



# STASILAND

## ANNA FUNDER

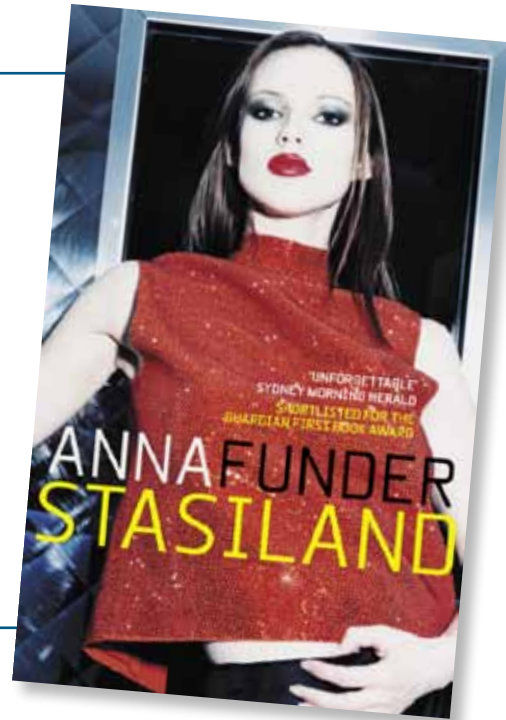


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List 1, Non-Fiction Text



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#### TEXT VCE ENGLISH TEACHING NOTES

- ▶ designed to meet the criteria of the Victorian Curriculum Assessment Authority's *VCE English Study Design*
- ▶ scaffolded to help teachers and students gradually develop their knowledge and understanding of the set text
- ▶ cater to a range of student abilities and learning styles
- ▶ contain a variety of activities to enable individual and group work
- ▶ encourage oral and written responses to the text
- ▶ guide students to develop critical and supported responses to the text
- ▶ feature ICT-related tasks
- ▶ include suggested assessment tasks as well as supplementary resources

# VCE ENGLISH Units 3 & 4: READING AND RESPONDING

## ANNA FUNDER, *STASILAND*.

### About the Author and Honours

Anna Funder is a highly regarded Australian author whose works *Stasiland* and *All That I Am* have won many awards and been loved by many around the globe.

In 2004, *Stasiland* won the BBC Four Samuel Johnson Prize, recognised as the world's biggest and most prestigious award for non-fiction. In addition, *Stasiland* was short-listed for the following:

- *The Age* Book of the Year Awards (non-fiction)
- *Guardian* First Book Award
- Queensland Premier's Literary Awards
- Award for Innovation in Writing, Adelaide Festival
- Index Freedom of Expression Awards
- W.H. Heinemann Award.

In 2012, *All That I Am* won the Miles Franklin Award, as well as a host of other prestigious literary prizes.

*Stasiland* has been translated into sixteen languages, published in twenty countries and appears on numerous text lists in Australia, the UK and America. *Stasiland* has also been on the VCE English Literature course.

Funder initially practised international law before turning her attention to her writing. To supplement her income while she wrote, she worked as a television and radio documentary producer at the ABC. While she researched *Stasiland* in Germany, she worked as an 'agony aunt' and research assistant in 'what was West Berlin' (p.5).

Funder is highly entertaining, funny and engaging, so it's no surprise that she is often interviewed. This is great news for teachers and students, because they have access to many interesting and engaging podcasts, television and print interviews, lectures and documentaries. Funder's articles and essays have been published globally in highly respected publications such as the *Guardian*, *Sunday Times*, *Sydney Morning Herald*, *Monthly*, *Ny Tid* and *Best Australian Essays*. In 2011, Funder was named in the 'Top One Hundred People of Influence' in the *Sydney Morning Herald*. She sits on the Literature Board of the Australian Council for the Arts.

Funder, who grew up in Melbourne, speaks German and French and has a Doctorate in Creative Arts. She lives in Brooklyn, New York, but has also lived in Paris, Germany and Sydney. She is married with three children.

Funder is a major Australian figure for VCE English students to be introduced to through her writing. She is a great role model for pursuing subjects that matter, writing beautifully and being a warm and intelligent individual who can simultaneously see humanity's barbarity and absurdity. She is also a person who has taken risks and challenged herself academically and personally.

## Introduction

Anna Funder's *Stasiland* is a wonderful work of non-fiction. No doubt, after studying this text closely, your students will be struck by the same 'horror-romance' Funder feels about the world of the Stasi. Students will gain a great deal from their study of this text but will need to work together to get as much out of the text as possible. Because it is such a dense text, full of intricate detail and nuance, students will need to complete a lot of group and jigsaw activities. This will allow them to share the workload of the study of the text. An important preface to this study guide is that the text is very confronting and quite heartbreaking in places. Teachers may need to approach the teaching of this text with care and be aware that students may find some of the text upsetting.

It's worthwhile beginning the study of Funder's masterful *Stasiland* by exploring the significance of the title itself and the way it hints at the text's central concerns and ideas. One of the most immediate connections one can make to the title is the way it suggests that *Stasiland* is in fact a place. The land Funder enters is the world of the Stasi, the secret East German police of the German Democratic Republic (GDR). The GDR only existed from 1949–1989. Forty years may seem like a relatively short amount of time to an outsider, but the emotional footprint it left was catastrophic. The grief and pain the Stasi wrought still looms large in the lives of survivors. Survivors have never received any apologies for the outrageous and immoral treatment they received at the hands of the Stasi, nor have they had the satisfaction of justice being meted out. No Stasis, with the exception of Mielke and Honecker, have ever been brought to account in any sort of legal context.

The other critical reason the world of the Stasi still haunts many East Germans from that era (and perhaps why they are still trapped in the nightmarish realm of *Stasiland*) is that they have no answers about what happened to their loved ones, or why they themselves were persecuted. They are suspended in a terrible state of not knowing. Some are waiting for 'puzzlers' to find and reassemble a destroyed file that may provide the answers and perhaps even some kind of peace (if that is at all possible in such circumstances).

*Stasiland* has connotations of fantasy and, in this sense, it is an apt title. The GDR was far from the democracy it claimed to be. It was a totalitarian regime and the irony of its title was mirrored in its conduct and values. Not only did the Stasi frequently disguise themselves using costumes and props, their use of propaganda to control the people was chilling. The land of the Stasi was a monumental lie and fiction. From manufacturing dance crazes to falsely telling a wife that her husband was producing pornography, *Stasiland* was a world of destructive deceit. Moreover, *Stasiland* was a place where Nazis could absolve themselves of past crimes simply by installing plaques that rewrote history. Funder talks of the disbelief she experiences upon finding a plaque 'commemorating the liberation of the East Germans from their Nazi oppressors by their brothers the Russians' (p.161). Other reminders of the false universe that was *Stasiland* (a place where normal codes of human decency seemed to have no place) are the attempts to cover up deaths in custody by presenting grieving relatives with empty coffins.

As Funder blackly tells her colleague, Uwe, 'I've been having Adventures in *Stasiland*...I've been in a place where what was said was not real, and what was real was not allowed, where people disappeared behind doors and were never heard from again, or were smuggled into other realms' (p.120).

# Background and Context

## Author's Context

*Stasiland* begins in Berlin. It's winter, 1996 and two years since Funder was last in Germany. She is working part-time at a television station and has returned to Berlin to gather stories about the Stasi and those affected by their regime or, as she so beautifully puts it, to '[look] for some of the stories from this land gone wrong' (p.9).

Funder grew up in Australia and as a student loved learning German, especially the 'sticklebrick nature of it' (p.2). This inspired her to study German in West Berlin in the 1980s. During this time, Funder 'wondered long and hard what went on beyond that Wall' (p.4) and returned to Germany in 1994, 'five years after the Wall fell in November 1989' (p.5). On this second trip to Germany, Funder goes to Runden Ecke, the Stasi museum in Leipzig, and this visit is a major turning point in her life. Her guide, Frau Hollitzer, tells her the story of Miriam Weber, which sets in train a fascination and connection with Miriam and her terrible fate at the hands of the Stasi.

After visiting Runden Ecke, Funder returned to Australia but found that she couldn't 'get Miriam's story...out of [her] mind'. This is why she has returned to Berlin in 1996, where *Stasiland* begins.

Funder leaves Berlin in 1996 following the death of her mother, but returns in 1999 to complete her interview with Miriam Weber.

## Historical Context

*Stasiland* examines the lives and times of those living in the GDR from 1949 to 1989 and what happens to the people who lived there following the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, which spelled the end of the GDR and Stasi rule and tyranny.

The former GDR is described by Funder as a manifestation of 'the dream of a better world the German communists wanted to build out of the ashes of their Nazi past...' (p.4). It is a place of pure nightmare; a place of surveillance, suppression, brutality; a place where civil rights do not exist and where citizens are controlled, persecuted, and lied to in a way that brings Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty Four* to life. The GDR is synonymous with injustice and inhumanity. It is also a place of great absurdity.

Following Germany's World War II defeat by the allies in 1949, Funder explains, 'the Allies [England, America, France and Russia] divided up their 'conquered enemy' (p.160) and as a result 'the German Democratic Republic was established as a satellite state of the USSR in 1949 '(p.161). Because the Russians were communists, 'the people living in this zone had to switch from being...Nazis one day to being Communists and brothers with their former enemies the next' (p.161).

Loathing the capitalism it associated with the West and fearing losing power and control, the Stasi were 'the internal army by which the [East German communist] government kept control' (p.5). Their job was 'to know everything about everyone, using any means it chose' and as Funder explains, 'It knew who your visitors were, it knew whom you telephoned, and it knew if your wife slept around' (p.5). The Stasi employed a range of strategies to gather information about people, ranging from microphones in thermos lids and flowers, wearing wigs and fake moustaches and even collecting people's 'smells' in jars for later use with sniffer dogs (p.8). They even tapped people's phones, bugged apartments and read personal mail.

The Stasi comprised 97,000 highly intelligent employees as well as a network of 173,000 informers, everyday citizens encouraged to inform out of fear or because of some deeper pathology. As Funder observes, 'If part-time informers are included, some estimates have the ratio as high as one informer for every 6.5 citizens' (p.56). The Stasi were methodical, meticulous and highly organised and this allowed them to create what the German media dubbed 'the most perfected surveillance state of all time' (p.57). It is no surprise that many ex-Stasi found work after 1989, sometimes in other countries, because of their highly valued skill-set.

Life for those living in the GDR, a country that, according to Funder, 'paid lip service to the institutions of democracy' (p.36), was a life devoid of personal freedom, privacy, choice and, it would seem, fun. The GDR was a totalitarian regime or dictatorship. In 1961, the Berlin Wall was erected to stop East Germans from defecting and, allegedly, to protect the GDR from 'fascists'. Not only did the Berlin Wall prevent East Germans from leaving the country, it was a physical reminder that their lives were not their own. The Wall was in fact a double wall and was patrolled by attack dogs. Rolls of barbed wire sat on top of it and trip wires ensured that anyone who thought they had escaped would be caught and perhaps shot by the armed border guards who watched from surveillance towers. Other manifestations of government control included the fact that 'rhoneo printers, typewriters and later photocopiers were strictly...controlled by licence in the GDR' (p.15); the 'government controlled the newspapers, magazines and television...[and] Access to books was restricted' (p.17). Orwell's *Animal Farm* was blacklisted (p.35).

The Stasi knew that psychological destruction was just as effective as physical pain. Anyone who fell foul of the Stasi suffered a range of terrible fates. They were imprisoned without trial (sometimes in solitary confinement) or denied access to family, lawyers, books, newspapers and phone calls (p.17). Some prisoners were subjected to horrifying torture, some were blackmailed and others were murdered.

The GDR was also synonymous with the doping of athletes to '[accelerate] growth and strength' with the goal of achieving national glory at the Olympics. The reality that 'the government screened youngsters for their potential and fed them into training institutes' and 'Children at sports schools were given hormones under the guise of vitamins' underlines the disregard the government had for rights and how it controlled its citizens. Another shocking legacy from this period is that, in some cases, these practices 'turned the little girls halfway into boys' (p.34).

Ironically, for all their surveillance and smarts, the Stasi did not foresee their own demise. In 1989, the '*die Wende* – the Turning Point' occurred. Communist rule came to an end, the GDR was no more and the Berlin Wall was pulled down; all as result of 'a peaceful revolution against the Communist dictatorship in East Germany...' (p.5).

### **Social context**

The East Germany Funder visits in 1994 feels 'like a secret walled-in garden, a place lost in time' (p.5). As Funder discovers, many of those living in the new united Germany bear terrible scars from life under Communist dictatorship. While there is freedom, many of the Stasi's survivors, and even some of the Stasi themselves, are held captive by the trauma of the past or the fear of being exposed. Some survivors are waiting for information from the puzzlers (who try to reconstruct the files shredded by the Stasi) to gain some closure on what happened to a loved one or even to themselves. There are also some in the ex-Stasi ranks who believe that their reign will come again. The fact that the Stasi (with the exception of Mielke and Honecker) have not been prosecuted for their crimes denies survivors a sense that any sort of justice has occurred.

Funder comes to realise the past is not a place many East Germans want to acknowledge. When Funder first suggests that the television station she works for make a program looking at ‘people who stood up to the regime...or were wrongfully imprisoned’ (p.12), her boss, Alexander Scheller, reacts angrily and dismissively. He accuses the East Germans (he and Uwe are both Westerners) of being ‘Germans who had Communism for forty years and went backwards...It was an experiment and it failed’. Later his ‘off-sider’, Uwe, explains, ‘No-one here is interested...and the whole Stasi thing...It’s sort of embarrassing’ (p.13). Interviews with Funder also reveal the hostile reaction she received to *Stasiland* in Germany. Rather than viewing her work as a brave outing of a shameful past, she was perceived as an impudent foreigner who had no right to say such things about Germany’s past.

In addition, Funder finds that some people are experiencing ‘Ostalgie’ – looking back to the time of the GDR as a time of employment, security and plenty. Some, too young to remember the GDR, view the GDR as a ‘harmless welfare state’ (p.275).

Finally, even though the Stasi have ceased to be, this doesn’t mean that haven’t stopped threatening and harassing people. New societies such as the Insiderkomitee, a ‘Society for the Civil Rights and the Dignity of Man’ is, according to Funder, ‘more or less a secret society of former Stasi men’ who harass people they fear might uncover them. Threatening behaviours include the delivery of ticking packages, severed car brake leads, the delivery of unsolicited porn to houses and, bizarrely, the delivery of a ‘truckload of puppies’ to a target’s home (p.84).

## Genre

*Stasiland* is considered to be a work of non-fiction. Students could begin by examining the three maps that appear in the epigraph and compare and contrast the different information each map gives them. As their reading of *Stasiland* evolves, students could reflect back on the value of the maps in terms of their understanding of the information being conveyed by Funder.

Funder uses a great deal of evidence to lend credibility to her writing and help tease out the various contexts that inform her subjects’ stories. For example, she often elaborates on the historical, political, social and economic factors crucial to understanding why an event occurred or how an individual came to be the person they were. Students could examine the various forms of factual material she incorporates to help the reader develop knowledge and understanding of the characters and the world in which they lived and live. An excellent example of this can be found on page 3. When she is talking to a lady whose job it is to look after the public toilets at the Wall, she explains to the reader the origins of the Wall, its size, length and purpose and parallels it to the Great Wall of China. Further examples include:

- Songs
- Letters
- Newspaper advertisements (p.53)
- Use of figures (pp.56-7)
- Dates
- Lists
- Personal testimony (from interviews)
- Expert opinion
- Reference to photographs (Students could even consider the fact that *Stasiland* does not contain any visual material apart from the maps in the epigraph and the cover. What might have influenced this decision?)

'Some Notes on Sources' which appears at the end of *Stasiland* is also worth examining. Discussion points could include:

- What extra evidence/clarification does it provide?
- What response is this section designed to draw from the reader?

*Stasiland* also operates as a personal account of Funder's journeys to Germany and the impact the stories had on her. Funder's first-person narrative voice is an integral part of *Stasiland* and at times the writing is very personal. Another discussion point could be the difference it would make to *Stasiland* if Funder's expose of the Stasi and its impact on its citizens was objective in its style and Funder remained outside (i.e. uninvolved in) the writing.

## Structure, Language and Style

The overall arrangement of *Stasiland* has been carefully thought through. Students might like to consider why the text is sequenced the way it is. Students could be encouraged to ask why one chapter succeeds another and why Funder chooses to bookend *Stasiland* with Miriam's story. Students could also reflect on the role the quotes from McCullers, Breytenbach and Carroll play in the epigraph.

*Stasiland* begins in Berlin in 1996 and then journeys back in time through the memories of the various people Funder interviews, finishing in 1999. Students could investigate the subtle ways Funder conveys this shift in time from 1996 to 1999 through her descriptions of the physical place of Leipzig (pp.270–1).

One of the unexpected delights of *Stasiland* is its terrific humour. Funder sees the absurdity of much of the Stasi's behaviour and also sees the humour in some of the idiosyncrasies of the Germans she encounters. She possesses a wonderful sense of irony. One example of this is the East German woman who tells Funder she hasn't travelled at all since the Wall came down but would like to go to China 'to have a look at that Wall of theirs' (p.3). Students will be amazed by Funder's recounting of the Stasi's smell jars and will share her sense of the ridiculousness of their existence, especially when they read about a jar containing the smell of a 'Worker's Underpants' (p.8). Funder's wry humour is also apparent in her observations of her time working at the overseas television service and the way bureaucracies tend to work, regardless of the political situation. Of her colleague, Uwe, Funder drily comments:

'Uwe's main job as adjutant is to make Scheller seem important enough to have an adjutant. The other part of his job is to appear busy and time-short, which is more difficult because he has hardly anything to do.' (p.11)

Students could create a table of humorous moments from the text and consider how Funder's wit influences the mood of that particular moment in *Stasiland*, or what the humour is exposing or underlining. For example, students could examine the authorial intrusion on page 86 when Funder is interviewing Herr Winz and the understated, black humour of her reply to his hatred of the CIA (p.85). Julia's explanation of the origins of the family nickname of Karl Eduard von Schnitzler, 'Karl-Eduard von Schni', is quite hilarious (p.101) as is her analysis and critique of the alleged 'Lipsi' dance craze (pp.126–7).

Funder's writing is very detailed and contains a great deal of hard evidence that gives her writing a real authority. As discussed in the section on genre, Funder uses figures, lists and statistics to horrify the reader and emphasise the huge scale and force of the Stasi. For example, she includes the fact that they had 97,000 employees and 173,000 informers, which amounted to 'one Stasi officer or

informant for every sixty-three people' (p.57) or, to be more exact, 'If part-time informers are included, some estimates have the ratio as high as one informer for every 6.5 citizens' (p.56).

Apart from using hard evidence to transport the reader into the menacing world of the Stasi, Funder's writing is also very descriptive. One of her strengths is her distinctive attention to detail. A lesson could focus on Funder's characterisation of her interview subjects. For example, her interview with 'Von-Schni' in chapter 13 contains many subtleties that combine to create a memorable portrait of him. Students could note the adjectives and verbs she associates with him, the objects from his home she chooses to include, his interaction with his wife, his mannerisms, the tone of voice he adopts, his speech patterns and even his pronunciation of 'Big Brozer' (pp.129–38). Students could look at her descriptions of Miriam and Charlie and consider how they influence the way the reader views them. Funder's description of Frau Paul's physical responses to Funder's questions (and her own response to Frau Paul's distress) also illuminate a great deal about both people (pp.207, 224, 226, 230–1).

#### **Other aspects of style worthy of attention:**

- Funder's use of metaphor brings a real beauty and depth to her writing. Students could examine how the Wall itself functions as a metaphor in *Stasiland* and what Julia's 'nocturnal disassembling of her apartment' could mean in a figurative sense, as well as the box of love letters she has left in her apartment. Another powerful metaphor is that of the Stasi as a cancer spreading itself throughout the country. 'It was a bureaucracy metastasised through East Germany society...'
- Her use of puns and sarcasm. Seen for example in the chapter titles: 'Drawing the Line' and 'The Linoleum Palace'.
- Funder also uses a great deal of colour to create mood and a sense of place, particularly grey and brown and 'Extreme Dark Green' (p.51).

For example:

'All I feel today in fact, as I pass where the bookshelf used to be in the hall, is the sudden predominance of linoleum in my life. Altogether I can count five kinds of linoleum in this once grand apartment, and they are all, each one of them, brown. Degrees of brown: dark in the hallway, fleck in my bedroom, a brown in the other bedroom that may have once been another colour before succumbing to house rule, brown-beige in the kitchen and, my favourite, imitation parquetry-in-lino in the living room.' (p.51)

'This apartment was converted under the Communists into a place of concrete render on the outside and, on the inside, practical lino brownness, washed and waxed and charmless...'

- Funder's ability to create mood. Students could investigate the end of her creepy encounter with Herr Bock of Golm (p.203) and could contrast this scene with her heartbreaking interview with Frau Paul (p.231).

See also:

'...drunk at home putting up with one another in a place from which there was no escape' (p.98).



'You have never been to Room 118' (p.112)  
 'until you have no private sphere at all' (p.113)  
 The end of chapter 23, describing Torsten in his car. What lines create a feeling of hope?  
 (p.234)

- Funder's use of German also gives her writing a distinctive style and enables the reader to feel a part of the German world she is immersed in. Funder has also said she loves German because it gives her a more succinct and precise way of expressing herself: 'Things could be brought into being that had no name in English...Schadenfreude...the sweeping range of world from "heartfelt" to "heartsick" (p.4). Staatsratsbeschwerde (p.114, 36).
- Her use of rhetorical techniques such as anaphora and tetracolon. '...Stasi on their fellows and friends in every school, every factory, every apartment block, every pub' (p.5).
- Funder's use of alliteration (p.203).
- Her use of literary allusions and reference to popular culture (p.120), Orwell, *Prisoner* (p.32).

## Themes, Ideas and Values

| Theme, idea or value  | Evidence   | Discussion |
|---|--|------------|
| <p><b>The difficulty of remembering difficult things</b></p> <p><b>The rewriting of history</b></p> | <p>(p.14)</p> <p>'What interests me is the process of dealing with it all now that it is all over. Can you rework your past, the grit that rubs in you, until it is shiny and smooth as a pearl?' (p.157)</p> <p>'History was so quickly remade...' (p.161)<br/>         Changing of street names -'from Marx-Engels-Platz to Schlossplatz...' (p.52)</p> <p>'And almost overnight the Germans in the eastern states were made, or made themselves, innocent of Nazism...This sleight-of-history must rank as one of the most extraordinary innocence manoeuvres of the century.' (p.161)</p> <p>'plaque commemorating the liberation of the East Germans from their Nazi oppressors by their brothers the Russians.' (p.161)</p> <p>'the parliament building of the GDR, the Palast der Republik. It is brown and plastic-looking, full of asbestos, and all shut up...Like so many things here, no-one can decide whether to make the Palast der Republik into a memorial warning from the past, or to get rid of it altogether and go into the future unburdened of everything, except the risk of doing it</p> |            |

|  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
|  | <p>all again. Nearby, Hitler's bunker has been uncovered in building work. No-one could decide about that either - a memorial could become a shrine for neo-Nazis, but to erase it altogether might signal forgetting or denial. In the end, the bunker was reburied just as it was. The mayor said, perhaps in another fifty years people would be able to decide what to do. To remember or to forget - which is healthier? To demolish it or to fence it off? To dig it up, or leave it lie in the ground?' (p.52)</p>  |  |
| <p><b>Lives shaped by the Wall<br/>Delusion</b></p>  | <p>pp.31, 32, 113</p> <p>'that shaped their lives so brutally' (p.233)</p> <p>'Wall in the head' (p.233)</p> <p>'The Wall persists in Stasi men's minds as something they hope might one day come again, and in their victim's minds too, as a terrifying possibility.' (p.234)</p> <p>The impact of horror on the listener. 'Miriam's story has winded me.'</p> <p>'I begin by asking whether she saw her life unfolding differently after the Wall came down. I wonder what it would have been like to watch the barrier that had held you in disappear and that the whole world open up like some strange and new dreamt-of thing.'<br/>(p.140)</p> <p>'internal emigration. It was exile' (p.105)</p> <p>'to keep something of themselves from the authorities' (p.10)</p> <p>(pp.266-7)</p> |  |
| <p><b>Moral courage and heroism</b></p>  | <p>'It was one of the very rare occasions when the bluff was called and someone 'won' against the Firm.'<br/>(p.117)</p> <p>(p.84)</p>   |  |
| <p><b>Why did the Stasi exist?<br/>What was their role?<br/>How did they control people?<br/>What made them so effective?<br/>Why didn't they just let people who didn't want to live there their freedom?</b></p> | <p>'The Stasi's brief was to be the "shield and sword" of the Communist Party...But its broader remit was to protect the Party from the People. It arrested, imprisoned and interrogated anyone it chose.'</p> <p>'the Stasi was the mainstay of State power. Without it, and without the threat of Soviet tanks to back it up, the SED regime [Communist Party] could not</p>   |  |

|   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| <p><b>Why did the Stasi want so much control? What were they afraid of?</b></p> <p><b>Why haven't they been punished?</b></p> | <p>have survived.' (p.59)</p> <p>'might amount to giving the people the freedom they craved...contain the dissenters at home.' (p.61)</p> <p>(p.29)</p> <p>(p.276)</p>  |  |
| <p><b>Deception, duplicity, lies</b></p>  | <p>'it opted for other ways of silencing them' (p.107)</p> <p>'trucks sometimes disguised as linen vans'( p.225)</p>  |  |
| <p><b>The ongoing nature of humankind's barbarity</b></p>   | <p>cruelty of prisoners to one another – survival instinct (p.32)</p> <p>Continued persecution of people after World War II had ended.</p>  |  |
| <p><b>Insular and dangerous leadership</b></p> <p><b>The dangers of extreme thinking</b></p>                                  | <p>'ossified...not interested in reform. As late as 1988, they disallowed Soviet films and magazines in an attempt to stop the people being infected with new ideas. And they cracked down, exiling waves of "negative-enemy" elements to West Germany.' (p.61)</p>   |  |
| <p><b>Good triumphs over evil/karma/life's absurdities</b></p>  | <p>The power of love to heal, breed enduring loyalty (p.33).</p> <p>' "And I think about those Stasi men. They would never in their lives have imagined that they would cease to exist and that their offices would be a museum. A museum!" She shakes her head and butts out a cigarette. "That's one thing I love to do. I love to drive up to the Runden Ecke and park right outside. I just sit there in the car and I feel...<i>triumph!</i> Miriam makes a gesture which starts as a wave, and becomes a guillotine. "You lot are gone." ' (p.46)</p> |  |
| <p><b>The evils of Communism</b></p>  | <p>'I'm looking out for other people too, who lived through Communism, the twentieth century's experiment on humans.' (p.93)</p>  |  |
| <p><b>The dangers of nostalgia</b></p>  | <p>(pp.251–2)</p>   |  |
| <p><b>The power of the written word</b></p>   | <p>'The stories of ordinary people must be told.'</p>   |  |

## Different Interpretations

Students could read some of the essays/articles listed in the Supplementary Resource section to gain some insights into the different responses a variety of audiences might have to *Stasiland*.

## Classroom and homework activities

### Background Reading and Viewing

In pairs, investigate the following topics or key terms. Summarise your findings into three dot points for each topic/key term and be prepared to share your discoveries with the class via email, oral presentation, blog or by publishing on a class wiki.

- GDR (German Democratic Republic)
- Stasi (East German Secret Police)
- West Germany
- East Germany
- Communism
- Socialist state
- Black humour
- Capitalism
- The Berlin Wall
- The fall of the Berlin Wall
- Interrogation
- Surveillance
- Cold War
- Black-listed
- Faust
- Fascists
- George Orwell and his novels, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *Animal Farm*
- The Australian television show, *Prisoner* (p.32)

[Note for teachers: Watching excerpts from *The Lives of Others* might also prove helpful – especially scenes which highlight the work of the Stasi in the GDR in 1984. Teachers should note, however, that this story portrays some Stasi figures as heroes and Funder has been fiercely critical of what she perceives as people’s need to distort history to provide some kind of “redemptive message” about some East Germans. (See ‘Tyranny of Deadly Silence,’ an opinion piece referred to in Supplementary Resource section.) Teachers will also find a wealth of excellent documentary material on YouTube to help develop students’ knowledge and understanding of the background and context of *Stasiland*.

For example:

*Stasiland*, is an excellent documentary from Journeyman Films (22 mins). It features fascinating insights from Anna Funder about the provenance of her work, as well as interviews with members of the Stasi and its victims, such as Frau Paul and her son, Torsten who also feature in *Stasiland*. This documentary can be accessed at: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mrMAVy\\_Aoak](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mrMAVy_Aoak)

*Stasi Files: The Lives of Others* / *The Journal Reporter* (10 mins), features DW-TV reporter, Georg Matthes, as he explores contemporary documentation of the Stasi files. This documentary can be accessed at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ha1jM9HAs6>

*Walled In! Germany's inner border* (10 mins) explains the history of the wall, its geographical location, purpose and operation. Highly recommended as a way of helping students to develop a mental picture of what life would have been like under the Stasi and to develop further knowledge and understanding of key locations and the time period in which the Stasi operated. This documentary can be accessed at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OwQsTzGkbiY>

*Anna Funder in Conversation with Jason Steger at the 2011 Melbourne Writer's Festival*. This interview can be accessed at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KF-fx1vtOY0> The interview's principal focus is on her novel, *All That I Am*, but Steger begins the interviewing by talking about *Stasiland*.

*Anna Funder: Daily Life under Communism*. Anna Funder gives a lecture at the University of Iceland, Reykjavik, on 22nd of September and her total focus is on *Stasiland*. This interview can be accessed at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qg0g0FZ0tXo>

*Anna Funder in Conversation with Richard Fidler* (podcast). Highly recommended. Interview would be an excellent extension activity and showcases Funder's charm and excellent sense of humour. A thought-provoking and insightful interview. Great to listen to on a walk! This interview can be accessed/downloaded at: <http://www.abc.net.au/local/stories/2011/11/10/3361547.htm>

The website, Berlin Wall Online, is another excellent resource. It contains maps, timelines, photographs etc. This website can be accessed at: <http://www.dailysoft.com/berlinwall/index.html>

**Considering the significance of the title, chapter titles and cover image and how these elements enhance the text's key ideas and themes.**

**Divide the class into groups to complete the following tasks:**

1. Examine the chapter titles. What do you notice? Can you think of any 'alternative' titles? Justify your choices.
2. In pairs, list five things you see when you look at the cover of *Stasiland*. Be as specific and descriptive as you can
3. What do you think is going on?
4. What do you wonder when you look at the cover?
5. *Stasiland* has had a range of covers, not surprising given it has been published around the world and in a wide range of languages. Images of these different covers can be accessed at this site: <http://annafunder.com/stasiland/gallery-stasiland>. Compare and contrast two different covers from the above site. Develop your observations into a short response that summarises the similarities and differences between each cover and offers a possible interpretation of the message possibly being conveyed by the different covers.
6. Consider the title of the text. Does the title of the collection provide a clue about *Stasiland's* central concerns?

### Developing knowledge and understanding of characters

In pairs or individually, create a table using cardboard and textas or mind-map software such as Inspiration or Prezi (free cloud based software: [www.prezi.com](http://www.prezi.com)) to provide a visual map of the main groups that appear in *Stasiland*. You might like to use some of these titles to group your characters: survivors, Stasi, West Germans, families, lovers, non-Germans, Communists.

### Developing knowledge and understanding of setting

&

Considering how a setting can be used to convey a particular idea or value

There are a variety of different settings in *Stasiland*:

- Runden Ecke in Leipzig
- Hohenschonhausen prison
- Stasi HQ in Normannenstrasse
- Palast der Republik
- The Berlin Wall
- Funder's apartment that she sublets from Julia
- Room 111 Dimitroffstrasse
- Contemporary History Forum Leipzig
- The Stasi File Authority Office, Nuremberg

1. List three adjectives to describe each of the settings.
2. How do the characters feel in this setting?
3. What might this setting symbolise about the character?
4. Explain in a paragraph how Funder uses one particular setting to help her reader understand a particular character or idea or value.

### Examining Funder's characterisation of the individuals which people *Stasiland*

Use the following table to develop notes on the following characters. Support each of your observations with an illustrative quote:

- Anna Funder
- Miriam Weber
- Julia
- Herr Winz
- Hagen Koch
- Frau Paul
- Von Schni
- Mielke and Honecker

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>Name of character (Does his/her actual name seem significant?)</b>                       |  |
| <b>Appearance</b>   |  |
| <b>Does Funder's description influence the reader to endorse or condemn this character?</b> |  |
| <b>Personality</b>  |  |

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <b>Values (as revealed by behaviour/actions, responses or dialogue)</b>  |  |
| <b>Views/attitudes (as revealed by behaviour/actions, responses or dialogue)</b>   |  |
| <b>Traits</b>  |  |
| <b>Interests</b>   |  |
| <b>Outlook i.e. worldview</b><br><br><b>(How would the character describe the world they live in? What words would you use to describe their worldview/outlook on life?)</b> |  |
| <b>Personal history – What events from the past seem to have influenced the development of this character?</b>   |  |
| <b>Who is this character in relationship with /connected to?</b><br><b>What is the nature of this relationship?</b>  |  |
| <b>Are any of these close relationships?</b>   |  |
| <b>How would you describe the quality of the relationship this character has with other (specific) characters?</b>   |  |
| <b>Which of these relationships change?</b>  |  |
| <b>Which key moments influence this change? (Turning points)</b>   |  |
| <b>Do any of his/her values change over the course of the narrative?</b>   |  |
| <b>Do any of his/her views change over the course of the narrative?</b>  |  |
| <b>Think about the fate of this character. Do you think the character is rewarded or punished in some way for the values he/she possesses?</b>                               |  |
| <b>Which values seem to be important to Funder?</b>  |  |

## Essay Topics

1. ‘...a silent crazy jungle under glass.’ How do the settings and characterisations of *Stasiland* influence the reader’s view of particular characters?
2. ‘The two of you, violator and victim (collaborator! Violin!), are linked, forever perhaps, by the obscenity of what has been revealed to you, by the sad knowledge of what people are capable of. We are all guilty.’ Funder’s investigation into the lives of the Stasi and its survivors reveals the terrible stain terror and trauma leave on all our lives. Discuss.
3. ‘I think about the feeling I’ve developed for the former German Democratic Republic...I can only describe it as a horror-romance.’ Despite the horrors of the hidden world Funder uncovers, ultimately her tale is one of triumph. Discuss.
4. Despite the unexpected humour of an investigation into the hidden histories of those living in the German Democratic Republic, ultimately *Stasiland* offers a bleak portrait of humanity.

5. 'When I got out of prison, I was basically no longer human.' What do Funder's interviews reveal about the impact of the Stasi on its survivors?
6. How does Funder use metaphor to convey a range of ideas and values?
7. Even though the Berlin Wall came down in 1989, *Stasiland* shows that one can never be free from the horrors of tyranny. To what extent do you agree?
8. *Stasiland* explores what happens to humans and human nature when basic human rights are ignored.
9. *Stasiland* shows that good will always triumph over evil. To what extent do you agree?
10. In *Stasiland*, Funder explores the qualities that allow individuals to resist and fall prey to dictatorships.
11. *Stasiland* shows that conformity and collaboration are the keys to survival.
12. How does Funder explore the legacy of totalitarianism?
13. *Stasiland* examines what it is about people that allows them to do the things they o.
14. *Stasiland* is a principally a story of heroism and human decency. To what extent do you agree?
15. The characters of *Stasiland* are victims rather than survivors. To what extent do you agree?
16. *Stasiland* is a powerful critique of humanity's inability to deal with unpleasant realities.
17. The world of *Stasiland* is a world utterly bereft of truth and decency.

## Supplementary Resources

Baum, C. October, 2002, 'The Writing on the Wall,' *Good Reading*, 16-17. (Great for alternative interpretations.)

Bogle, D. 17 March, 2007, 'Tyranny of deadly silence,' *Adelaide Advertiser*, 15. (Also great for interpretations.)

Funder, A. 5 June, 2004, 'A Stranger in the East,' *Daily Telegraph*, 1-2.

Knox, M. 12 June, 2004, 'Silent fury for author how lifted stones of Germany's past,' *Sydney Morning Herald*, 13.

Cunningham, S. 13 September, 2003, 'Making up the truth,' *The Saturday Age*, 8.

Thorpe, V. 27 June, 2004, 'Story of the Stasi holds the secret of a bestseller,' *The Observer*, p.9.

There are some excellent 'Reading Group Notes' and discussion questions on Anna Funder's website. These notes and questions can be accessed at:

<http://annafunder.com/stasiland/book-club-notes-stasiland/>



## About the author of this study guide

Jill Fitzsimons BA Dip.Ed is a VCE English teacher and teaches at Whitefriars College. Jill has taught at Genazzano FCJ College, Loreto Mandeville Hall and Mackillop College, Swan Hill and has written VCE Literature study guides for Adrian Hyland's, *Kinglake-350* (with Adrian Hyland) and Peter Temple's, *The Broken Shore*. She has worked as a VCE English and GAT assessor and has presented workshops for VCE English teachers.