

The Centre for Holocaust Education and Scholarship
Teachers' Workshop 2017
Think – Pair – Share Strategy
“Where Can We Go?”

Background

Following Hitler's rise to power, Canadian Jews watched the events unfolding in Europe with grave concern and petitioned Canadian authorities to get relatives out of Europe. Acting through Canadian Jewish Congress, a campaign was organized to press the government to remove immigration restrictions against Jews. Finally in 1942, Privy Council Order 1647 permitted 500 Jewish refugee children living in Vichy France to enter Canada. Sadly, these children were caught in the cross fire of war and never made it to Canada.

Even after the war, most countries still maintained their restrictive immigration laws barring Jews from entry. Among the 170,000 Jewish refugees, 4,000 were children with no place to go. Some of these children languished in Europe until 1950 – more than 5 years after the conclusion of the war, waiting for the international community to determine their fate.

There were very few choices open to Jewish refugee children. Between 1945 - 1948 only Canada, Australia, England, Palestine and the United States admitted refugee children. Canada was one of the first to open its doors, albeit cautiously. Prime Minister Mackenzie King felt that votes would be lost by admitting too many Jewish refugees. From 1945 - 1948, only 8,000 of the 65,000 refugees admitted into Canada were Jews.

In 1947 the Privy Council Order was revived permitting the entry of 1,000 Jewish children orphaned by the Holocaust. This sparked the search for eligible children in Europe and for Canadian homes to receive them.

To be granted a Canadian visa, Jewish orphans had to be under 18 years old and in good health. They had to express a desire to come to Canada, “have the ability to adjust” and show proof of orphan status. Officials often excluded children who wore glasses or could not read. With economic prosperity and an increased demand for labour came a change in Canada's immigration policies. In the few years after 1948, 20,000 Holocaust survivors were permitted into Canada.

Examine the Paper Trail - Efforts to Open Doors

An excerpt from a letter from Charity Grant, United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration works, 20 January 1946...

UNRRA

APO 757

C/O Postmaster, NYC

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January 20th, 1946.

...I don't know how to describe what I feel. To work with people who have no future is the most humbling thing you can imagine. One's own worries and troubles are picayune, childish. Concentration camp survivors are a new race of human beings.

I wish Canada would offer to take a group of Jewish children. So far no country has offered any permanent haven to any of them. Canada says it must play the part of a major power. Well let her show herself. Let her be the first to offer refuge to some of these children. I don't think it would be possible to get Canada to open immigration to large numbers of refugees but it might take some children. We have thousands of orphans all of whom have no place to go. And of course the sooner we were to offer to take them the better material for citizenship they would be because living in this country is no place to learn good citizenship. I can't tell you what it would mean to thousands of people to think that at long last one country had offered to take even a small group of children. It would give them hope that may be some day they could start life again. It would be a really magnificent gesture...

Yours truly,
Charity Grant.

Memorandum from Saul Hayes to National Executive, CJC, Montreal, 10 February 1947...

#86 Confidential Feb.10, 1947

1. Delegation to Prime Minister.

Arrangements were made for a delegation of the Canadian Jewish Congress to meet the Prime Minister to discuss our representations on the refugee matters and immigration. This meeting took place on Friday, February 7th, 1947 when Rt. Hon. Wm. L. Mackenzie King and the following cabinet Ministers ... The principal representations were:

- (a) that an immediate extension be made of present Orders in Council which allow a joinder with Canadian relatives without certain restricted degrees of relationship.
- (b) that Canada accept a number of DP's for permanent settlement to help in international plans for the solution of the DP problem.
- (c) that Canada grant a permit to the Canadian Jewish Congress for 1,000 children up to the age of twenty-one.
- (d) that the present Orders in Council preferring agriculturists, loggers, miners, be excluded to include tailors, operators, carpenters.

...As to the request for 1,000 orphans it was made clear that just prior to the days when southern France was invaded by the Nazis, the government has agreed to allow entry to 1,000 Jewish orphans to the age of sixteen under Congress sponsorship. The project was aborted by the course of the war. The situation was now so drastically changed that the

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delegation proposed a new plan to allow entry of 1,000 Jewish orphans but up to twenty-one years of age.

...The Prime Minister explained how his government was acting and the need to be certain that each relaxation of immigration bars was well received by the people. Canada's political situation was such that precipitate action might harm the basic idea of bringing relief since if the public was unresponsive the slim majority which government had in the House of Commons left no margin of safety to encourage measures granting additional extensions.

It was obvious that a very deep impression was made on the Prime Minister and the seven Cabinet Ministers present. The Prime Minister pointed out three times that the Cabinet would look closely into the matter and would try to meet our proposal on at least some aspects....

Discussion Questions

What kinds of arguments were made to persuade the Canadian government to admit Jewish refugee children?

How responsive should Canada be to the plight of refugee children to today?

How long did it take for Canada's immigration doors to open?

For More Information...

The above information is based on the exhibit *Open Hearts – Closed Doors*, produced by the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre (VHEC). All of the information provided is found in the VHEC Teacher's Guide. The PDF document can be found here www.vhec.org/images/pdfs/openhearts_guide.pdf. For more information on this exhibit and other exhibits on the Holocaust at the VHEC please visit www.vhec.org.