

Unit 6 Reading

When the Wall Came Tumbling Down

<Oral History>

My grandparents' generation came of age in a divided country. In 1961, East Germany's Communist government built the Berlin Wall, which divided the city in two. The construction of this wall was a **premeditated** act, planned by a vengeful regime determined to **brandish** its power in the decades following the Allied victory over Hitler's Germany. My grandmother said isolating West Berlin from the rest of Soviet-controlled East Germany was a way for the regime to thumb its nose at Western democracies. In a **deft** statement of double-speak, East Germany's leaders claimed that the wall would shelter its people from "the ravages of capitalism." Even if the wall's real purpose had not been made **explicit** already, the truth was soon obvious to all: It prevented East Germans like my grandparents from fleeing to West Germany in search of freedom and a better life.

By the time I was born, that ugly concrete wall, with its **ominous** watchtowers, was a daily reminder of East German control and repression. Rather than protect us, the Berlin Wall was a cruel blockade that cost nearly 300 people their lives. Some tried to climb or fly over it, and others tried to dig under or around it, but most failed in their attempts to breach that barrier. They were all trying to escape a country in which everyday life was marked by our political leaders' **officious** rules. Every law was rigidly enforced by the **venal** secret police. We both despised and feared them.

Despite our fears, despite the guards, it was regular people like me who finally brought down the wall simply by walking through its checkpoints. **Ironic**, isn't it? What happened was this. During the late 1980s, the East German government gradually became less rigid. Bit by bit, it began offering its people more freedoms. Then in 1989, its leaders declared that on November 9, anyone who had a proper visa could visit West Germany. I did not have a visa, but I went to the wall anyway with some friends. Within hours, the crowd had become huge, and it was clear that the guards were overwhelmed. They could no longer keep back the thousands and thousands of people who wanted to pass through the checkpoints.

I'm not sure if it was that the guards were outnumbered and scared, or that they, too, wanted freedom. But suddenly, the barricades were open, and when people began to walk through, the guards let them. That's really when the wall came down. We did not physically tear it apart, brick by brick. But it was clear the wall no longer served as a threat or a barricade. In our minds, it was already gone.

I will never forget what it was like to be in Berlin that November. Everywhere in the streets people were dancing and laughing. You could hear horns and music from one end of the city to the other. I saw people spray-painting democratic slogans on the wall and even hammering off chunks to keep as souvenirs. Everyone was smiling and laughing—it was an amazing contrast to the gloom I used to feel when walking past the wall as a kid.

On November 10, my friend Anja and I went to the **stately** Brandenburg Gate, the centuries-old symbol of Berlin that had been cut in two by the wall. People were still gathering in the streets, still dancing, still laughing. We were all celebrating freedom, something most of us probably never thought we would experience. Suddenly, as Anja and I were dancing, an armed soldier left his post by the wall and walked toward us. That made Anja and me nervous. He reached out to shake our hands. Then he and I swapped caps. We each had a huge smile on our face—I swear, it was the **pinnacle** of our lives, the happiest day ever! Imagine the **solace** that comes from realizing that in just 24 hours, we had gone from being enemies to being friends.

Although joy was **rampant** and evident in everyone's eyes, within days, our delight was muted by concerns about what was ahead for our country. We were no longer trapped behind the wall, but we had lived for generations under a harsh regime. To get by, East Germans had learned to **suppress** their hopes and dreams. Citizens had to **accede** to the rules of the communist system, or face prison—or worse. Now that the wall was down and our government was weakened, how would we **extirpate** the fears and anxieties that had plagued our lives? These were the questions people asked in the days and weeks after the Berlin Wall fell. But during those glorious first days, all we knew was that we were making history—and that soon, the two Germanys would be reunited as a single nation.

Unit 6 Examples

1. Management was not willing to **accede** to labor's initial demands, thus increasing the likelihood of a long and bitter strike.
2. I **brandished** my umbrella repeatedly in a vain effort to hail a cab.
3. Classical symphonies usually **comprise** three or four movements of varying musical form, tempo, and character.
4. The **deft** fingers of Spanish seamstresses produced some of the finest, most delicate lace ever seen.
5. Some people fled their homes so suddenly that they arrived at the refugee camp absolutely **destitute**.
6. The more **explicit** your directions are, the easier it will be for all of us to find our way to the campsite.
7. We must do everything we can to **extirpate** racism from American society.
8. Why do my relatives always seem to turn up at the most **inopportune** time imaginable?
9. The short stories of O. Henry are famous for their **ironic** endings.
10. Houses that have been closed up for a very long time often have an unpleasantly **musty** smell about them.
11. The manager of the store warned the entire sales force not to be too **officious** when helping customers.
12. The **ominous** sound of distant thunder warned us of the storm's approach.
13. Some pop musicians reach the **pinnacle** of their careers comparatively early in life.
14. Some crimes are spontaneous acts of passion; others are quite **premeditated**.
15. All kinds of odd rumors run **rampant** during a political campaign.
16. Many world leaders seek **solace** from the cares of state in the pages of great literature.
17. I could find no way to **solace** my deeply troubled conscience.
18. The **stately** procession slowly wound its way from the palace to the cathedral.
19. Have you ever read Robert Frost's famous poem about swinging on the **supple** branches of a birch tree?
20. Totalitarian governments usually take strong measures to **suppress** free speech.

21. The presence of even one **venal** official may jeopardize the integrity of an entire organization.

Unit 6 Choosing the Right Word

1. Eliza Doolittle was a poor flower seller, but she learned to conduct herself with the **stately** bearing of a princess.
2. Coming at a time when I was flat broke, your suggestion that we have a bite to eat and go to the movies was highly **inopportune**.
3. Was Oscar Wilde being **ironic** when he said that he could resist everything except temptation?
4. The way he **brandishes** his facts and figures reminds me of a butcher swinging a meat cleaver.
5. Someone who believes that everyone has a price must think that human beings are **venal** by nature.
6. Traveling in the dead of night, the weary travelers found **solace** knowing that their journey would lead them to freedom.
7. He is in for a rude awakening if he thinks that as the son of a rich family, he will simply **accede** to a position of wealth and power.
8. There's a world of difference between a helpful research assistant and an **officious** one!
9. Even in the prisoner-of-war camps, some basic feelings of decency and humanity were not completely **extirpated**.
10. I have no patience with **musty** old ideas about family roles based on gender.
11. His speech at first seemed highly dramatic and impressive, but we soon realized that he was quite **destitute** of new ideas.
12. She has the kind of **supple** personality that can easily adapt itself to a wide variety of needs and conditions.
13. Let's prepare a joint statement that will **comprise** the various objections of all civic groups to the freeway plan.
14. How unfortunate that those in power are often presumed to have a **venal** nature.
15. The only sure way to **suppress** social unrest is to make possible a decent, secure life for all the people.

16. During the darkest hours of defeat, their only **solace** was the knowledge that they had fought hard to the very end.
17. **Extirpating** everything in its path, the deadly tornado left nothing but a desolate landscape.
18. The actress felt that she had reached the **pinnacle** of fame when the principal of her former school asked for her autograph.
19. The senator finally **acceded** to the controversial legislation, handing her opponents a victory.
20. They tried to explain away their insult as a slip of the tongue, but in my opinion it was deliberate and **premeditated**.
21. No doubt there are some dishonest officials, but it is a gross exaggeration to say that graft and corruption are **rampant** in our government.
22. We were prepared for a sharp scolding but not for the **ominous** silence with which the principal greeted us.
23. No matter how ticklish the situation, the hero of the cartoon always devised some **deft** maneuver to avoid capture.
24. If the law is intended to limit nonessential use of gasoline and heating oil, it should state this **explicitly**.
25. If you need to **suppress** an itching rash, try an herbal remedy.

Unit 6 Synonyms

1. The **distinguished** language of the Gettysburg Address: **stately**
2. A **stuffy** old office building: **musty**
3. **Consists of** bits and pieces of longer works: **comprises**
4. A **contradictory** conclusion to a promising career: **ironic**
5. Left the orphans totally **impoverished**: **destitute**
6. At the very **height** of the social scene: **pinnacle**
7. A rule that is **adjustable** if circumstances require: **supple**
8. Actions that were obviously **calculated**: **premeditated**
9. Annoyingly **intrusive** coworkers: **officious**
10. An **unseemly** occasion for a feast: **inopportune**

Unit 6 Antonyms

1. A **fresh-smelling** box of books: **musty**
2. Sections of the city that are extremely **wealthy**: **destitute**
3. A most **fitting** time to visit: **inopportune**
4. An extremely **stiff** fabric: **supple**
5. An art collection that **omits** important works: **comprises**

Unit 6 Completing the Sentence

1. I vowed that I would **extirpate** every weed that dared to show itself in our newly seeded lawn.
2. The sudden drop in temperature and the unnatural stillness in the air were **ominous** signs of an unfavorable change in the weather.
3. “We could not have chosen a more **inopportune** spot for our picnic,” she observed as she swept ants off the blanket.
4. The referee gave a(n) **explicit** warning that if either team protested her decisions, she would be forced to call a technical foul.
5. Accomplished portrait painters can usually reveal a person’s character with a few **deft** strokes of a brush.
6. A great dancer, like a great athlete, must have a sharp sense of timing and a highly trained, responsive, and **supple** body.
7. Even when the economy is strong, there are always a large number of **destitute** families in urgent need of assistance.
8. We will never **accede** to those selfish and unfair terms.
9. It is a sobering thought to realize that when one has reached the **pinnacle** of a mountain, there is nowhere to go but down.
10. Airline companies often call in professional grief counselors to help **solace** the families and friends of crash victims.
11. How **ironic** that they finally inherited all that money at a time when it could no longer help to solve their problems!
12. The unruly mob retreated as the line of deputies moved forward slowly, **brandishing** their riot sticks.
13. How can I ever forget that **officious** inspector in the customs office who insisted that I empty every piece of luggage before him!
14. The students couldn’t **suppress** their groans of dismay when the teacher announced a surprise quiz.

15. Unfortunately, the so-called recreational facilities **comprise** nothing more than a card table and a small-screen TV set.
16. Attacking the present administration, the candidate said that crime has been **rampant** in the streets of our city.
17. Who can forget the stirring sight of those **statel**y tall ships with their lofty masts and graceful lines as they sailed past the Statue of Liberty on the Fourth of July?
18. Who would have dreamed that the cluttered old attic, with all its darkness, dust, and **musty** odor, contained such a treasure!
19. Whether your act was **premeditated** or the result of carelessness, the fact remains that you have caused great pain to someone who has always been very good to you.
20. In the mid-1800s, "Boss" Tweed controlled New York City through a(n) **venal** political machine that fed on graft and extortion.

Unit 6 Vocabulary in Context (Literary Text)

1. I saw him smile to himself—grin rather—and lapse into **ominous** musing whenever Mrs. Linton had occasion to be absent from the apartment.

Thoughts that are **ominous** are NOT

- ① gloomy ② dismal ③ **hopeful** ④ harmful

2. Linton looked at me, but did not answer; and, after keeping her seat by his side another ten minutes, during which his head fell drowsily on his breast, and he uttered nothing except suppressed moans of exhaustion or pain, Cathy began to seek **solace** in looking for bilberries, and sharing the produce of her researches with me: she did not offer them to him, for she saw further notice would only weary and annoy.

To seek **solace** is to seek

- ① **respite** ② defeat ③ amusement ④ danger

3. It was a Testament, in lean type, and smelling dreadfully **musty**: a fly-leaf bore the inscription—"Catherine Earnshaw, her book," and a date some quarter of a century back.

A book that has a **musty** smell is most likely

- ① new ② rare ③ **old** ④ original

4. The lands, being a minor, he could not meddle with. However, Mr. Heathcliff has claimed and kept them in his wife's right and his also: I suppose legally; at any rate, Catherine, **destitute** of cash and friends, cannot disturb his possession.

Someone who is **destitute** is

- ① vigilant ② **needy** ③ prosperous ④ proficient

5. "...Time stagnates here: we must surely have retired to rest at eight!"
"Always at nine in winter, and rise at four," said my host, **suppressing** a groan: and, as I fancied, by the motion of his arm's shadow, dashing a tear from his eyes.

The act of **suppressing** involves

- ① changing ② consoling ③ conveying ④ **restraining**

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10. Airline companies often call in professional grief counselors to help _____ the families and friends of crash victims.
11. How _____ that they finally inherited all that money at a time when it could no longer help to solve their problems!
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13. How can I ever forget that _____ inspector in the customs office who insisted that I empty every piece of luggage before him!
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15. Unfortunately, the so-called recreational facilities _____ nothing more than a card table and a small-screen TV set.
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Unit 6 Vocabulary in Context (Literary Text)

11. I saw him smile to himself—grin rather—and lapse into **ominous** musing whenever Mrs. Linton had occasion to be absent from the apartment.

Thoughts that are **ominous** are NOT

- ① gloomy ② dismal ③ hopeful ④ harmful

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