

FARRAR STRAUS GIROUX

Teachers' Guide

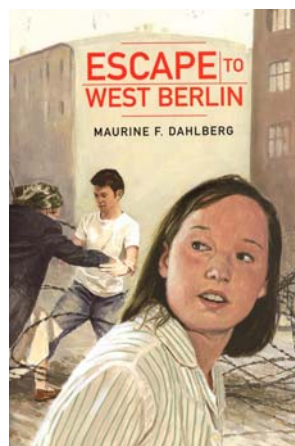
Escape to West Berlin

by Maurine F. Dahlberg

Grade Level:
Grades 3–7

Themes:

- Berlin 1961
- Cold War
- Courage
- Family Life
- Growing Up
- Friendship



Introduction

During the summer of 1961, Heidi Klenk grapples with drastic political change, growing up, friendship, and loss as she and her family plot to flee East Berlin before the border is closed. Heidi's perilous flight draws upon her inner courage and adaptability and stretches the ties of family and friendship.

Dahlberg depicts the events and emotions surrounding the rise of the Berlin Wall through the eyes of thirteen-year-old Heidi. As she struggles to become more independent, relate to friends, and adapt to a new baby in the family, Heidi and her family must make secret plans to escape as the Communist government clamps down on those passing from East to West Berlin. Dahlberg's humanist eyes lock onto the strain in Communist society and the divisions created by a cold war mentality. She captures the angst of families and friends torn apart by the border closing and of teens who consider their futures under both socialist and democratic systems.

Discussion

1. If Heidi and Petra lived to see the fall of the Wall in 1989, they would have been about forty-one years old. Do you think they would try to find each other? If so, what do you think the first encounter would be like? What do you imagine they would say to each other? How would they feel about the differences in their lives?
2. In chapter 5, Heidi's mother urges Heidi to make up with Petra. What would have been the consequences of not reconciling versus reconciling?
3. At the end of chapter 3 and the beginning of chapter 4, Heidi's family encounters pressure and threats because her father is a border crosser. Discuss the rationale and conditions of those who posted signs about border crossers, the angry neighbors, Petra's plea to Heidi, and Herr Brecht's actions.
4. On pages 73–78, why do you think Heidi's perception of the "ideal society" is different from that of her parents? What is important in convincing Heidi to agree to her parents' plan?

Activity Suggestions

1. Read true stories of escape and/or attempted escape from East Berlin (or East Germany). Write a report on the context and the mode of the escape using resources such as www.die-berliner-mauer.de/en/.
2. Write a newspaper article interviewing Heidi immediately after she is helped out of the canal (pp. 174–75).

ESCAPE TO WEST BERLIN

3. Watch *Night Crossing*, the true story of the Strelzyk family's escape and create a chart comparing the escape attempts made in 1979 versus those in 1961. Include transportation mode, clandestine tactics, risk of being caught, danger levels, resources, support from the West, feelings of teenagers and family members who are leaving, conditions in East and West Berlin, and reasons for going.
4. On an outline map of Germany, draw in and label Berlin, the Müggelsee, the Spree River, Riesa, Dresden, Freital. (Other major landmarks not mentioned in the book, such as Hamburg, Munich, the Danube, and Stuttgart, can also be plotted.) Hypothesize where Dahlberg's fictitious "Alt Mittelheim" might have been, using clues from the book, and trace the heroine's flight from Alt Mittelheim to West Berlin. Calculate the distance. Use a detailed map of Berlin and find the city transportation stops. Hypothesize, using clues from the book, where Heidi might have lived in East Berlin and also where her cottage might have been, based on the transportation stops she describes. On an outline map of Berlin, plot these points as well as the Berlin Wall, Checkpoint Charlie, the Berlin Zoo, the Spree River, the Wedding District, the Teltow Canal, and the Tiergarten. Also calculate the distance Heidi swam across the canal, fifty meters, (p. 166) in feet and yards.



MAURINE F. DAHLBERG
Photo credit © Leesa Woodard

About the Author

Maurine F. Dahlberg grew up in Fulton, Missouri, and is the author of several historical novels, including *The Spirit and Gilly Bucket*, a Bank Street Best Children's Book of the Year, and *The Story of Jonas*. An editor for a Navy research institute, she lives with her husband in Springfield, Virginia.

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Web sites:

www.fsgkidsbooks.com

Includes additional information about her novels.

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