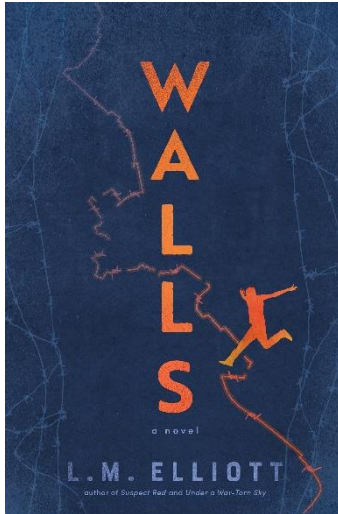


# Breaking Down Walls: Disinformation, Lies, and the Berlin Wall

Starting Conversations with Teens about the Dangers of Propaganda and Conspiracy Theories



Support teaching media literacy and develop classroom conversations around identifying credible information and sources using L.M. Elliott's NCSS/CBC Notable book **WALLS**, alongside her **Fall for the Book** video *Breaking Down Walls*, a mashup of the game Two Truths and a Lie with elements from *Wait Wait...Don't Tell Me!*, NPR's weekly quiz program.

For more information about Cold War truths, the Berlin Wall, Khrushchev's propaganda, and other learning resources, visit the author's [website](#) and these helpful resources related to **WALLS** and topics discussed in the video:

[Educator Guide to Discussion and activities for WALLS](#)  
[Virtual Book Tour and Writing Prompts for WALLS from the TeachingBooks Blog](#)  
[Banned Book Lesson Plans included in the SUSPECT RED Discussion Guide](#)  
[More about the Green Feather Movement protests against book-banning](#)



## A Note from author L. M. Elliott:

*I wrote WALLS because I could see many teens didn't know why NATO was formed—(Soviet Russia's brutal takeover of Eastern Europe after WWII)—if they even knew it existed. To "teach" them about the Cold War and NATO, what could be a more dramatic, show-rather-than-tell story humanizing that terrifying nuclear-armed standoff and Russia's longstanding antipathy for Western democracies than the Berlin Wall? I made the book's title plural because the novel not only presents the city's toe-to-toe tension and the shocking overnight raising of the Berlin Wall to entrap East Berliners in a communist police-state, but also the figurative "walls" we put up between us, born of misunderstanding and fear, stoked by thinking in labels, hyperbole, and stereotypes.*

*Set in the volatile year of 1960-61, WALLS is told through an American Army teenager stationed in West Berlin and his East German cousin, who has been raised in the Soviet Russia sector. The question of what it would take for that East Berlin youth—inculcated in communist dogma and Anti-American propaganda, caught up in the ardor and camaraderie of the FDJ ("Free German Youth")—to trust a Westerner—and vice versa—felt a poignant and powerful question to explore.*

*My hope is my docudrama novel and the video produced by **Fall for the Book** will inspire teens to use history as a neutral springboard to have frank, safe discussions about political messaging, spin, and catchy, derisive labels or slogans meant to discredit opponents. That—as my characters Drew and Matthias had to—their story encourages readers to open their hearts and use their smarts to think critically before adopting an opinion. To see the power of listening to differing perspectives to bring about change.*



**History shows propaganda is a terrifyingly potent tool in suppressing nations, creating mob beliefs by deadening free thought, free speech, and the free flow of facts, thereby obliterating resistance.**

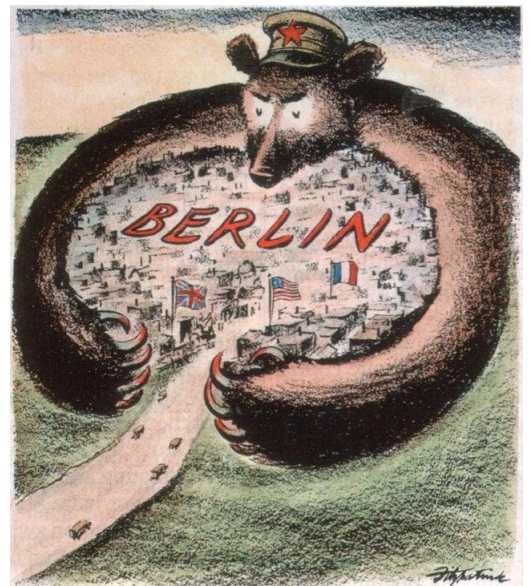
Disinformation can be subtle—seeding fear and distrust to poison productive, mutually empathetic conversation that is the heartbeat of diplomacy among nations and the sense of collaboration that is the engine of a democracy. Calculated conspiracy theories or outright lies couched in simplistic language, knowingly repeated and spread, build prejudices and unyielding tribalism that make a society vulnerable to in-fighting, all-or-nothing thinking, scapegoating, cults of personality, and the rise of authoritarianism and state-dictated inequalities.

As Drew's mother says to him, when they find an oath his East Berlin cousin signed to fight "warmongering, greedy capitalist Americans," *Some people have trouble seeing past the hyperbole or conspiracy theories or hate-filled labels they've been fed. But that doesn't mean they can't change if they are given truth and factual information as counterbalance.*

Below are tools, lessons, and activities to help students better explore, assess, evaluate, and share information.

### Tools:

- [How NOT To Spot Fake News](#) from the PBS Idea Channel
- [Crash Course: Media Literacy](#) with Jay Smooth
- The [CRAAP Test](#), developed by librarians at California State University-Chico, is a handy checklist to use when evaluating resources
- [Propaganda Critic](#) is dedicated to promoting techniques of propaganda analysis among critically minded citizens
- [Snopes.com](#) focuses on urban legends, folklore, myths, rumors, and misinformation, and rates them according to true, false, multiple truth values, undetermined, and unclassifiable veracity



### For Educators:

- [Give Facts a Fighting Chance: A Global Playbook for Teaching News Literacy](#) from the News Literacy Project
- [Evaluating Sources in a 'Post-Truth' World: Ideas for Teaching and Learning About Fake News](#) from the *New York Times* lesson plans
- [Analyzing Contemporary Propaganda](#) from Mind Over Media
- [Civic Online Reasoning](#) from the Stanford History Education Group offers lessons and assessments to help teach students to evaluate online information that affects them, their communities, and the world
- [Checkology](#)'s lessons and other resources help students navigate today's information landscape
- [Media Literacy Resources](#) including activities, lessons, and case studies from the Newseum
- [5 Ways Teachers Are Fighting Fake News](#) from nprED