the resources below) to each group. Students should read the assigned articles individually, noting what former East Germans consider the negative side of reunification. Students should then meet in assigned groups, discuss what they have read, and compile a composite list of reasons why they may remember their past positively.

As a class discuss the reasons East Germans are nostalgic for the past. Are there dangers to this kind of nostalgia?

► Resources

- “Growing up in the DDR.” *Us Europeans.com*, <http://www.photologix.nl/useuropeans/index.php?post=338>.
- Kirschbaum, Eric. “The Dark Side of German Reunification.” *Reuters.com*, Global News Journal, 29 September 2010, <http://blogs.reuters.com/global/2010/09/29/the-dark-side-of-german-reunification/>.
- “Ostalgie: Many Eastern Germans Still Mourn the Demise of Communist East Germany.” *YouTube*, uploaded by DW News, 13 July 2009, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BTG4RKcUix0>.
- Porter, Tiffany and David Maldonado. “Effects of Reunification of Germany: Effects on the Citizens.” *Website of the Ohio State University: Fisher College of Business*, <https://u.osu.edu/eng4400portermaldonado/psychological-effects-on-citizens/>.
- Wolfgang, Dick. “Ostalgie: Romanticizing the GDR.” *Deutsche Welle*, 3 October 2014, <https://www.dw.com/en/ostalgie-romanticizing-the-gdr/a-17959366>.



☑️ SUMMATIVE PERFORMANCE TASK

How does nostalgia help people cope?

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.

⊕ EXTENSION (OPTIONAL) TASK

Students can visit a local senior citizen facility and ask the residents what items or products they remember from their childhood that bring back pleasant memories and why. They may share their findings with their classmates.

TAKING INFORMED ACTION

UNDERSTAND Think about something from your childhood that instills a sense of nostalgia in you and your classmates. Is that product still available now? Consider what it is (music, the taste of a certain breakfast cereal, a whiff of someone's perfume, a quirky fashion trend you embraced wholeheartedly).

ASSESS With a partner, discuss the different associations you have with that product. How do you feel when you are reminiscing about that item? Does it make you laugh, or do you feel sad about it?

ACT Design a poster intended to awaken that same sense of nostalgia for other people in your school. Was there a song connected to it? Was there a slogan? Find images of that item and use your poster to try to compel your audience to embrace that product once again.

REFLECT As you admire your classmates' work, consider how you would feel if not a single one of those products were available for purchase now. What if you could never taste that taste again, hear that song, or smell that perfume ever again? Write about how this experience would make you feel, and compare your feelings with the *Ostalgie* experienced by people who lived in East Germany.