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Level » Advanced

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Berlin Wall's most iconic paintings under threat



Berlin Wall murals by the French artist Thierry Noir who has joined protests to save the wall Action Press/Rex

Before reading

- 1 Look at the photos of the Berlin Wall on page 5. What do you know about the history of the wall? Work in pairs and answer the questions below.

- 1 When was the Berlin Wall built?
a ☐ 1947 b ☐ 1955 c ☐ 1961 d ☐ 1966
- 2 How long was the wall in its final version?
a ☐ 53km b ☐ 89km c ☐ 104km d ☐ 155km
- 3 How many people are believed to have escaped across the wall?
a ☐ Nearly 100 b ☐ About 350 c ☐ Around 1,500 d ☐ Approximately 5,000
- 4 Which US president visited Berlin after the wall was built and said: "Ich bin ein Berliner."?
a ☐ Kennedy b ☐ Roosevelt c ☐ Truman d ☐ Eisenhower

5 What was the open section of land between the east and west side of the wall known as?

- a ☐ The iron curtain b ☐ The death strip
c ☐ The Eastern Bloc d ☐ Checkpoint Charlie

6 When was the wall finally opened and partly knocked down?

- a ☐ 1983 b ☐ 1987 c ☐ 1989 d ☐ 1992

- 2 Look again at the photos A-C of the Berlin Wall. How could you describe the current artwork on the wall? Tick the appropriate adjectives.

- ☐ anarchic ☐ colourful ☐ conservative ☐ conventional
☐ monochrome ☐ orthodox ☐ political
☐ radical ☐ revolutionary ☐ subversive
☐ thought-provoking ☐ traditional ☐ unadventurous

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- 3 Look at these words from the article about the Berlin Wall. What do you think it is about? Check any unknown words in a dictionary.
outdoor gallery, mural, symbol, divided city, dismantle, gentrification, developers, protestors, authenticity, preservation

Article

Berlin Wall's most iconic paintings under threat

- 1 The longest-remaining stretch of Berlin Wall, known as the East Side Gallery, is the German capital's second most-visited tourist site and the mural of former Soviet and East German leaders Leonid Brezhnev and Eric Honecker in a passionate clinch is one of the star attractions.
- 2 But the 1.3km-long outdoor gallery, which is covered in paintings by artists from around the world, is now threatened by the city's strident gentrification, with a significant section of it due to be dismantled soon to make way for luxury flats.
- 3 "Our guide book describes it as an unbroken length of wall," said Coco García López, a 21-year-old art student from Madrid on a one-week visit to the city. But the gallery, she notes, already has a gaping hole after a 50-metre section was removed some years ago to provide access to a boat landing stage and an open view on the river for the O2 World arena, which dominates the land adjacent to the gallery. "If Berlin's not careful, it will lose all of this beautiful structure," she said.
- 4 The latest threat is from Living Levels, a 63-metre-high tower of 36 flats and offices, which its developers, Living Bauhaus, describe as a "new dimension of life" offering "breathtaking panoramic views".
- 5 But opponents of the plan said it would destroy the aesthetics of the gallery, which is visited by an estimated 800,000 visitors a year, as well as insulting the memory of those killed on the former death strip while trying to escape from East Berlin.
- 6 Kani Alavi, head of the artists' initiative East Side Gallery, who led a \$3.3m restoration project of the wall four years ago, and was one of the original artists to paint on the wall, said the whole

structure was now under threat. "We see this act as a direct act of destruction towards the artwork, to the extent that you might as well tear the whole thing down," he said.

- 7 The parts of the wall that are to be removed so the flats' owners will have access to the water bear the famous "heads with big lips" paintings by the French artist Thierry Noir. Last month the 54-year-old artist joined protesters at the wall to fight for the preservation of his work as a part of the gallery and the wall's survival.
- 8 "All the paintings have become a symbol of freedom in Berlin and Europe," he said. "Unlike elsewhere in the city, where the majority of the wall has been removed, this is a unique opportunity to preserve a large section of what was once a death strip. If you remove the sections, you're destroying the authenticity of this place."
- 9 The district's mayor, the Green MP Franz Schulz, confirmed that parts of the wall would be removed: "The investor has a legal right to demand this, so we'll have to do it." But he insisted the removal of the wall would not only make space for the flats but also for a new walkway for cyclists and pedestrians.
- 10 Pausing at another of the wall's iconic images - of an East German Trabant car appearing to tear through the wall - García López, the Spanish tourist not yet born when the Berlin Wall was brought down in November 1989, said: "It's the best place for me to come and have any sort of an inkling of what it must have been like to live in a divided city. If this goes, then that opportunity goes too."

Kate Connolly Berlin

Glossary

iconic (adjective) acting as a sign or symbol of something

clinch (noun, informal) an embrace where two lovers hold each other very tightly

adjacent to (adjective) when a building, room etc is situated next to or near something

tear down (phrasal verb) to pull or knock down a building, wall etc

inkling (noun) a slight knowledge of something that has happened or is about to happen

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While reading

1 Read the article and complete the sentences with a word or phrase from the text.

a The second most popular visitor attraction in Berlin is called the .

b Part of the site will soon be taken down because of the construction of .

c A section of the wall was previously taken away, which left a .

d The new development has the name .

e The look of the outdoor gallery will be ruined according to the .

f Kani Alavi is worried that the whole of the East Side Gallery is currently .

g Thierry Noir argues that the paintings symbolise in the city and beyond.

h The mayor claims that the removal of the wall will also benefit both .

2 Read the article again. Answer the questions.

a What is one of the key images on the East Side Gallery? Why do you think this is?

b What does the author mean by the “strident gentrification” of Berlin?

c Why might Coco García López have felt disappointed?

d What argument relating to the past do opponents make against the new plan?

e What association do Kani Alavi and Thierry Noir both have with the wall?

f Why is Thierry Noir against removing the sections of the wall?

g Why does García López think the wall is important for young people like her?

3 Work with a partner. Look back at the photos on page 5 of the wall and the article. Do you think that the East Side Gallery should be preserved as a whole? Why?/Why not?

After reading

1 Look at these examples of the passive from the article.

But the 1.3 km-long outdoor gallery, which **is covered** in paintings by artists ... (paragraph 2)
... with a significant section of it due **to be dismantled** soon ... (paragraph 2)

... where the majority of the wall **has been removed** ... (paragraph 8)
When the Berlin Wall **was brought down** in November 1989 ... (paragraph 10)

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Complete the text with the active or passive of the verbs in brackets.

The East Side Gallery (a) (know) as one of the most thought-provoking attractions in Berlin and it (b) (describe) in detail in all the major guidebooks to the city. Modern-day visitors (c) (attract) to the gallery by the colourful images and sense of history. Many of the pictures (d) (reflect) the past of the wall, which (e) (build) at the height of the Cold War in the 1960s. However, at present, developers (f) (plan) to build luxury flats in the area and a large section of the wall is likely (g) (dismantle). Opponents (h) (say) that the authenticity of the wall (i) (threaten) by the new proposals and they (j) (argue) that it should (k) (keep) in its original state.

- 2 Look at these examples of the possessive 's from the article, plus the use of its and it's. Work with a partner and discuss how we use the apostrophe in these cases.

... the German capital's second most-visited tourist site ... (paragraph 1)

... the flats' owners will have access to the water ... (paragraph 7)

The latest threat is from Living Levels, which its developers, Living Bauhaus, describe as ... (paragraph 4)

It's the best place for me to come ... (paragraph 10)

Put the apostrophes in the correct place in these sentences.

a Berlin's famous East Gallery lost some of its original paintings 10 years ago.

b Protestors against changes to the wall say that it's one of the city's key tourist sites.

c The main protestors' names are Kani Alvi and Thierry Noir.

d Thierry Noir's giant paintings show a number of people's faces.

e This painting is particularly famous and it's in many visitors' photographs.

Activity - writing

a As a class, brainstorm planned building developments either in your country or abroad eg a new shopping centre, motorway, stadium, office block etc.

b Work with a partner. Choose and research one of the developments.

c Look back at the original article and note down key vocabulary for writing about a new construction project.

d With your partner, plan and write a short text about the proposed development. Include the following paragraphs:

1 An introduction covering the "what, where, when and why" of the development.

2 What the opponents of the project argue.

3 What the developers say.

4 A conclusion highlighting what is likely to happen in the future.

e Swap your text with another pair. Then comment on and discuss the content of the texts. For example: Does the new development sound like a good idea?

Answers

Before reading

1 1 c 2 d 3 d 4 a 5 b 6 c

2 anarchic, colourful, political, radical, revolutionary, subversive, thought-provoking

While reading

1 a East Side Gallery b luxury flats (and offices) c gaping hole d Living Levels

e opponents of the plan f under threat g freedom h cyclists and pedestrians

2 a The passionate clinch between Brezhnev and Honecker. It is a shocking and thought-provoking image which reminds people of the political past behind the wall. b That older, poorer parts of Berlin are being 'improved' by property developers in a determined and aggressive way, which is possibly unsympathetic to the history of the city.

c There was a big difference between how the outdoor gallery was described in her guidebook and how it actually appears. There was no mention of a gaping hole in her book.

d It would insult the memory of those killed while trying to escape.

e They are both artists who have painted on the wall.

f It will be a missed opportunity to preserve what was once a death strip. It will destroy the authenticity of the place.

g It can help her to understand what it was like to live in a divided city.

After reading

1 a is known b is described c are attracted d reflect e was built f are planning g to be dismantled h say i is threatened / will be threatened j argue k be kept

2 a Berlin's famous East Gallery lost some of its original paintings 10 years ago.

b Protestors against changes to the wall say that it's one of the city's key tourist sites.

c The main protestors' names are Kani Alvi and Thierry Noir.

d Thierry Noir's giant paintings show a number of people's faces.

e This painting is particularly famous and it's in many visitors' photographs.

Page 5 Picture sheet information: Picture A: Tourists visiting the wall B: Brezhnev and Honecker "kiss" C: Trabant car mural D: Building the wall in 1961 E: The wall 1962 F: Building the wall in 1961

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Picture sheet



Picture A Johannes Eisele/AFP/Getty Images



Picture D EPA



Picture B Sean Gallup/Getty Images



Picture E CSU Archives/Everett Collection/Rex Features



Picture C Sean Gallup/Getty Images



Picture F AP