

# Identity shapes belonging



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Being true to your own identity enables a sense of belonging. It is only when we understand our own identity that we can have a sense of belonging. A sense of belonging emerges from the connections made with people, places and the larger world. It is these connections that influence where we search for meaning in our lives and ultimately, where we belong. The texts *Immigrant Chronicle* by Peter Skrzynecki and *Interpreter of Maladies* a collection of immigrant stories by Jhumpa Lahiri a winner of the Pulitzer Prize both explore the concepts of belonging through the immigrant experience, as well as belonging through 'home'.

Home and its connotations. Our home or a place in which we belong defies our sense of belonging. *10 Mary Street* from the *Immigrant Chronicles* closely inter-links with the concept of home. It is the routine predictable tasks that develop our sense of belonging. The entire first stanza of the poem is the daily routine; shut the house like a well-oiled lock, this emphasises the routine through the use of simile, a home isn't temporary it forms our sense of belonging over time, as seen in 'we lived together for nineteen years'.

In the poem's finishing lines, 'naturalised for over a decade, we have become citizens of the soil', sums up the effects of home, over the years their house has become a home with strong meaning and connections. By accepting their home they are accepting their identity and this is what enables a sense of belonging. In *Interpreter of Maladies*, in particular the third and final continent we see the importance of home in forming identity.

Identity is defined as the distinct personality of an individual regarded as a persisting entity; individuality. In this story the narrator uses symbolism

where he compares his arrival in America to the moon landing, which had just happened, for him it is a major step in life. “ While the astronauts, heroes forever, spent mere hours on the moon, I have remained in this new world for nearly thirty years. I know that my achievement is quite ordinary.

I am not the only man to seek his fortune far from home, and certainly I am not the first”. When he and his wife move into their new apartment they do small things which connect them back to home, for instance his wife doesn’t stop wearing her Indian clothing and styling because she won’t change her identity for society. They also go exploring the wider city, where they are able to sought out the other Bengali’s people, Bengal region is where they are from, “ Together we explored the city and met other Bengalis, some of whom are till friends today”, through the connections they make by being true to their identity they are able to develop their sense of belonging.

The immigrant experience can have an inverse effect on someone’s sense of belonging. But through our identity we distinctively seek out one another, a natural response to belonging. The Immigrant Chronicle is a series of immigrant experiences and stories, the one I believe to highlight the immigrant experience the best is the migrant hostel.

Throughout the poem there is a sense of disorganisation and constant movement, in the first stanza we read ‘ sudden departures from adjoining blocks that left us wandering’, the use of enjambment underlines their sense of disorganisation and be-wilderness, we then read in the third stanza ‘ we lived like birds of passage’ which through the use of anthropomorphism highlights the constant movement, this is reflected throughout the poem.

Some may consider this poem to relate to not belonging, to some extent that is true, but they are able to belong and relate to the people who are going through the same situation. In the second stanza we read 'Nationalities sought each other out instinctively, like a homing pigeon', this defines identity, although they are going through the immigrant experience they are still capable of making connections in which they can form a sense of belonging.