

# Belonging in swallow the air essay sample

[Environment](#), [Air](#)



Where one feels a sense of belonging and connectedness is largely determined by the degree to which an individual feels sense of affinity with those around him. Belonging implies a connectedness to people and places because of shared norms, values, customs and practices. Belonging also implies relationship, which involves a sense of familiarity with and often affection for the people and places we know, consequently, not belonging often engenders a sense of disorientation, rejection, despondency and alienation.

For the most part, belonging is a positive experience. There are times when not belonging can be a positive thing, when belonging leaves the individual exposed to harm or damaged in some way. Hence not belonging. Half cast may's journey to find her place of belonging, in a predominantly white society, results from the disorienting experience of the death of her mother.

Upon reflection May likens her mother's death to that of the stingray she saw on the beach when playing with Billy, it was draped over rocks " Like a plastic raincoat" May's fascination led to her slitting its skin with her switchblade and the blood that oozed from its sides symbolised the release of its pain. Hence May, even then, had a sensitivity to elements of the natural world, a legacy of her indigenous heritage and unwittingly a sense of the loss inherent in her aboriginality

Winch's novel not only explores May's search for the people from whom she is descended, but it also shows how European settlement has resulted in a dislocation and decimation of a race, its lore and its lifeblood. The narrative explores two worlds, that of May's childhood enriched by knowledge of all

that has been handed down to her, culturally and spiritually, and the ugly world beyond this where she encounters the dangers of a society from which the indigenous population or outcasts seek to escape.

Only at the end of her journey is may able to integrate her experiences to find a place of acceptance where she can live with the pain of her past. Hence, the jacaranda, that “ sacred, bloody pest” under which her mother died, becomes a symbol of the need to appreciate “ the purple bells” and live with the stains they leave behind. When Percy Gibson tells may that there is “ a big missing hole” between his current existence and the place may is looking for she holds back her tears “ her eyes hardened like honeycomb”.

And then it makes sense “ the land is belonging, all of it for all of us” and the tears are not only may’s tears but they belong to the whales, to Charlie, to Joyce, to Johnny, to issie, to Percy and auntie. They belong to the spirits and she offers them to her mother. Mays sense of connection derives from her ability to assimilate her experiences of people places and the past to arrive at a place of personal integration, as symbolised as the circle drawn by issy in the dirt.

The tragic irony of mays situation and that of her people is that they are victims of their circumstances over that they have little control. Mays rape is emblematic of the violation and denigration of her indigenous ancestors and their sacred territory. Paradise parade is the antithesis of a idyllic location, mays father it the antithesis of an idealised fruit picker on the post car and

the Lachlan river, once a life source has become “ dead land” and the sports field at the mission “ looks more like a rodeo pit”.

The non-linear structure of the novel provides scope for shift between past and present as May makes sense of where she fits and where she doesn't. Not all life's lessons however are pleasant. May mistakenly regards Joyce's concern for her welfare for rejection when she tells her she has “ sumthin to find, fire in the belly” that she has to know, though may seems content to yarn and drink and play cards with her aunties, but Joyce advises her as a true “ auntie” would. The block is no place for May.

Perhaps the greatest lesson may learns however, is that its all wright” and even essential to remember, one's past, ones pain and one's place, to know and value one's brother, ones ancestors and ones heritage and to honour the memory of ones mother and her stories. And may learns, too, that alcohol, poppies and petherdine, drugs that numb the pain of those who cannot face it, rob the individual of their dreams, daydreams and struggles and ultimately the need to connect with the forces that link past and present and offer a justification for all the tears that are shed.