

Great expectations related text notes

[People](#), [Charles Dickens](#)



“ Understanding nourishes belonging; a lack of understanding prevents it”

Belonging is valuable because it enriches our identity through relationships, connections to place and offers acceptance and understanding. This value inspires human nature’s desire to seek belonging; however it is also Human nature to create barriers which prevent it. Charles Dickens novel Great Expectations exemplifies these concepts, through figurative language and structural form, protagonist Pips overwhelming desire to become a Gentleman, but also how lack of understanding is a constant obstacle throughout his journey to ascertain this perceived sense of belonging. The evocative illustrations and symbols in Shaun Tans picture book The Red Tree (2001) also encapsulate the human yearning to belong, and that ultimately, understanding and acceptance of self- inspire hope and an inner sense of belonging. Great Expectations is shaped in the form of a Bildungsroman, focusing on the story of the protagonist’s individual growth and development within his context of a strict social order. Pips social class defines who he is, characteristic of Dickens personal context having being a victim of the Victorian class system himself. A prominent aspect of the text is Pips “ search for meaningful existence within society”, which begins after his encounter with the Lavish lifestyle of Miss Havisham, causing him to query his lower-class background. Miss Havisham’s contempt for ‘ common’ people becomes entrenched in Pips young, impressionable mind and causes him to criticise his coarse and common upbringing “ I wished Joe had been rather more genteelly brought up, and then I should have been so too”. This dialogue indicates how Pips search for meaningful belonging in society is hindered by his naïve perception that becoming a Gentleman is the key to

his desires. Shaun Tans picture book *The Red Tree* also explores an individual's search for 'meaningful existence', with comparable visual imagery that denotes the characters struggle to find belonging. Illustrations of the nameless girl wandering through elaborate, dark and ambiguous scenes articulate her alienation as she engages on a journey of existentialism with yearning to belong. The cover artwork of the text portrays the girl alone, floating aimlessly on a lake inside a paper hat, staring down longingly at a floating Red Leaf. The Red leaf is interpreted as an icon of hope and security, and its clear disconnection from the girl effectively conveys her emotions of loneliness, distinctly identifying her as a person who does not belong. The initial introduction to Pip in the opening of chapter one employs imagery to give insight into Pips early state of existence. As Pip wanders alone in the Churchyard, affiliates his parent's grave-stones to their perceived physical appearance with descriptive dialogue " I drew a childish conclusion that my mother was freckled and sickly". Furthermore the imagery of the environment " dismal, melancholy wind" also reflects Pips gloomy and oppressed state of mind. Through this depiction of Pip we become acutely aware that this vulnerable and isolated boy does not belong in one way or another. SHARED IDEAS about Belonging -Belonging is complex and constantly shifting- Great expectations: with the autobiographical form which allows the reader to observe the character Pip move through experiences in life that develop his understanding and ultimately lead to acceptance and moral enlightenment. This form is comparable to the structure of *The Red Tree*. Interpreted as a generalised account of a young girl experiencing a bad day, the differing eccentric

dreamscapes on each page offer an underlying concept that belonging is complex and constantly shifting throughout one's journey. At different stages of his life he feels like he belongs, or does not belong to certain places: examples Wemmick's house when he goes to work at a law firm. Wemmick's house is described in a positive and warm manner, reflects warmth- strong sense of belonging and family. Contrasted with his dual character at work he puts on an office-clerk demeanour, and at home he is at ease, with a warm and family oriented demeanour. Great Expectations: changing views of belonging influenced by lack of understanding and naivety. In the early stages Pip contrasts his meagre existence with the lavish lifestyle he got a glimpse of when he met the Havishams " I had believed in the best parlour as a most elegant saloon". However this place also houses the character of Mrs Joe and Pumblechook, which reflect Pip's anguish, abuse and criticism from Mrs Joe. The Red Tree: the simplistic syntax " sometimes you just don't know what you're supposed to do, " or who you are meant to be" effectively captures the notion of struggling to belong, questioning your identity (the little girl in the illustrations can be affiliated with young character Pip in this way) and the implications are shown through the drab, ambiguous imagery in the accompanying artwork. Belonging to place: Through Pip's connections to the exterior world and interior places belonging is either built upon and developed or diminished. Great Expectations: The Forge, wooden...the cottage, the place where Pip's " heart belongs" because it reflects the character of Joe. Joe represents conscience, affection, loyalty, and simple good nature. Joe was " he was in my eyes still: just as simply faithful, and as simply right". Wemmick's home: ' Castle'. A " crazy little box of a cottage" is

a cosy contrivance, containing a “ collection of curiosities”. Welcoming Warmth, happiness, family oriented. Haven of belonging Marshes: Relationships: Joe: “ Oh dear good faithful tender Joe, I feel the loving tremble of your hand upon my arm, as solemnly this day as if it had been the rustle of an angels wing”. Pip is not completely blinded by his wealth, his love for Joe is so great that it becomes a tough obstacle to get past in order to achieve his dream of becoming a gentlemen and winning over Estella. Loss of this friendship and betrayal wounds Pip. Upon returning to his home as an older and wiser man “ he was in my eyes still: just as simply faithful, and as simply right”. Magwitch: a symbol for the implications of not belonging. He is a victim of the Victorian social class system, trapped in the lower rungs of society and ostracized as an orphan and a convict later on. He has no family, and this is why he values Pips friendship and kindness so greatly. Pip reflects on Magwitch later on “ I only saw him a much better man than i had been to Joe”. Estella: “ I loved her simply because I found her irresistible” He sees her faults clearly, and knows that loving her promises destruction and pain he cannot help but be drawn to her (lustfully), so much so that it becomes a major barrier between Pip and Joe, and his sense of belonging. Older Pip as the ‘ omniscient’ Narrator: This switch between perspectives of older Pip who is brutally honest, allows us to understand the development of the character and his acquired knowledge of self and the world he lives in. Chapter 57 Pip returns to his home, older and wiser. The imagery of “ rich summer growth” and “ sweet summer scents filled the air” depict the warmth and sense of belonging he feels when he returns home to Joe and Biddy. “ My great expectations had all dissolved, like our own marsh

mists before the sun" about Joe " exactly what he had been in my eyes then, he was in my eyes still: just as simply faithful, and as simply right. Dickens makes the point that a gentleman is about integrity, not wealth. When Pip finally understands this, this is when he discovers a true sense of where he belongs. (also lack of Mrs Joe helps) The Red Tree: the connections between warmth and belonging are depicted in the final panel of the picture book. Despite the characters sense of alienation throughout the day's journey, the final panel of The Red Tree contrasts this idea with the depiction of an immense sense of belonging. Portrayed through an image of the little girl returning home to her previously bleak room she began the day in, to find a lush, vibrant red tree flowering, and glowing with warmth. It is covered in the red Leaves that she initially viewed as out-of-reach. The character is looking up at the tree in admiration with a smile and this can be affiliated with Pips sense of admiration for Joe, and the belonging he finds upon return to his home and in Joe. Connotations of Hope and security are found within the tree.