

ENGLISH TEXT SUMMARY NOTES  
**“Stasiland”**

Text guide by: Peter Cram

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SAMPLE

## BACKGROUND NOTES

Anna Funder was born in Melbourne in 1966 and attended schools in both Melbourne and Paris. She learned German at school. At first she studied law and worked as a lawyer. Then she became a documentary filmmaker. She later completed post-graduate studies in creative writing at Melbourne University.

In the 1980s, Anna Funder received a German Government scholarship to study at the Free University of Berlin. In 1997 she once received further financial assistance to return to Germany as a writer in residence at the Australia Centre in Potsdam. She met Miriam Weber, and this gave her the idea to write a book that would become *Stasiland*. It was published in 2002. It has been translated into a number of languages and has also been studied by school and university students.

Awards:

Winner, the BBC Four Samuel Johnson Prize for non-fiction, 2004.

Shortlisted, The Guardian First Book Award.

Shortlisted, The Age Book of the Year.

Anna Funder has since published her first novel, *All That I Am*, also set in Germany. This won the Miles Franklin Literary Award, 2012, and the Indie Book of the Year, 2012.

Anna Funder lives in New York with her husband and three children.

## HISTORICAL ISSUES

### NOTE

*Stasiland* is about real historical people who lived during a particular period of time – the communist era of East Germany (the German Democratic Republic) between 1949 and 1989 and beyond. Historical research about some of the people in this text will discover much information about them. However, this text has been placed on the Text List for the study of English, and while further historical research may be of interest to a study of the text, it must be remembered that the final outcome of the study is to write an English Text Response.

### ***The German Democratic Republic***

The German Democratic Republic (GDR), also called East Germany, was a socialist state established by the USSR in 1949 from the Soviet-administered zone of occupied Germany. It included the eastern part of Berlin, the western part was administered by the Allies. The GDR had borders with Czechoslovakia in the south, West Germany in the south and west, Poland in the east, and the Baltic Sea in the north.

The history of the GDR is notoriously controversial. Opponents of the GDR regarded it as a puppet state of the USSR. The GDR regarded the West German government as an extension of the Nazi government. Nearly 3 million East Germans left the new nation for West Germany, even though there was a ban on departures. Eventually the GDR built frontier walls to try to keep its citizens from escaping to the west for a more desirable life. This culminated in the so-called 'Berlin Wall' in 1961 (called the 'Anti-Fascist Protection Wall' in the GDR), built to keep its citizens in.

In 1989, a non-violent movement called for the end of a divided Germany and demanded civil liberties. This prompted a crisis where many GDR citizens left for the West through Czechoslovakia and Hungary. The leadership of Mikhail Gorbachev in the USSR, pre-occupied by its own reforms, refused to intervene, as he wished to de-escalate the Cold War with the West, and left East Germany to resolve its own crisis. The demolition of the Berlin Wall began in November. In October 1990, the German Democratic Republic was reunified with West Germany, becoming a single Germany once again, and the East German state ceased to exist.

In a nation of only 16 million people, the Stasi employed about 274,000 in its efforts to expunge its perceived enemies. In 1989, more than 91,000 persons were full-time, including 2000 full-time collaborators, 13,000+ soldiers and 2200+ officers of the GDR army. There were 173,000+ informants inside the GDR and another 1500+ informants in West Germany. In all, about 2.5% of the GDR's adult population was involved. As many records have been destroyed since 1989, it is estimated that there were up to 500,000 informers, and up to 2,000,000 if casuals were also included.