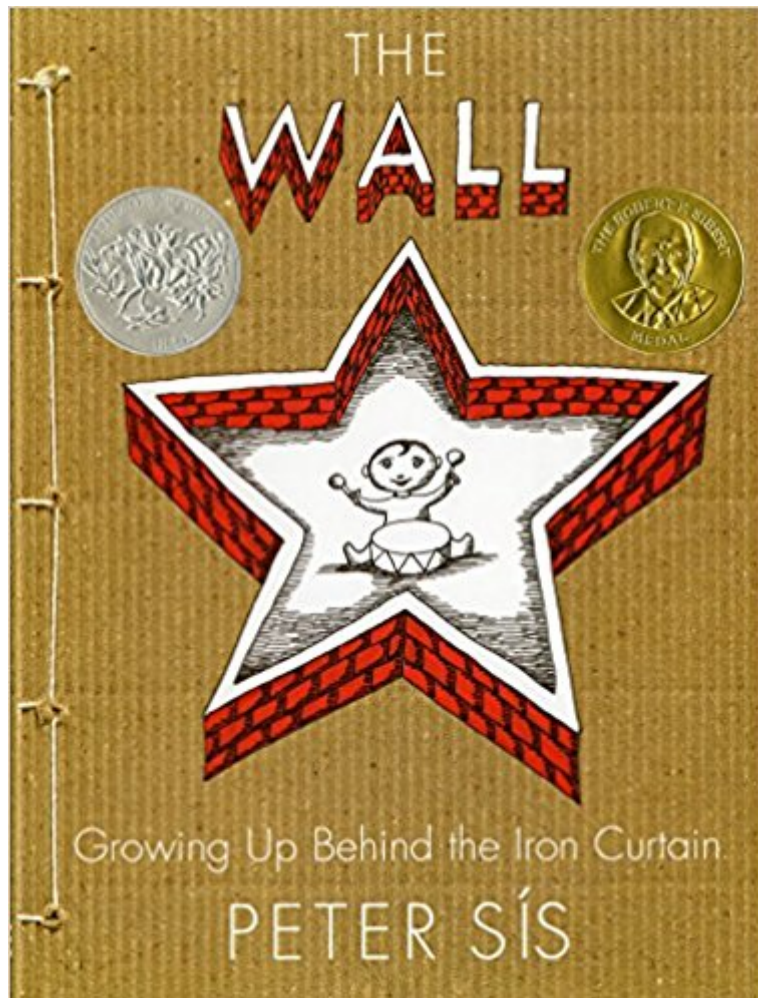


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# The Wall: Growing Up Behind The Iron Curtain (Caldecott Honor Book)



## Synopsis

A NEW YORK TIMES BEST SELLER "I was born at the beginning of it all, on the Red side of the Communist side of the Iron Curtain." Through annotated illustrations, journals, maps, and dreamscapes, Peter Sís shows what life was like for a child who loved to draw, proudly wore the red scarf of a Young Pioneer, stood guard at the giant statue of Stalin, and believed whatever he was told to believe. But adolescence brought questions. Cracks began to appear in the Iron Curtain, and news from the West slowly filtered into the country. Sís learned about beat poetry, rock 'n' roll, blue jeans, and Coca-Cola. He let his hair grow long, secretly read banned books, and joined a rock band. Then came the Prague Spring of 1968, and for a teenager who wanted to see the world and meet the Beatles, this was a magical time. It was short-lived, however, brought to a sudden and brutal end by the Soviet-led invasion. But this brief flowering had provided a glimpse of new possibilities—creativity could be discouraged but not easily killed. By joining memory and history, Sís takes us on his extraordinary journey: from infant with paintbrush in hand to young man borne aloft by the wings of his art. This title has Common Core connections. The Wall is a 2007 New York Times Book Review Best Illustrated Book of the Year, a 2008 Caldecott Honor Book, a 2008 Bank Street - Best Children's Book of the Year, the winner of the 2008 Boston Globe - Horn Book Award for Nonfiction, and a nominee for the 2008 Eisner Award for Best Publication for Kids.

## Book Information

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Grade Level: 3 - 7

Starred Review. Born out of a question posed to SÃfÂ-s (Play, Mozart, Play!) by his children (Are you a settler, Dad?), the author pairs his remarkable artistry with journal entries, historical context and period photography to create a powerful account of his childhood in Cold WarÃçâ -â œera Prague. Dense, finely crosshatched black-and-white drawings of parades and red-flagged houses bear stark captions: Public displays of loyaltyÃçâ -â •compulsory. Children are encouraged to report on their families and fellow students. Parents learn to keep their opinions to themselves. Text along the bottom margin reveals young SÃfÂ-s's own experience: He didn't question what he was being told. Then he found out there were things he wasn't told. The secret police, with tidy suits and pig faces, intrude into every drawing, watching and listening. As SÃfÂ-s grows to manhood, Eastern Europe discovers the Beatles, and the Prague Spring of 1968 promises liberation and freedom. Instead, Soviet tanks roll in, returning the city to its previous restrictive climate. SÃfÂ-s rebels when possible, and in the book's final spreads, depicts himself in a bicycle, born aloft by wings made from his artwork, flying toward America and freedom, as the Berlin Wall crumbles below. Although some of SÃfÂ-s's other books have their source in his family's history, this one gives the adage write what you know biting significance. Younger readers have not yet had a graphic memoir with the power of Maus or Persepolis to call their own, but they do now. Ages 8-up. (Aug.) Copyright Ã Â© Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

**\*Starred Review\*** In an autobiographical picture book that will remind many readers of Marjane Satrapi's memoir *Persepolis* (2003), Šťáhlav's latest, a powerful combination of graphic novel and picture book, is an account of his growing up in Czechoslovakia under Soviet rule. Written in several stands, the somewhat fragmented narrative never dilutes the impact of the boldly composed panels depicting scenes from Šťáhlav's infancy through young adulthood. Throughout, terrific design dramatizes the conflict between conformity and creative freedom, often through sparing use of color; in many cases, the dominant palette of black, white, and Communist red threatens to swallow up young Peter's freely doodled, riotously colored artwork. The panels heighten the emotional impact, as when Šťáhlav fleeing the secret police, emerges from one spread's claustrophobic, gridlike sequence into a borderless, double-page escape fantasy. Even as they side with Peter against

fearsome forces beyond his control, younger readers may lose interest as the story moves past his childhood, and most will lack crucial historical context. But this will certainly grab teens' who will grasp both the history and the passionate, youthful rebellions against authority' as well as adults, many of whom will respond to the Cold War setting. Though the term picture book for older readers has been bandied about quite a bit, this memorable title is a true example. Mattson, Jennifer

I love the print version of this book, but found the electronic version difficult to navigate. There were lots of sizing issues and the zoom feature made it difficult to keep the big picture while also being able to see. If you did not use the zoom, you couldn't see anything. Meanwhile, the book itself is amazing. There are several great interviews of Peter Sis online and I highly recommend them also.

Adults tend to believe that political and military decisions begin and end with them. Sis's book echos what is learned in childhood continues on for generations.

Absolutely, perfect description and illustration of what it meant to grow up in Communist Czechoslovakia. It is not overly dramatic or sensational. It gives the reader a straight forward understanding of the situations faced by the people of that country during those times. It is a picture book that is meant for adults as well as older children.

The Wall is an autobiographical graphic novel/kids book about Peter Sis's life in Czechoslovakia during World War II. As a child, Peter loved to draw. As the book states, he drew shapes and people as a kid, and then tanks and wars as he got older, because that's what he was exposed to. The book follows his life from innocent child to Beatles obsessed teen who had to make his own instruments because real ones were banned. And all the while he drew, what he was allowed to in person, and what he wanted to in private. He kept drawing because it's what inspired him and what took him away from the life he was experiencing. The book ends epically on November 9th, with Peter imagining ways to get away and then realizing that he could as he watched the Berlin Wall fall. This is the first book (that isn't a text book) that I read for grad school and I found it incredibly interesting. Peter Sis does an amazing job at telling his heartbreaking story of growing up in a war torn country. Each page is illustrated with large images and narrated with quick sentences here and there. Each one meaningful and descriptive. Sliced within the book are excerpts from his childhood journals. I loved this idea because it showed his innocence throughout the whole situation. While

some entries dealt with his uncle being imprisoned, others discussed his desire to be in a rock band and move to London. Even though he was going through a war, he was still a child and then a teenager. The country couldn't take that away from him. If you weren't reading the words, you'd think it was a normal kid's book. Peter Sis did an amazing job at illustrating the entire book, using hopeful and colorful images on some pages, and bleak black and white drawings on others to illuminate the difference between the real from what he, in his mind, wanted. What I found most haunting, and realistic about the images was the presence of pigs dressed as cops in every picture, showing how soldiers were always watching. Two page specifically spoke to me. "Everyone wanted to draw. They painted a wall filled with their dreams..." the first page states. Above those words are pictures of people grafting the side of a building. The pictures are of suns and peace signs and guitars and flamingos. The next page shows the soldiers washing off the painting, and then the people re-painting it. Over and over, each strip repeats it. "...and repainted it again and again." They never gave up. I thought this was a brilliant way to tell the story of his childhood. In the afterward, Peter states why he decided to create the book the way he did. After his children asked "How did you decide to settle here in America?" he decided to tell them through the book. "...it's hard to put it into words," he states, "and since I have always drawn everything, I have tried to draw my life-before America-for them. Any resemblance to the story in this book is intentional."

No matter where one grows up, there is always hope and curiosity, love and caring, even within the seeming limits of living behind the Iron Curtain. A really good read for people of all ages.

I bought this book for a teaching unit on Eastern Europe. It met all expectations. The reader gets a real sense of life under Communist rule in a way that younger (middle school/high school) students can relate to.

This book is a wonderful account on both child and adult level. It presents the history of eastern Europe during the Cold War era from the perspective of someone who lived there.

Good book.

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