

The Centre for Holocaust Education and Scholarship
Teachers' Workshop 2017
Think – Pair – Share Strategy
“Becoming Canadian”

Background

Between 1947 and 1949, 1,123 Jewish orphans came to Canada. Most entered the country through Pier 21 at the port of Halifax. All groups were met by members of the Halifax Jewish community and representatives of Canadian Jewish Congress. After a short stay in Halifax, the children boarded trains for 38 communities across the country. The orphans expected to find homes with Jewish families, continue their education and find work. Many families expected to receive young children, but the majority who arrived were older adolescent boys. Only 37 of the 1,123 were under 10 years of age.

Prior to their arrival, the Canadian government required that the Jewish community assume responsibility for these children. Jewish communities responded with open hearts. The community saw the coming of these young people as a renewal, the first tangible result of many years of effort. The commitment to look after these children was a large undertaking for the small Jewish community of 1947.

The orphaned youth formed close-knit ties among themselves, helping one another, socializing and often marrying one another. The relationship between host families and the young people was not always an easy one. Differing expectations sometimes resulted in a change of living arrangements. However for the most part, host families provided a secure base from which the orphans could forge new lives. Many orphans and their host families formed lifelong attachments. Social workers and members of Canadian Jewish Congress played a central role as well, often going beyond their professional duties to support the orphans.

These adolescents displayed a resilience and an ability to adapt that was nothing short of remarkable. Many became not only productive members of the community but also its pillars.

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A photograph showing Jewish orphans upon their arrival at Pier 21, Halifax

A reflection by Robbie, one of the orphaned children admitted to Canada...

“I thought of Canada as a young country full of wheat fields. It seemed to be a place where I would never run out of bread. Canada represented a new life and a new beginning. Although I was anxious about the unknown, I remember feeling a tremendous amount of anticipation and excitement.”

A reflection by Esther, one of the orphaned children admitted to Canada...

We were hoping to have a better life. I had no idea what Canada would be like, but I desperately wanted to leave Belgium. I had only bad memories of Belgium and wanted to get away. They said that we would be well taken care of and would not suffer anymore. They said we would be adopted and that we would be together.”

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PAMPHLET RECRUITING HOMES FOR ORPHANS

David is among the first 1000 healthy, happy boys and girls who are being brought to Canada by the Canadian Jewish Congress. Their future in Canada, their happiness, their lives depend upon people such as you. They need someone to belong to — someone to love them — someone to want them.

David most likely will soon be working and will be able to pay his own way — but he needs a home — now!

*David
does
not
need
more
than
your
own
child*

That spare room in your home can fulfill a promise for David.

He has come a long way from war-torn Europe.

He needs a home, a room in your home.



*David
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Discussion Questions

How did Canada figure in the orphans' imaginations?

What does it mean to adapt to a new country and new culture?

Describe the needs (physical, psychological, social) and expectations of both the refugee children and the families that received them.

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.