

Local History at Berlin Cosmopolitan School

The history of Berlin stretches back over 800 years and some of the most important world events of the last century revolve around the city. The streets ooze history. Nearly every building and street has a story to tell. Some of these are stories of tragedy, hardship and loss, whereas others entail determination and heroism. Additionally, Berlin has been the home to brilliant scientists, philosophers, artists, musicians as well as great leaders and despicable dictators.

Learning how to research local history

The local history programme at BCS involves grades 6-10 of the secondary school. Each year, students will take part in a workshop run by published author and local history expert Paul Scraton, who will provide the students with insights into new ways of revealing Berlin's complex history. Each workshop is designed to build on the skills learned in the previous year, whereby grade 10 students should be able to design a mini-tour of their own neighbourhood.

The local history project

The projects are staggered over the course of the year and wherever possible overlap with relevant history units, as per the Berlin state curriculum. All projects must fit on one single-sided A4 piece of paper in landscape format (with the exception of year 10), the best of which are displayed in the hallway of the third floor of our main building in a purpose-built table. Additionally, students are expected to include a description of their research process and a bibliography on the reverse side, wherein at least two-thirds of the research must come from non-internet sources (e.g. books, plaques, eye-witnesses, museums, etc.).

Local History Library

As of 2016, one section of the school library is devoted to local history. Here students can peruse historical photo collections, old maps, guide books and other texts dealing with Berlin's history and sights. These should provide a place for students to begin their research for their local history projects as well as getting them used to using non-internet sources. *We have a small collection already, but always welcome further donations from parents!*

The programme for grades 6-10

Grade 6

Students will be taken on a tour of area around the school, one class at a time. The focus is on the development of the area over time (changes in land use, lifestyles and problems facing the area) overlapping with the new curriculum for *Gesellschaftskunde*, topic 3.3: *Stadt und städtische Vielfalt*. Students will be assigned one of the sites mentioned on the tour to do further research into. Paul Scraton will provide a step-by-step guide to investigating the history of the sites and walk students through the process based on his experiences researching for the Circus Hotel on Rosenthaler Platz.



Grade 7

Paul Scraton will take the students to the Mitte Museum in order to show them how he used it to research for a tour of Wedding. Using his examples and tips, students will then be expected to explore their own neighbourhood's history by visiting their local district's museum. This overlaps with the elective history module of the Berlin curriculum: *Geschichte der Stadt am Beispiel von Brandenburg-Preußen*. Each project should only (at most) handle one of the old (pre-2001) districts.

Grade 8

We will hold an in-school workshop, in which Mr. Scraton details various methods for doing research into historical buildings in Berlin. Using the school's local history library as well as other sources, students will do research into a historical site or building of their choice.

**In 2017/18, the 8th grade will do the 7th grade option, as they already did this in 2016/17*

Grade 9

Using one or two examples of historical personalities who lived in Berlin, Paul Scraton will show students how they can use a biography to learning about Berlin's history by talking them on a mini-tour. Students will then be expected to choose a historical personality (e.g. politician, author, musician, scientist, etc.) to research, and find at least three locations in Berlin that relate to this person, showing how this person impacted/ or was impacted by these places.

Grade 10

Paul Scraton will take students on his tour of Wedding, whilst explaining how he did research for the tour. Students will then be expected to put together their own walking tours for their own neighbourhoods, by showing the route on a map as well as providing brief texts and pictures for each stop. The best and most feasible tour proposals will be led by the students for another class and could possibly be adapted into MSA presentations.

Paul Scraton was born in Lancashire and has lived in Berlin since 2001. A writer with a particular interest in landscape, memory and place, he is the editor-in-chief of [Elsewhere: A Journal of Place](#) and the author of *The Idea of a River: Walking out of Berlin* (Readux, 2015) and *Ghosts on the Shore: Travels along Germany's Baltic Coast* (Influx, 2017). You can find out more about Paul on his website, where you can also read some of his continuing adventures beyond the front door, whether in the city, the country or the edgelands in between: www.underagreysky.com.

