

I. The Other Shore

Introductory Brainstorming

What sorts of meanings can the phrase "to arrive on the other shore" have?

The apprentice saddle-maker František Kupka had been crazy for painting since he was a child. Thanks to his resilience and his talent, in 1889 he got into the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague. He did not stay there long, but was drawn to Vienna and then onward out into the world. In 1895 he finally ended up in Paris. His physical journey was at an end, but his artistic and personal search continued.

Document 1

The Other Shore (Shore of the Marne), 1895. Oil on canvas, 46x38. In the collection of the National Gallery in Prague.



- 1) Describe Kupka's picture "The Other Shore." What does it represent?
- 2) What might have led the artist to paint this picture? (Look again at the date of its creation)

Document 2

The Wide Shore

Fate had already granted him one great blessing: he was able to draw his boat out from the swampy and indolent Czech stream and release it into the great current of the world. And Kupka is one of those artistic characters who needs freedom, a position standing on the wider shore of history, and a boundless horizon.

Source: MACHAR, J. S.: *Kupka. Rudé květy*. Praha, 1905, n. 4, p. 50.

- 1) What does Machar consider to be Kupka's fated blessing?
- 2) According to Machar, why can Kupka create more easily in Paris than in Bohemia?

Document 3

Inner Freedom

Thus I had arrived at that phase of life, where a person stops valuing that which happens *to* him and only measures that which happens *within* him...

Source: MACHAR, J. S.: *Kupka. Rudé květy*. Praha, 1905, n. 3.

- 1) What does Kupka see as important?

REFLECTION

Paint your own version of the picture *The Other Shore*.

II. Two Homelands

František Kupka (1871–1957) came from eastern Bohemia. After studies in Prague and Vienna, he left for France, where he lived out most of the rest of his life and where he died. But he never forgot about his native Bohemia.

Document 4

- 1) Arrange the various parts of Document 4 (in the separate supplement at the end of the worksheet) according to whether they appear to be speaking about Kupka's relationship to France or about Kupka's relationship to Bohemia. Paste them in chronological order in the table.

KUPKA AND FRANCE	KUPKA AND BOHEMIA

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

KUPKA AND FRANCE	KUPKA AND BOHEMIA

- 2) Provide additional reasons why Kupka wanted to remain in France. Why do these reasons seem likely to you?

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III. 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 5

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, but physical fatigue soon breaks his will. After reassignment to the rear, he is confined to bed.

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

Document 6

Map of Europe in 1914



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

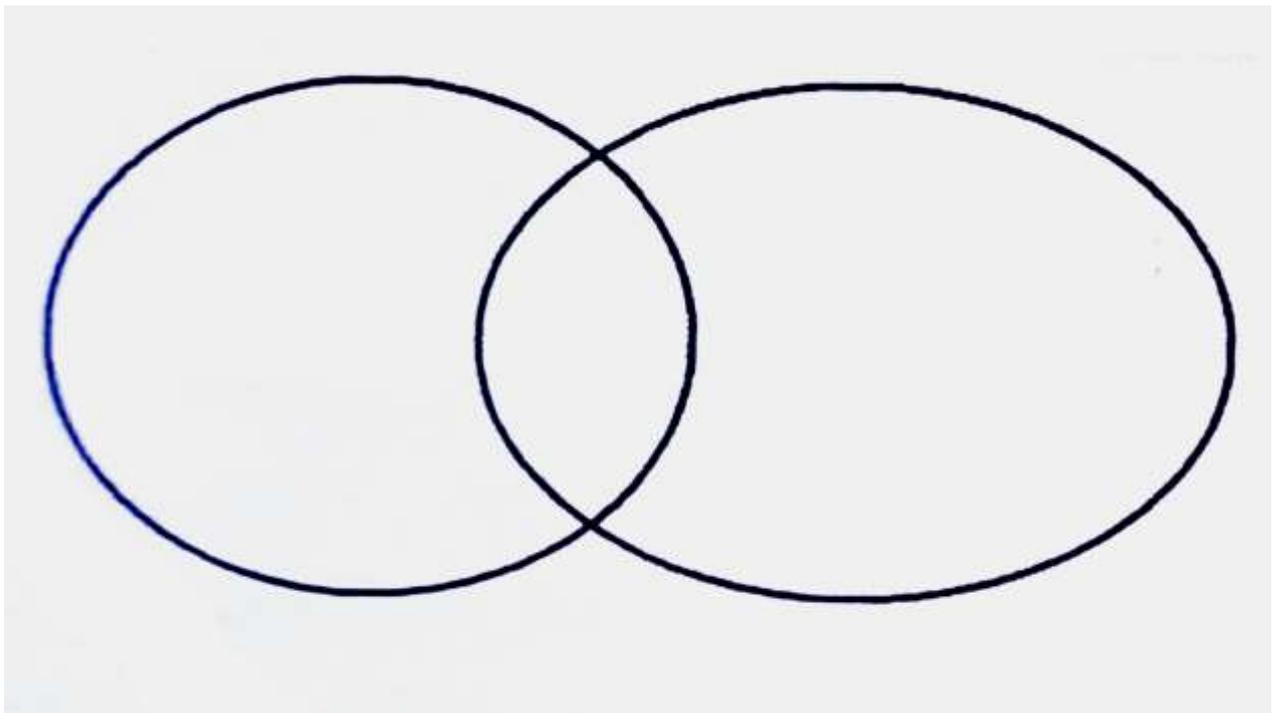
Document 7

A (Literary) Hero

He was from Bohemia and he was a good quarter-century older than we were. He was a painter by vocation. (...) a good, cool-headed, calm soldier. Quiet. Facially, he was slightly pockmarked, with bright, amused eyes. A wrinkled forehead. Greying hair. A white beard. He was tall and burly. He was already past the age for soldiering and, despite high morale, courage, and steadfastness, he was often sick. Several times he was bedridden on account of gallbladder disturbances and liver colic, but these never broke him. Kupka never reported sick and never wanted to go to the doctor. Afterwards they transferred and then discharged him from the army due to a frostbitten foot. I recall that he was the first among us whose feet were frostbitten in the trenches at Frise, where we spent the night up to our waists in water that was around 0° to 2°. (...) I don't know why he enlisted in the army, but I suspect that it was the influence of his wife, who was a fiery patriot, stout-hearted and spirited, a sort of Warrior-Woman [“boj-baba”], as the Russians say.

Source: CENDRARS Blaise. *Uříznutá ruka*. Praha: Elka Press, 2000, p. 44.

- 1) Which two countries does Kupka call his homelands? Why do you think he feels a duty to these two countries? (*Document 5*)
- 2) What kind of situation were these two countries in at the start of the war? (*Document 6*)
- 3) Compare Documents 5 and 7. What do the testimonies agree on, and how do they differ?



Document 8

Mrs. Kupka

I remember the day when we left Paris for the front. We went around the city along an outer boulevard, so we would not have to march through the cheering streets (that was one of the colonel's phobias), and when we arrived at the circular city square on La Défense, there stood Mrs. Kupka, driven by I don't know what kind of intuition (she lived nearby, on the cul-de-sac de la Révolte), waiting on her man. She carried her husband's knapsack and rifle, fell in with the column, and marched with us as far as Écouen. On the next day she wanted to keep going, but the colonel turned her over to the gendarmes and, *ex officio*, they put her on the train back to Paris.

Source: CENDRARS Blaise. *Uříznutá ruka*. Praha: Elka Press, 2000, p. 44.

- 1) What was the departure of the soldiers to the front like?
- 2) How does Mrs. Kupková behave? Why might she act this way?
- 3) Why do you think that Cendrars writes about this detail in his novel?

WORKING WITH THE INTERNET

Find out who Blaise Cendrars was.

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 9

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 his comrade-in-arms Blaise Cendrars portrays him in Document 4.

Document 10

František Kupka, *The Death of Cornet Bezdiček and Volunteer Šibal at Arras* (France, 1915–1918, watercolor, handmade paper with watermark) – in the collection of the Military History Institute

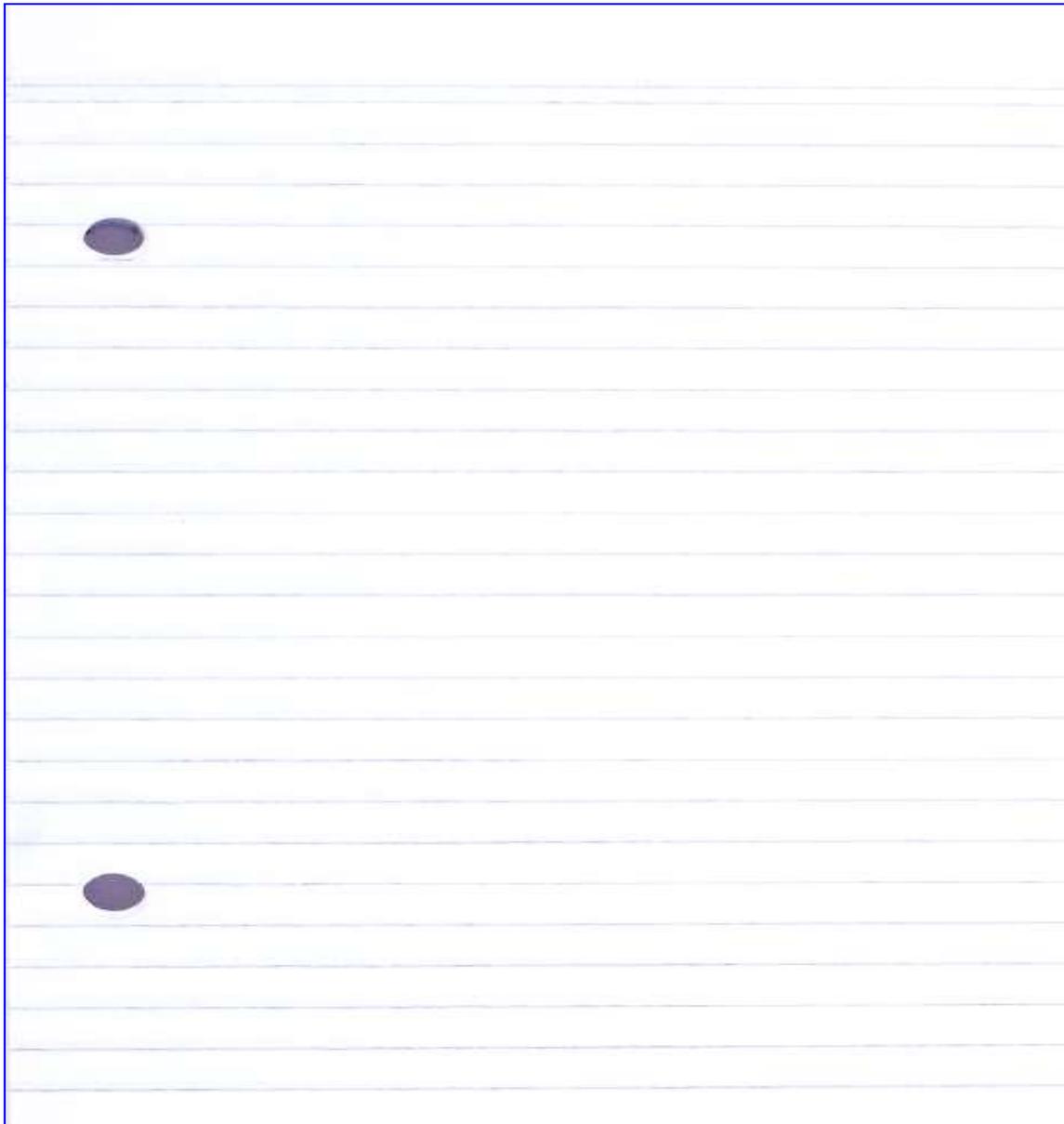


- 4) In the painting, identify Kupka's comrades-in-arms Bezdiček and Šibal. Are they attacking or defending?
 - 5) How did they die?
 - 6) What can you learn from the painting about the method of leading an attack in trench warfare?
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Exercise for Documents 9 and 10

- 7) 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 (a) his ordinary, daily duty in the trench at “Feuillère” on December 12, 1914 or (b) the Battle of Arras on May 5, 1915.

From the diary of the soldier František Kupka



Document 11

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.

- *Supplement to the Worksheet (for the teacher to cut into separate pieces and individually give to the students)*

Document 4: Kupka, France and Bohemia

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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.

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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.

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C)

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).

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D)

Diary entry from the year 1909

Life is full of difficulties, I am totally uprooted, and 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.

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E)

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

“Kupka, who had said of himself earlier that he was ‘déraciné,’* had previously always committed himself only to fighting against something. 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.
*A French word – uprooted.

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F)

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.

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G)

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.

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H)

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).

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