Bertolt Brecht (1898–1956) was a German playwright and poet in the years between the wars. Like other postwar writers, he was disillusioned by the violence and destruction caused by World War I. He strongly opposed the Nazis. Brecht wrote his poems and plays to criticize corruption, hypocrisy, and the abuse of power. What do the following poems say about the political climate of Germany during the crisis years?

**Germany, You Blond Pale Creature**

Germany, you blond pale creature  
With wild clouds and a gentle brow  
What happened in your silent skies?  
You have become the carrion pit of Europe.

Vultures over you!  
Beasts tear your good body  
The dying smear you with their filth  
And their water  
Wets your fields. Fields!

How gentle your rivers once  
Now poisoned by purple anilin¹  
With their bare teeth children root  
Your cereals up, they're  
Hungry.

But the harvest floats into the  
Stinking water.  
Germany, you blond pale creature  
Neverneverland. Full of  
Departed souls. Full of dead people.  
Nevermore nevermore will it beat—  
Your heart, which has gone  
Mouldy, which you have sold  
Pickled in chili saltpetre²  
In exchange  
For flags.

Oh carrion land, misery hole!  
Shame strangles the remembrance of you  
And in the young men whom  
You have not ruined  
America awakens.

**Song of the S.A. Man¹**

My hunger made me fall asleep  
With a belly ache.  
Then I heard voices crying  
Hey, Germany awake!  
Then I saw crowds of men marching:  
To the Third Reich, I heard them say.  
I thought as I'd nothing to live for  
I might as well march their way.  
And as I marched, there marched beside me  
The fattest of that crew  
And when I shouted 'We want bread and work'  
The fat man shouted too.  
The chief of staff wore boots  
My feet meanwhile were wet  
But both of us were marching  
Wholeheartedly in step.  
I thought that the left road led forward  
He told me that I was wrong.  
I went the way that he ordered  
And blindly tagged along.  
And those who were weak from hunger  
Kept marching, pale and taut  
Together with the well-fed  
To some Third Reich of a sort.  
They told me which enemy to shoot at  
So I took their gun and aimed  
And, when I had shot, saw my brother  
Was the enemy they had named.  
Now I know: over there stands my brother  
It's hunger that makes us one  
While I march with the enemy  
My brother's and my own.  
So now my brother is dying  
By my own hand he fell  
Yet I know that if he's defeated  
I shall be lost as well.
Report From Germany
We learn that in Germany
In the days of the brown plague
On the roof of an engineering works suddenly
A red flag fluttered in the November wind
The outlawed flag of freedom!
In the grey mid-November from the sky
Fell rain mixed with snow
It was the 7th, though: day of the Revolution!

And look! the red flag!

The workers stand in the yards
Shield their eyes with their hands and stare
At the roof through the flurries of icy rain.

Then lorries roll up filled with stormtroopers
And they drive to the wall any who wear work clothes
And with cords bind any fists that are calloused
And from the sheds after their interrogation
Stumble the beaten and bloody
Not one of whom has named the man
Who was on the roof.
So they drive away those who kept silent
And the rest have had enough.
But next day there waves again
The red flag of the proletariat
On the engineering works roof. Again
Thuds through the dead-still town
The stormtroopers’ tread. In the yards
There are no men to be seen now. Only women
Stand with stony faces; hands shielding their eyes, they gaze
At the roof through the flurries of icy rain.

And the beatings begin once more. Under interrogation
The women testify: that flag
Is a bedsheet in which
We bore away one who died yesterday.
You can’t blame us for the colour it is.
It is red with the murdered man’s blood, you should know.

from John Willett and Ralph Manheim, eds., Bertolt Brecht

Footnotes:
Germany, You Blond Pale Creature:
1. anilin: oily, poisonous liquid used in manufacturing.
2. saltpetre: salt used in making gunpowder.

Song of the S.A. Man:
1. S.A. Man: member of the brown-shirted Nazi militia.

Report From Germany:
1. the Revolution: the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia.
2. lorries: trucks.

Activity Options
1. Drawing Conclusions With a group of your classmates, take turns reading these poems aloud. Then discuss the picture of postwar Germany that Brecht creates.
2. Developing Historical Perspective Pretend you are Brecht. Write a letter to a friend in which you express your opinions about Germany after World War I. Share your letter with classmates.