

František Kupka – Level B

- *Methodological guide for teachers*

I. Two Homelands

Document 1

Sort the several parts of the document (in the separate supplement at the end of the worksheet) according to whether they discuss Kupka's relationship to France or his relationship to Bohemia. Place them in chronological order in the table.

KUPKA AND FRANCE	KUPKA AND BOHEMIA
<p><i>Note on his first arrival in Paris in 1895</i></p> <p>“Paris! I was revived, as soon as I climbed out of the train and the murmur of its life entered into my ears and my spirit.”</p> <p>Source: KUPKA, František a Dana MIKULEJSKÁ. <i>František Frank Frantík François Kupka</i>. The National Gallery in Prague, 2013.</p>	<p><i>Voluntary induction into the army in the First World War (1914)</i></p> <p>“And now for the first time he (Kupka) commits himself to something: to Czech independence.”</p> <p>Source: VACHTOVÁ, L. <i>František Kupka</i>. Praha: Odeon, 1968, p. 27.</p>
<p><i>Portrait of František Kupka and his wife Eugénie Kupková (oil, 1908)</i></p>	<p><i>Appointment as professor at the Prague Academy of Fine Arts in 1922</i></p> <p>“His welcome in Bohemia was far from how Kupka had imagined it. Therefore he soon abandoned his original idea to settle here permanently.”</p> <p>Source: VACHTOVÁ, L. <i>František Kupka</i>. Praha: Odeon, 1968, p. 28.</p>
<p><i>Diary entry from the year 1909</i></p> <p>“...Although I've been here (in Paris) for a long time already, I'm still a foreigner.”</p> <p>Source: KUPKA, František a Dana MIKULEJSKÁ. <i>František Frank Frantík François Kupka</i>. The National Gallery in Prague, 2013.</p>	<p><i>Sale of the painting Fugue in Two Colors (1946)</i></p> <p>“The final painting President Beneš purchased for the Prague Castle after the Second World War (...). Mrs. Kupková explained to me how Kupka had refused to sell the painting, but surrendered it with pleasure for a small fee, because he longed for the picture to be in Prague.”</p> <p>Source: M. Mládková From the introduction to the catalog of the exhibition <i>František Kupka and Otto Gutfreund</i> (Kampa Museum, Praha 2006).</p>

Kupka's explanation of why he writes in French to a Czech friend (1908)

...I've forgotten Czech...my French is really ghastly, but it's still better than if I were to write in Czech.

Source: Letter to V. Hynais from 21. 6. 1908 (Archive of the National Gallery, Prague).

Diary entry from the year 1938

“I have been here (in Paris) since 1895 and my whole artistic career rests on the good graces of the admirers of French art... If I saw any possibility to be more of a benefit to my nation at home, I would return.”

Source: KUPKA, František a Dana MIKULEJSKÁ. *František Frank Frantík François Kupka*. The National Gallery in Prague, 2013.

1) Write in your own words what you learned from the documents. (A maximum of five sentences for each paragraph)

KUPKA AND FRANCE	KUPKA AND BOHEMIA
He likes Paris.	He wants to help Bohemia become independent.
He has a wife there.	He considered a return to Bohemia, but eventually he is disappointed by Czechoslovakia.
Even after many years he doesn't feel at home.	He thinks that he is forgetting Czech and he is ashamed to write in Czech.
He believes that he doesn't know French well.	He wants his paintings to be in Prague.
The French love Kupka's paintings; he already has an audience there.	He is always ready to help his native country.

In the table are given, as examples, simplified summaries of each of the documents (one sentence per document). The students can of course choose other formulas, but the sense should be preserved. In the ideal case they will not summarize every document individually, but will create a coherent text from the five statements. For example: In Paris Kupka has a family background, the French are interested in his art, and on top of that he fell in love with the city at first sight. At the same time, even after years there he doesn't feel fully at home, and it seems to him that he's always having problems with the French language.

From the documents it is obvious that Kupka had an ambivalent relationship to both countries. Despite the fact that he lived in France for a long time and deeply loved the

country, he did not feel French. On this, S. Brouček says: “Kupka remained an immigrant, and they often reproached him for not becoming a Frenchman.”¹

Still more inconsistent is his relationship to his native Bohemia. Two documents show Kupka's distinct interest in the good of the Czech nation: he committed himself to the independence of the Czech people in the time of the First World War (doc. 4. E in the supplement) and in the doubtful year 1938 he writes that he is willing to sacrifice his personal success in order to help the Czechoslovak state (doc. 4 G in the supplement). He thus demonstrates a definite feeling for civic involvement and responsibility toward his native country. On the other hand, he was almost out of contact with his countrymen, he did not maintain contact with his family (“I didn't see my brothers or my sister, who actually is living married in Prague,” letter of February 2, 1926, to V. Hynais after a visit to Prague), and expressed himself very critically to his contacts in the Czech Lands, especially in the domain of art. The art historian L. Vachtová expressed great surprise at Kupka's involvement in the time of the First World War. “It is remarkable that Kupka, who sent so many scathing comments in the direction of the Czechs – that this Parisian, who for years associated with virtually no one from Bohemia and whose entire contact with the homeland was represented by subscriptions to *Free Directions*, *Golden Prague*, *Red Flower* and several anarchist periodicals – that this antimilitarist enlists immediately as a volunteer at the front and runs without hesitation into combat duty.”²

Kupka made several attempts at collaboration with other Czechs, but his enthusiasm always wore off quickly. At the beginning of the century, a travelling exhibition of his works was presented in Bohemia and Moravia. In 1907, Kupka himself finally goes to the closing of the traveling exhibition. He stays in Louny, but he sticks around for only a few days, stops in Prague, and then flies off back to Paris, disgusted by Czech attitudes, ‘by the cows and oxes, by the sugar refineries and cheap cigars.’³ A lecture, which Kupka prepared for Czech students after his appointment as professor at the Institute of Fine Arts, met with failure, and he definitively abandoned the idea of settling in the newly-founded Czechoslovakia. He put great hope into a comprehensive exhibition, which was organized for him in 1946 by the Mánes Art Guild under the auspices of the Czechoslovak government. “Kupka arrives in Prague in the autumn of 1946 and actively participates in the preparations for the exhibitions, he undertakes the cataloging of the works and writes an autobiographical preface for the catalog, he keeps an eye on the installation work. In the press conference during the private viewing he recapitulates the reasons for his method of painting, and, as he awaits the outcome, even decides to alter the provisions of his will and name an heir to his works. He also wants to live out the remainder of his life in Bohemia. Articles put out on the occasion of this exhibition remain within the frame of ‘hommage à Kupka’⁴, and discuss him with respect, although they more often judge the contributions of Kupka the illustrator than those of Kupka the painter. The only positive result for him is the purchase of several paintings for the

¹ BROUČEK, S. *K druhému břehu*. Praha, 2007, p. 78

² VACHTOVÁ, L. *František Kupka*. Praha, 1968, p. 27.

³ VACHTOVÁ, L. c. d., p. 21.

⁴ A French expression: “*Tribute to Kupka*”

National Gallery and more for the collection at the Prague Castle. Kupka will visit Bohemia but one more time: in 1947 he brings a portrait of his father to Dobruška, to request that the picture be hung in the assembly chambers of the town hall, where Václav Kupka had at one time worked as a notary clerk. After a long and fruitless wait in the lobby, without anyone recognizing him, Kupka puts the picture in the hands of the chief attendant and leaves for the station. No one in Bohemia would ever see him again.⁵

2) Give more reasons why Kupka could have wanted to stay in France. Why do they seem likely to you?

This exercise challenges the students to draw on their experiences outside of school. If they themselves are growing up outside of their home country, many reasons for a person to want to remain abroad will definitely occur to them. If not, they can attempt to put themselves into the shoes of their friends who have moved to the Czech Republic with parents.

For example, we can anticipate the following sorts of answers:

- It is easier for him to make a living in France than in Bohemia.
- His wife is French and doesn't know Czech.
- His children attend school in France.
- His friends are in France, and in Bohemia he no longer knows very many people.
- In France he bought a house (apartment), a garden...
- He wants to be famous as a painter in Paris, which is bigger and more important for artists than Prague.

The teacher can add his comments to all of the children's suggestions, which can inform them about the details of Kupka's life.

Concerning his livelihood, Kupka's beginnings in Paris were far from easy. On this, L. Vachtová⁶ writes: "The first time in Paris is an endurance test. For four or five days Kupka manages not to eat, until he gets a fever from the hunger. (...) he draws freelance fliers for cabaret singers, which is, however, hardly enough for his subsistence." A Danish friend, who came from Vienna for his sake, helped him out of the worst period of poverty. She arranged a commission for him to draw design illustrations for fashion magazines and department stores. Later Kupka becomes a steady contributor to humorous magazines (Cocorico, Canard sauvage, Assiette au beurre and others) and also gives drawing lessons to cutters of women's dresses. Meanwhile, he is always painting – at the World Exhibition in St. Louis in 1902, he won a gold medal for the painting *Ballad (Joy)*.

⁵ VACHTOVÁ, L. c. d., p. 33.

⁶ If not mentions otherwise, all details about Kupka's life quote the following book: VACHTOVÁ, Ludmila. *František Kupka*. Praha: Odeon, 1968.

In his newspaper artwork Kupka created pieces that are regarded as an integral part of his life's work. On the strength of these drawings, in which "Kupka the individualist discharges his protest for himself alone, yet unexpectedly becomes the tribune of the people," in Bohemia the idea develops to organize an exhibition for him (in 1907 – see also the comment to Exercise 1). Kupka's works are well-received.

Yet in this period Kupka is already trying to quit journalistic drawing, because he is receiving commissions for book illustrations. In 1905, he receives an order for his first book in a bibliophile's edition.

In 1910, he is named a member of the Czech Academy of Sciences and Arts, and this position brings him important financial relief. After the end of the First World War, he accepts for a time a position at the Czechoslovak Memorial to the Independence Movement and in June of 1919 he is named professor at the Prague Academy. It was difficult to sort out his status in such a way that he might at the same time remain in Paris, where he already felt at home.

Finally it was decided that his function will be to arrange liaisons with French culture for Czechoslovak interns in France. This "mission" is broken off in 1938 by Kupka's request for retirement.

During his stay in Czechoslovakia in the early 1920s, Kupka also makes the acquaintance of Jindřich Waldes, who will become Kupka's major benefactor. And this source of income makes it possible for Kupka to devote himself to his genuine artistic practice.

In the course of a personal life closely linked to France, after several short-term Parisian courtships, Kupka becomes acquainted with the Frenchwoman Eugenie Straub, his Nini, and he lives out the rest of his life with her. When they first came to know each other she was already married, and she brought to their own marriage a daughter. They never had children of their own together.

On Eugenie's initiative Kupka also moves from the wild Montmartre to the peaceful Parisian suburb of Puteaux. His neighbor there was the painter Jacques Villon. In the publication *Kupka - Čech, Francouz, Evropan*⁷, we find this supplement on the subject: "In 1906, both painters moved from Caulaincourt Street at the base of the Montmartre to Puteaux. – Villon's and Kupka's families settled at Number 7, Lemaitre Street. During the year 1907 Villon's brother Raymond also moved to this street, and here they all created together a colony of family and friends. Marcel Duchamp also frequently called on the brothers there, and in 1908 he settled in nearby Neuilly. In Villon's studio and at the home of Camilla Renault, owner of renowned restaurants and patroness of modern art, there came together the artists who belonged to the core of the painters' school in Puteaux." Unfortunately, Kupka's house in Puteaux is no longer standing: it was demolished to make room for the modern quarter La Défense. Yet we can find there a tower that bears the name Kupka.⁸

⁷ KUPKA, František a Lenka JAKLOVÁ. *František Kupka: Čech – Francouz – Evropan*. Hradec Králové: Královéhradecký kraj, 2009.

⁸ <http://www.ladefense.fr/fr/tour/kupka-b-et-c> [12. 12. 2016].

According to Vachtová, Kupka departed to Paris due to painting: “He doesn’t want to be just an Austro-Hungarian academician. After a sudden decision he goes to Paris. This gesture was in no way exceptional; in this period he begins wholesale intellectual immigration to the City of Light. Yet Kupka is only partially successful in fulfilling his ambitions during his lifetime. In this beginning period, his career develops in a promising way, he makes a name for himself as a creator of newspaper drawings, an illustrator, and a painter. In 1912 he exhibits his first abstract painting. Yet the World War, during which Kupka works intensely for the homeland, disrupts this development. Thus Kupka cannot collectively present his (prewar) work until 1921. He is disappointed – the exhibition does not meet with the hoped-for success. Vachtová comments on this with these words: “these pictures reek too much of the spirit of the Art Nouveaux; Kupka’s ‘un-Frenchness’ rises out of them.” The exhibition in the Galerie de La Boétie in 1924 fares much better (about forty articles appeared about it), but Kupka is already too absorbed in himself and his own pursuits, and he plunges into isolation. Then, in the 1930s, repeated nervous breakdowns and depressions exhaust him. He loses all interest in the promotion of his work, which his wife completely manages. For example, thanks to her Kupka’s works are added to the collection of Alphonse Mucha’s paintings on view in the Jeu de Paume in 1936. Again we may quote L. Vachtová: “World fame, for which the hunt had gone along so happily in prior times, as in a song, and which Kupka had begun to envision for himself after the exhibition at the Galerie de la Boétie, does not arrive. All the painters, who, like Kupka, famously began their careers in the years 1912 to 1913, have their reputations and their positions. Kupka is an outsider. The rest are the prototypes of French painting and ornaments of the French spirit, but Kupka remains an immigrant.”

A large comprehensive exhibition, which the Mánes Art Guild prepares under the auspices of the Czechoslovak government in 1946, also ends in disappointment. At the beginning, Kupka is full of enthusiasm: in the autumn of 1946 he arrives in Prague in order to participate in the preparations and writes an autobiographical preface for the exhibition catalog. At the press conference during the exhibition’s private reception he explains the reasons for his methods of painting. The subsequent write-ups, which above all emphasize his patriotism and see him as a better illustrator than painter, are proof for him that his entire life’s work has been completely misunderstood (on the exhibition see also the commentary on Exercise 1).

Only in 1951 does Kupka succeed in securing a contract with a really significant art dealer, the Galerie Carré. They organize for him, among other things, a solo exhibition in New York, which meets with success. L. Vachtová remarks: “Geometrical abstraction is on the agenda, yet nevertheless this boom in interest does not illuminate the qualities and the contribution of the whole of Kupka’s works to the extent that it deserved. The USA will be more favorably inclined than France, yet Kupka bases so much on the opinion of the latter.”

Six years later, Kupka dies. A year after his death the Museum of Modern Art in Paris organizes a major retrospective of his works. After the end of the exhibition, the Kupka hall is set up as a component of the permanent exhibition. In the same year his work represents

Czechoslovakia (alongside Gutfreund, Šíma, Špála, and Filla) at the World Exhibition in Brussels.

Since this time, Kupka's paintings have been included in all surveys of the development of modern art.

SUMMARY (diamond)

This exercise is inspired by one of the methods of the RWCT (Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking) program. The diamond is actually a doubled cinquain (for more about cinquains please see the methodological introduction to the Worksheet for F. Kupka, Level A). The Diamond teaches students to see the important, contrasting aspects of research topics. In the first sections, the students write positive terms – what is positive about the theme: in our case what can be pleasurable or beneficial, about life in-between two countries. In the second section of the Diamond, the students then write the opposite: that is, the negative things that this reality brings about. The Diamond helps them to appreciate “both sides of the story.”

The first row is the topic, the subject matter of the Diamond. _____

The second row is a two-word description of the nature of the subject. _____
(positive perspective)

The third row expresses, in three words, a narrative element, what the subject does or what happens to him. (positive perspective) _____

The fourth row is four syntactically associated words, showing empathy toward the subject. (positive perspective) _____

The fifth row is four syntactically associated words, showing empathy toward the subject. (positive perspective) _____

The sixth row expresses, in three words, a narrative element, that is what the subject does or what happens to him. (negative perspective)

The seventh row is a two-word description of the nature of the subject. (negative perspective) _____

The eighth row is a one-word synonym (a metaphor), which recapitulates the essence of the subject, regardless of whether it is positive or negative. _____

Example Solution:

TWO HOMELANDS

HAVING TWO HOMELANDS is liberating, attractive.

A PERSON CAN recognize, create, inspire.

An amazingly unlimited adventure of the spirit.

One foot always somewhere else

A PERSON pines for home, doubts himself, is isolated

HAVING TWO HOMELANDS is schizophrenic, stifling

A CHALLENGE

Comment:

If the students are encountering this method for the first time, they may be taken slightly off guard. It is appropriate either to prepare them by giving them an opportunity, before working with the worksheet, to try out the Diamond on other, easier and more concrete topics, or to allow them to work in groups for part of the time. For example, the whole classroom will suggest a suitable word and a verbal connection, which is written down in the table. During the final, individual composition of the Diamond, the students can use these suggestions for inspiration.

II. The Struggle for an Independent Czechoslovakia

A) Joining the Legions

- 1) Which two countries does Kupka call his homelands? According to you, why does he feel an obligation to these two countries? (*document 5*)

Kupka definitely names Bohemia and France as his two homelands. Bohemia is Kupka's native country, and we saw in the previous section that he is certainly not indifferent to its fate. Kupka will choose France for his home; despite certain feelings of "rootlessness," he feels comfortable there, and consequently regards it as his second homeland.

- 2) What was the situation of these two countries at the beginning of the war? (*Document 3*)

The map shows us that two blocs fought against each other: the so-called Central Powers, that is, Austria-Hungary and Germany with their allies, and the countries of the Entente (the Allies), which was created by France, Great Britain, and Russia. (Also fighting on the side of the Entente were Italy, which did not enter the war until a year later [1915], the United States of America [1917], and other smaller countries.) Therefore, from the very

beginning of the war, France and Austria-Hungary stood on opposite sides of the front as two enemy states.

Of course, in 1914 the Czech Lands are firmly integrated in Austria-Hungary, and therefore the Czechs are regarded everywhere in the world as Austrian citizens. Collectively, the Czechs abroad do not hesitate to show, from the very first days of the war, their disagreement with Austro-Hungarian policies, exactly like František Kupka. Above all in the countries of the Allies, where numerous Czech settlements exist, almost immediately after the outbreak of the war there are efforts to support the Allied states through voluntary military service (military units like the Nazdar Company in France and the Czech Companions in Russia; the entry of Czech volunteers into the British Army, and the like).

Most likely, it is necessary to also emphasize to today's students the difficulty of the situation in which the Czechs living in the Allied nations found themselves after the outbreak of war. Their feelings continue to be expressly anti-Austrian, yet as citizens of Austria-Hungary living on the territory of the Entente states, they are considered to be citizens of an enemy state and are threatened with internment. They can either quickly return home, where as part of the general mobilization they will be called to the front to fight for Austria-Hungary, or they can attempt to resolve their situation by dealing with the governments of the countries in which they live. In the end, representatives of the Czech emigrants in France negotiated an arrangement with the French Ministry of Internal Affairs for a special status for Austro-Hungarian citizens of Czech nationality. On the basis of its decree ("Owing to a claim parallel to that of the Poles and Alsations, the Czechs settled in France are also regarded as friends of France"), the prefecture was able to grant the Czechs permission for residency. The fact that the Czechs voluntarily entered the French army was, for the ministry, one of the weightiest arguments.

Comment:

On the internet and in the literature it is also possible to find similar descriptions of the circumstances of the Nazdar Company's origins: "On the first of August, 1914, around four in the afternoon, Paris and then the whole of France learned that war was coming very soon. Public notices announced that the first day of mobilization will be Sunday, the second of August. The text clearly said that German and Austro-Hungarian citizens, who do not leave France, will face deportation to internment camps. A sense of impending disaster provokes the Czechs in Paris into enormous activity. (...) The crucial assembly of Czechs happened on August 9th. (...) The first and most important item of discussion became the recruitment of volunteers into the Foreign Legion. On August 18, the military governor ruled that from this date the Czechs can report to the Foreign Legion. (...) A conscription center was established in Paris for the Foreign Legion under the direction of Colonel Rain, who determined that in the first days the recruitment would proceed in alphabetical order according to nationality. August 22 fell to the Czechs and Slovaks. Three hundred volunteers came before the military doctor at Les Invalides and the majority received their uniforms. The Paris military governor

did not permit the volunteers of the Foreign Legion to have their training grounds in Paris, so they learned during the very process of recruitment that the following day they would leave for Bayonne in the south of France on the Spanish border. (...) After the ceremonial oath on the 12th of October, Mayor Garat of Bayonne presented the Czech volunteers with a military banner, with which they embarked from Bayonne, by way of Bordeaux and Paris, to Rheims, where they were integrated into the First March Regiment of the Foreign Legion. Behind them come others, arriving to the frontline trenches of the Somme.”⁹

3) Compare Documents 2 and 4. What do the testimonies agree on, and how do they differ?

A Venn diagram serves as a graphical representation of ideas – it helps to make visible the thought process that occurs whenever we enter into an examination of any sort of topic. It is formed from two (or more) partially overlapping circles. It can be used for a summary representation of the contrast between ideas and of their areas of similarity.

The teacher can ask the students to fill in only one of the circles (in our case, some of the students examine Document 2 and the others Document 4). Afterwards the teacher can create pairs (or groups): the students then compare notes with each other and record in the intersection of the circles those items which are common to both texts.¹⁰

Parallel Themes in Both Documents:

Kupka’s Czech origin, his motivation for joining the army (both deal with this theme, but they differ as to their explanations: according to Kupka, he was “driven to this by devotion to both homelands,” while according to Cendrars it is difficult to answer this question and the most likely cause was the influence of Kupka’s wife). Both also comment on why Kupka was sent behind the lines, away from the front: they concur that the cause was Kupka’s physical condition, which not even Kupka’s strong will could overcome. (“Physical fatigue soon breaks the will,” says Kupka; “despite high morale, courage, and steadfastness he was often sick,” writes Cendrars. Cendrars also emphasizes Kupka’s relatively advanced age several times in the text.)

Information only contained in Kupka’s text:

The period of departure to the front (“August 1914”), the fact that he went together with other Czechs (“with Czech compatriots”).

Information only contained in Cendrars’ text:

⁹ BROUČEK, S. *K druhému břehu*. Praha 2007, p. 103–107.

¹⁰ Inspired by: TEMPLE, STEEL, MEREDITH. *Čtením a psaním ke kritickému myšlení*. Příručka III. Praha, 1993.

Kupka's age ("he was a good quarter-century older than we were"); profession (painter); a description, above all physical ("tall, burly," "bright, amused eyes," "quiet," etc.), an assessment of soldierly qualities ("a good, cool-headed, calm soldier"; "despite high morale, courage, and steadfastness"), a characterization of Kupka's wife ("a fiery patriot, stout-hearted and spirited, a sort of Warrior-Woman ["boj-baba"], as the Russians say"). Several times, Cendrars points out Kupka's advanced age ("He was already past the age for soldiering," "wrinkled," "greying hair," "a white beard").

Students can also record in the diagram the formal similarities and differences between the two texts. Kupka is writing his autobiography (for the catalogue of his exhibition in Prague in 1946), while Cendrars is writing an autobiographical novel, in which Kupka is only a peripheral character. Kupka's style is rather terse and matter-of-fact. Cendrars narrates events with more flourish and with emphasis on specific details, he lets us look more often into his inner world, how he perceived the people and events around him. And of course – the basic difference is that in the second passage Kupka is not the narrator, but "only" a literary character, and we see him through the eyes of the narrator. It is likely that they were not particularly close. Cendrars explains only his own surmises as to the reasons for Kupka's going to the front: evidently, they did not speak with each other about personal things. Nevertheless, we learn more about Kupka than he was willing to divulge in his autobiography about himself (and also with respect to the scope and determinateness of his text). Cendrars' narration mentions the hardships of soldiers at the front and from this we can clearly see Kupka's unpretentious heroism.

Working With the Internet

Find out who Blaise Cendrars was. Confirm whether his claim that Kupka "was a good quarter-century older than we were" is true or not.

On Wikipedia and in the Czech biographical database, students will find this text:

"Blaise Cendrars" (September 1, 1887 – January 21, 1961), born **Frédéric Louis Sausser**, was a Swiss writer and poet who settled in France. He was strongly influenced by Modernism.

Cendrars was born into a Francophone family in Swiss La Chaux-de-Fonds. He did not complete school, but instead became a watchmaker. He moved to St. Petersburg, Russia, to practice this profession, and there he later became a librarian in the Russian National Library. In 1907, he returned to Switzerland, where he began the study of medicine at the University in Berne. During his studies he began to write his first poems, subsequently published together in the collection *Séquences*. In 1911 he departed for New York. He summed up his impressions of this metropolis in the text *Les Pâques à New York*, which was the turning point in his career. It was, on the one hand, his first text written from a modernist standpoint, and, on the other hand, it was the first which he wrote under the pseudonym Blaise Cendrars. In 1912 he left for Paris, where he became involved in the rich cultural activity on the Montparnasse, especially among the artists of Leftist orientation. With the Anarchist

writer Emil Szittyá, he founded the publishing house *Les Hommes Nouveaux*. He was associated with Marc Chagall, Fernand Léger, Léopold Survage, Amedeo Modigliani, Alexander Archipenko, and Robert Delaunay. However, he was most influenced by Guillaume Apollinaire. In 1914 he left to fight at the front in the ranks of the French Foreign Legion. He fought in the Battle of the Somme, among others. Around 1925 he ceased writing poetry and concentrated on short stories.”

In the pages of the publishing house Baobab (which published Cendrars’ children’s prose *Little Black Stories for Little White Children*) we find this supplemental information:

“Blaise Cendrars (1887–1961)”

The writer and poet of Swiss origin, Blaise Cendrars, was among things a great traveler and adventurer. Over seventeen years, he set out for Moscow, supported himself as a performer, sailor, beekeeper, and reporter, entered the foreign legion during the First World War, and was wounded and lost an arm. All of this is reflected in his writing. His books include *The Man Struck by Lightning*, *Panama or the Adventures of My Seven Uncles*, *Seven Adventures*, *The Severed Hand*, *Gold: the Marvelous History of General Johann August Suter*. His poetry (collected in Czech as *In the Heart of the World*) is animated by boundless curiosity and an unceasing search for new techniques. He published his *Little Black Stories* for the first time in 1929, in which by a unique method he narrates the legends and stories of the oldest continent. We can hear in them the rhythm of African songs, the swinging step of the women, the furtive step of an animal, the squeaking of the mice, the wind dancing over the arid land, the steps of people both cunning and stupid, and, finally, the laughter of children: of those children who listened and are still listening to these stories.”

In our context it is important that, like František Kupka, Cendrars voluntarily entered the French army after the start of the First World War. Both found themselves in the Foreign Legion (soldiers of foreign origin were not permitted to serve in other units). In his book *The Severed Hand*, Cendrars dedicated the first chapter to Kupka (or to the Kupkas as a couple) with the title “Mrs. Kupka.”

If we look at the dates of birth of both artists, we can easily calculate that Cendrars was 16 years younger than Kupka. The difference may indeed be substantial, but “quarter-century” is an exaggeration.

B) At the front and in the rear

Document 5

František Kupka, *Tranchée de la Feuillère* (France, 18. 12. 1914, watercolor on paper)

- 1) The painting has a French title. Translate the title according to what you see in the picture.

In English, the title of the painting would read “Trench at the Feuillère.” (The French word “tranchée” we translate into English as “trench” – from the Old French “trenche,” a man-made trench, from the verb “trenchier,” to cut).

With respect to the First World War, we commonly speak of “trench warfare.” It is up to each teacher to decide to what extent he wants to introduce this term to the students.

2) What tool is in the foreground of the painting? Why do you think that it is there?

In the foreground of the painting, Kupka has placed a shovel. This is probably because every soldier had to be able to work quickly and skillfully with a shovel in their own interest. The trenches protected them from the enemy, but the building and upkeep of these trenches required hard physical labor.

In her book *Trench Warfare*, Yvette Heřtová explains: “The defender, torn up by preliminary artillery fire, and the attacker, terribly wounded by the defender’s guns and cannons, search for cover. Initially, people pressed together into shallowly dug foxholes, protecting their necks with their hands and helplessly moaning with horror. Then they began to dig in more deeply – the earth took them in and with a bit of luck even protected them. The more the soldier dug in, the deeper he went. The trenches, which a man excavated in a ferocious battle against time, became one of his defenders. Here he gradually brought everything that he needed for life in wartime. Here he felt at least a little bit protected, here he could eat, sleep, wait for the order to attack, from here, under the protection of the high earth parapets, he could shoot with his rifle and his machine-gun, here he could even resist an attack with bayonets, when the enemy was lucky enough to make it to his lines. The shovel was added to the necessities of the soldier in the field, and there was no man who wouldn’t learn to handle it quickly and skillfully, if he wanted to live.”¹¹

3) Kupka depicted himself in the painting. Compare his wartime self-portrait with the way his comrade-in-arms Blaise Cendrars portrays him in Document 4.

Surprisingly, a cheerful blue color dominates this watercolor, painted in the year 1914. In the narrow surroundings of the trench two soldiers are on guard. Kupka is leaned against the wall of the trench, although we cannot see too much of his face, and can instead only guess that it is him. This is most convincingly implied by the beard (this already the dominant feature of the face in an oil painting, where he is depicted with his wife – see Document No. 1). It is impossible to reconcile the details of the face with those to which Cendrars alludes (bright amused eyes, wrinkles, greying hair, a white beard). Only, perhaps the beard can appear to us as greyish; yet that may be due only to the subconscious influence which the text has had upon us. But we can certainly affirm that Kupka looks “tall and burly.”

¹¹ HEŘTOVÁ, Y. *Zákopová válka*. Praha, 2008, p. 120.

Document 6

František Kupka, *The Death of Cornet Bezdíček and Volunteer Šibal at Arras* (France, 1915-1918, watercolor, handmade paper with watermark)

- 4) In the painting, identify Kupka's comrades-in-arms Bezdíček and Šibal. Are they attacking or defending?

Kupka's unit (and thus also Bezdíček and Šibal) are the attackers in this battle – they are rushing forward into the enemy's trenches.

- 5) How did they die?

In battle. In the picture we see Cornet Bezdíček leaning over the enemy trenches, attacking the men beneath him with his bayonet. Yet a bayonet (on the gun barrel) is already being driven into his chest. On account of the painting's title, we can suppose that a similar fate is waiting for Šibal, who is shown in the vicinity of Bezdíček.

In Rudolf Robl's book *Cornet Karel Bezdíček* (Moravian Legionaire, Brno, 1935), we find this description of Bezdíček's passing: "the main witness of Bezdíček's death was the youngest of the Kirchner brothers, Antonín. He also saw Bezdíček during the attack, in the moment at La Targette when he charged the German trench with his bayonet. Therewith a bullet struck Bezdíček, so that he pitched forward into the trench. Immediately after him the Czech legionnaire Ferdinand Kulfánek fell in the same place, likewise mortally wounded. Antonín Kirchner leapt down to them. Blood was pouring from Bezdíček's breast. Supposedly he said 'Lift me up!' and so Kirchner knelt down beside him and cradled his body in his arms, but just then the wounded man stretched himself out and passed away... Kirchner set him down on the floor of the trench, and seeing that he could not help Kulfánek either, threw himself into the attack, and in the heat of moment he did not think to recover the banner."¹²

Comment: A good deal of space in R. Robl's book is devoted to the theme of the banner of the Nazdar Company. It was indeed a great honor for the Czechoslovak soldiers to fight under their own banner and, according to the author of the book, their commander greatly wished to bring it back to victorious Prague. Unfortunately, the banner remained with Bezdíček, whose body was never found.

Josef Šibal, the chairman of the Parisian Social-Democratic association Rovnost ("Equality"), fell too on the same day in the battle at Arras.

"And in the field around all of La Targette and Neuville Saint Waast they remained with the Cornet – as faithful guards of the banner – these most beautiful of the beautiful ones: not only Lieutenant Václav Dostál, but also the proud 'Sokol' chief Josef Pultr, as well as the chairman of 'Rovnost' Josef Šibal, and also the director of the tambura players Jožka Vantuch.

¹² ROBL, R. *Praporečník Karel Bezdíček*. Brno, 1935, p. 156–157. Accessible from: <http://www.karelvatko.cz/zivotopisy-legionaru> [12. 12. 2016].

Everyone who had been a leader before in Paris had now gone forward and led by example on the field of battle.”¹³

6) What can you learn from the painting about the method of leading an attack in trench warfare?

The methods of attack were quite primitive, risky, and bloody. The painting indicates that the attackers were really at the mercy of the defenders in the trenches, as they ran toward them completely unprotected. Naturally, many of them fell before they even arrived at the trenches. Others died in hand-to-hand combat right at the trench-lines.

“It was at five till ten when the squadron rose up from the trenches and was able to run out onto the field. At the stroke of ten, the order rang out: ‘En avant!’ Battalion C, led by its ‘father’ Major Noiret, crashed out into the storm of German bullets. To a thunderous ‘Hurrah’ the fighting call ‘Nazdar!’ rang out – the salutation of the Czech company, led by Captain Sallé.

The banner barely reached its goal, the wounded dropped, the dead were falling. But the others drove irresistibly forward and, with a charge like an eagle’s swoop destroying with grenades everything that remained in their path, they captured the first German line at the ‘white works.’ The troops of the second and third lines (that is, Battalions D and A) advanced in succession behind them.

Assault Battalion C put these others under orders to mop up the last of the Germans in the trenches and then advanced alone. Not far behind the first German line Major Noiret fell with a fatal wound in the chest. Soon after him Captain Sallé collapsed, seriously wounded, and the ranks of the squadrons were thinning out. Even still, the second German line – well fortified but poorly manned – soon fell as well, because the Germans, beholding the mad onslaught, had already retreated from a vast area to the third line, near the Béthune highway. A hard battle was fought for this line and especially the village La Targette. Here, at about half past ten in the morning, not far from the village, he fell together with the others: cornet of the Czech company, the gallant hero Karel Bezdíček.”¹⁴

The volunteer Josef Antoš describes the battle thusly:

“Our trumpeters blare out the call to arms. It is exactly ten o’clock. We have been learning how to attack as one line, each one three steps from the other. So as soon as we had rushed out from the trench, our first worry was to be in ordered ranks, each in his place, as we had once done in Bayonne. What a pretty sight we must have been, the whole battalion going to meet death in such proper order. In the meantime, however, the German machine guns were clattering, clattering fast as right before our eyes the ground was thrown open by the explosions of grenades. Our ranks were thinning out. Many of us fell early, before we had made it to the wire that was protecting the first German trench. The passage through the barbed wires was terrible for us: the tails of our long coats got stuck in the wires and the

¹³ ROBL, R. c. d., p. 149.

¹⁴ ROBL, R. c. d., p. 147–149.

Germans defended themselves. Some of us had the bad luck to fall into deep pits, from which they did not crawl out again; others were killed here by the Germans. And among these our Cornet Bezdíček and our banner were lost. We had orders not to attend to the enemies in the trenches, but to cross over these as quickly as possible and hurry toward a predetermined target. The Germans took advantage of this: as soon as they saw that we had crossed their first trench, they turned their guns around and fired at us from behind. We rush forward. Before us is a plain, a field, but no more trenches. We are 100-200 meters to the left of the village Neuville Saint Vaast. We had arrived just in front of the very grove of del Folie – our target. We lie down in the level field and begin firing, the German bullets landing thick around us. We scrape together the dirt and pile it in front of us, all our companies mixed up together. The greatest danger threatening us is from the village, where the Germans were sheltered in the houses, firing at us mercilessly. Only now did we see in what kind situation we had found ourselves: we were very few, we had lost a good 60% of our men. Somewhere lies one, there a second, there a third. Next to me is a Belgian sergeant. As I am watching, he abruptly stops firing. His hand is on the trigger and he closes his eyes. He had been shot through heart. On the second day a French regiment arrives to replace us. Slowly, one after the other, we head to the rear. We went down into the trenches, from which we had departed the day before. My Bayonnaise sergeant is counting us. We are few, very few. We keep on gazing ahead, watching to see if one of us will still arrive: but we are watching in vain.”¹⁵

The battle at Arras had a fatal impact on the Nazdar Company – in the end it had ceased to exist, as so few of its members survived the battle. For more, see for example Karel Straka’s article *Rota Nazdar: more than just the memorable fight of May 9, 1915*.¹⁶

7) Kupka also often expressed himself in writing on the topic of his own life. Try to imagine what he might have written down in his diary about (a) his ordinary, daily duty in the “Trench at Feuillère” on December 12, 1914 or (b) the Battle of Arras on May 5, 1915.

During an assignment of this type, the students classify their new knowledge and impressions while they are writing. The resulting text will reflect their imagination and capacity for empathy, but of course this very much depends upon what they have learned in class about the life of the soldiers in the trenches.

Document 7

František Kupka, *Designs for Orders and Medals for the Czechoslovak Army* (France, 1918, gouache, watercolor, paper)

¹⁵ Download from the internet: <http://www.jaromirjermar.cz/historie/ceskoslovenske-legie-v-i-svetove-valce-za-vznik-samostatneho-statu.html> [12. 12. 2016].

¹⁶ <http://www.vhu.cz/rota-nazdar-nejen-o-pamatnem-boji-z-9-kvetna-1915/> [12. 12. 2016].

1) Of these designs, only one, the Golden Linden Decoration, was actually realized. Of the three, which one is it?

Of the three orders depicted in the watercolor, only the center one contains the leaves of the linden tree (also known as the lime or basswood tree) as a design element. The leaves are in the shape of a sort of wreath (a suggestion of a laurel wreath?), which connects a ribbon in the Slavic colors to the medal. In addition, if we really scrutinize the watercolor quite carefully, we will definitely notice that something is written under the order in the center: “ORDE DE ‘GOLDEN LINDEN’.” This inscription confirms that the central order is indeed the one in question.

2) Why did he choose precisely the linden for the name of order, and not some other tree?

The small-leaved linden (*Tilia cordata*) is one of less obtrusive symbols of the Czech Republic. It can be seen in, for example, the presidential standard, the state seal, on soldiers' uniforms, or on banknotes. It is a popular symbol of the Slavic peoples generally, often used as a symbol of Slavic solidarity (Jan Kollár, the poet of the National Revival, also used it for this purpose). The linden became an official national symbol in June of the year 1848 during the All-Slavic Congress in Prague, with the participation of delegates from all the Slavic nations living in the Habsburg Monarchy.

3) The Golden Linden Decoration was not awarded until 90 years after it was designed. In which year did this happen?

In 2008.

For more see the following text from the webpages of the Ministry of Defense of the Czech Republic.¹⁷

The Golden Linden Decoration of the Ministry of Defense of the Czech Republic is given by the Minister of Defense only very rarely, to citizens of the Czech Republic and to foreign nationals who significantly contributed to the defense of human rights and liberties, particularly human life, well-being, and property and to the foundational principles of democratic and law-governed states, or who otherwise exceptionally contributed to the advancement of the defense and security of the Czech Republic, including scientific and technical efforts. The Golden Linden Decoration of the Ministry of Defense of the Czech Republic has one degree and it may be bestowed repeatedly.

The Golden Linden Decoration of the Ministry of Defense of the Czech Republic is based on a design of the artist František Kupka, a participant in the Czechoslovak resistance abroad in France. The obverse side is in the form of a four-pointed star, the center of which is formed from four interwoven circles of red. In the center between the circles is placed a gold linden leaf. Surmounting the decoration is a suspension in the form of two joined linden

¹⁷ <http://www.acr.army.cz/scripts/detail.php?id=12239> [12. 12. 2016].

wreaths, hung upon a ribbon. On the reverse side a medallion is set into the center of the star, with the emblem of the Ministry of Defense and the inscription “MINISTRY OF DEFENSE OF THE CZECH REPUBLIC” and “HONOR AND HOMELAND,” and completed by a space for the imprinting of a serial number.

Simultaneously with the presentation of the Golden Linden Decoration of the Ministry of Defense of the Czech Republic, a certificate is presented that states the rank, title, name, and surname of the person to whom the Golden Linden Decoration of the Ministry of Defense of the Czech Republic is being awarded and serial number of the award.

The Decoration has been awarded by the Minister of Defense since 2008.

The Golden Linden Decoration of the Ministry of Defense of the Czech Republic stems directly from the original design, preserved in the collection of the Military History Institute. Its creator is one of our most significant artists, František Kupka. This work, created around the year 1918, is part of a unique, systematic collection of designs of state and military symbols for the new Czechoslovakia. It includes not only orders and decorations, but also banners, uniforms and their components, etc. At the time, Kupka was serving as a captain in the 21st Infantry Regiment of the Czech Legion in France. The artistic element of the four mutually overlapping circles (symbolizing the historical lands of Bohemia, Moravia, Silesia, and Slovakia) is very characteristic of Kupka’s designs.



Comment:

One possibility is to take a moment with the students to consider why the realization of the design took so long. Perhaps immediately after the war the design was in competition with many others? In totalitarian Czechoslovakia, there was certainly no interest in commemorating Kupka in any way, no more than there was any interest in the values of the first Czechoslovak independence movement. Interest in Kupka's work was not revived until after the Velvet Revolution, by which time he had already become a celebrated painter in the rest of the world.

WORKING WITH THE INTERNET

The Golden Linden Decoration is bestowed by the Minister of Defense of the Czech Republic to people who have contributed significantly to the protection of fundamental human rights and liberties. Find some of the bearers of this decoration on the internet.

The Minister of Defense bestows the Golden Linden Decoration regularly on the occasion of Czechoslovak Independence Day and often also on the anniversary of the end of the Second World War (the bestowal of the decoration then usually happens in the Church of Saints Cyril and Methodius on Resslova Street in Prague). However, it is occasionally also given on days other than these significant ones.

Among the most frequently honored are participants in the First, Second, and Third Czechoslovak independence movements, victims of political show trials, and generally people persecuted by the Communist regime. However, among the bearers of the decoration there are also journalists, politicians, athletes, and scientific and cultural personalities.

In light of the great abundance of honorees, we offer here only a small illustrative sample.

First Independence Movement

Gen. Rudolf Medek
František Kupka

Second Independence Movement

Alois Denemark (*one of the last living participants of the Silver A group and Operation Anthropoid*)
Milan Zapletal (*participant in the Second Independence Movement, last living member of the parachutist group BIVOUAC, jumped on the night of April 28, 1942*)

Fighters Against Communism

Milada Horáková and her daughter Jana Káňská
František Šedivý
Naděžda Kavalírová
Ctirad, Josef, and Zdena Mašín
Jan Palach
Dana Němcová
Vilém Prečan
František Stárek

Journalists

Lída Rakušanová
Petra Procházková
Karel Rožánek
Marek Vitek

Scientific, Cultural, and Athletic personalities

Meda Mládková
Vladimír Beneš
Dana Zátoková
Jan Železný
Tomáš Dvořák
Roman Šebrle
Štěpánka Hilgertová

Politically Active Personalities

Madeleine Albright
Ronald D. Asmus
Jaroslav Šedivý
Štefan Füle