

# Being a refugee in Canada

## Pedagogical activity



Refugees fleeing Europe after World War Two. Courtesy of M. Paul Herzeg.



Montreal Holocaust Museum

## Scenario

Our educational activity about forced migration during the Second World War and today offers the students the opportunity to consider why an individual might leave everything behind to start a new life elsewhere. It further informs them about the responsibilities of states (e.g., the Canadian government) and civil societies (e.g., the Canadian society). Through the use of different primary and secondary sources, along with analysis charts, students are also encouraged to think about the links between the past and the present. **Our objective is not to compare the two historical contexts (each situation is unique). However, it is possible to establish links between shared experiences.**

Through this activity, we hope to make students aware of how the past is relevant in the present, sensitive to current problems, and conscious of their duties as citizens.

### Skills developed:

- Developing critical thinking
- Exercising critical judgment
- Analyzing and using information
- Learning to cooperate
- Learning to communicate appropriately
- Understanding and taking a stand on contemporary issues
- Preparing to be active citizens
- Learning to respect the differences of others
- Learning to reject all forms of exclusion



***Plan for at least 1:30***

Start by asking your students if they think Canada is an immigrant country. Ask them if they were born somewhere other than Canada. If yes,

Where? When did you arrive in Canada? Why did you come to Canada? How did you come to Canada? Did you adapt easily? Do you miss your home country?

If no,

Were your (great) (grand) parents born somewhere other than Canada? Where? Why did they come to Canada? How did they come? Do you know if they had any difficulties related to immigration?

### **PART 1 – Who are they?**

Give the three documents to your students (1. The photograph of passengers on the MS. Saint Louis, 2. The newspaper article from 1939, 3. The document on the flight of Syrians). Ask them to fill out the “Who Are They?” table in groups of two or three.

See what your students have in common. Address the following subjects:

- The rise of Nazism in the 1930s, Anschluss, anti-Jewish persecution in Nazi occupied territories, the MS. Saint Louis.
- The conflict in Syria, the Islamic State.

*For more information on these topics, please see our resources (at the end of the activity).*

The historical, political, and social contexts of the two events are very different. The point is not to compare them. The aim is to show your students that in both cases, despite the different circumstances, populations have fled persecution (e.g., discrimination, massacres, etc.).

### **PART 2 – Canada’s response**

Give the four documents to your students. (4. The quotes from William Mackenzie King and Frederick Blair, 5. The poster from Saint-Agathe, 6. Trudeau’s declaration on Syrian refugees 7. Documents about grassroots support for refugees). Ask them to fill out the “Canada’s Response” table in groups of 2 or 3.

See what they have in common. Go further than simply correcting the answers. Ask your students why they think Canada’s response to Jewish immigrants during the Second World War was so negative. Ask them about the role of civil society (what is our power to act and our power to influence elected officials?). Discuss the following subjects:

- Antisemitism in Canada

- The Canadian government during the Second World War.
- The role of religion in Quebec's society during the 1930s and 1940s.
- The wide media coverage of the current crisis

*For more information on these topics, please see our resources (at the end of the activity).*

### **PART 3 – Rethinking one's conclusions**

Give the four documents to your students (8. Letter from Birks, 9. Document on Senator Cairine Wilson, 10. Anti-Syrian graffiti, 11. Document on Roma immigration to Canada). Ask them to fill in the "Rethinking One's Conclusions" table in groups of two or three.

See what your students have in common. If your students do not know who Roma are, briefly explain to them that they are a people originally from Northern India. Pejoratively called "Gypsies," Roma are several groups of people that share a language, a history, and a common traditional culture. Since their arrival in Europe at the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, Roma have faced constant persecution and discrimination.

Explain to your students that politicians and citizens are not homogenous groups, and that it is important to not over generalize.

### **WRAP UP**

There are several themes that you can address in the conclusion:

- Why leave? A large number of people flee due to war, persecution, and (political, religious, and sexual) discrimination, but those are not the only motives to flee. Many people also flee poor living conditions or after natural disasters.
- Migrants vs refugees. Ask them if they know what the difference is.

A person that leaves their home country for personal reasons, and is not in danger is a migrant.

The Refugee status was created in 1951 after the adoption of the UN "Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees."

Someone who leaves their country because their life is in danger and asks for protection from another country is an asylum seeker. If their request for asylum is granted, they acquire refugee status. Countries do not have the same obligations toward refugees and migrants. Refugees are protected by international law. The signatory countries of the Convention have an obligation to protect refugees and to not send them back to their home country.

Some people who are not accepted as refugees attempt to come to a new country as migrants (and vice versa).

-The power of citizens? Not everyone has the funds to sponsor a refugee family, but there are many other ways to help, for example:

By volunteering for a refugee organization, by providing clothing or furniture, or simply by meeting refugees in your neighborhood, talking to them, and lending an ear.

Examples of associations: CCR, TCRI, Action Réfugiés Montréal.

If you wish to provide precise examples for your students, we suggest you do some research to see what volunteer opportunities exist in your neighborhood.

### **Homework suggestions**

- Ask your students to find a newspaper article about the current situation, which is similar in tone to Document 2.
- Ask your students to find quotes from current political leaders, with the same arguments as those put forward by M. King and F. Blair (Document 4)
- Ask your students to look for other examples of forced migration (Where? Reasons to flee? etc.)

# 1 Who are the refugees?

As you read documents 1 to 3, fill in the following table

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	PAST (doc 1 & 2)	PRESENT (doc 3)
Who are the refugees?		
When did they flee their countries?		
Why did they flee?		
How did they flee?		

## DOCUMENT 1



© USHMM. Curtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration, College Park

On May 13, 1939, the transatlantic liner St. Louis sailed from Hamburg, Germany, for Havana, Cuba. There were 937 passengers on the voyage. Almost all of them were Jews fleeing Nazi Germany.

## DOCUMENT 2

Copyright, 1939, by The North American  
Newspaper Alliance, Inc.

LONDON, March 25.—Refugees—  
and more refugees! Chancellor Hit-  
ler's heavy hand, descending on  
Czecho-Slovakia, has sent a new  
wave of them fleeing across the  
borders into France, The Nether-  
lands, Belgium and Great Britain.

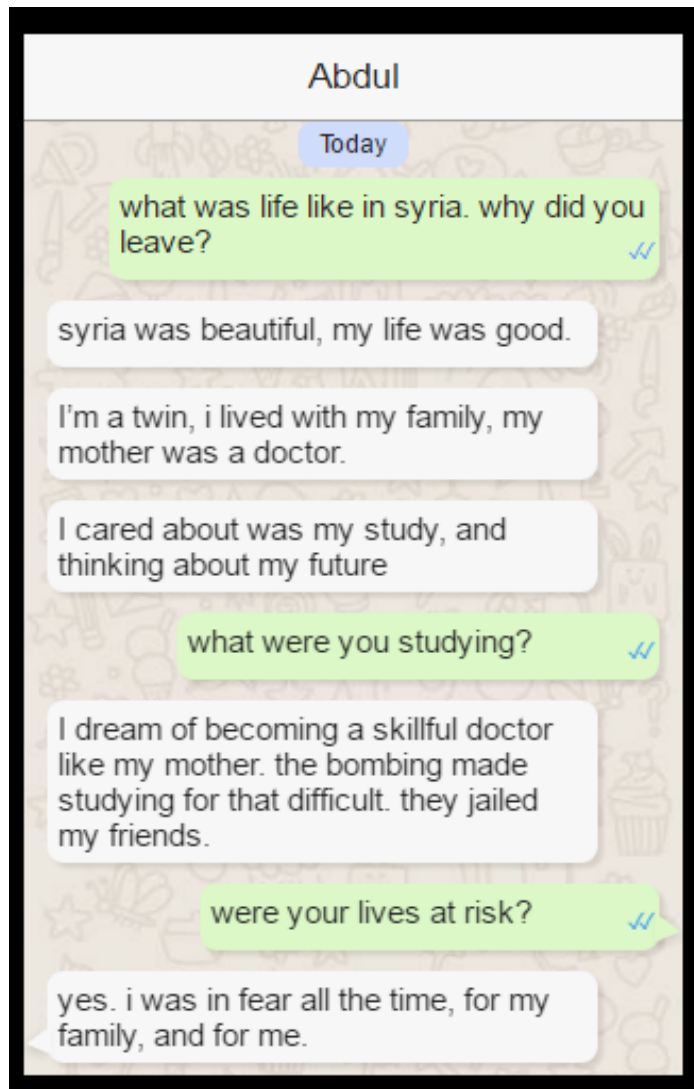
Since 1933, when the persecution  
of Jews and "non-Aryan" Chris-  
tians began in Germany, the world  
has had to consider how to absorb  
in countries outside Germany more  
than a million human beings. It is  
estimated there were about half a  
million Jews in Greater Germany  
and the same number of "non-Ary-  
an" Christians.



**DOCUMENT 3: A Syrian in conversation with a journalist**  
**Through WhatsApp.** December 2015

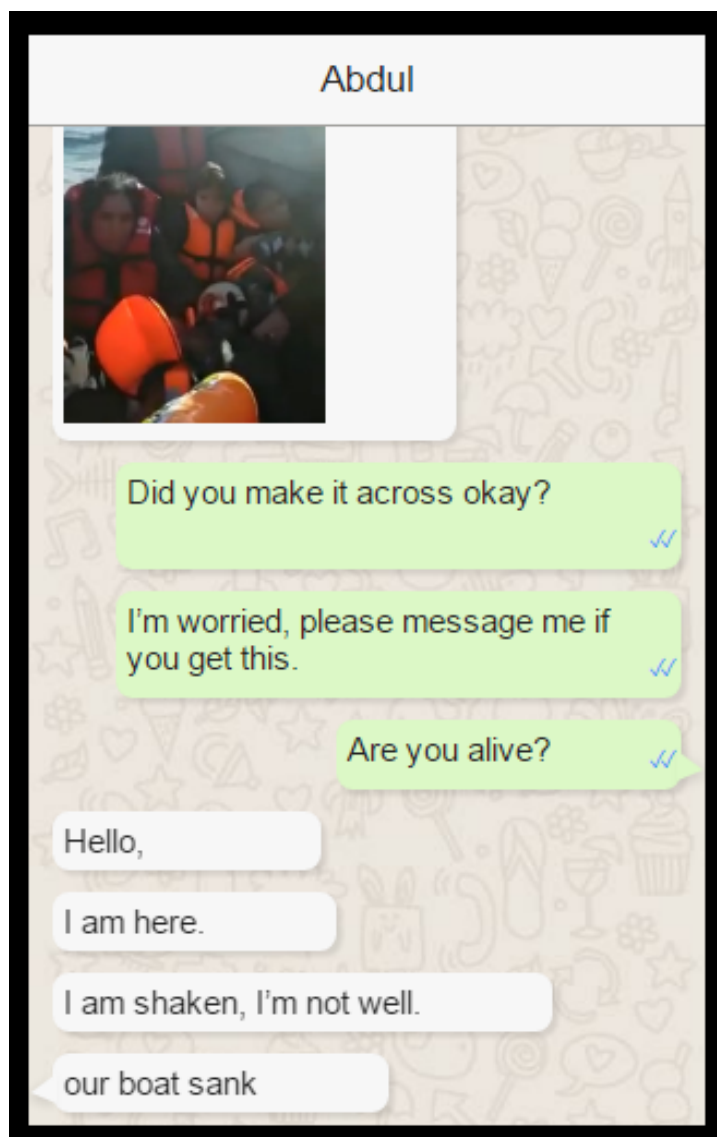


Abdul, Syrian, 19.  
Left Syria in 2015.



The first week of November 2015, several Syrian people, including Abdul, made an attempt to cross the Aegean Sea from Izmir, Turkey, to the Greek shoreline. There was water inside the boat, and the motor was smoking. When the Syrians tried to get off the boat, the smugglers “started shouting in Turkish, and then fired their guns in the air.”





Abdul swam back to Turkey. He didn't make it to Greece, but at least he survived.

The crossing to Europe is perilous. Despite the risk, at least 570,000 people traveled from Turkey to the Greek islands on their way towards Western Europe in 2015.

Text adapted from the Buzzfeed article available on line: [https://www.buzzfeed.com/rossalynwarren/a-syrian-refugee-used-whatsapp-to-share-his-journey-through?utm\\_term=.tmjD7XLQnd#.lsJjlexRd5](https://www.buzzfeed.com/rossalynwarren/a-syrian-refugee-used-whatsapp-to-share-his-journey-through?utm_term=.tmjD7XLQnd#.lsJjlexRd5)

2

## Canada's response

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As you read documents 4 to 7, fill in the following table

	PAST	PRESENT
<b>POLITICIANS</b> <i>The government's response to the refugee crises (during the Second World War and today)?</i>	Doc 4	Doc 6
<b>CIVIL SOCIETY</b> <i>Civil society's response?</i>	Doc 5	Doc 7 (a, b and c)

## DOCUMENT 4: How the Canadian government responded to the plight of Jews in Europe during World War II

- Excerpt from Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King's diary, 29 March 1938

« We must (...) seek to keep this part of the continent free from unrest and from too great an intermixture of foreign strains of blood (...). I fear we would have riots if we agreed to a policy that admitted numbers of Jews ».

- Voyage of the MS Saint Louis, spring 1939

On May 13, 1939, 937 German Jews, who were desperate to flee Europe, boarded the MS St. Louis ship in Hamburg, Germany. The ship was bound for Cuba, a country for which many people onboard held landing visas. However, Cuba did not allow the passengers to disembark. After several days in port, the ship sailed towards Florida in the hope that the US would let them in. They did not, and neither did Canada.

According to Frederick Blair,

« Aucun pays ne peut accueillir les centaines de milliers de Juifs qui veulent quitter l'Europe : il faut savoir fixer des limites »<sup>1</sup>.

The ship was forced to sail back to Europe. Later, 254 passengers would die in the Nazi camps.

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<sup>1</sup> Cited here: <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/ms-st-louis/>

## DOCUMENT 5



## DOCUMENT 6



*Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau, welcomes Syrian refugees upon their arrival at Toronto Pearson International Airport.*

December 11, 2015 — Statement from Prime Minister Justin Trudeau:

« Today we welcome several Syrian refugees that were forced to leave their homeland due to war and conflict. Canada is acting as it must by offering refuge to those that are so desperately seeking safety. This is an important step in our plan to welcome 25,000 Syrian refugees to Canada over the next several months. This emphasizes our commitment to ensure the resettlement of the refugees, which is a part of Canada's proud humanitarian tradition (...). »

Excerpt taken from: <http://pm.gc.ca/fra/nouvelles/2015/12/11/declaration-du-premier-ministre-du-canada-loccasion-de-larrivee-de-refugies>

## DOCUMENT 7

Document 7a :



© Action Réfugiés Montréal

Document 7b: **Number of Syrian refugees who arrived in Canada between November 4, 2015 and January 29, 2017.** © Gouvernement du Canada

	Number of refugees
Refugees supported by the government	21 876
Other	3 931
<b>Refugees sponsored by the private sector</b>	<b>14 274</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>40 081</b>

**DOCUMENT 7C: Flyer for an information session about the private sponsorship of refugees programme**

**Next Information Session**

**Group from 2 to 5**

**Monday, February 8 at 6 p.m.**

**Saturday, February 20 at 1 p.m.**

**Wednesday, February 24 at 6 p.m.**

**Thursday, March 3 at 6 p.m.**



To register

Maximum of 20 participants to allow for better exchanges

<https://voletparrainage.doodle.com/poll/7pmpp3iasgf96e38>



© Elise Gravel

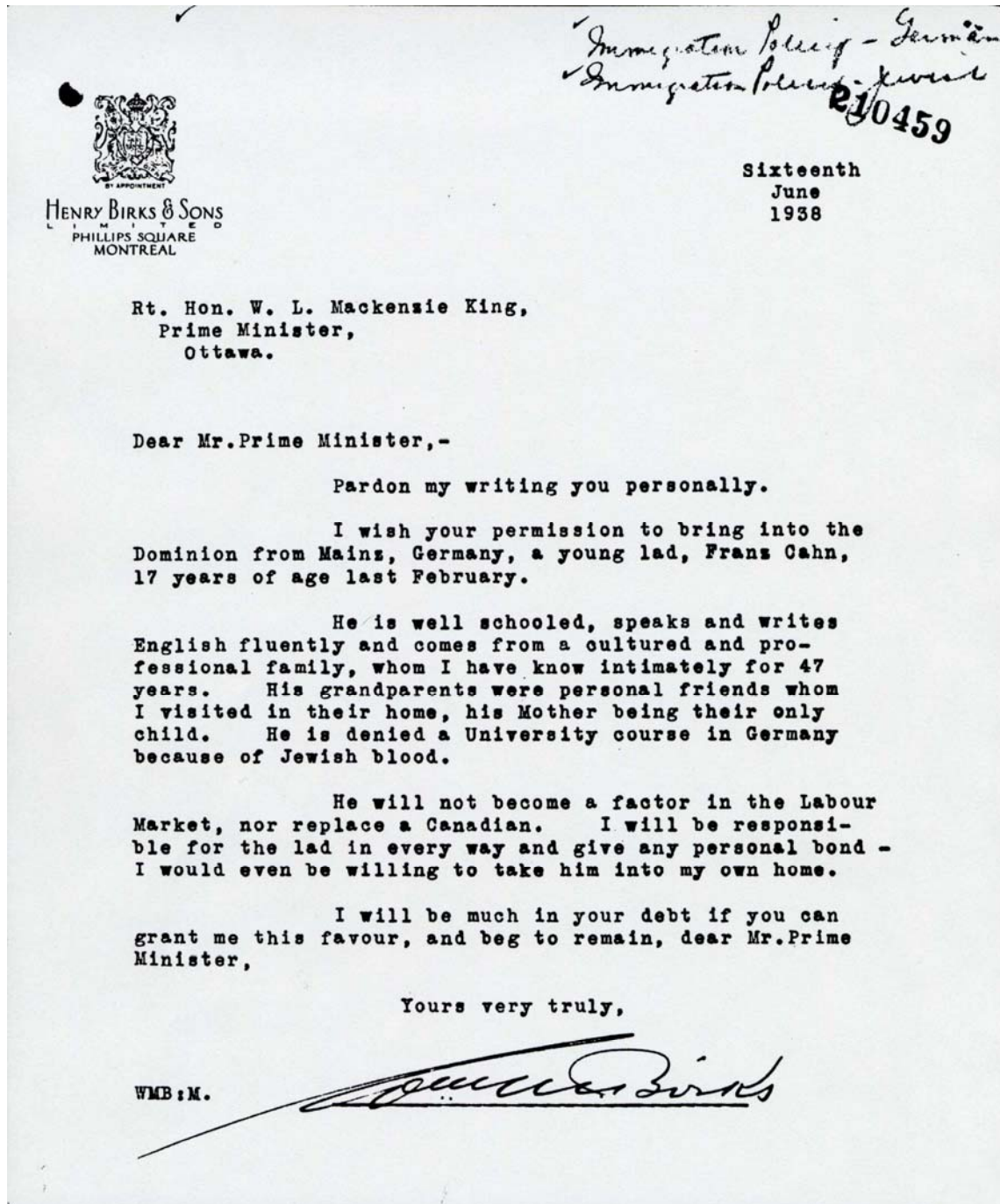


### 3 Rethinking one's conclusions

? As you read documents 8 to 11, fill in this table

	How are these documents different from the previous ones?
<b>Letter from M. Birks (doc 8)</b> – to be compared with doc 5	
<b>Document about Senator Cairine Wilson (doc 9)</b> – to be compared with doc 4	
<b>Document against refugees (doc 10)</b> – to be compared with doc 7	
<b>Document about Roma immigration (doc 11)</b> – to be compared with doc 6	

## DOCUMENT 8



## DOCUMENT 9

## Cairine Wilson, senator (1930-1962)



Cairine Wilson was the first woman to be appointed to the Senate in Canada. In the Senate, Cairine Wilson supported legislative measures designed to promote equal opportunity and independence for women. She called for easier access to divorce. In 1936, Senator Wilson began to take an interest in the fate of European refugees fleeing from the Nazis. She was President of the League of Nations Society in Canada from 1936 onwards, of the Canadian National Committee on Refugees from 1938 to 1948, and of the Senate Standing Committee on Immigration and Labour. In 1949, she became the first woman named to a Canadian United Nations delegation. In 1950, she was named Knight of the Legion of Honour by France in recognition of her assistance to French refugees during the Second World War.

Text adapted by the Montreal Holocaust Museum. Source : Site du gouvernement du Canada : <https://www.canada.ca/fr/parcs-canada/nouvelles/2016/05/l-honorable-cairine-reay-mackay-wilson-1885-1962-.html>

## DOCUMENT 10: Response of some Canadians to the resettlement of Syrian refugees in Canada

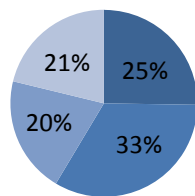
Hateful graffiti sprayed on Calgary School:



Screenshot from *Morning News Calgary* (February 2016)

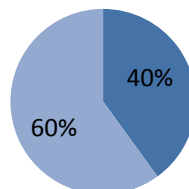
Results from a survey conducted among 1,000 participants from Quebec (November 2015):

### The opinion of Quebecers on the resettlement of Syrians in Canada



- We should welcome more refugees
- We should welcome less refugees
- We shouldn't welcome any refugees at all
- Doesn't know what to answer

### Do you support the government's decision to welcome 25,000 refugees by the end of 2015?



- Yes
- No

Source : *La Presse* « Six Québécois sur dix disent non aux réfugiés » 20 novembre 2015

**DOCUMENT 11: Roma family facing deportation to Hungary fears for its future** (July 28, 2016, Laura Marchand, Montreal Gazette)



A five year-long bureaucratic battle to stay in Canada ended Thursday for Gilda, 17, and her mother Katalin Lakatos, with the news that they will be deported back to Hungary on Aug. 11.

The Lakatos family has been in Canada since 2011, having fled what they claim is systematic and widespread racism against the Roma people in Europe. (...)The Lakatos family filed a claim for permanent residence on humanitarian grounds in 2015, but has yet to hear the result. (...)

One man, who was Roma and asked not to be identified due to fear of reprisals, said he had no words to describe the disappointment he felt. “This is not justice. This is not the Canada that I know,” he said. “In this world, to be Roma is to be a crime. If Canada — liberal Canada — can’t open its eyes and recognize us as people, there’s nothing (we) can do.” He said his parents are still scared to tell anyone they’re Roma. When asked, he said they tell people they’re Greek. “That’s just a product of extreme (anti-Roma racism) and just not feeling as much like a person as other people,” he said. “If (the Lakatos family) can’t achieve equality in Hungary, they have to get out before someone gets killed.” Freda Guttman, one of the supporters who waited outside for the Lakatos family, said she had expected better from the new federal government.

Adapted from the article « Roma family facing deportation to Hungary fears for its future » July 28, 2016.  
<http://montrealgazette.com/news/local-news/roma-family-to-be-deported-to-hungary-fears-for-their-future>



## Resources for teachers

(in French and English)

### World War II

- Brief history of the Holocaust : <http://museeholocauste.ca/app/uploads/2017/01/brief-history-holocaust.pdf>
- Le St Louis : <http://www.encyclopediecanadienne.ca/fr/article/ms-st-louis/> (in French and English)
- L'antisémitisme au Canada :
  - o Brief history of antisemitism in Canada : <http://museeholocauste.ca/app/uploads/2017/01/brief-history-antisemitism-canada.pdf>
  - o <http://www.encyclopediecanadienne.ca/en/article/anti-semitism/> (in French and English)
- Senator Cairine Wilson. Petition from the Canadian National Committee on Refugees (CNCR), which she contributed to found in 1938: [http://enemyaliens.ca/la\\_defense-advocacy/les\\_comites\\_de\\_refugies-refugee\\_committees/dossier/4-fra.html](http://enemyaliens.ca/la_defense-advocacy/les_comites_de_refugies-refugee_committees/dossier/4-fra.html) - The CNCR's initial objectives were to lobby for the liberalization of immigration laws (in order to allow more refugees into Canada) and to educate the Canadian public to the plight of European refugees.
- About the Ste Agathe poster. Extract the *Gazette* (Date unknown)



- About Birks: The Birks are a non-Jewish business family. Following Birks' demands regarding Franz Cahn, visas were granted not only to Franz, but to Franz's entire family (his two brothers, his father, his mother, and his maternal grandmother)

## Syria and ISIS

- Comprendre le conflit en Syrie en 6 minutes : [http://www.lemonde.fr/proche-orient/video/2015/10/27/comprendre-la-situation-en-syrie-en-5-minutes\\_4798012\\_3218.html](http://www.lemonde.fr/proche-orient/video/2015/10/27/comprendre-la-situation-en-syrie-en-5-minutes_4798012_3218.html)
- Iraq explained : <https://ed.ted.com/on/ARGy9sm7>
- The rise of ISIS explained in 6 minutes : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pzmO6RWy1v8>

## Refugees

- UN definition of a refugee : <http://www.unrefugees.org/what-is-a-refugee/>
- Bande dessinée que vous pourriez étudier en classe : *La Fissure* : [http://www.gallimard-bd.fr/ouvrage-J00352-la\\_fissure.html](http://www.gallimard-bd.fr/ouvrage-J00352-la_fissure.html)
- Teaching about refugees, with teaching resources (UN Refugee Agency): <http://www.unhcr.org/teaching-about-refugees.html>
- Les réfugiés, au-delà des mythes : <http://ccrweb.ca/fr/refugies-au-dela-mythes>
- Animated history of the Roma people : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q6wSLfGBVGY&t=42s>
- « Le Canada, une terre d'accueil pas toujours hautement exemplaire » : <http://ici.radio-canada.ca/premiere/emissions/aujourd-hui-l-histoire/segments/entrevue/29220/canada-terre-d-accueil-histoire-harold-beaulieu-marie-helene-panisset-greg-robinson>