

Belonging essay



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Generic Essay: For individuals to feel a sense of acceptance and belonging to place, people around them need to accept them as they are. Belonging to a place occurs through our interactions with people around us. The failure to understand or accept an individual's uniqueness prevents this sense of belonging from developing. Texts that explore belonging to a place through connections to people are Peter Skrzynecki's poems, " Feliks Skrzynecki", " 10 Mary Street" and " Migrant Hostel", the short film, " Be My Brother" directed by Genevieve Clay and from the website, <http://www.yronbodyandsoul.com>,

the online article, " Making sense of this place" by Susanna Freymark. Each of these texts encourages the responder to reflect not only upon the importance of belonging to a place, but also on the way in which understanding and acceptance by others impacts on one's ability to form this connection. In the poem, " Feliks Skrzynecki", Peter Skrzynecki describes the sense of belonging achieved by his father through his attachment to his Polish friends. Feliks's friends are a source of understanding as they share common memories, experiences and traditions.

Together they " reminisced about farms where paddocks flowered...Horses they bred, pigs they were skilled in slaughtering. " The positive connotations expressed in these lines allude to the immigrants' shared experiences and heritage, and the solace which Feliks derives from the connection with his Polish friends further nourishes his sense of cultural belonging. Peter, however, does not feel this same sense of inclusion as he does not understand the Polish culture or the behaviour of his father's friends.

This is demonstrated in his reference to how they, " Always shook hands too violently" and the " formal address /I never got used to". This same sense of

lack of understanding and alienation also exists between father and son. Peter's allusion to "Hadrian's Wall" in the lines, "Watched me pegging my tents/ Further and further south of Hadrian's Wall" and his admission that, "I forgot my first Polish word", are indicative of the widening gap between them as both father and son find it increasingly difficult to share a common understanding or a sense of cultural community .

Feliks's garden, to which he has a great affinity, is yet another place where he feels secure and blissful. From the talks he has with his friends it is evident that he is used to hard physical labour and that he understands and has a close bond with the land. The poet writes that Feliks loved his garden, "like an only child". This simile emphasizes the love and devotion that his father lavishes upon the garden, and the hyperbole, "swept its paths Ten times around the world" suggests his connection with it and the way in which he has created for himself a world which he understands and with which he can identify and belong.

Peter describes his father sitting in the evening "With his dog, smoking" and reflects that he was, "Happy as I have never been". This last statement further emphasizes Peter's feeling of alienation and dislocation from a place in which his father is completely content. Developing a sense of belonging through understanding can also be seen in the poem "10 Mary Street". This poem describes the emotions of an immigrant family through their process of integration into the Australian society and their understanding of the Polish culture.

The house is a place where, after having lived there for nineteen years", they feel they belong. Understanding "the whole block" gives an indication of

their connection to the house and their familiarity with their local neighbourhood. The statement that, “ Each morning the house was shut like a well-oiled lock”, illustrates their routine movements and the reference to the ‘ lock’ represents the security they feel living in the house.

Their home is warm and inviting, illustrated by the description of it painted “ in its china-blue coat”. The color suggests vibrancy and life and is described as “ standing” as if it, too, is a member of the family. The use of personification stresses the ties forged with this house over the years. In a similar fashion to “ Feliks”, the garden in “ 10 Mary Street” provides a sanctuary and a special place of belonging for Peter and his family where they spend their happy moments together.

The cumulative listing, “ My parents watered plants-grew potatoes, And rows of sweet corn” is used to good effect to create a strong connection to the garden which reinforces the sense of belonging to place. The simile, “ tended roses and camellias like adopted children” is reminiscent of a similar comparison used in the poem, “ Feliks Skrzynecki”, reinforces the love and devotion lavished on the garden and exemplifies the family's strong attachment to place. Peter would share this joy by ravaging the garden for strawberries and peas “ like a hungry bird”.

The final stanza of the poem evokes a powerful image of belonging to the Australian land in the lines, “ We became citizens of the soil/That was feeding us” and the last lines, “ Inheritors of a key /That'll open no house/ When this one is pulled down”, signifies the importance of their ties to 10 Mary Street as a place connecting them to their new adopted country. In contrast to the security, understanding and connection to place engendered

by 10 Mary Street, the poem, " Migrant Hostel" presents an image of rejection and alienation resulting from physical and mental barriers.

In this poem, Skrzynecki describes the hostel as a busy place where " No one kept count of all the comings and goings". The poem's depressing tone evokes a feeling of disorientation with the inference that the migrants have no control over their lives; their existence is characterized by a mood of disappointment and captivity as they are in a state of confusion not belonging to their surroundings. . The fourth stanza opens with strong use of imagery, " a barrier at the main gate sealed off the highway...As it rose and fell like a finger, pointed in reprimand or shame. This suggests a physical impediment that implies entrapment and prevents the migrants from understanding the Australian culture and having their own place in Australia. Additionally, the use of the simile in this quote would seem to imply that alienation is due to some fault of the migrants, themselves. Because of this lack of understanding, the migrants do not want to belong to the hostel where they are ' sealed off' as they do not know what is going to happen to them, as it brings back memories of the past.

The simile, " like a homing pigeon circling to get its bearings" presents a powerful image of the migrants desperately trying to find something or somewhere to which to belong but " like birds of passage - always sensing a change", they are unsure of their future and continue to search for a better place where they can at last feel a sense of attachment. When understanding and acceptance does not occur, people risk either being alienated or alienating others. This is conveyed through the short film, " Be My Brother", which was the Tropfest winner in 2009.

It characterizes Richard, a ‘ Down’s Syndrome’ sufferer, who because of his mental disability, walks and talks differently from the others. Richard feels isolated and alone especially when the two other characters in the film, Amanda and his brother, Damien, ignore him. These two are representative of the “ normal” community and because they perceive Richard to be ‘ abnormal’, they deprive him of the sense of belonging. In the opening panoramic scene, the metaphorical belonging to place is depicted through the medium shot of Richard walking on the below Amanda, while she is sitting on the bench at the bus stop above him.

These ‘ rocks’ are the symbolic representation of the hardships and troubles that he faces in his life and which are the cause of his disaffection and alienation. The director conveys this notion through the Amanda and Damien’s lack of eye contact and their monosyllabic responses, which is symbolic of the community’s lack of understanding of his disability, which results in his sense of exclusion from the rest of society. The director has effectively uses Damien’s hoodie as a symbol of his lack of understanding, it symbolizing the barrier and subsequent isolation Richard feels.

However, when he removes his hoodie and sits next to Richard, the responder recognizes that a real understanding has taken place between the two characters. This change in relationship is further emphasized through the mid shot, which represents equality. This is a strongly comforting scene as it is apparent that Damien at last is starting to understand and accept his disadvantaged brother thus encouraging his sense of belonging. . The article “ Making sense of this place” written by Susana Freymark details the strong sense of attachment that the composer feels for “ Byron Bay”.

She writes that, " Your name, address and family ties you to a place and helps define who you are and your place in the world. " Through the use of imagery in ' ties you to a place' the composer infers that a personal identity bonds the individual to a place where he or she feels accepted and comfortable and for her, " No other place evokes my sense of self more". Freymark states that the external world reflects the inner sense of where we belong and to this end, she feels, " passionately about this land, the weather that shapes it, the ocean and the asymmetrical mountains that edge the coastline. This listing of the region's physical attributes is, however, only one reason why Freymark has such a great affinity for Byron Bay. She writes also of living within a community of like-minded people who are welcoming, share the place and " look for where the connections are between us". Together they hold a deep respect for the land and its original aboriginal inhabitants, they are accepting of individual identity and are " mindful of exclusion". This understanding and acceptance fosters a strong sense of belonging to a place where Freymark " feels complete" and can see herself living "... until the day I die. Conclusion for belonging through understanding: It is evident that communication is a means of understanding and that it is through communication and acceptance that belonging is nourished and developed. These ideas are represented in the texts " Immigrant Chronicle" and " Be My Brother". An in-depth study of the anthology " Immigrant Chronicle" and the short movie " Be My Brother", highlights the way in which a sense of belonging can either be enhanced or restricted through the interactions that people have with others and the degree to which they feel understood and accepted for who they are - culturally or even intellectually.

Conclusion for belonging to places: Through the examination of the chosen texts, it can be seen that belonging to a place is fostered by either a sense of familiarity or based on common similarities and our interactions with each other. Because of his attachment to his Polish friends and the love and familiarity he has for his home and garden, Feliks is able to create a place within which he feels happy and secure.

In “ Making sense of this place”, Susannah Freymark experiences a strong attachment and sense of belonging to Byron Bay not only because of the affinity she feels for the physical beauty of the region itself, but also because of the inclusive and welcoming attitude of the community and the likenesses she shares with the other residents of the town. However, Richard in “ Be My Brother”, is denied this sense of belonging to place as both his own brother and the community at large, reject him because of his individuality and his mental disability. This negative interaction and exclusion results in his dislocation and detachment.