World War II was a hot war marked by the dropping of atomic bombs on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August, 1945. The United States and Great Britain had given Japan an ultimatum: surrender or face total destruction. When the Japanese did not respond, President Harry Truman gave his formal approval for the bombings by saying: “Release when ready.” The official surrender of the Japanese was signed on September 2, 1945.

Even though this hot war was over, a cold war was beginning. The Russians refused to give up control of countries they had helped liberate, and they refused to donate funds to help countries rebuild their cities. General George Patton, a United States Tank Commander was criticized strongly for stating that the Russians could not be trusted, yet his remarks were followed soon after by Sir Winston Churchill who said, “I view with profound misgivings the descent of an Iron Curtain between us and everything to the eastward.” He was referring to eastern European countries that were then coming under Soviet control.

The iron curtain was communism, a political philosophy that threatened to block truth and freedom and keep natives of such countries as Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia and East Germany from enjoying the many privileges of freedom. The cold war officially began in 1947 when President Harry S. Truman established The Truman Doctrine, a foreign policy statement that told the world that the United States would fight communism anywhere and everywhere. The Cold War lasted until 1990, a time when the Eastern bloc countries began to reject communist control.

Teacher Directions
1. Students in small teams discuss the following questions.
   - What are some differences between hot wars and cold wars?
   - Think about the meaning of an iron curtain. We use curtains to keep out sunlight or keep in warmth. What would people who lived behind an iron curtain not be able to hear or learn about—or see—or do—or even buy?
   - Do you think that it was a good idea for President Truman to announce in the Truman Doctrine that the United States was going to fight to free Europeans from communist control? Why or why not?
Students Speculate: The United States eventually became involved in other wars like Korea and Vietnam. Should our country take part in hot wars to free people from communist control or from dictatorships?

2. Make sure students understand the following points in discussing the questions.

3. Encourage a discussion of the basic principles of communism and communist control such as reliance on terror and oppression; control of press and radio; fixed elections (if any); control of the economy; and the suppression of personal freedoms. Would students like to live under communist control? Stress that Russia suffered enormous losses during World War II, and they fought hard on all fronts. Explain that even Churchill admired the Russians, yet he believed that they wanted to expand their power as well as the communist doctrine.

4. Discuss those countries that rebelled against Russian takeover attempts, such as Hungary and Yugoslavia. Even Romania, actually a monarchy, tried to regain control of its government. Prior to 1947, Soviet Russia contemplated a takeover of Greece and Turkey, an act that actually motivated Truman to write his now famous doctrine. The Marshall Plan, named after another famous American general, George C. Marshall, was actually called the Foreign Assistance Act. Ultimately, it contributed over $13.5 billion to help countries rebuild after the war. Russia refused to accept one dime. And, in Berlin, Germany, in 1961, the Russians built a wall through the middle of the city to keep people from escaping into Western Europe.

Teacher Directions

1. Students read All the People by Joy Hakim Chapter 3, “A (Very Short) History of Russia” or use other resources such as the Internet to research Russia’s history under the tsars, the Russian Revolution, and Russia’s development as a communist country.

2. Distribute the Student Sheet: The Berlin Wall. Students work in small teams to read aloud “A Death in Berlin.”

3. Each team brainstorms the differences in lifestyle between free and Communist countries.

4. Visit with each team encouraging them to be highly specific. For example, rather than answer “food,” ask them to list specific items.

5. Teams share their different responses. The students reflect on the following question.

6. Author Joy Hakim stresses in *All the People* that “communism collapsed because the system proved unworkable.” Ask the students to suggest possible reasons for its collapse. How was communism unworkable?

7. Conclude with a brief discussion of why people fight hot wars. Use “A Death in Berlin” as a focus stressing the last three sentences about defending peace to protect liberty.

**Teacher Directions**

1. Distribute and explain the Student Sheet: *Letter from Cuta*.

2. Students respond to the following writing prompts:

   Read the letter from Cuta (koo-tah), a young Romanian girl who lives in Moldavia/Bucovina in the northeast part of Romania. (First, locate Moldavia on a world map. It is in the far northeastern section of Romania, rather mountainous and very primitive.)

3. Students write back to Cuta and answer her questions.

**Teacher Directions**

1. Very briefly share information about Russia’s history under the tsars, the Russian Revolution, and Russia’s development as a communist country with the students. Resources that provide such information are Joy Hakim’s *All the People*, Chapter 3, “A (Very Short) History of Russia,” Internet sites, and library books.

2. Distribute the Student Sheet: *Communist Leaders—Yesterday and Today*, so students can discuss the personalities of four communist leaders: Slobodan Milosevic, Nicolae Ceausescu, Vladimir Lenin and Joseph Stalin.

3. In their teams, students discuss the lives of the four communist leaders.
   - What were their early lives like? Similarities? Differences?
   - Were their families poor or wealthy? Well-educated?
   - How did they gain power over the people?
   - How did they control the people once power was gained?
   - Did all of them engage in mean-spirited activities?
**Teacher Directions**

Get your students involved in recognizing that the lingering Communist influence is alive and well today in many countries – especially Romania – as a good example.

Use the following activities with your students.

**Library and Research** — Students use the Internet or school library. Assign teams to research the current conditions in communist countries, focusing on lifestyles, income levels, agriculture, population and politics. Communist countries include Cuba, Romania, North Korea, Yugoslavia, Poland, Bulgaria, and Mainland China.

**Language Arts** — Students write a brief story about Claudiu and Catalin, two male friends about twelve years old who climb on top of the Berlin Wall in the mid-1960s and see people living lives of freedom. Stress that the boys see restaurants, cars, television, fine clothes, new bicycles, and nice living conditions. The stories should reflect how different their lives are from what they see beyond the wall.

**Art** — Students draw either an iron curtain or a large wall. Students show the differences between life on each side of the wall or curtain.

**Music** — Students listen to music of the 1950s. Emphasize the fact that 1950s young people who lived in communist countries did not have access to music or television.

**Music** — Students listen to Hungarian, Russian, or Czechoslovakian music. Students may have access to such music through their families or the Internet. Students compare the music of the 1950s to the music of Eastern Europe.

Letter from Cuta

March 26, 2001

Dear Students in the United States,

My name is Cuta, and I am your age. I live in Moldavia in the northeastern part of Romania near the painted monasteries of Bucovina. You should look up information about the monasteries on the Internet. They are all painted in beautiful colors of lapis lazuli and aqua and citron yellow. Many tourists come to visit them. Sometimes the tourists wear shorts or jeans to these churches, so the nuns give them long aprons to tie around their waists. It is not considered respectful for men to wear shorts or women to wear anything but long skirts when visiting these lovely places.

I would like to share with you a bit about my life. I awaken in the morning to the sound of cow bells beneath my window. My village of Vatra Moldovitae is very primitive. We have no cars – because Romanian cars are very expensive. They are called Dacia’s, and they break down all the time, and there are no parts to fix them. We travel by carts pulled by horses or oxen. It takes a long time to get from one small village to the next.

I was very young when Nicolae Ceaucescu and his wife were killed in 1989 after a people’s revolution. They had set up our school system with books written only by Romanians under their control. We were never allowed to read anything from other countries. Only communist doctrine. People were not even allowed to read the Bible. Neighbors spied on neighbors. Most of the money in Romania went to build Ceausescu’s People’s Palace, a huge structure in Bucharest filled with gold and oil paintings and enormous rooms.
Today, at least we are free, but the communist influence still lasts. We have no nice smelling soaps like you have. Our toilet paper is rough and brown and like your crepe paper. I have never tasted a pecan! That’s a nut! Right! We have no lettuce and few fresh vegetables. A salad for us is just cucumbers and tomatoes and cheese.

Our clothes are odd, too. We cannot dress like Americans. Most of our families only make the equivalent of $30 to $40 a month. We cannot afford jeans or CD’s or stereo systems.

From 1969 until 1989, when the Ceaucescu’s were assassinated, most people in the bigger cities lived in teensy apartment high rises where they still live. They still have to hand wash their clothes – and hang them on balconies to dry. Most people in the villages have no telephones or television. Those luxuries are too expensive. There is no air conditioning either – and Romania can get very hot in the summer.

I am just like you, at least in age. But I cannot buy make-up or nice clothes or even a hamburger! CD’s produced by famous rock stars are too expensive. I work in an inn – cooking and serving food to local Romanians. I do not know if I will be able to finish school or not.

Please write to me and tell me about your lives. I want to hear about television and clothes and rock concerts and fun things you do on the weekends. Tell me what places you have traveled to. I have never left my small village. What is your favorite food? What kinds of clothes do you wear? What does an ocean look like? Are you going to go to college? I know what college is, but I will never be able to go to one.

What are your favorite books? We really don’t have books in our village, no library either.

Please write back and answer my questions. I will appreciate it very much.

Sincerely,
Early in the morning of Sunday, August 13, 1961, the East German government, concerned about the large number of citizens fleeing to the West, began to block off East Berlin from West Berlin. Tanks were posted at strategic places, and subway service between East and West stopped. Within days, a solid wall was being built.

Cars and pedestrians could cross only at checkpoints which were carefully guarded by armed soldiers. West Germans in 1963 wait to cross to the East at the Heinrich Heine Strasse crossing point.

Photos © Deutsches Historisches Museum
The Berlin Wall

The border cut through 192 streets and divided neighborhoods and families. People who lived in one section of the city were no longer able to commute to their jobs on the other side.

The wall was four meters high, usually with a concrete tube on top. Behind it (on the eastern side) lay a well-lit area called the “death area.” Refugees who reached this area were shot without warning. Behind this was a trench to prevent vehicles from driving through, then a patrol track, a corridor with watchdogs, watchtowers and bunkers, and a second wall.

Photos © Heiko Berkhardt Collection @ www.dailysoft.com/berlinwall
The Berlin Wall

Spectators crowd one of the openings in the Berlin Wall.

An electronic billboard in West Germany just after the fall of the Berlin Wall proclaims:

“The border patrol have surrendered already. Our fellow countrymen come and go. The Border patrol cannot manage the onset, they have stopped checking documents.”

Photos courtesy of Frederik Ramm @ www.remote.org/frederik/culture/berlin/
A Death in Berlin
By Dennis L. Bark

I visited Berlin in 1962, when I was twenty years old. On the East Berlin side of Checkpoint Charlie, on a Friday afternoon in August, my brother and I passed the border control, gave our coins to the East German Red Cross, and were walking through the no-man’s-land, toward the white line on the pavement dividing the Soviet sector from West Berlin.

Suddenly we heard gunshots and saw people running. A Vopo pointed his machine gun at us and told us to stop. My brother and I didn’t know why, of course. But an eighteen-year-old boy, Peter Fechter, had just been shot and was bleeding to death at the wall, one hundred meters from where we were standing, because he wanted to go from one part of Berlin to another, from dictatorship to democracy.

The Voppo kept us standing there for thirty minutes—I learned later that, during this half hour, the East Germans were permitting Peter Fechter to bleed to death—then he told us to cross the border. When I put my foot over that white line, I had a feeling in my stomach that I still remember. I was free again, and, for the first time in my life, I began to think about why people fought wars and revolutions and defended peace to protect liberty. I thought that Peter Fechter knew how precious freedom was, which is why he risked his life to get it.

Dennis L. Bark is a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution.