

FRANTIŠEK KUPKA

LEVEL A

I. Two Homelands

František Kupka (1871–1957) came from eastern Bohemia. He spent his childhood in Dobruška, where he was apprenticed as a saddle-maker. Thanks to his artistic talents he was recommended, in 1889, for art school. He studied at the Academies of Fine arts in Prague and in Vienna. In 1895 he left for France, where he lived until his death. But he never forgot about his native Bohemia. Today he is considered to be one of the most significant Czech artists of the 20th century.

Documents 1: Kupka and France

Document A: Note on his first arrival in Paris in 1895

"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."

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

Dokument B: Portrait of František Kupka and his wife Eugénie Kupková (oil, 1908)



Source: Painting in the collection of the National Gallery, Prague; taken from the book VACHTOVÁ, Ludmila. *František Kupka*. Praha: Odeon, 1968.

Document C: Diary entry from the year 1909

“...although I've been here (in Paris) for a long time already, I'm still a foreigner.”

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

Document D: 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.

Documents 2: Kupka and Bohemia

Document A: Voluntary induction into the army in the First World War (1914)

“And now, for the first time, he commits himself to fighting for something: for Czech independence.”

Source: VACHTOVÁ, L. *František Kupka*. Praha: Odeon, 1968, p. 27.

Document B: Appointment as professor at the Prague Academy of Fine Arts in 1922

“His welcome in Bohemia was far from how Kupka had imagined it. Therefore he soon abandoned his original idea to settle here permanently.”

Source: VACHTOVÁ, L. *František Kupka*. Praha: Odeon, 1968, p. 28.

Document C: Sale of the painting Fugue in Two Colors (1946)

“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 now surrendered it with pleasure for a small fee, because he longed for the picture to be in Prague.”

Source: M. Mládková, introduction to the catalog for the exhibition František Kupka and Otto Gutfreund (Kampa Museum, Prague 2006).

Document D: 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) Fill in the table. Write in your own words what you learned from Documents 1 and 2.

| KUPKA AND FRANCE | KUPKA AND BOHEMIA |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| | |

- 2) Write in your own words what you learned from the documents. (A maximum of 5 sentences for every column).

SUMMARY (cinquain)

Guidelines:

TWO HOMELANDS

HAVING TWO HOMELANDS IS ___ ___

HAVING TWO HOMELANDS ___ ___ ___

HAVING TWO HOMELANDS ___ ___ ___ ___
MEANS

II. The Struggle for an Independent Czechoslovakia

A) Joining the Legion

The First World War broke out in June of 1914. Many Czechs burst into open resistance against Austria-Hungary. They wanted to create an independent Czechoslovakia. Several military units (later named Legions) were founded abroad, in which Czechs and Slovaks fought against Austria-Hungary and its allies.

Czechs living in France also asked the French government to let them get involved in the war. In August of 1914 they created the Nazdar Company, in which Czech volunteers fought on the Western Front. Kupka enlisted himself in this unit without any hesitation.

Document 3

From Kupka's autobiography

In August of 1914, Kupka departs for the battlefield with his fellow Czechs. He awakens to a sense of obligation toward both countries (...)

Source: BROUČEK, S. *K druhému břehu*. Praha, 2007, p. 118.

Document 4

Map of Europe in 1914



Source: Taken from the history textbook for middle schools: Robert Kvaček: *České dějiny 2*. Praha, 2002.

- 1) Which two countries does Kupka call his homelands? Why do you think he feels a duty to these two countries? (*Document 3*)
- 2) What kind of situation were these two countries in at the start of the war? (*Document 4*)

WORKING WITH THE INTERNET

How much time elapsed between the declaration of the First World War and the creation in France of the Czechoslovak Nazdar Company, in which Kupka enlisted? Which unit of the French army was the Company a part of?

B) At the front and in the rear

František Kupka spent the beginning of the war at the front, where he participated in many difficult battles. But, due to health problems, in 1915 he was sent back to Paris. There he guided the organization of Czech compatriots and helped E. Beneš and M. Štefánik to constitute the Czechoslovak army. Even in his artistic production, he worked for the homeland: he designed uniforms, banners, decorations, postage stamps, and postcards published in support of the Legions. Thanks to his meritorious activities he was made an Officer of the Order of the Legion of Honor (the highest French order) and promoted to the rank of captain.

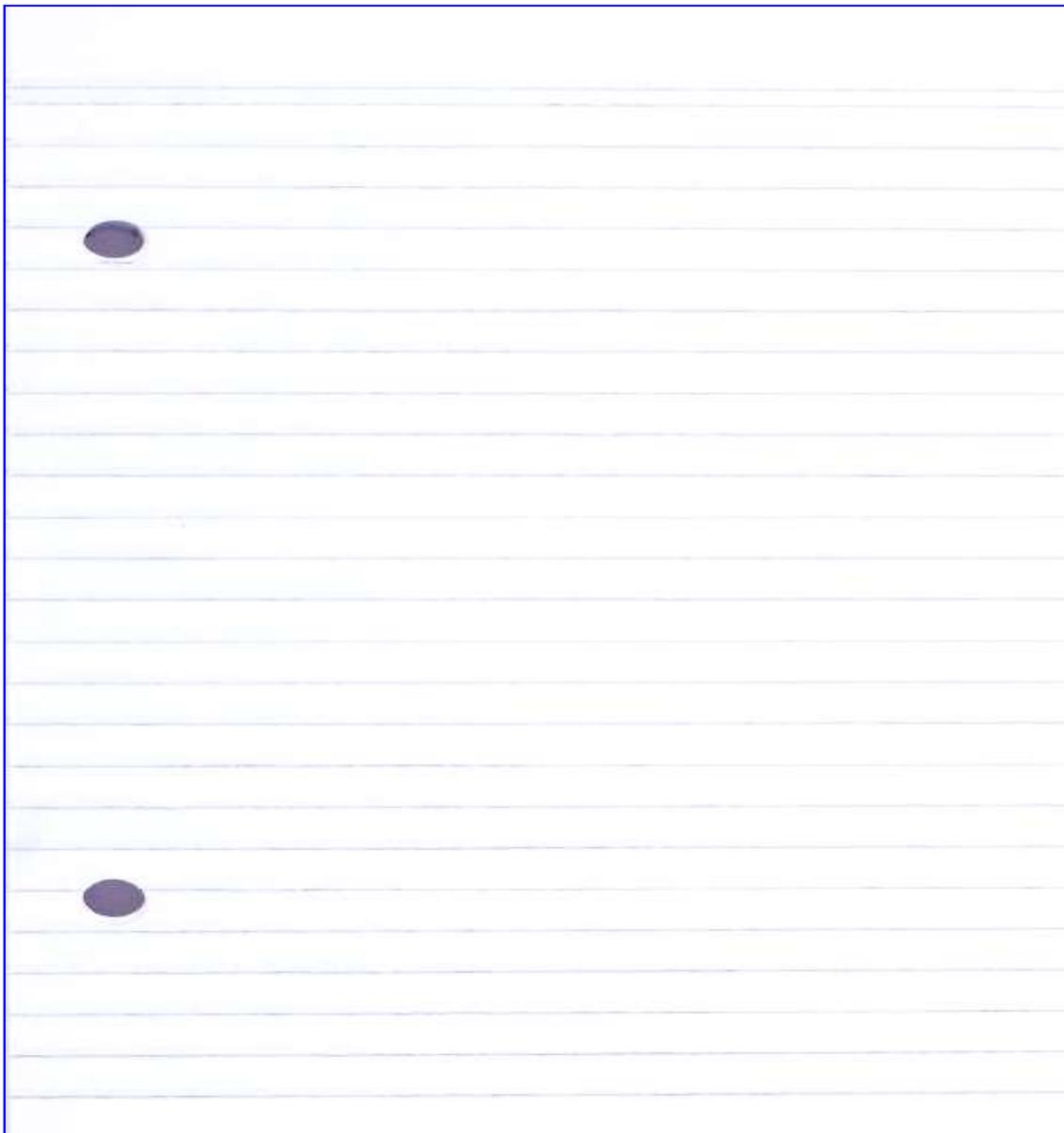
Document 5

František Kupka, *Tranchée de la Feuillère* (France, 18.12.1914, watercolor on paper) – in the collection of the Military History Institute



- 1) The painting has a French title. Translate the title according to what you see in the picture.
- 2) What tool is in the foreground of the painting? Why do you think that it is there?
- 3) Kupka depicted himself in the painting. Compare his wartime self-portrait with the way he is depicted in the painting in Document 1B.
- 4) Kupka also often expressed himself on the topic of his own life in writing. Try to imagine what he might have written down in his diary about his ordinary, daily duty in the trench at “Feuillère.”

From the diary of the soldier František Kupka, 18. 12. 1914



Document 6

František Kupka, *Designs for Orders and Medals for the Czechoslovak Army* (France, 1918, gouache, watercolor, paper) – in the collection of the Military History Institute.



- 1) Of these designs, only one, the Golden Linden Decoration, was actually realized. Of the three, which one is it?
- 2) Why did he choose precisely the linden for the name of order, and not some other tree?
- 3) The Golden Linden Decoration was not awarded until 90 years after it was designed. In which year did this happen?

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.