

Belonging – ‘we are going’



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

What does the Oodgeroo Noonuccal poem ‘ We Are Going’ have to say about Belonging and Not Belonging? How does the poet use language forms, features and structures to convey ideas and feelings? The poem ‘ We Are Going’ by Oodgeroo Noonuccal is about the displacement of the Aboriginal people in Australian society/culture and their confusion about where or what to belong to as their traditional customs are taken away/forgotten. The text raises the issues and themes of ‘ Belonging’ through a mostly-‘ defeated’ tone as it shows their loss of tradition and culture in the new Australia.

In order to create a sense of sympathy and consideration for the Aboriginal people, the poet uses a range of language forms and techniques to cause effect in this text. One of the most important of these is the writer’s use of Irony - in Lines 8-9 we see the words, “ We are strangers here now, but the white tribe are the strangers. We belong here, we are of the old ways”. This statement, in particular, expresses the overall message of this poem while focusing on the ‘ Belonging’ concept.

The writer put forward the interesting yet tragic idea that the Aboriginal people no longer belong to their homeland, whereas the “ White tribe” - who are unable to fully understand or appreciate it as the Indigenous do - have now overrun them and belong more to this land now than they do. This side of the poem brings it its tragic and “ defeated” tone, thus affecting the reader. The language the poet uses is quite informal and colloquial, without using any slang. The feeling created is that of a story-telling almost.

They also use some Indigenous words such as “ corroboree” and “ Dream Time”. This is in-keeping with the poet’s heritage and the nature of ‘ belonging’ to a language and to a people. Using unusual, broken-meter and

irregular phrasing, the melancholy mood is heightened in that it doesn't flow as a poem often does. This puts more emphasis on each line and makes it sound less like a poem, more like a short story. Then, in Lines 8-14, the constant repetition of the word “ we” at the beginning of each line gives the poem a more defiant, hopeful edge; making it sound like a pledge.

The blunt contrast between the words “ We” and “ They” at the beginning of many lines de-humanises the White people, making them seem more like an enemy or foe. The poet also uses very emotive words such as “ Subdued and Silent”, “ Dream Time”, “ Laughter” and “ Belong” to cause effect, as well as Visually-impacting words such as “ Wandering Camp Fires”, “ Lightening”, “ Dark Lagoon” and “ Shadow Ghosts”. These add to the emotional effect and eerie feel. Like a true Indigenous person (the author is clearly Aboriginal by looking at her name and her use of “ they” and “ we”), they speak of the land like their mother, their provider (eg. The shrubs are gone, the hunting and the laughter. The eagle is gone, the emu and the kangaroo are gone from this place”, and so the poet asserts a strong connection and sense of ‘ Belonging’ to the land and to their people, even though they are “ dying out” as a culture and community. As the final line states, “ And We Are Going”, the writer is not only stressing that their race or clan is becoming extinct, but also that the traditional Indigenous customs and traditions and being forgotten.

These are a part of the Aboriginal culture and a significant thing, which they belong to as a people. This is shown through the writer's emphasis on these customs and traditions in such lines as “ We are the corroboree and the bora ground” and “ We are the wonder tales of the Dream Time, the tribal legends

told. " When the poet uses phrases like " The Shrubs are gone" and " The emu and kangaroo are gone from this place", she doesn't mean they are extinct completely, of course.

What she is saying is, in fact, is that their traditional way of life is gone - the hunting and gathering, their " wandering camp fires". The White people have come and taken over their land and have chased away many of the native plants, animals etc. and as such the Aboriginals are left confused and misplaced in their own land, becoming dependent on the Europeans for food, whereas before they were self-sufficient and able to hunt, and medicine, with the introduction of virus and disease.

And so, basically, the poem is in fact a metaphor for the disappearing old way of life of the Aboriginal people and their connection and sense of Belonging to the land. It assumes a slightly nostalgic tone with traces of defiance in some parts but an overall sense of hopelessness and defeat. Through it, we the reader meditate on the idea of ' Belonging' and ask ourselves what the Aboriginal people will belong to in our society where their old traditional ways are being taken away. In the words of Oodgeroo Noonuccal, " We Are Going".