

When I read *Song of Freedom, Song of Dreams* by Shari Green early in 2025, it was because I have a personal love of verse novels as a format for story. And, truthfully, I was intrigued that 1989 could be a setting for historical fiction. I remember when the Berlin Wall fell. I was excited to see Democracy *win*. However, I didn't have a sense of the real cost of that moment.

Helena, the main character in *Song of Freedom, Song of Dreams*, gave me the ability to imagine what that cost might have been for me if I had been living in East Germany at that time. She wrestled with tough circumstances of losing a best friend who defected from the GDR with her family, a budding romance with a boy that could jeopardize her safety, and the stress of living in that communist police state. As captivating as Helena's story is, the backstory of how peaceful protest of prayer and song, at the cost of life and liberty to many of her family and compatriots, is what I identified with as a grownup reading this YA novel.

As an educator, I could not help but see tremendous interdisciplinary connections between Humanities core subjects: History, Music, Language Arts and Literature, Political Science, Sociology, and Psychology. Even though middle school students as young as 13 will enjoy *Song of Freedom, Song of Dreams*, young adults in high school could benefit tremendously from the background knowledge and context this novel provides for many subjects of study.

I hope many young people and adults read this novel. Additionally, I encourage educators to make it available for their students who also have dreams. This hope is what led me to draft curriculum connections for educators who might seek teaching and learning from *Song of Freedom, Song of Dreams* in a more formal, academic way. What follows is a list of activities, connections to US Common Core State Standards as well as American Association of School Library Standards Framework for Learners.

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Before reading *Song of Freedom, Song of Dreams*

Pre-reading strategies

Activity	i. Common Core State Standards (CCSS) ii. American Association of School Libraries Standards (AASL) Framework for Learners	Comments/Extra
Are there certain songs or pieces of music that you listen to again and again? Write the name of a song or piece of music and list reasons you enjoy listening to it.	CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.1: Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.4: Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development,	CCSS standards emphasize the importance of using specific details to support the central idea, maintaining coherence in

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	<p>organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.9: Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research</p> <p>AASL THINK. INQUIRE.. 2. Recalling prior and background knowledge as context for new meaning.</p>	<p>writing, and refining the narrative through revision.</p> <p>AASL standard builds new knowledge by inquiring, thinking critically, identifying problems, and developing strategies for solving problems.</p>
Recall a time when music reminded you of a person, place or event. Describe something about the music that enabled your mind to travel into the past.	<p>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.5: Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.9: Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research</p> <p>AASL. GROW. INQUIRE. 4. Using reflection to guide informed decisions.</p>	<p>CCSS standards emphasize the importance of supporting claims with evidence, maintaining coherence in writing, and using textual evidence to support analysis.</p> <p>AASL standards encourage learners to participate in an ongoing inquiry-based process.</p>
Sometimes people seem to know something without being told. How do they know? Look at the cover of <i>Song of Freedom, Song of Dreams</i> by Shari Green. Jot a short list of some things you might know based on what is displayed on the cover.	<p>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.7: Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words</p>	<p>CCSS standards emphasize the importance of making inferences from visual cues, integrating information from various formats, and interpreting the meaning and tone of visual elements.</p>

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	<p>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.4: Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone</p> <p>AASL. THINK. INQUIRE. 1. Formulating questions about a personal interest or a curricular topic.</p>	AASL standards encourage learners to display curiosity.
<p>Read the quotation from a prayer of St. Augustine that appears before page 1 in <i>Song of Freedom, Song of Dreams</i>. “Tune our hearts to brave music.” Jot your thoughts about at least two points below into a journal or notebook that you can return to later after you’ve finished the book.</p> <p>a. What do you think brave music sounds like? b. What emotion(s) do you expect to be expressed in the verse novel? c. Are there any songs or pieces of music you listen to that you would describe as brave?</p>	<p>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.4: Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.7: Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.1: Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence</p> <p>AASL. SHARE. INQUIRE. 1. Interacting with content presented by others.</p>	CCSS standards emphasize the importance of making inferences, interpreting word meanings and tone, integrating information from various formats, and supporting claims with evidence.
<p>The heading on page 1 before a poem from Helena is “Leipzig, German Democratic Republic. August 1989”</p> <p>What comes to mind when you read that heading?</p>	<p>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text</p>	CCSS standards emphasize the importance of making inferences, integrating information from

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<p>Are there any people, places, things or events that you can think of that relate to that heading? List some of these connections.</p> <p>What questions can you formulate based on that heading? Write a question that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- can be answered easily with an internet search;- cannot be answered easily with an internet search. <p>Share your questions with a classmate. Use the questions you wrote to make inferences about what the verse novel <i>Song of Freedom, Song of Dreams</i> is about.</p>	<p>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.7: Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.9: Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.7: Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation</p> <p>AASL. THINK. I. INQUIRE. 1. Formulating questions about a personal interest or a curricular topic.</p>	various formats, comparing different texts, and conducting research based on focused questions.
	<p>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.6: Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.4: Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.1: Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence</p> <p>AASL. THINK. V. EXPLORE. 2. Engaging in inquiry-based processes for personal growth.</p>	CCSS standards emphasize the importance of making inferences, analyzing point of view, interpreting word meanings and tone, and supporting claims with evidence.

While reading *Song of Freedom, Song of Dreams*

Activity	CCSS AASL	Comment
<p>Details! As you read <i>Song of Freedom, Song of Dreams</i>, pay attention to the different places mentioned in the poems. Write each place name on a sticky note. Once one side of your sticky note is full, organize your list in a way that helps you understand the story better.</p> <p>Here are some ideas for organizing your list:</p> <p>By page number: List the places in the order they appear in the book.</p> <p>By function: Street for transportation, square for gathering, building such as a church. Notice how important the places are to the characters as the story unfolds.</p> <p>By emotion: Some places are where Helena feels safe and happy, others are where she feels unprotected from the government. Rank places Helena visits by her feelings of peace, calm and security, or anxiety and fear.</p>	<p>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.7: Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.9: Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.7: Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation</p> <p>AASL. IV. CURATE.</p>	<p>CCSS standards emphasize the importance of making inferences, integrating information from various formats, comparing different texts, and conducting research based on focused questions.</p> <p>AASL standards support learners in making meaning for oneself and others by collecting, organizing, and sharing resources of personal relevance.</p>
<p>Exploring German Words and Names in <i>Song of Freedom, Song of Dreams</i></p> <p>As you read <i>Song of Freedom, Song of Dreams</i>, you'll come across many German words and</p>	<p>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.4: Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and</p>	<p>CCSS standards emphasize the importance of interpreting word meanings, integrating information from various formats, and participating in collaborative discussions.</p>

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<p>names. Use the glossary on pages 243-244 to help you understand these terms better.</p> <p>For a fun activity, turn to a classmate, friend, or someone you know and address them using their German honorific. For example, Mrs. Smith would be known as "Frau Smith."</p> <p>Or,</p> <p>Write several German words on cards. Turn the cards word-side down and mix them up so that students don't know what words are when they select one.</p> <p>Students should take turns holding a card to their forehead so that a partner can read the word. The partner should describe the word and the person holding the card should guess the German word (use the glossary as a support during guessing).</p>	<p>analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.7: Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.1: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively</p> <p>AASL. THINK. III. COLLABORATE. Developing new understandings through engagement in a learning group.</p>	AASL standards encourage learners to work effectively with others to broaden perspectives and work toward common goals.
<p>Music plays a crucial role in the story and storytelling of <i>Song of Freedom, Song of Dreams</i>.</p> <p>Choose one of the activities below to deepen your understanding of this verse novel.</p> <p>Search for Songs: Use the internet to find songs and pieces of music mentioned in the novel.</p> <p>Create a Playlist: Make a themed playlist. Here are some theme ideas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Sounds like 1989- Brave Music- Classical German- Music by a Composer Mentioned in the Novel- A Theme of Your Choice <p>Share and Discuss: Share a song or musical piece with a classmate,</p>	<p>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.7: Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.9: Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.7: Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation</p>	CCSS standards emphasize the importance of integrating information from various formats, comparing different texts, conducting research based on focused questions, and participating in collaborative discussions.

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<p>relative, friend, or teacher. Use the music to help explain what the story is about.</p>	<p>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.1: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively</p> <p>AASL. IV. CURATE.</p>	<p>AASL Standards support students in making meaning for oneself and others by collecting, organizing and sharing resources of personal relevance.</p>
<p>Exploring Musical Elements in <i>Song of Freedom, Song of Dreams</i></p> <p>As you read <i>Song of Freedom, Song of Dreams</i>, keep a list of musical terms, notations, and titles. Organize these terms into groups to deepen your understanding of the story.</p> <p>Here are some suggested groupings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Music Important to a Character: Choose a character and list the music that is significant to them.- Piano Student Terms: Identify terms that a piano student must learn.- Classic vs. Modern: Compare and contrast classical and modern music.- Create Your Own Grouping: Come up with your own title and organize the terms accordingly.	<p>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.4: Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.7: Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.9: Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.7: Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation</p> <p>AASL. SHARE. V. EXPLORE. 2. Co-constructing innovative means of investigation</p>	<p>CCSS standards emphasize the importance of interpreting word meanings, integrating information from various formats, comparing different texts, and conducting research based on focused questions.</p> <p>AASL Standards support students in discovering and innovating in a growth mindset developed through experience and reflection.</p>

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<p>Exploring Historical Events in <i>Song of Freedom, Song of Dreams</i></p> <p>Use information sources like an online encyclopedia or a historical newspaper database at your public library to find a nonfiction news article about the fall of the Berlin Wall. Read the article to deepen your understanding of the real events of 1989.</p> <p>Next, write a note or postcard to Helena, a character in the story. Encourage her with your insights from the future. You might even introduce her to a song, piece of music, or composer that you think will give her hope at any point in the story.</p> <p>If you enjoyed writing to Helena, choose another character in the story and write a similar postcard to them. Perhaps you will write notes to many characters! Perhaps your postcards will turn into poems similar to those in the novel.</p>	<p>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.7: Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.3: Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.7: Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation</p> <p>AASL. GROW. IV. CURATE. Integrating and depicting in a conceptual knowledge network their understanding gained from resources.</p>	<p>CCSS standards emphasize the importance of making inferences, integrating information from various formats, writing narratives, and conducting research based on focused questions.</p> <p>AASL standards develop learners' ability to make meaning for oneself and others by collecting, organizing, and sharing resources of personal relevance.</p>
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Post Reading

Activity	CCSS AASL	Comment
<p>Choose one of the quotes below to turn into a visual product such as a flyer or a poster. Be sure to illustrate images you gathered from the story to deepen not only your understanding of the story but to connect to the audience of your work.</p> <p>“It’s a rebellious thought to stir people to dreams. Imagining the possibility lets loose butterflies within me” (27) Helena</p> <p>“And for sorrow? Beethoven, maybe.” (57) Lucas</p> <p>“Activism shapes a country, he said, much the same way you might shape a piece of music” (75) Papa</p> <p>“Because, Helena, music has power—power to change hearts and minds, power to bring people together and incite boldness. The Stasi fear everything that gives such power to the people.” (99) Herr Weber</p> <p>“I am the conductor and it’s up to me to shape the discordant parts of my life into a song of freedom” (197) Helena</p>	<p>Reading Standards for Literature (Grades 6-12)</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.1 to RL.12.1: Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.2 to RL.12.2: Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text; provide an objective summary of the text.</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.4 to RL.12.4: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone.</p> <p>Writing Standards (Grades 6-12)</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.6.1 to W.12.1: Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.6.2 to W.12.2: Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.6.3 to W.12.3: Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.</p> <p>Speaking and Listening Standards (Grades 6-12)</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.6.1 to SL.12.1: Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade-level topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.6.5 to SL.12.5: Include multimedia components (e.g., graphics, images, music) and visual displays in</p>	CCSS standards emphasize the importance of textual analysis, evidence-based writing, multimedia integration, and collaborative discussion, all of which are integral to creating a meaningful flyer or poster with quotes and images from a story.

	<p>presentations to clarify information, strengthen claims and evidence, and add interest.</p> <p>Language Standards (Grades 6-12)</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.6.3 to L.12.3: Use knowledge of language and its conventions when writing, speaking, reading, or listening.</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.6.5 to L.12.5: Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.</p> <p>AASL. SHARE. VI. ENGAGE. Disseminating new knowledge through means appropriate for the intended audience.</p>	<p>AASL standards encourage students to demonstrate safe, legal, and ethical creating and sharing of knowledge products independently while engaging in a community of practice and an interconnected world.</p>
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For Further Reading:

Berlin Wall and Resistance

- *I Must Betray You* by Ruta Sepetys
- *Berliners* by Vesper Stamper
- *Going Over* by Beth Kephart
- *A Night Divided* by Jennifer Neilsen
- *Wall* by Peter Sis
- *The Wall* by Eve Bunting

Poetic and Lyrical Reading about Coming of Age, Resistance and Music

- *With a Name Like Love* by Tess Hilmo
- *A Time to Dance* by Padma Venkatraman
- *The Surrender Tree* by Margarita Engle
- The Poetry of the Berlin Wall edited by David L. Pike