

Depiction of an importance of home in literature

Sociology



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

There's No Place like Home

Home is not always the stereotypical white-fenced suburban house with a dog, two parents, and happy children. Rather, home is a landmark of comfort and stability that humans drive for. Affection and security is imperative for children to build their character and discover their moral beliefs, for young adults to receive guidance, and for the elderly to enjoy a stable retirement. In Homer's *Odyssey*, Dai Sijie's *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*, and NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*, characters of all ages, religions, ethnicities and pasts all seek the comfort of home, family, and a safer future. These characters reveal that the ache for security and shelter lives in everyone. When humans are nostalgic for the past, they associate themselves with their home, linking their identity to the constancy and familiarity of a physical homeland.

Odysseus in the *Odyssey* and the narrators in *We Need New Names* exhibit a strong desperation to return home because they yearn for the memories and familiarity of the past. Odysseus's goal is to complete his *nostos*, or his homecoming, as he tries to return home after the Trojan War and reassert his place as rightful king of Ithaca. In book five, Homer introduces the strong and heroic Odysseus weeping for his lost home. Even though he could enjoy his luxurious life with Calypso on an exotic land, he "long[s] for home, long[s] for the sight of home" (Homer 229). Calypso is befuddled by Odysseus's choice to return home to his mortal wife in Ithaca rather than be with a beautiful goddess in paradise forever. Ithaca acts symbolically as a representation of *nostos* and the emotional and physical comfort of a familiar place. His refusal of many temptations along his travels reveals that

reaching the island of Ithaca is Odysseus' optimal achievement. He decides that returning to Ithaca takes precedence to other desires and his own personal glory. Although he traveled to many lively and welcoming places, Odysseus felt unconnected to these unfamiliar peoples and locations whereas he had already formed bonds and memories on his home island of Ithaca. Just as desperate to return home as Odysseus, the speakers in *We Need New Names* long to return to Africa after realizing they cannot forge a new life in America. The confusion and misery of assimilating into another culture while being illegal immigrants instigates nostalgia for the family and traditional customs they had abandoned. While Odysseus is physically restricted on the island by Calypso, the narrators in *We Need New Names* mentally imprison themselves in America by deluding themselves into staying. Midway through the story, the narrators begin to refer to Africa as their home and to America as a prison: " We stayed, like prisoners...and we pulled our shackles even tighter and said, we are not leaving America" (249). The narrators are imprisoned by both their refusal to return to penury in Africa and by their status as illegal immigrants—forced to work unwanted jobs to escape suspicion, to learn a new language, and banned from practicing their past customs. They cannot identify themselves with America because it provides no comfort for them. Even when they had American children, the speakers still could not connect themselves with their new country and family, saying that they had to " squint to see ourselves in them" (250). Their children spoke a different language and grew up in a different culture than what the speakers had in Africa. The narrators need new names because they had arrived in an alien place that they had no connection or identity with. Both Odysseus and the narrators in *We Need*

<https://assignbuster.com/depiction-of-an-importance-of-home-in-literature/>

New Names covet a home that they can identify themselves with through memories or traditions.

The characters in *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress* and in *We Need New Names* cannot leave their captivity to return home, so they find objects that remind of them of the comfort of a familiar place. Since Luo and the narrator's parents are considered enemies of the government, they are more likely to die in re-education camp than obtain freedom. The speakers in *We Need New Names* choose to imprison themselves in America because they knew that if they returned to Africa, they would not have the papers to reenter America. The narrators of *Balzac* describes their chances of returning home as "infinitesimal: three in a thousand...Luo and I were no-hopers" (17) just as the speakers have no chance of seeing home again if they are to return to America. Resigned to their gloomy fates, the characters in both novels find other ways to keep each other entertained and to mentally escape their prisons. The narrator in *Balzac* uses his violin as a source of comfort and a reminder of home and family. One night, Luo asks him to play the violin and the narrator "suddenly thought of our parents, [Luo's] and mine..." (16). Playing the violin brings a melancholy yet soothing mood to the two boys as they are reminded of their past and of their family. In addition to the narrator's violin, the two boys are able to snag some banned books and escape their dreary and forced labor through literature. The narrator describes these books as "credible and riveting" (57), and becomes so enthralled by this new world that he forgets about his current predicament and inability to return home. The books provide an escape that reminds the narrator of the freedom he had experienced at home before the

Cultural Revolution. Likewise, in *We Need New Names*, the speakers find relief from their entrapment through stories. When more people from their home town flee to America, the narrators are glad to see them, “smell[ing] their hair and clothes” (248), and questioning them about the current events in Africa. They eagerly await stories about any news of their land, trying to catch “every precious word, every feeling” (248), because they wanted to imagine the old comfort of past memories. They ask about the people and locations they once knew, and these stories provide comfort to them because they enable them to identify themselves with their past and avoid the present. Knowing that they can never really return home, the characters in *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress* and in *We Need New Names* find means of escaping their prisons by associating their identities with things that remind them of home.

Although the characters in the *Odyssey*, *We Need New Names*, and *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress* differ dramatically in age, country, ethnicity, and belief, they all long to find or return to a place where they feel accepted and comfortable. These novels reveal to the audience that everyone—no matter where they came from or who they are—experience nostalgia for the past which drives them to seek a home in the present. The most important surrounding to individuals is home because of the comfort and constancy it provides. Humans depend on their surroundings to embody the moods and ideas they respect. When they find a place where the environment and people have similar outlooks and experiences as their own, they tend to honor the location with the term “home.” Individuals are often more relaxed at home and are thus able to let the elusively authentic and

spontaneous side of their character show. Homes do not have to offer permanent occupancy or store clothes to merit the name, but it must be a place where humans are able to form a sense of security and stability within themselves and create their individual identity.