

English notes
belonging – strictly
ballroom essay
sample



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1. Introduction to Belonging & Strictly Ballroom|

- * 1 core text + 2 related texts of your own choosing
- * Link them by concept NOT content (i. e. don't link by setting, character or plot/events)
- * Belonging to a group can establish your sense of identity e. g.: * Scott Hastings – included
- * Mr Hastings (Doug) – excluded
- * Mrs Hastings (Shirley) – included
- * Fran – excluded
- * Concept: ' the struggle or fight to belong is an innate (essential) quality in people'
- * Director: Baz Luhrmann
- * Iconic Australian Film
- * Key Scenes:
 - * Scott and Fran begin to dance together – she asks him for a ' chance'. *
 - Fran's house – where Scott is taught how to dance the ' Paso Doble' by Fran's father. *
 - Dancing at the competition – Fran and Scott after they're told not to. *
 - ' Blocked in' – when Scott and Liz are dancing in the Pan Pacific's. *
 - Scott's father (Doug) dances with his wife – reconciliation.

2. Opening Titles/Waratah Championships|

- * Opening music (traditional Strauss waltz) emphasises ' magnificence' of ballroom dancing juxtaposed with Scott's mother yelling out as though she's at a football match (strong ' Aussie' accent). The strong references immediately to being Australian are concerned with cultural stereotype: *

These strategies connect to the concept of belonging because to fit the stereotype can mean to be included or excluded. Strictly Ballroom raises universal concepts about the ability to fit in or be accepted. * Universal concepts - ideas that are common to us all. We do not necessarily experience these in the same way but we recognise ideas about multiculturalism, gender roles, stereotyping and identity. * Fran is represented as not belonging as she is not as pretty or as cosmetically overdone as the rest of the ballroom dancers.

* Waratah Championships - Scott dares to dance his own steps, dazzling the audience with his own steps. His mother, his dance coach (Les Kendall) and Barry Fife prevent him from exploring his individuality because the traditional world of ballroom dancing gives them a sense of belonging and they don't want this to change. 3. Strictly Ballroom Specific Scene Analysis - Example Essay|

I am choosing to analyse a number of scenes, selected from the feature film, 'Strictly Ballroom' (1992) because they strongly represent the understanding I have reached regarding to the belonging concept. The 'mirror scene' connects strongly to the belonging concept because it portrays Scott dancing his own steps and thus conveying that he does not belong to the 'norm' of ballroom dancing. The mirror is seen as a symbol of self-expression as Scott uses it to watch himself dance his 'non-federation' steps. Scott is portrayed as a mixture of passion and ambition with flashing eyes that indicate his non-conformist, rebellious personality. He has the skills to win the Pan Pacific's but he defies the rules by adding 'non-federation' steps to his routine. He wants to dazzle the crowds and do things his own

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way. Scott's uncommon sense of outrage appears when Fran suggests that he should partner her. Like Scott, Fran also challenges family traditions and shows courage in standing up against her father and dance studio extremists like Liz. Fran began as a shy character, often seen dancing with a girl or alone, yet she displays great courage when she asks to be Scott's partner. When Scott refuses her offer, she bravely calls him a 'gutless wonder'. To be continued...

4. SCENES 46-66. Tryout Montage and Dance Practice|

While others attempt to find a new partner for Scott, he practices with Fran.

* The montage which takes up the bulk of this sequence covers most of the three weeks before the Pan Pacific Grand Prix. The four strands are linked with the song 'Time after Time'.

* One of the strands was the 'try-out's' scene. The candidates are all parodies of what is expected in ballroom dancing. From the kitchen window, others including Fran and Scott's sister, look on and comment on each of the candidates.

* The contrast between the glamour of ballroom and the everyday lives of the characters are portrayed in both the Hasting's and Fran's households: * Shirley is mutilating the calendar that has shown the passing of time during the montage while Doug is again lost in his own private world, shuffling in the background. This is the last straw for Shirley who attacks Doug, yelling at him 'stop that shuffling you stupid man!' before collapsing in tears. * Fran is from a poor Spanish family background. She is downgraded and unfortunate.

In Kendall's Dance Studio, she is teased and bullied. Liz accuses her of being 'really clumsy' and even makes fun of her name, 'watch it Frangipani!'

5. SCENES 67-78. The State Championships|

* Barry Fife gives the state championships an iconic, almost 'god-like' status using the exaggerated description of the champion as a 'hero, a guiding light.' Baz Luhrmann is gently mocking the self-importance of the dance federation officials which also links to our understanding of the belonging concept, conform or be excluded.

* Doug, Scott's father, is a character who represents this exclusion and Scott is being represented as following in his father's footsteps.

* Our growing understanding of the belonging concept: The desire to be included is strong and the action of being excluded is humiliating: * When Tina is available to dance with Scott, he is in conflict over his desire to dance his own way or to win the Pan Pacific Grand Prix, which he knows he can only win by dancing the traditional way. He chooses Tina Sparkle over Fran, leaving her heartbroken and rejected.

* Fran's question, 'are you going to dance with Tina?' Rather than answer directly he comes out with the pathetic 'she's a champion' to justify his cowardice.

* The P. O. V shots from Fran's perspective emphasise her exclusion from the world of ballroom dancing that Shirley and the other dancers clearly belong to. They undermine Fran's confidence and intimidate her.

6. SCENES 79-82. Paso Doble at the Milk Bar|

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Scott finds Fran at the milk bar. He says to her, ' I want to dance with you'. When she says ' we won't win' his reply is ' I just want to dance our steps'. * This scene shows that Scott has left the artificial world of the Dance Federation behind him as Fran's father (Rico) and his grandmother show him how to dance with passion.

* The meeting of different cultures is significant to the belonging concept because we see that relationships can be created through different communities and tolerating changes.

* What is most important here is that Scott learns about the paso doble from a community other than the narrow, disciplined one of the competitive ballroom dancing. The film shows us the importance and value of discovering how other cultural groups outside of our own live.

* The shot of the train passing the café, lighting the dancers and adding to the rhythm of the dance, helps us establish that this is a more realistic setting. It is also symbolic, suggesting that Scott is now certain of how he wants to dance and the direction in which he must travel.

6. SCENES 83-95. Preparing for the Pan Pacific|

Les is distraught at the news that Scott doesn't care about winning. Scott's decision creates a real stir in the world of ballroom dancing. The chant of ' new steps' and another spinning ' Dance News' headline shows us the chaos.

* Scene 94 is important in building the tension that surrounds the ' truth' about the past. We already know that there has been some traumatic event

in Doug and Shirley's past. In this scene we see Doug, once again, dancing alone.

* The editing of these scenes is very abrupt; one scene picks up on an argument which had begun in another, e. g.: * The rapid cut from scene 83, where Scott says ' I don't care about winning the Pan Pacific Grand Pix' to scene 84 where Les is saying, ' He doesn't care about winning the Pan Pacific Grand Pix?!' The editing keeps the tempo of the film moving and increases the sense that Scott's actions have really shaken the Dance Federation.

7. SCENES 96-97. Barry's Big Lie and the Pan Pacifics|

Barry lies about Scott's father's dancing career. It is an effective lie because he only changes one key detail: the identity of Shirley's dance partner. * Wayne becomes informed about Barry Fife's corruption when he overhears him telling Ken and Liz that he has fixed the competition to ensure that they would win, leaving Scott to be humiliated.

* The flashback from Barry's ' story' takes place on a stage with red velvet curtains, a motif which links this scene with other theatrical elements in the film.

* Barry emotionally blackmails Scott, telling him, ' I know you'll do the right thing'.

* When Scott and Fran are dancing ' Paso Doble' at the Pan Pacifics, Fran appears confident to finally belong on the dance-floor. During their dance, Charm (one of the umpires) cuts the power supply and the music stops.

However, Doug begins to create the beat by clapping and soon the whole crowd joins in.

* Character Doug – is quiet and reserved and says very little; he holds a secret passion for dancing, his own steps.

8. Choose 3 scenes to analyse related to belonging |

1. Mirror Scene

2. Scene where Scott learns ‘ Paso Doble’ from Fran’s father 3. Last scene where Scott and Fran are dancing in the Pan Pacific’s – Fran is confident – no longer a ‘ beginner’.

1. The Mirror Scene

Techniques:

1. Scott dancing in a singlet and black pants, an expression of true self and contrasts with the flashy colour of the ballroom dancing costumes. * This scene reveals Scott’s strong sense of identity which is linked to his creativity and individuality. It conveys his need to break the strict rules of the group.

2. Dialogue reinforces the connections and similarities between Scott and Fran * The effects of dialogue s to show that both Fran and Scott, although different to each other in terms of their level of dancing, are both strongly motivated by individual passion and beliefs.

3. Close-up shots of faces and eye contact reinforce the intensifying connection between Scott and Fran * The effect of the close up shots of face and eye contact is to focus the audience on the developing connection between Scott and Fran.

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4. Close-up of feet dancing

* The effect of close-ups is to contrast Fran's clumsiness with Scott's skill and agile steps.

9. Belonging Essay using the 3 scenes |

Baz Luhrmann's film, 'Strictly Ballroom' (1992) effectively depicts the strict world of ballroom dancing where an individual must conform to the precise rules. 'Strictly Ballroom' is set in a surreal world of hyperbole and all of the characters are exaggerated stereotypes. Those who hold the power in the ballroom dancing world, value tradition and would do anything, even corruption, to prevent individuals from rebelling against the 'norm'. The traditional world of ballroom dancing gives them a sense of belonging, and they do not wish for this to change. In the scene where Scott is dancing his own steps in front of the mirror, conveying that he does not want to belong to the 'norm' of ballroom dancing, the mirror is seen as a symbol of self-expression as Scott uses it to watch himself dance his 'non-federation' steps. He dances in his singlet and black pants, an expression of true self contrasting with the flashy colourful ballroom dancing costumes. The bright yellow, pinks and blues in the costumes highlight the significance of appearing extraordinary. Scott dances in and out of the frame, demonstrating his rebellion and decision not to belong.

In contrast, the long shots of the earlier 'strictly ballroom' waltz establishes the code of behaviour necessary to belong in the ballroom dancing world.

Scott's character is portrayed as a mixture of passion and ambition with flashing eyes that indicate his non-conformist, rebellious personality. He has

the skills to win the Pan Pacific's but he decides to not conform to the rules by adding ' non-federation' steps to his routine. He wants to dazzle the crowds and do things his own way. Scott's uncommon sense of outrage appears when Fran suggests that he should partner her. Like Scott, Fran also challenges family traditions and shows courage in standing up against her father and dance studio extremists like Liz. Fran began as a shy character, often seen dancing with a girl or alone, yet she displays great courage when she asks Scott to be his partner. When Scott refuses her offer, she bravely calls him a ' gutless wonder'. The effect of the close-up shots of Fran and Scott's face and eye contact reinforces the intensifying connection between Scott and Fran as they dance their made-up steps. Close-up shots of their feet are also seen to contrast Fran's clumsiness with Scott's skilful and agile steps.

These camera angle shots are also seen when Scott visits Fran at the milk bar. Fran's father is outraged when he sees Scott talking to Fran but soon is informed of their dancing path and agrees to teach them the ' Paso Doble'. Scott learns the steps to the ' Paso Doble' from a community other than the narrow, disciplined one of the competitive ballroom dancing community. The film shows us the importance and value of discovering how other cultural groups outside of our own live. The shot of the train passing the café, lighting the dancers and adding to the rhythm of the dance, helps us establish that this is a more realistic setting than the stereotypically, overdone scene of the ballroom dance competition. There are many close-up camera shots of feet stamping on the floor, with dust rising into the air. Scott then realises the importance of passion in the Spanish dancing styles,

symbolising that he is now certain of how he wants to dance and the direction in which he must travel.

The beautiful golden light and stage spotlight in the Dance Studio highlights the joy and satisfaction Scott and Fran have dancing their own steps together. It shows the audience that this is where they belong, in a place where they can show their creativity and originality, not just skill. As Scott and Fran continue to practice their routine throughout the film, a transformation is seen. Fran appears to have transformed from her initial character as the 'ugly duckling' - clumsy, bespectacled and 'pimply' to a 'beautiful swan' that is admired and applauded by all in the colourful ending. Being able to watch Fran transform from this dull lifeless woman into a beautiful, confident dancer leaves the audience feeling warm-hearted. Scott has been an important factor in this transformation process but he also undergoes a similar transformation from someone who has been confined by the rules imposed by others into a mature, independent artist who feels free to express himself through his own dance routine.

It is through Fran and her Spanish culture that Scott is transformed, and finds the true meaning of belonging - that it can encompass the joy of individual expression rather than boring conformity. Scott's meek and timid father, Doug, appears for the bulk of the film but is often dismissed by the other characters as something of a fool. His past dancing glories and failures are gradually revealed, showing the audience that his past is similar to Scott's current situation. However, his failure to act is set against the determination of his son who wants to take control of his own destiny. Doug admires this rebellious stance and becomes the vehicle in which Scott learns

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the true value of not being afraid to follow your dreams, ' it was the dancing that mattered. We had the chance but we were scared. We walked away. We lived our lives in fear!' Close-ups of Doug's hands slowly clapping in the final dance scene show not only his own freedom but that of his son as well.

As Scott and Fran begin to dance the ' Paso Doble', allowing them both to feel the freedom to creatively incorporate their own dance steps, there is another close-up of Doug's face streaming with tears as he too feels the freedom through his son dancing his own way, something that he failed to do when he was younger. Fran's transformation is again seen when she appears confident to finally belong on the dance floor. It is a triumphant finale and as more and more couples took to the dance floor, the boundaries between the performers and spectators are gradually broken down and both parties are merged.

* A transformation can also be seen in ' Looking for Alibrandi' when ... * In the finale, both characters are portrayed as able to show personal qualities that were initially suppressed and hidden. * Dance has transformed the dancers and become the motif for independence just as it was previously the sign of conformity.]

Katrina By Bruce Dawe

Katrina, now you are suspended between earth and sky.

Tubes feed you glucose intravenously. Naked you lie

In your special room in Ward Fifteen. Is your life

Opening again or closing finally? We do not know, but fear

The telephone call from a nurse whose distant sympathy

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Will be the measure of our helplessness. Your twin brother's

Two-month old vigour hurts us, remembering

Thin straws of sunlight on your bowed legs kicking

In defiance of your sickness, your body's wasting.

Against the black velvet of death threatening

Your life shines like a jewel, each relapse a flash of light

The more endearing.

Your mother grieves already, so do I.

Miracles do not tempt us. We are getting in early,

Although we know there is no conditioning process which can counter

The karate-blow when it comes,

No way can we arrange the date-pad to conceal

The page torn-off, crumpled, thrown away.

Katrina, I had in mind a prayer, but only this came,

And you are still naked between earth and sky.

Transfusion-wounds in your heels, your dummy taped in your mouth.

[1]. Liz says ' where the man goes the woman must follow'. This relates to the belonging concept represented in the film because if she does not ' conform' she cannot participate in the championships. Therefore, the pressure is on her to conform. Parody is used to convey this message. It is a patriarchal society (i. e. a male-dominant society). [2]. A montage is a series of shots which compresses the events of a longer period of time into a much shorter space in a film.