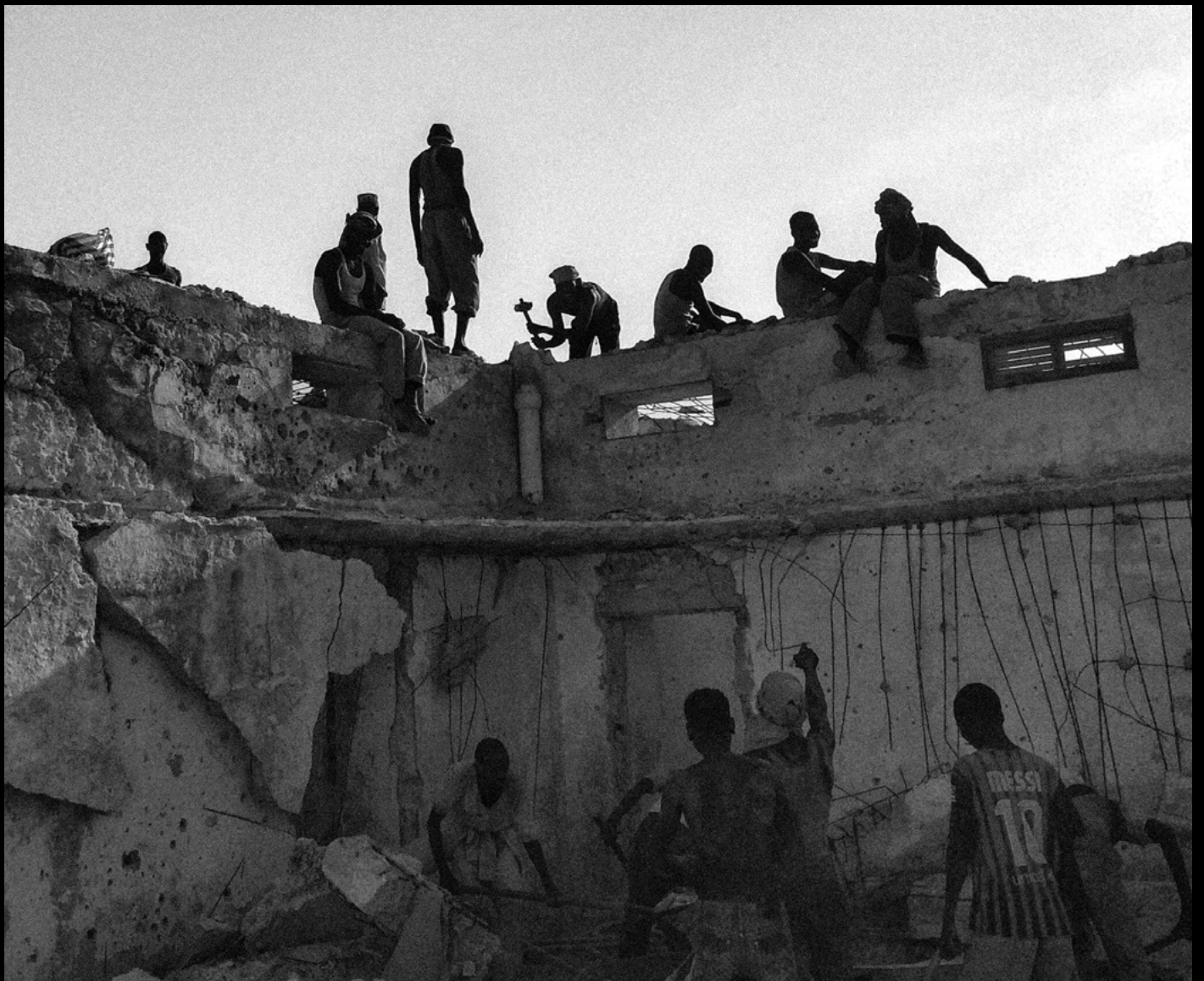


# THE WALL

A DOCUMENTARY BY ROOPA GOGINENI AND TREVOR SNAPP  
TEACHER'S GUIDE



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Stanford Program on International and Cross-Cultural Education (SPICE)

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## **Cover Image**

Courtesy of Roopa Gogineni, CatchLight Fellow, Photographer and Filmmaker, *The Wall*

Dear Educators and Students,

My first encounter with Mogadishu was during an African history course in college. One morning, my professor arrived with a box of slides from his fieldwork in the '70s. In the darkened lecture hall he clicked through the carousel of images, projecting a stunning city on the sea, bustling sidewalk cafes, and bougainvillea pouring over whitewashed walls. I was enthralled.



My wonder was all the more pronounced because until then, my defining image of Mogadishu had come from *Black Hawk Down*, the 2001 Hollywood blockbuster set amid Somalia's civil war. Filmed in Morocco without any Somali actors, the movie followed a unit of U.S. army rangers besieged by violent throngs of Somalis, emerging zombie-like from bombed out buildings.

The gulf between these two versions of Mogadishu became a driving question for me as a student and then later, as a visual storyteller. How and why do certain stories and visual narratives emerge and come to dominate the collective consciousness? I invite you to consider this question as you watch my film.

While there is not enough space here to explore Somalia's complex history in full, the following background is helpful to keep in mind as you watch.

From Italian occupation to Ethiopian invasions to internal clan conflict, Somalia has known violence for generations. Since 2006, the country has faced the threat of Al Shabaab, an Islamist group seeking to rid Somalia of foreign influence and to establish an Islamic state.

Al Shabaab occupied Mogadishu for several years until mounting pressure from African Union peacekeeping forces forced their withdrawal in 2011. Upon arriving in the capital, the AU forces established their base at the airport, transforming what had once been a Somali national army training camp into a heavily fortified green zone. Nearly fifteen years later, the airport base (known to Somalis as Halane) bustles with foreign diplomats, intelligence operatives, aid workers, mercenaries, and peacekeeping forces, yet it remains largely inaccessible to local Somalis. Meanwhile, Al Shabaab launches sporadic terrorist attacks across the city, which are used to justify the impenetrable walls surrounding Halane.

After graduating, I moved to Kenya and traveled to Somalia whenever possible. At the time, most reporting on Somalia was trauma-laden, populated by pirates, terrorists and famine. These were real problems facing the country, but the narrative made no room for the everyday life I witnessed while visiting Mogadishu—newly opened restaurants, ubiquitous construction sites, and Friday crowds on the beach. I set out to make films and photographs to confront and complicate the popular understanding of the city.

The misunderstanding surrounding Somalia stemmed from a fundamental problem. Most of the people responsible for telling Somalia's story to the outside world could not actually access the country. When foreign journalists traveled to Mogadishu, they remained largely confined to the airport base with other foreigners. When they managed to travel beyond Halane, they moved in tanks, embedded with AU peacekeeping forces. As a freelancer, there were fewer restrictions around my movement. I could hire private security and move with relative freedom about the city. Crossing back and forth, I was constantly struck by the assumptions people held about what lay beyond the wall, assumptions which inspired this short film.

Though this is a story about Mogadishu, I suspect countless films could be made about places around the world, past and present, divided by walls of our own making. It reveals an all too common yet still astonishing human tendency to build barriers, to live so near to one another yet to inhabit entirely separate realities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized initial 'R' followed by a long horizontal line that ends in two small dots.

**Roopa Gogineni**  
Photographer and Filmmaker

**Questions to consider:**

1. As noted in my letter, I asked the question, “How and why do certain stories and visual narratives emerge and come to dominate the collective consciousness?” Keeping this question in mind, write about (or discuss) another historical episode that you are aware of where certain stories and visual narratives have emerged and come to dominate the collective consciousness.
2. Think about a location (whether a neighborhood, city, state, country, etc.) that you were initially introduced to through visual images. How did those images shape—or fail to shape—your interest in that location?
3. The walls in this film are quite literal, but divisions and misunderstandings between people can develop even when barriers are more socially constructed and don’t necessarily restrict physical movement. Write about another wall (physical or metaphorical) that divides a community you know or have researched. How does this division shape people’s understanding of each other?

Dear Educators and Students,

At CatchLight, we believe that visual storytelling is not only a means of documentation—it is a method of inquiry. In a world saturated with images, the most impactful ones do more than inform; they invite us to look closer, to ask deeper questions, and to engage critically with the realities they reflect. We believe photography, at its most powerful, offers an opportunity to pause, interpret, and understand the forces that shape people’s lives—to see what matters. Photography creates a space where empathy and analysis coexist.



*The Wall*, a film by CatchLight Fellow Roopa Gogineni, explores the fortified green zone that divides Mogadishu, Somalia—a physical and symbolic barrier separating international actors from the city’s residents. At the heart of the story is not just the structure of the wall, but the lives that continue around and beyond it.

Gogineni’s work challenges dominant narratives about Somalia, moving beyond the familiar images of crisis and conflict. Through intimate access and careful collaboration with her subjects, she reveals a city striving to be seen on its own terms. Her approach reflects CatchLight’s core belief: that stories rooted in deep listening and long-term engagement can shift how we see the world—and how the world sees itself.

*The Wall* is an invitation to explore questions of visibility, security, access, and voice. It is also a tool for teaching visual literacy—encouraging students not only to watch, but to read the film’s imagery with the same rigor they might bring to a text. As you engage with this curriculum, we hope you’ll consider how images are constructed, whose perspectives they reflect, and what they ask of us as viewers and citizens.

We are proud to support storytellers like Roopa Gogineni, who expand our understanding of the world.

Warm regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "E. Mailliet Storm".

**Elodie Mailliet Storm**  
CEO, CatchLight

**Questions to consider:**

1. What are other examples of “dominant narratives” of a country that you are familiar with?
2. How does *The Wall*—an example of visual storytelling—serve as both a means of documentation and a method of inquiry?

**While viewing the film:**

3. Consider how *The Wall* visually shapes your understanding of Somalia, of borders, and of conflict and community.
4. Is there a sense of collaboration between filmmaker and subject? What evidence of trust do you see?

## THE WALL

### Grade Level and Subjects

This teacher's guide is recommended for the following secondary and community college classes:

Contemporary Issues  
Debate  
Global/International Issues  
Government  
Law  
Political Science  
Social Studies  
World Cultures  
World History

### Connections to Curriculum Standards

This teacher's guide has been designed to meet certain national history, social studies, and geography standards as defined by the National Center for History in the Schools, the National Council for the Social Studies, and the National Council for Geographic Education. The standards for the lesson are listed here.

#### **National History Standards (from the National Center for History in the Schools)**

##### **World History**

- Era 9, Standard 1A, Grades 9–12: Explain why fascism was discredited after World War II and how popular democratic institutions were established in such countries as Italy, the German Federal Republic, Greece, India, Spain, and Portugal between 1945 and 1975. [Marshal evidence of antecedent circumstances]
- Era 9, Standard 1B, Grades 5–12: Explain the causes and international and local consequences of major Cold War crises, such as the Berlin blockade, the Korean War, the Polish workers' protest, the Hungarian revolt, the Suez crisis, the Cuban missile crisis, the Indonesian civil war, and the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. [Formulate historical questions]
- Era 9, Standard 2C, Grades 9–12: Assess the strengths of democratic institutions and civic culture in countries such as Britain, France, Germany, Canada, the United States, Japan, India, and Mexico and analyze potential challenges to civil society in democratic states. [Interrogate historical data]
- Era 9, Standard 2C, Grades 9–12: Assess the success of democratic reform movements in challenging authoritarian governments in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. [Formulate a position or course of action on an issue]



- Era 9, Standard 3A, Grades 7–12: Explain the changing configuration of political boundaries in the world since 1900 and analyze connections between nationalist ideology and the proliferation of sovereign states. [Marshal evidence of antecedent circumstances]
- Era 9, Standard 3A, Grades 5–12: Compare causes, consequences, and major patterns of international migrations in the late 20th century with world population movements of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th. [Draw comparisons across eras and regions]
- World History Across Eras, Standard 1, Grades 5–12: Analyze how ideals and institutions of freedom, equality, justice, and citizenship have changed over time and from one society to another.

### **National Social Studies Standards (from the National Council for the Social Studies)**

- Time, Continuity, and Change; Thematic Strand II: Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of the past and its legacy.
- People, Places, and Environments; Thematic Strand III: Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of people, places, and environments.
- Individual Development and Identity; Thematic Strand IV: Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of individual development and identity.
- Individuals, Groups, and Institutions; Thematic Strand V: Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of interactions among individuals, groups, and institutions.
- Power, Authority, and Governance; Thematic Strand VI: Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of how people create, interact with, and change structures of power, authority, and governance.
- Global Connections; Thematic Strand IX: Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of global connections and interdependence.

### **National Geography Standards (from the National Council for Geographic Education)**

The National Geography Standards were established to form a framework that provides guidelines on what students should know about geography. *The Wall* helps to address the following National Geography Standards:

- Standard 4: The physical and human characteristics of places.
- Standard 5: That people create regions to interpret Earth's complexity.
- Standard 6: How culture and experience influence peoples' perceptions of places and regions.

- Standard 9: The characteristics, distribution, and migration of human populations on Earth’s surface.
- Standard 12: The processes, patterns, and functions of human settlement.
- Standard 13: How the forces of cooperation and conflict among people influence the division and control of Earth’s surface.
- Standard 14: How human actions modify the physical environment.
- Standard 17: How to apply geography to interpret the past.
- Standard 18: How to apply geography to interpret the present and plan for the future.

### Essential Questions

Through exploring *The Wall* and the activities outlined in this teacher’s guide, students will be able to answer and discuss the following questions:

- What is a border?
- What does peace mean for different people?
- What is it like living with the daily risk of violence?
- How does the wall in Halane affect people’s ability to move freely within their own city?
- What does the presence of a UN compound with diplomats and peacekeepers suggest about Somalia’s ability to govern and control its own land and people?
- How are people, communities, or nations connected across borders, even in places divided by walls or conflict?
- How do the concerns of people living on each side of the wall in Halane reflect broader issues of safety and inequality?
- How do first-hand perspectives, such as interviews and quotations, help us better understand history and human experiences?
- What modern-day parallels are there between what people experience in Mogadishu and what many people are experiencing in other parts of the world?

### Objectives

Through exploring *The Wall* and the activities outlined in this teacher’s guide, students will:

- examine the concept of borders and how they affect people’s lives;
- explore different understandings of peace and what it means to various individuals and communities;
- analyze what it is like to live with the daily risk of violence, particularly in conflict-affected areas;
- evaluate how walls and security barriers affect freedom of movement within a city or region;
- examine the concept of sovereignty in relation to the presence of a UN compound with diplomats and peacekeepers in Somalia;

- investigate how people, communities, or nations remain connected across borders, even in places divided by conflict;
- understand the concerns and experiences of people living on each side of the wall in Halane;
- evaluate the importance of first-hand perspectives, such as interviews and quotations, to gain deeper insight into history and human experience; and
- identify modern-day parallels between the experiences of people in Mogadishu and those in other parts of the world today.

**Materials** *The Wall* film

Letters to Educators and Students

Roopa Gogineni, pp. IV–V, 30 copies

Elodie Mailliet Storm, p. VI, 30 copies

Handout 1, *Viewing Questions*, p. 7, 30 copiesHandout 2, *Divided Spaces: What Do Borders Mean?*, p. 8, 30 copiesHandout 3, *Analyzing Perspectives: Quote Analysis*, p. 9, 30 copiesAnswer Key, *Divided Spaces: What Do Borders Mean?*, p. 10**Equipment** Computer with Internet access  
Computer projector and screen  
Computer speakers  
Whiteboard and markers**Teacher Preparation** Instructions and materials are based on a class size of 30 students. Adjust accordingly for different class sizes.

1. Familiarize yourself with handouts, answer key, and the film *The Wall*.
2. Set up and test the computer, projector, and speakers. Confirm ability to play video and project sound audibly to students.
3. Make the appropriate number of copies of handouts.

**Time** Two or three full class periods**Procedures**

1. Inform students that they will watch a short documentary called *The Wall*. The film explores life in Mogadishu, Somalia’s capital, where a large security wall divides the city. They will examine the impact the wall has on people living on both sides, consider the meaning of borders, and compare this wall to other divided spaces in world history.
2. Divide the class into pairs of students. Distribute copies of *Letters to Educators and Students* to each pair. Inform students that the letters were written by photographer and filmmaker, Roopa Gogineni, and Elodie Mailliet Storm, the CEO of Catchlight, a nonprofit media organization that discovers and develops visual storytellers.

3. Ask student pairs to spend 10 minutes reading the letters and briefly discuss the questions. The following questions are also included with the letters.
  - As noted in my letter, I asked the question, “How and why do certain stories and visual narratives emerge and come to dominate the collective consciousness?” Keeping this question in mind, write about (or discuss) another historical episode that you are aware of where certain stories and visual narratives have emerged and come to dominate the collective consciousness.
  - Think about a location (whether a neighborhood, city, state, country, etc.) that you were initially introduced to through visual images. How did those images shape—or fail to shape—your interest in that location?
  - The walls in this film are quite literal, but divisions and misunderstandings between people can develop even when barriers are more socially constructed and don’t necessarily restrict physical movement. Write about another wall (physical or metaphorical) that divides a community you know or have researched. How does this division shape people’s understanding of each other?
  - What are other examples of “dominant narratives” of a country that you are familiar with?
  - How does *The Wall*—an example of visual storytelling—serve as both a means of documentation and a method of inquiry?
  - Consider how *The Wall* visually shapes your understanding of Somalia, of borders, and of conflict and community.
  - Is there a sense of collaboration between filmmaker and subject? What evidence of trust do you see?
4. Distribute Handout 1, *Viewing Questions*, to each student. Review the directions on the handout with students and instruct them to complete the questions while watching the film.
5. Show *The Wall* to the class. Stop the film when necessary if students need time to write down their responses to the handout.
6. Debrief the film by discussing student responses to Handout 1, *Viewing Questions*.

### Activity

1. Next, divide the class into four small groups and distribute a copy of Handout 2, *Divided Spaces: What Do Borders Mean?* Review the directions and assign each group a border listed on the handout. Each group will need to research their divided zone or border and briefly present their border to the class, focusing on:
  - When it was constructed
  - Why the wall or border exists
  - Who created it and why
  - How it affects national and/or international populations

- Whether it is still standing today
2. Ask each group to share their findings.
  3. Conclude the activity with a class discussion of what borders symbolize using the following discussion questions:
    - What is the purpose of a border?
    - Who decides where borders go?
    - Are borders natural or created?
    - Do borders protect people or divide them? Or can they do both?
    - How does a physical wall change how people see each other on either side?
    - Can people truly be free if they are restricted by borders?
    - Are there walls in the world today that you think will disappear in your lifetime? Why or why not?

### Extension Activity

1. In the final activity, students will choose and analyze one quote from Handout 3, *Analyzing Perspectives: Quote Analysis*.
2. Instruct the students to write a paragraph (5–7 sentences) explaining what they think the quote means, using at least one guiding question below in their response.
  - Who is speaking, and what might their perspective be?
  - How does the quote connect to themes like freedom, division, and/or trust?
  - What contrasts or tensions does the quote reveal?
  - What emotions or ideas does the quote express?
  - Can you relate to any part of the quote? Does the quote challenge or change how you see the world?
3. Conclude by asking students to share their analysis with the class.

### Assessment

- Assess student participation in group and class discussions, evaluating students' ability to:
- clearly state their opinions, questions, and/or answers;
  - provide thoughtful answers;
  - exhibit sensitivity toward different cultures and ideas;
  - respect and acknowledge other students' comments; and
  - ask relevant and insightful questions.

## VIEWING QUESTIONS

You're about to watch *The Wall*, a short documentary by filmmakers Roopa Gogineni and Trevor Snapp. The film explores life in Mogadishu, the capital of Somalia, where a large security wall divides the city. On one side, millions of Somali people face the daily danger of violence. On the other side, there's a UN compound where diplomats, aid workers, and peacekeepers live and work. It's very hard to move between these two sides. As you watch the film, think about the following open-ended questions.

Use the space below to answer each question. You may want to take notes on another sheet of paper as you watch the video.

1. What do people think life is like on the other side of the wall?
2. What does peace mean for different people? (e.g., Samiira, Mebrak)
3. What does the presence of a UN compound with diplomats and peacekeepers suggest about Somalia's ability to govern and control its own land and people?
4. Do you think foreign aid workers should be separated by walls from the people they're helping? Why or why not?
5. How does the wall affect people's ability to move freely within their own city?
6. What might it feel like to live in a place where you're not allowed to cross into another part of your own hometown?

**DIVIDED SPACES: WHAT DO BORDERS MEAN?**  
**(GROUP WORK)**

Your group will research one of these major walls or divided zones in world history:

1. Halane Wall (Somalia)
2. Berlin Wall (Germany)
3. Korean Demilitarized Zone (DMZ)
4. U.S.–Mexico Border Wall

Each group will briefly present its border to the class, focusing on:

- When it was constructed
- Why the wall or border exists
- Who created it and why
- How it affects national and/or international populations
- Whether it is still standing today

## ANALYZING PERSPECTIVES: QUOTE ANALYSIS

Choose one quote from the list provided. Read the quote carefully and think about what it means. Write a paragraph (5–7 sentences) explaining what you think the quote means. Use at least one guiding question below in your response, and be prepared to share your analysis with the class.

Quotes (choose one):

1. “I find it quite sinister and sad in some ways. It feels like no-man’s land.”—Mebrak Tareke
2. “Wherever there is peace, there is beauty.”—Samiira Mohamud
3. “I don’t like the idea of setting myself apart personally from the local community ... It creates such a gap between me and the locals, and I think it breaks trust.”—Mebrak Tareke
4. “If you’re turned away from waters where you want to fish, it hurts. You feel like someone who has been restricted from his land.”—Abdiaziz Salat
5. “For me, this isn’t the way people should live. It’s just a way to survive ...”—Mebrak Tareke

Use the following questions to guide your analysis:

- Who is speaking, and what might their perspective be?
- How does the quote connect to themes like freedom, division, and/or trust?
- What contrasts or tensions does the quote reveal?
- What emotions or ideas does the quote express?
- Can you relate to any part of the quote? Does the quote challenge or change how you see the world?



**DIVIDED SPACES: WHAT DO BORDERS MEAN?  
(GROUP WORK ANSWER KEY)**

This Answer Key provides information for the four borders that appear on Handout 2, *Divided Spaces: What Do Borders Mean? (Group Work)*.

<b>Case Study</b>	<b>Halane Wall (Somalia)</b>	<b>Berlin Wall (Germany)</b>	<b>Korean DMZ</b>	<b>U.S.–Mexico Border Wall</b>
<b>When: Time Period Built</b>	2010s–present (expanded over time)	1961–1989	1953–present (after Korean War)	1990s–present (expanded from 2006–2020, 2025)
<b>Why: Purpose</b>	Protect UN compound and foreign diplomats from attacks, security, anti-terrorism, foreign presence, isolation	Prevent East Germans from fleeing to West Berlin, Communist control, stop brain drain to the West	Separate North and South Korea, ceasefire boundary, containment of communism, maintain armistice	Deter illegal immigration and drug trafficking, border control, nationalism, security
<b>Who: Key Players</b>	UN, African Union, Somali government, foreign embassies	German Democratic Republic (GDR) or East Germany, Soviet Union, West Germany	North Korea, South Korea, U.S., China	U.S. federal government, Department of Homeland Security, Customs and Border Protection, Mexico
<b>How: Impact on Local People</b>	Locals cut off from aid and diplomacy, feelings of exclusion, extremely restricted, UN/local access tightly controlled	Families divided, risk of death crossing border, severely restricted, movement allowed only via checkpoints like Checkpoint Charlie	Families separated, high tension along the border, civilian access forbidden, high surveillance	Displacement, surveillance, migrant deaths, restricted crossings, checkpoints, militarized areas
<b>Still Standing Today?</b>	Yes	No (fell in 1989)	Yes	Yes (portions completed, others proposed/under review)