

## Year 13 Trip to Berlin

The Year 13 History trip to Berlin was a great success and not only reinforced the impact of the Cold War on the city of Berlin and for European relations; it also gave us the opportunity to explore a wide breadth of historical sites and cultural elements. On the first day we did a walking tour of the city taking in memorials like the Kath Kollwitz *Mother and Child* statue, the *Book Burning* memorial in Bebelplatz and statues of key German leaders like Bismarck and Frederick the Great. We started our experience by visiting the German History Museum to get a foundation knowledge of German history from the founding of the state in 1871 through to the end of the Cold War. Here the group explored artefacts from the Weimar Republic, Third Reich era and Cold War. Our final visit for the day was to the Reichstag building, where we explored the political ideas set out by the Weimar Republic in 1918 and how German Politics works today. The view from the top was particularly nice and offered a wonderful panorama of the cityscape.



Day two was focused on the Third Reich period with visits to Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp, the Jewish Memorial and Jewish Museum. Sachsenhausen was deeply moving first thing on Friday morning and the bitter cold was a reminder of the harsh conditions that inmates would have experienced in the 1930s and 40s. Here features of the camp were explored, and students had the chance to take in the site themselves, before we conducted a series of readings poems, which allowed us to commemorate those lives lost during the Holocaust. Moving back into the city brought us to the Jewish Memorial which was created in 2005 and showcased how Berlin has tried to use its modern memorial designs to commemorate some of the darkest elements of their country's past. The final stop, the Jewish Museum helped to bring into context the history of the Third Reich period in Germany's past and thread the story of triumph over persecution.

The third day was Cold War themed and started with a visit to the East Side Gallery, a section of wall which has been preserved close to the actual East-West border and now used as an outdoor art gallery, depicting images of peace and reconciliation from multiple artists across Europe. Checkpoint Charlie was next, where we visited the site of the shooting of 18-year-old Peter Fechter (someone we study in the course) and the Black Box museum, which charts the story of the Cold War and was an excellent reminder of how the events of Berlin sat within the context of the wider



Cold War. After an early lunch, we visited the Berlin Wall Memorial at Bernauer Strasser, giving us an opportunity to climb an observation tower to look down over a section of preserved wall. In the afternoon we made our way to the DDR museum, an interactive experience which allowed our students to explore what it would have been like to drive a car in the DDR, play games, listen to music in the replica flat and try to understand the difference between culture. The TV Tower gave our group a chance to see Berlin from up high at night before we headed across to Potsdamer Platz

for the Christmas Markets and restaurant.

The experience was amazing, and our students were a true delight to take away. Their interest and determination to walk the distances we did, helped to see as much of the city as possible. I am sure that this has given them a greater understanding of German History and given them a thirst to want to explore more.