



# Germany

## TERMS & NAMES

Berlin Wall

reunification

Ludwig van  
Beethoven

Rainer Maria Rilke

## MAIN IDEA

Germany has overcome many obstacles to become both a unified and a modern nation.

## WHY IT MATTERS NOW

Germany has helped to shape recent European history and contemporary Western culture.

## DATELINE

### BERLIN, GERMANY, OCTOBER 3, 1990—

It is just past midnight. Church bells are ringing, fireworks are exploding, bands are playing, and the streets are filled with celebrating Germans. At midnight, the treaty to reunite East and West Germany became official. Germany is whole once more!

Just a year ago, the Berlin Wall—a 103-mile-long barrier of concrete and barbed wire—still separated East and West Berlin. Constructed in 1961, the Wall kept East Germans from escaping from their Communist government to democratic West Germany. Then, in 1989, as the Communist government weakened, the Wall came down.



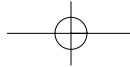
**Location** • Germans celebrate unification in front of the Reichstag, the seat of the federal government. ▲



**Location** • The largest remaining sections of the Berlin Wall, which stand up to 15 feet high, are covered with paintings and signatures. ▲

## A Divided Germany

Today, the reunified nation of Germany is one of the largest countries in Europe. When World War II ended in 1945, however, Germany was divided. U.S., French, and British soldiers occupied the new West German nation, and Soviet soldiers occupied the new East Germany.



**West Germany** The United States helped West Germany set up a democratic government. In part, the United States supported the new nation because it was located between the Communist countries of Eastern Europe and the rest of Western Europe.

With the help of U.S. loans, West Germany experienced a so-called economic miracle. In 20 years, it rebuilt its factories and became one of the world's richest nations. Its economy later became the driving force behind the European Union.

**East Germany** In contrast to West Germany, East Germany remained poor. Most East Germans saw West Germany, and Western Europe in general, as a place where people had better lives. East Germany's Communist government, however, discouraged contact between east and west.

By 1989, the Soviet Union's control of Eastern Europe was weakening. Hungary, a Soviet ally, relaxed control over its borders with Western Europe. East Germans began crossing the Hungarian border into Austria and eventually made their way into West Germany. After the **Berlin Wall** came down in 1989, more East Germans fled to West Germany.

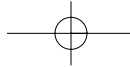
### BACKGROUND

Although Berlin was inside East Germany, it had a large free zone defended by the Allies. The Berlin Wall separated the two parts of the city: East Berlin and West Berlin.



### GEOGRAPHY SKILLBUILDER: Interpreting a Map

1. **Location** • Which country is nearest to Germany's national capital?
2. **Place** • Which was larger, East or West Germany?



**Region** • The new Volkswagen Beetle is typical of German car design, known for its simplicity and style. The first Volkswagen was designed by Ferdinand Porsche (POOR•sheh) in 1934. ▲

## Reunified Germany

Since the 1990 **reunification**, or the reuniting of East and West Germany, the German government has spent billions of dollars rebuilding the eastern part of the country. The effort has included

roads, factories, housing, and hospitals. The city of Berlin, once again the nation's capital, was also rebuilt. The newly reunified nation also restored the Reichstag (RIEKSH•tahg), where the Federal Assembly meets.

However, reunification has also caused tensions between “Ossies” (OSS•eez) and “Wessies” (VESS•eez). Many Ossies complain about the lack of jobs and the cost of housing. Many Wessies complain about paying taxes to rebuild the nation and to help support the former East Germans.

### Reading Social Studies

**A. Clarifying** Why did East Germany need to be rebuilt and not West Germany?

### Vocabulary

**Ossies:**  
former East  
Germans

**Wessies:**  
former West  
Germans

## German Culture

Germany's rich cultural traditions may help to unite its people, who are especially proud of their music and literature. Germans are also famous for designing high-quality products, such as cars, electronic appliances, and other complex machinery.

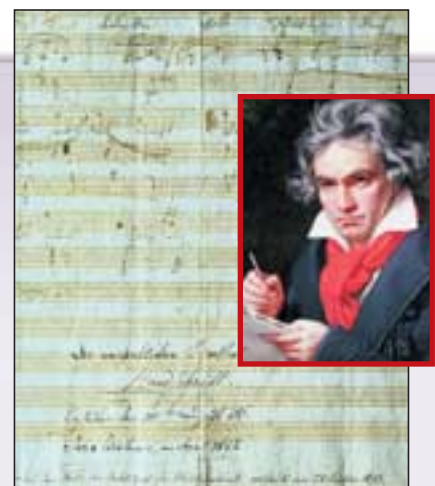
**Music** Three of Germany's best-known composers are Johann Sebastian Bach (bahck) (1685–1750), George Frederick Handel (HAHN•duhl) (1685–1759), and **Ludwig van Beethoven** (LOOD•vig vahn BAY•toe•ven) (1770–1827). Their music is still performed and recorded all over the world. German composer Richard Wagner (VAG•nuhr) (1813–1883) wrote many operas, including a series based on German myths and legends known as the Ring Cycle.



**Beethoven** Perhaps the best-loved German composer is Ludwig van Beethoven. Beethoven began to lose his hearing when he was in his 20s. By the time he was 50, he was almost deaf.

Beethoven refused to let his deafness stop him from creating music,

however. “I will grapple with Fate, it shall not overcome me,” he wrote. In 1824, he finished his Ninth Symphony, which ends with a section containing the well-known “Ode to Joy.” An orchestra played this same symphony at an open-air concert during the destruction of the Berlin Wall.







### BACKGROUND

More than 100 million people around the world speak German.

**Literature** One of the greatest writers in the German language was **Rainer Maria Rilke** (RIL•keh) (1875–1926). His poems, which are still admired and studied today, were a way for Rilke to communicate his feelings and experiences.

Other important 20th-century German authors include Günter Grass (grahss) (b. 1927) and Thomas Mann (mahn) (1875–1955). Grass has written about the horrors of World War II, the setting for his novel *The Tin Drum*. Both writers were awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature—Mann in 1929 and Grass in 1999.

**Place** • Half-timber architecture, shown here, is common throughout Germany. ▲

## SECTION 4 ASSESSMENT

### Terms & Names

- 1. Identify:** (a) Berlin Wall (b) reunification (c) Ludwig van Beethoven  
(d) Rainer Maria Rilke

### Taking Notes

- 2.** Use a chart like this one to compare aspects of Germany before and after reunification.

Before Reunification	After Reunification

### Main Ideas

- 3. (a)** Describe the economic miracle that occurred in West Germany.  
**(b)** Why has there been tension between the Ossies and the Wessies?  
**(c)** On what projects has Germany spent billions of dollars since 1990?

### Critical Thinking

#### 4. Synthesizing

What makes Germany an important European country?

#### Think About

- ♦ its location
- ♦ its size
- ♦ its role in modern history

### ACTIVITY -OPTION-

Reread the “Dateline” feature at the beginning of the section. Write a **short story** describing what it might have been like to celebrate the reunification of Germany in 1990.