

2012 hsc english essay

Science



2012 English HSC Essay by Marcus Kraefft An individual's perceptions of belonging can change in response to the passage of time and their interactions with the world. Constructive interactions can increase one's sense of belonging. In the same way destructive interactions or alienation can decrease one's sense of belonging. The passing of time also affects an individual's sense of belonging in that it can lead to an appreciation of place and culture. One's sense of belonging also depends on whether they choose to belong and are chosen to belong, but choice is not always enough.

Although both parties may want to belong to each other, barriers can still exist, preventing a sense of belonging. This is evident in Raimond Gaita's 'Romulus, My Father' (1998) and 'American History X' (1998) directed by Tony Kaye. The sense of belonging of the individuals in these texts evolves through the elapsing of time and interactions with their world. An individual's interaction with their world shapes their sense of belonging; constructive interactions increase one's sense of belonging.

Upon first moving to Australia Romulus was immediately drawn to Horu and Mitru because they have similar backgrounds. Romulus had many interactions with Horu and Mitru and as a result Romulus felt an increasingly strong sense of belonging to them. Romulus spent more time and interacted more with Horu and we see that Romulus developed a stronger friendship with Horu than with Mitru. Raimond also had many interactions with Vacek and as they met more often Raimond felt more and more comfortable with Vacek, showing an increased sense of belonging.

Similarly in 'American History X', Derek despises negroes and has no sense of belonging to them. When Derek goes to prison though, he is forced to

interact with negroes through prison duties such as folding sheets together. From this Derek forms a strong friendship with a particular negro, Jim, and as a result of their interactions, his perspective of negroes changes for the better. "In here, you the nigger", as quoted by Jim, shows the contrast in the environment Derek is in; he was used to a white dominated society and is now forced to live in a society dominated by negroes.

In the same way that constructive interactions strengthen a sense of belonging, destructive interaction or alienation can weaken a person's sense of belonging. In 'Romulus, My Father' Christine is forced to move with Romulus to Australia. "She's a city girl", who felt alienated in the barren landscape of Frogmore - "a landscape that highlighted her isolation". Her mental illness reduced her number of interactions with others and directly resulted in a decreased sense of belonging.

Alienation causes loss in one's sense of belonging and can be expressed through desensitisation. This is present in 'American History X'. The skinhead clan reject all negroes and immigrants, alienating them. Alienation results in a decreased sense or absence of belonging, which can be represented by causing harm to another with no remorse. This is shown in 'American History X' when Derek murders two negroes and then smiles about it while being arrested by police, as if he is proud of what he has done.

This absence of belonging between the skinheads and the negroes applies to both parties. This is shown at the end of the film when a negro high school student gruesomely shoots and kills Danny, Derek's brother, in the school bathrooms. He stood in silence with no emotion and no remorse. This scene shows how alienation affects a person's decisions, actions and reactions.

Choosing to belong and being chosen to belong often leads to a sense of belonging but choice may not always be enough. Certain barriers may exist to prevent a sense of belonging.

In 'Romulus, My Father' Christine chooses to belong with Raimond as his mother and Raimond accepts his mother, loving her very much, but Christine's mental illness prevents her ability to nurture Raimond as a mother should. Horu sees this lack of attention and despises Christine because of it, asking her to leave and never come back. Although Christine wanted to belong, her mental illness affected her relationship with both Raimond and Horu. This demonstrates Christine's inability to integrate with Australian culture. Another barrier to a sense of belonging is race.

In 'American History X' the negroes and immigrants want to fit into the local community but because of their race the skinhead clan reject them. Similarly in 'Romulus My Father', upon arrival to Australia Romulus wants to be accepted by the Australian culture but initially he is not because of his foreign background. Over time Romulus is eventually accepted into the Australian community because of his hard working habits. This shared value allows Romulus to integrate with Australians and form a strong sense of belonging with Australian culture.

An individual's sense of belonging is affected by the passing of time in that it can lead to an appreciation of place and culture. Initially Romulus did not like the Australian landscape - "The noble red gums... seemed symbols of deprivation and barrenness". Raimond was influenced by Romulus' European stories and memories but over time Raimond began to show an appreciation and sense of belonging to the Australian landscape. This is shown when

Raimond is about to shoot a wild rabbit but does not because he realised that the environment and nature itself is beautiful.

The elapsing of time also allowed Romulus to build up a strong reputation of being a hard working blacksmith. He developed trust with Australians over time which would have been difficult given Romulus' foreign background. Initially in Australia Romulus had little knowledge of the environment and its effects on everyday life. Romulus accidentally lit a hay stack on fire, not being familiar with the hot and dry climate. Over time Romulus was able to adapt to the Australian environment and so he no longer made mistakes and was therefore accepted by Australians as a worker.

Similarly in ' American History X', Derek initially despises negroes, but his time and interactions in prison change his perspective of them. Derek is alienated in prison and vulnerable to assault from the negroes but Jim tells them not to harm Derek even though he is a Neo-Nazi. Derek discovers that Jim saved his life; Derek as a direct result appreciates negroes and accepts them, showing respect and friendship. Derek's opinion on foreigners is changed by the actions of one man.

From these points it becomes clear that the passing of time and the interactions of an individual with their world shape that individual's sense of belonging: Constructive interactions often result in a sense of belonging whilst destructive interaction or alienation results in a decreased or no sense of belonging. Choice also affects one's sense of belonging however choice may not always be enough as there are often barriers preventing a sense of belonging such as mental illness and race. Time can also have an impact on

an individual's appreciation of place and culture, increasing their sense of belonging.