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Escaping East Berlin: A Content Centered Cold War Activity

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Abstract

This content analysis presents an example of how Robert Stahl's negotiation activity approach can promote decision-making in the social studies classroom. The effects of the activity on students' ability to decide on various methods to escape East Berlin. The students' choices and class discussion on how to relate Cold War activities suggested that students postulated potential strengths and weaknesses for each escape method.

Key Words: Cold War, communism, religious negotiation, content-centered learning, East Berlin, Berlin Wall

November 2021 marks the 32nd anniversary of the opening of the Berlin Wall. From 1961 to 1989, the Wall served as a social, economic, and political lightning rod between East and West Germany. The Wall was officially designed as an 'anti-fascist' barrier to shield East Germans from Western ideology. In its many adaptations, the Wall was intended to constrain travel and communications with West Berlin and eliminate talented and skilled workers leaving East Germany. Considered an iconic landmark throughout the Cold War, the Berlin Wall is marginalized in the history curriculum and content standards. In an era of high-stakes testing and pacing instructional guides for teachers with few student-centered activities, the relegation of historic Cold War periods and events receive minimal coverage. Instead, such periods are reduced to little consideration or historical scrutiny, constituted to unremarkable readings, passive worksheets, often resulting in little to no student interaction or in-depth analysis (Rapoport, 2006; White, 1994). As a current and former social studies teacher, we often found that students often depreciated the contentious relationship between the world's two superpowers roles in a divided Berlin. The result suggested students could not associate and comprehend most events beyond the knowledge comprehension level. To increase students' understanding of the Berlin Wall and East and West Berlin's division, we implemented the content-centered learning approach. By investigating the Berlin Wall, students could research, analyze, and prioritize escape routes to West Berlin.

For this activity, the lesson 'Escaping East Berlin' was designed to investigate East Germans' various escape attempts and operations to escape the East German communist state. Students, incorporating the four phases of thinking and decision-making, analyzed, evaluated, and prioritized a negotiation content-centered activity that required students to

determine the most feasible methods to escape over, across, and under the Berlin Wall. Such an activity encouraged students to confront three fundamental questions. Should a government have the right to build a fortified wall to prevent its citizens from entering or leaving against their own free will? When does a government have the right to spy and collect information on its citizens? When do individual liberties and freedoms outweigh a government's power for national security and control?

Historical Background of the Berlin Wall

In the 1950s, East German Communist Party officials were growing concerned with East Berliners' permanent departure to West Berlin. Estimates suggest that between 100,000 to 150,000 East Berliners crossed the virtual border between East and West Berlin, never returning each year, effectively draining the East Berlin of talented and skilled workers and their income. West Berlin served as a severe economic threat to East Berlin and East Germany (Fritz, 2009). While an estimated 12,000 – 13,000 West Berliners worked in East Berlin, nearly 57,000 East Germans worked in and smuggled goods to West Berlin daily to serve West Germany's consumer needs. In the communist government's eyes, East Berliners leaving and even working in West Berlin was an economic nightmare. East Berliners working in West Berlin slowly drained East Germany's socialized healthcare system and education with critical tax dollars benefiting the West Berlin economy. In all, some 1.6 million skilled East Germans left East Germany via West Berlin, creating a vacuum of skilled labor before the first-generation Wall was erected in August 1961.

On Sunday, August 13, 1961, under the East German Communist Party's direction, 10,000-armed East German border guards began closing border crossings to include street, river crossings, selected train stations, and communications to the West. Four weeks after the barbed wire was erected, the East German government authorized the use of border troops to be permanently stationed to protect East Berlin. Such border troops fell under the Defense Ministry's authority and received battle tanks, machine guns, and war weapons to intimidate East Berliners. To combat low morale and maintain a proper defense readiness, border guards received "ideological encouragement" from the government in addition to specially placed Stasi or secret police agents acting as border guards (Flemming, 2009).

For those desperate enough to risk possible death or imprisonment, the idea of escaping East Berlin was both a dream and a reality. In 1961, the Berlin Wall consisted of barbed wire and concrete blocks. Fleeing by creeping under the barbed wire, climbing over the Wall, or even ramming fortifications with a vehicle quickly came to an end. Most, if not all, who tried to escape failed. According to Border Guard reports, of the 4596 known escape attempts, 3984 or 87%, could not reach the first barrier (Flemming, 2009). Because of this, tunnel operations were the most common method of escape. Since sewage and water systems were sealed with thorough welds of all maintenance hole covers, the tunnel method was dangerous. Professional 'helpers' had more reliable and more straightforward escape methods through vehicles or foreign passports. While fleeing by car would be the logical selection,

failed attempts provided both border guards and secret police agents detailed examples of hidden compartments used to intensify the border. The Ministry for State Security effectively infiltrated agents and unofficial informers into escape groups and their helpers. Captured helpers and alleged escapees faced years of imprisonment, with information gained through creative interrogation techniques providing detailed future escapes and tactics. The result led to the second and third-generation construction and fortification of the Berlin Wall, which added the various obstacles along the border zone.

The Four Phases of Values Decision-Making

The concept of asking students to analyze, evaluate, and derive a values-based conclusion is not a new concept in social studies education. Moral/value dilemmas originated as early as the 1960s with the Harvard Social Studies Project, which provided students with an eclectic arrangement of authentic and fictional case studies of historical events to teach students to analyze scenarios before making independent decisions that may lead to adverse long-term effects and desirable outcomes (Byford & Russell, 2006). The Harvard Social Studies Project intended to involve students as more than passive spectators, but more thinking, acting participants in history and modern life. The Harvard Project did not provide ready-made, right or wrong answers to social and historical problems. Instead, it challenged students to develop their positions and resolve conflicting views faced in society (Levin, Newmann, & Oliver, 1969). As with all New Social Studies era projects, they eventually were relegated to cabinets and storage closets to collect dust, with few teachers devoted to projects' pedagogical ideals. Like other projects, the Harvard Project eventually faded from prominence; elements of project materials sparingly remained in isolated classrooms.

Expanding on a values-based curriculum derived from various New Social Studies projects, progressive social studies scholar Shirley Engle called for the social studies curriculum to incorporate and embrace decision-making as a method to promote useful citizenship. According to Engle (1960), "decision-making requires more than mere knowledge of facts, and principles; it requires a weighing and balance, a synthesizing of all available information and values" (p.301). Engle maintained the purpose and quality of the social studies instruction is to educate for citizenship. Such education for citizenship involved students becoming active agents of change by studying significant problems, analyzing interpretations, difficulties, and modern implications of historical, social, and political issues facing society. Engle's rebuff of traditional rote-memorization and trivial facts were discouraged. Instead, the teacher's role is to lead the student through the decision-making process and provide support as they apply their understanding of the issue or problem while going beyond the textbook and analyze and debate multiple sources of data firsthand. However, as the 1970s ushered in a new outlook on traditional educational reforms, terms such as cooperative learning, values education, and decision-making remained famous buzz words, despite limited yet practical classroom resources.

As early as 1973, two social scientists, J. Doyle Casteel and Robert J. Stahl began an in-

depth analysis of values-decision-making activities and the decision-making phases students encounter as they develop a framework of understanding and reasoning. Coined content-centered learning activities focused on attaining values clarification and/or moral development goals. Stahl (1979) indicated students must engage in four phases of thinking during values/moral classroom instruction: conceptual, relational, valuation, and reflective. Such steps embedded into unique decision-making strategies provided social studies teachers with subject matter-centered materials that enhanced content comprehension while aiding students in inquiring decision-making, valuing, and moral reasoning skills.

Casteel and Stahl (1997) maintained that students who encounter values-based activities encounter four distinct phases of decision-making as they investigate and formulate which decisions are needed. Decision-making activities concerning content-specific materials are designed to cultivate student use of conceptual, relational, moral-reasoning, and reflective thinking. Students explore both individually and in small groups moral dilemmas associated with social science-based content and incorporate the four phases of thought before they are determined.

The first stage of thinking and decision-making occurs at the conceptual level. The conceptual stage emphasizes student comprehension as they address explanatory questions of who? where? when? what? how much? and how many apply. When moral issues or problems are examined, and decisions are considered, there is a focus on moralization. Students use descriptive language patterns during the conceptual phase to indicate their understanding of the situation, problem, or dilemma. In doing so, they identify the nature of the problem or dilemma to include specific moral issues and substances involved. According to Stahl (1979), students who engage with conceptual thinking answer such questions: What does this mean? What is your interpretation of the situation or events? What data is known? And what are some of the relevant attributes, characteristics, or features discussed? Such questions assist in the early steps toward deciding on potential objects, situations, and problems examined.

The second stage of thinking and decision-making occurs at the relational level. This phase focuses on methods and approaches the classroom teacher may help students engage in moral reasoning behaviors within the subject matter's context and content. The relational phase emphasizes applying and analyzing information from the activity and course material. In turn, the application and analysis of data and material encourage synthesis between the two elements, resulting in integrating previously learned material with new meanings and concepts (Casteel & Stahl, 1997; Stahl, 1995). Students attempt to connect their conceptualization of morality to the ideas, content, images, and understandings of the issue at hand during the relational phase.

The moral-reasoning stage, or third phase, occurs when students engage in moral reasoning. Students employ moral criteria to consider and select which consequences they desire to attain or protect. This includes students considering which measures are used and how the requirements are applied, which policy will and should be followed, which situations are considered moral, and which courses of actions are implemented. Students utilize ethical

criteria in potential decisions or judgments during the moral-reasoning phase. Students consider the consequences of moral judgment in addition to the legitimacy of such effects. During this phase of thinking, the students might enlighten their decision-making with questions as if placed in this dilemma, what course of action would one take? What results should be expected if the first or second alternatives are selected?

The final reflective phase occurs when the other stages are presumed complete. The reflective phase is designed to enable students to examine the consistency of how they used moral criteria and how they made moral judgments through a declaration or public statement of the final decision and the rationales for having arrived at the situation. According to Casteel and Stahl (1997), “under optimum conditions, this phase of thinking also embraces careful reconsideration and reprocessing of one’s ideas, information, and beliefs” (p. 18).

Content-Centered Learning

Postulating the four phases of values decision-making is the cornerstone of content-centered learning. According to Stahl (1979), the assertion of content-centered learning is the support and development of students to attain both values clarification and moral development in the social studies classroom. Indicatively, values clarification refers to desired patterns of students’ statements, which measures engagement in comprehending, conceptualizing, and clarifying values. To cultivate both values clarification and moral development, content-centered learning is brief to one of the following five categories of dilemmas. First, there is a neutral issue or context that people may react or consider in terms of some value or moral belief. Second, a value or moral issue is present, which could be viewed in its highest forms. Third, a value or moral issue conflicts with another value or moral issue in a problem-solving situation. Fourth, a value or moral issue is present that causes conflict that allows for two or more possible choices. Fifth, a problem is present where two or more values or moral dilemmas are suitable and may conflict (Casteel & Stahl, 1997).

Stahl, Corbett, and Gasche (1978), content-centered activities emanate from either a situation or event found in social studies content in conjunction with one or more of the five types of dilemmas. Once an event or controversial element is identified, the teacher may select from five distinct decision-making formats students can utilize with values-based or moral dilemmas. Such strategies enable students to solve conflict, problem-solving, and decision-making. In the end, the rank-order, force-choice, negotiation, invention, and exploration strategies impart higher-order thinking possibilities for students and unique opportunities to foster critical pedagogy provided the given context, conditions, and specific needs of the situation (Stahl, 1995).

Designing the Negotiation Activity

Considering the four phases of decision-making and notions of content-centered learning and the authoritarian control over East German citizens, the authors decided to

incorporate the negotiation decision-making strategy. The negotiation strategy, according to Casteel and Stahl (1997), is designed “to help students develop ways to make decisions where they must surrender one group of options to obtain a group of options they value more highly” (p.139). Furthermore, the negotiation strategy provides students with various situations where individuals must accept unwanted iniquity to avoid possible despair. The negotiation strategy consists of four essential elements. First, a story provides a context where either an individual or group confronts the need to select highly valued options. Second, a list of nine or more options from which a student or group must choose the third of available options most preferred and the third of opportunities surrendered. Third, a decision sheet in which a student or group records both preferred and undesired options ensures the first group of options is obtained. Fourth, a series of questions indicates the type of questions raised during the follow-up discussion.

Individual and group decision sheets provide students with a structure to complete the final decision tasks. Decision sheets aid students to engage in a conscious examination of the basis for their choices' actions, and consequences. Students often are instructed to list the positive effects of their preferred options and adverse effects that might result from the options rejected. When a student or group has completed the decision sheets provided, they have generalized that three options are best and three are less desirable. Students or group members list probable consequences from each of these decisions.

Procedure and Preparation for the Teacher

For the Teacher

Teaching about Cold War events is often difficult. When teaching events associated with the Cold War, episodes such as the Berlin Airlift, Cuban Missile Crisis, and the Berlin Wall fall are sparingly covered. This negotiation activity provides students with a decision-laden dilemma and various recorded escape options many East Germans utilized to flee to West Berlin. This lesson is to expand and broaden students' collaborative skills and increase their decision-making by using characteristics expected in the four phases of decision-making.

Step One: Introduction

Set the negotiation activity in the context of what is studied and establishing a purpose. To set the stage for the activity, the teacher should introduce students to Germany's post-war division and establish occupational zones by the United States, Soviet Union, England, and France to discuss the diametrically opposing economic and political systems for West and East Germany. In addition, a brief discussion of the East German government's rationale for the wall provides students with a conceptual framework before the implementation of the activity.

Step Two: Negotiation Activity Distributed

Students examine the negotiation activity individually or in small groups with critical questions of power and authority, human rights and escape operations posed, active participation with students explaining and analyzing possible action choices. Provide students

with a personal decision sheet (appendix A) or a group decision sheet (appendix B). Students evaluate a list of escape plans used by East Germans to escape to West Berlin, either individually or in groups. Each escape attempt dealt with unique escape operations and potential pitfalls from capture, death, secret police operations, or informants. Instruct the class on a designated time limit (determined by the teacher) to analyze, evaluate, and prioritize potential escape strategies.

Step Three: Comprehension Development

The student synthesizes and evaluates the information provided. Provide an opportunity for students to assess each escape plan and then have the individual student or groups assign and justify the three best escape plans with the highest probability of success and three methods with the lowest likelihood of success. Students must determine the relevance, practicality, and feasibility of each escape operation and the ability to defend their decisions.

Step Four: Reinforcement / Extension

Students transfer the learning of the topic with questions for review and reflection. Inform each student or group to identify and explain the top three options while defending their rationale for each choice. Moreover, students will answer individually or in groups while taking part in a class discussion or provide a written justification for review and reflection. The teacher may ask the following questions. Why should government organizations like the East Germans have the right and power to restrict their citizens from travel forcibly? When does a government have the right to gather information and spy on its citizens based on national security? How is it appropriate for a country to build barriers to restrict travel in the name of national security? What is greater importance: living in an oppressive government or risking one's life for freedom and prosperity? What criteria did you or your group use in evaluating the importance, value, and effectiveness of each option?

Teacher-led questions are viewed as both tools of creation using students' everyday knowledge and historical context of the past and how historical events potentially have implications in modern society. According to Wright-Maley (2015), teachers who incorporate simulation qualities were significantly more likely to include value and engage in critical inquiry with their students than content acquisition alone through role-playing. The activity role-plays, combined with a standard negotiation format and open-ended responses, provided students with historically accurate selections/actions. Such a dilemma encouraged students to become active participants whose actions or decisions directly influence the outcome.

For the Student

The date is May 15, 1980. The location: East Berlin. Situation: You, along with your friends, are citizens of the German Democratic Republic (East Germany) and live in East Berlin. However, there is nothing "democratic" about the oppressive, communist government. Since your country's birth in 1948 from Russian occupation, your government has become increasingly paranoid about its citizens leaving for the West. The Berlin Wall has significantly reduced your fellow East Germans from traveling to West Berlin. The East German secret police (Stasi) are ruthless in both spying on East Germany's citizens and how they "obtain"

information. Stasi infiltration into every aspect of East German life is guaranteed.

The communist city you live in is marginal compared to your fellow Germans living in West Berlin. Often, when you and your friends walk beside the wall separating the two cities, you can hear and occasionally see the fast-paced lifestyles of West Berlin. This sense of freedom, along with the recent arrests of several friends by the secret police, has only fueled your desire to escape to a better life. With this passion also comes fear. The secret police have infiltrated social and political groups to gather information on all citizens. Since the wall's initial construction in 1961, over one hundred East Germans have died trying to escape. Rumors suggest that some have survived, while others caught disappear. Successfully escaping comes with consequences. When and if you and your friends escape to West Berlin, the secret police and other government officials will act swiftly when you fail to report to your assigned jobs the following day and arrest your family and remaining friends. Later that evening, you sit down in your apartment to examine possible escape scenarios.

Student Options

Option A: Ultralight Escape. With the help of relatives living in West Berlin, you receive what you believe is a coded message to be picked up early on a weekend morning. To confuse East German border guards, your relatives glue the red star symbol of the Soviet Union on each wing. Your relative also wears an army coat with red stars on the helmet. The hope is to confuse East German border guards into not firing upon the ultralight. You are to position yourself in a large group of bushes near a long open stretch in an East German park in the early morning. The goal is for your relative to fly the small twin-engine ultralight at 300 ft. using the city glow and pre-dawn light to navigate. Once the plane lands, you dash from your hiding place and jump in the empty seat.

Option B: Homebuilt Hot Air Balloon. Buying all materials from various local stores, you purchase goods over months. If confronted by government officials, you indicate purchases of fabric are to make sails for the local boat club. Construction of the balloon takes two weeks to sew a balloon-shaped leg 15 meters (49 feet) wide by 20 meters (66 feet) long on a 40-year-old manually operated sewing machine. Basket assembly is made from an iron frame, wood floor with a clothesline around the sides' perimeter. The burner uses two bottles of liquid propane household gas. The balloon is estimated to carry up to three small adults. No testing has occurred.

Option C: Escape by Train. You know a person who has a friend that works for the city train system. You do not personally know the train conductor. The train conductor indicates he knows of a small portion of track running from an East Berlin suburb into West Berlin. This track is rarely used to deliver official government goods and purchases to West Berlin. The object of escape is to take the train and ram lightly fortified barriers until on West Berlin soil.

Option D: Stolen Armored Vehicle. Using a military armored car, you will attempt to ram through a lightly defended Wall section. After several weeks of observation, you observe the border guard schedules and shift changes. Before each shift change, specific armored

military cars are rotated from the Wall for refueling. The goal is to distract guards from the car while refueling and drive the vehicle into the concrete wall and climb the barbed wire fence before border guards can react.

Option E: Scaling the Wall. One of your close friends has a house close to the Wall. Each night he records the shift changes and behaviors of border guards. You wait for heavy rainfall in the hope border guards are less suspicious. Dressed in all white to better blend into the wall, you and your friends take a ladder and scale the wall. It would help if you avoided several trip wires and barbed wire fences without detection before reaching the smaller outer wall. You must then use the ladder and scale the lower partition to freedom.

Option F: By Zip Line. Recently, your cousin defected to West Berlin. He has indicated through a letter; he is willing to help you and your friends escape using a homemade zip line. You and your friends train up in archery and find the tallest building overlooking West Berlin. The plan is to sneak into the attic while shooting a cable over the Wall using a bow and arrow. Your cousin will wait on the other side and fasten the wire to his car. With a metal pulley, you ride to the Wall to freedom.

Option G: Digging a Tunnel. You are friends with a factory worker. He is employed at approximately 360 feet (one football field) from the border wall. While it might take time, you and your friends begin to dig a small tunnel towards the wall. It would be best if you avoided the secret police and sensitive listening devices designed to detect digging along the border. The secret police often cave in suspected escape tunnels with construction equipment. With luck, you tunnel to the other side.

Option H: Bulletproof Bulldozer. To maintain a clean area around the wall, border guards used bulldozers with protective armor to move grass, weeds, and unwanted trees. You steal the bulldozer in the middle of the night and drive it through a fenced area along the border. In doing so, you hope to avoid being shot by border patrol guards and avoiding vehicle mines.

Option I: The Trojan Cow. A relative in West Berlin can smuggle one person at a time out of East Berlin using a life-size model of a cow with a hollowed belly. The relative moves back and forth from West to East Berlin, crossing at different checkpoints. If stopped by border guards, the relative describes the cow as a decorative display item used in-store promotion. There is only room for one individual.

Conclusion

It is hoped that student responses demonstrate empathy through the decision-making and role-playing processes. According to Boddington (1980), most classroom activities and assessments are modeled upon the “imagine you were...” The question, which lends insight and recognition to one or more points of view to a historical event. According to Wineburg (2001), such empathy, in conjunction with historical reasoning, may contribute to students' decision-making. Students conceivably imagined themselves in the unlikely situation through central facts, events, and possible outcomes. Thus, while students establish possible escape

methods on their understanding of the now, the hope students are more likely to recognize such an event in perspective. Alternatively, student responses provide problem-solving strategies based on either a limited or expansive understanding of history. Rather than empathizing with those facing the dilemma, students contextualize the dilemma based on personalization or preferences.

While this activity may be considered a small glimpse of students' perceptions of a significant Cold War event, this activity was undertaken to develop a potential way to further student participation in implementing active learning while studying Cold War materials. Additionally, students may or may not evaluate all the positive or negative possibilities with each escape plan when given a sequential list of outcomes. However, students tried to connect with a prior reference frame to prioritize from most to least significant or internalize an escape to West Berlin solely from a personal standpoint. In high-stakes classrooms, student thinking is often minimized to the testable content, allowing little or no classroom time to be afforded to situations like those found in this negotiation activity. Methods of this nature require students to think and categorize, evaluating specific options.

Dr. Jeffrey M. Byford is a professor of social studies education at the University of Memphis. His research interest includes Cold War education and curriculum design.

Alisha Milam is a graduate student at the University of Memphis. Her research interests include critical inquiry and curriculum design within social studies education.

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Appendix A

Escaping East Berlin – Personal Decision Sheet

Directions: For purposes of this exercise, you are to assume the following conditions are real.

Your Dilemma: The date is May 15, 1980. You are citizens of the German Democratic Republic (East Germany) and your friends. However, there is nothing “democratic” about the oppressive, communist government. Since your country’s birth in 1948 from Russian occupation, your government has become increasingly paranoid about its citizens leaving for the West. The Berlin Wall has significantly reduced your fellow East Germans from traveling to West Berlin. The East German secret police (Stasi) are ruthless in both spying on East Germany’s citizens and how they “obtain” information. Stasi infiltration into every aspect of East German life is guaranteed.

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your friends escape to West Berlin, the secret police and other government officials will act swiftly when you fail to report to your assigned jobs the following day and arrest your family and remaining friends.

Later that evening, you sit down in your apartment to examine possible escape scenarios.

Ultralight Escape. With the help of relatives living in West Berlin, you receive what you believe is a coded message to be picked up early on a weekend morning. To confuse East German borderguards, your relatives glue the red star symbol of the Soviet Union on each wing. Your relative also wears an army coat with red stars on the helmet. The hope is to confuse East German borderguards into not firing upon the ultralight. You are to position yourself in a large group of bushes near a long open stretch in an East German park in the early morning. The goal is for your relative to fly the small twin-engine ultralight at 300 ft. using the city glow and pre-dawn light to navigate. Once the plane lands, you dash from your hiding place and jump in the empty seat.

Homebuilt Hot Air Balloon. Buying all materials from various local stores, you purchase goods over months. If confronted by government officials, you indicate purchases of fabric are to make sails for the local boat club. Construction of the balloon takes two weeks to sew a balloon-shaped leg 15 meters (49 feet) wide by 20 meters (66 feet) long on a 40-year-old manually operated sewing machine. Basket assembly is made from an iron frame, wood floor with a clothesline around the sides' perimeter. The burner uses two bottles of liquid propane household gas. The balloon is estimated to carry up to three small adults. No testing has occurred.

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Stolen Armored Vehicle. Using a military armored car, you will attempt to ram through a lightly defended Wall section. After several weeks of observation, you observe the border guard schedules and shift changes. Before each shift change, specific armored military cars are rotated from the Wall for refueling. The goal is to distract guards from the car while refueling and drive the vehicle into the concrete wall and climb the barbed wire fence before border guards can react.

Scaling the Wall. One of your close friends has a house close to the Wall. Each night he records the shift changes and behaviors of border guards. You wait for heavy rainfall in the hope border guards are less suspicious. Dressed in all white to better blend into the wall, you and your friends take a ladder and scale the wall. It would help if you avoided several trip wires and barbed wire fences without detection before reaching the smaller outer wall. You must then use the ladder and scale the lower partition to freedom.

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with protective armor to move grass, weeds, and unwanted trees. You steal the bulldozer in the middle of the night and drive it through a fenced area along the border. In doing so, you hope to avoid being shot by border patrol guards and avoiding vehicle mines.

The Trojan Cow. A relative in West Berlin can smuggle one person at a time out of East Berlin using a life-size model of a cow with a hollowed belly. The relative moves back and forth from West to East Berlin, crossing at different checkpoints. If stopped by border guards, the relative describes the cow as a decorative display item used in-store promotion. There is only room for one individual.

Directions: On the lines below, record your decision for each statement. Remember, you are considering each possible escape attempt to better your life in the West.

1. The three escape plans that should be assigned the *highest probability* of success are:
 - A)
 - B)
 - C)

2. The three most important reasons why these three escape plans were selected as being the *most effective* for immediate implementation are:
 - A)
 - B)
 - C)

3. The results of these escape plans that I would hope for are:

4. The three escape plans that should be assigned the *lowest probability* are:
 - A)
 - B)
 - C)

5. The three most important reasons why these three escape plans are considered *least effective* of all the methods are:
 - A)
 - B)
 - C)

(Appendix B)

Escaping East Berlin – Group Decision Sheet

Directions: For purposes of this exercise, you are to assume the following conditions are real.

Your Dilemma: The date is May 15, 1980. You are citizens of the German Democratic Republic (East Germany) and your friends. However, there is nothing “democratic” about the oppressive, communist government. Since your country’s birth in 1948 from Russian occupation, your government has become increasingly paranoid about its citizens leaving for the West. The Berlin Wall has significantly reduced your fellow East Germans from traveling to West Berlin. The East German secret police (Stasi) are ruthless in both spying on East Germany's citizens and how they “obtain” information. Stasi infiltration into every aspect of East German life is guaranteed.

The communist city you live in is marginal compared to your fellow Germans living in West Berlin. Often, when you and your friends walk beside the wall separating the two cities, you can hear and occasionally see the fast-paced lifestyles of West Berlin. This sense of freedom, along with the recent arrests of several friends by the secret police, has only fueled your desire to escape to a better life. With this passion also comes fear. The secret police have infiltrated social and political groups to gather information on all citizens. Since the wall’s initial construction in 1961, over one hundred East Germans have died trying to escape. Rumors suggest that some have survived, while others caught just disappear.

consequences. When and if you and your friends escape to West Berlin, the secret police and other government officials will act swiftly when you fail to report to your assigned jobs the following day and arrest your family and remaining friends.

Later that evening, your group sits down in your apartment to examine possible escape scenarios.

Ultralight Escape. With the help of relatives living in West Berlin, you receive what you believe is a coded message to be picked up early on a weekend morning. To confuse East German borderguards, your relatives glue the red star symbol of the Soviet Union on each wing. Your relative also wears an army coat with red stars on the helmet. The hope is to confuse East German borderguards into not firing upon the ultralight. You are to position yourself in a large group of bushes near a long open stretch in an East German park in the early morning. The goal is for your relative to fly the small twin-engine ultralight at 300 ft. using the city glow and pre-dawn light to navigate. Once the plane lands, you dash from your hiding place and jump in the empty seat.

Homebuilt Hot Air Balloon. Buying all materials from various local stores, you purchase goods over months. If confronted by government officials, you indicate purchases of fabric are to make sails for the local boat club. Construction of the balloon takes two weeks to sew a balloon-shaped leg 15 meters (49 feet) wide by 20 meters (66 feet) long on a 40-year-old manually operated sewing machine. Basket assembly is made from an iron frame, wood floor with a clothesline around the sides' perimeter. The burner uses two bottles of liquid propane household gas. The balloon is estimated to carry up to three small adults. No testing has occurred.

Escape by Train. You know a person who has a friend that works for the city train system. You do not personally know the train conductor. The train conductor indicates he knows of a small portion of track running from an East Berlin suburb into West Berlin. This track is rarely used to deliver official government goods and purchases to West Berlin. The object of escape is to take the train and ram lightly fortified barriers until on West Berlin soil.

Stolen Armored Vehicle. Using a military armored car, you will attempt to ram through a lightly defended Wall section. After several weeks of observation, you observe the border guard schedules and shift changes. Before each shift change, specific armored military cars are rotated from the Wall for refueling. The goal is to distract guards from the car while refueling and drive the vehicle into the concrete wall and climb the barbed wire fence before border guards can react.

Scaling the Wall. One of your close friends has a house close to the Wall. Each night he records the shift changes and behaviors of border guards. You wait for heavy rainfall in the hope border guards are less suspicious. Dressed in all white to better blend into the wall, you and your friend stake a ladder and scale the wall. It would help if you avoided several tripwires and barbed wire fences without detection before reaching the smaller outer wall. You must then use the ladder and scale the lower partition to freedom.

By Zip Line: Recently, your cousin defected to West Berlin. He has indicated through a letter; he is willing to help you and your friends escape using a homemade zip line. You and your friends train up in archery and find the tallest building overlooking West Berlin. The plan is to sneak into the attic while shooting a cable over the Wall using a bow and arrow. Your cousin will wait on the other side and fasten the wire to his car. With a metal pulley, you ride to the Wall to freedom.

Digging a Tunnel: You are friends with a factory worker. He is employed at approximately 360 feet (one football field) from the border wall. While it might take time, you and your friends begin to dig a small tunnel towards the wall. It would be best if you avoided the secret police and sensitive listening devices designed to detect digging along the border. The secret police often cave in suspected escape tunnels with construction equipment. With luck, you tunnel to the other side.

Bulletproof Bulldozer: To maintain a clean area around the wall, border guards used bulldozers with protective armor to move grass, weeds, and unwanted trees. You steal the bulldozer in the middle of the night and drive it through a fenced area along the border. In doing so, you hope to avoid being shot by border patrol guards and avoiding vehicle mines.

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 - B)
 - C)

3. The results of these escape plans that we would hope for are:

4. The three escape plans that should be assigned the *lowest probability* are:
 - A)
 - B)
 - C)

5. The three most important reasons why these three escape plans are considered *least effective* of all the methods are:
 - A)
 - B)
 - C)

Questions for Review and Reflection

Suggested follow-up questions to focus and guide inquiry, reflection, and learning.

1. What is the major problem(s) the group had to resolve or overcome in this situation?
2. What is the significant difference between your best plan escape plan and your worst escape plan?
3. Assuming the situation was real, how would you feel knowing friends and family left behind would be arrested?