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Introduction to the Context

EXPLORING ISSUES OF IDENTITY AND BELONGING

In this article
This article is designed to introduce some of the ideas and arguments suggested by the Context Exploring Issues of Identity and Belonging and offers a variety of strategies for unpacking it. It also introduces the four texts set for study in this Context by VCAA in 2008–9.

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Introduction to the Context

EXPLORING ISSUES OF IDENTITY AND BELONGING

INTRODUCTION

Who am I? Where do I belong? What things have shaped me into the person I am today? How have they done so? In the Context, Exploring Issues of Identity and Belonging, you will explore many issues related to questions of identity and how we gain a sense of belonging to a family, group, place or community. The title of this Context gives equal emphasis to identity and belonging, suggesting that each is related to the other. Together, these issues go to the heart of who we are and how we present ourselves to the world. Thinking about the factors that contribute to our sense of self and where we belong will be important, as will those factors that often challenge this.

The Context is inviting you to explore the ideas associated with identity and belonging with considerations such as these in mind.

Ongoing Activity: A Context File

Put together a file or folder to house all your notes and materials related to Exploring Issues of Identity and Belonging. By adding to this file regularly, you will build up an excellent resource to draw on when preparing for the SACs and the end of year exam. You will also be able to see how your ideas and point of view on the Context develop and expand. You might include:

- notes from class discussions and brainstorming
- articles or images (including cartoons) from newspapers, magazines or websites that have something interesting to say about ‘identities’ and ‘belonging’ in society
- useful vocabulary or a word bank for discussing and writing about the Context
- summaries of key ideas and arguments about the Context drawn from the two texts you are studying
- notes on language and structural features of your set texts (i.e. the choices an author makes) which might influence the choices you make for your own writing.
BUILDING THE CONTEXT

Building the Context requires developing a range of initial ideas about what the Context means. What issues does it relate to? What questions does it encourage you to think about? You are building the Context broadly at this stage. It is not yet necessary to draw ideas from the texts you are studying. The parameters of the Context may be endless, but you will build an initial framework that you can add to, refine or change as your thinking develops.

Below are several suggested activities for getting started building the Context. You may do these activities individually. In the classroom, different groups may choose different activities and then report their findings to the class as a whole. It may also be useful to revisit these activities at various stages throughout the year to see how your initial thoughts about the Context have changed.

**Words and meanings**

- Create your own word bank which you can add to throughout the year, on your own or in class.
- Begin by brainstorming definitions of the key words of the Context: ‘identity’ and ‘belonging’.
- Use a dictionary and thesaurus to expand on these definitions and write down several entries that seem helpful or interesting to you.
- Consider the associated words, terms, phrases and meanings that are elicited by these initial key words. Work in groups of three or four and compare and discuss your findings. How do these relate to or contrast with ‘identity’ and belonging’? It will be useful to repeat this task at various times throughout your study of the Context, to see how these words and meanings change.
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Below are some associated words and phrases. Start with these. How many other words and phrases can you think of?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identification</th>
<th>Ideology</th>
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**Quotations**

- Other people’s viewpoints can stimulate and expand your thinking. Use the internet to find relevant quotations. Search for quotes about both identity and belonging. These will help expand your word bank and also the ideas that you associate with the Context. The quotes can also be used as starting points for discussion or writing topics.

**Who am I?**

What does an identity consist of? If you were to lose your memory, what information would you need to learn about yourself in order to find out who you are?

- In the classroom, view scenes 1–8 of *The Bourne Identity* (2002). Jason Bourne has lost his identity and, with no memory of his past, sets about trying to uncover who he is. After you have viewed the scenes, break up into small groups and explore the following questions:
  - Where does Jason Bourne start looking for answers to who he is?
  - Does he pay attention to his instincts and feelings or does he only seek answers in facts?
  - Is ‘who am I’ a question Jason can answer alone? What role do other people play in telling us who we are?

- How do we define ourselves? How are we defined by others? Create a mind map like the one below detailing a number of important things about yourself. Include both external and internal factors. External factors will include things such as your age, gender, ethnic background and physical appearance. Internal factors (not visible to others) may include your relationships with family and friends, hobbies, interests, beliefs, your feelings about yourself, the choices you make and how you communicate with...
others. After you have completed the map, consider whether external or
internal factors reveal the most about who you are. What does this map not
tell people about you?

• Is identity just a collection of roles we play? Can one person have several
identities? Keep notes in your Context file of the ways in which you take on
different identities depending on where you are and who you are with.
Consider how this impacts on your interactions with others. Do you think that
people know the real you?

Where do I belong?
What is the connection between our sense of
belonging to people, places or ideas and our
sense of self? Belonging is, in many ways, a paradox. Belonging helps provide
a connection to others and a feeling of acceptance. Conforming to the needs of
a group can, however, stifle or compromise your sense of individuality.
Belonging can have both positive and negative aspects. Consider these
paradoxes as you do the following short activities.

• Make a list of all the groups to which you belong, including family, ethnic
group, peer groups or sporting groups. Put your list in order of those that are
most important to you. From this list, consider both the positives and
negatives of belonging to these groups.
• Belonging is not always desirable. Write a brief piece about a time when you
felt pressure to belong. Did you do or say things you normally would not in
order to be accepted? Did your need to belong challenge your sense of who you are?

- Write an open letter to the school community to be published in the principal’s newsletter presenting an argument that school rules are designed to enforce conformity at the expense of individual identity.

- In small groups, discuss a place to which you feel a strong sense of belonging. Describe it and explain what makes it more meaningful than other places in your life. Has this place impacted on the way you see yourself? For example, if you had never been there, do you think you would be a different person? Think carefully about the kind of connection you have to this place.

IDENTIFYING THE BIG IDEAS

What are the Big Ideas and arguments that emerge from this Context? Before you begin to explore your texts, consider further ways of grouping concepts about Exploring Issues of Identity and Belonging using the following Big Ideas:

1. Families and intimate relationships with others shape who we are
2. Groups, communities and a sense of belonging
3. Factors that challenge our identity
4. Choosing not to belong

You may find an overlap between many of these ideas. For example, issues relating to families and belonging might also be relevant to our sense of belonging to other groups. Of course, there are many more Big Ideas in this Context than those identified here. How many more can you identify?
1 Families and intimate relationships with others shape who we are

Trigger questions

• What role do family and friends play in establishing who we are and where we belong?
• What happens to our sense of belonging if we find ourselves in conflict with those closest to us?
• Is it possible to have a strong sense of identity and belonging without strong family ties?

Ideas to get you started

Our identities are shaped by many different factors. Our families are the first group to which we belong. Families, ideally, provide love, protection and the opportunity for us to find out who we are. We develop a sense of who we are through our relationships with others. Not all families provide the same kind of opportunities for personal growth and, even in the most stable and supportive families, pressures to conform may occur. Parents’ expectations and values may drive a wedge between them and their children. Our siblings, therefore, often play a significant, supportive role.

While we do not choose our families, we can choose the intimate connections we make with other people. These choices reveal many things about us. We learn a lot about ourselves from the people we choose to build close relationships with. A desire to belong is also a desire to connect to other people. Relationships with family members, our closest friends and those we love can be both challenging and rewarding.

Changing circumstances can precipitate a change in our intimate relationships. Moving to a new school, town or country means the need to adapt to a new environment and make connections with new people. In doing this, we may lose our sense of belonging to the people and places we have left behind. We might say that adult identity is formed, in part, by the experiences we have throughout childhood. This may not be completely true for everyone; however, some part of this is true for most people. As we grow up our identities are constantly
reshaped and developed. We might feel and behave differently depending on who comes in and out of our lives.

**Writing activity**

- Imagine you are delivering a speech at the wedding of a sibling. This speech will reveal to guests some important things both about your sibling and the relationship that you share. Consider the following:
  - What do they mean to you?
  - What have you learned from them about yourself?
  - What impact have they had on other members of your family?

**Discussion questions**

- In small groups, discuss whether you think that your position in your family (i.e. whether you are a firstborn or middle child etc.) has affected your identity or sense of belonging.
- Consider the following idea: ‘All children betray their parents at some point. They have to in order to truly discover who they are.’ To what extent do you think this is true?
- Do you still have any friends that you made in kindergarten or primary school? If so, why do you think you have remained friends for so long? What factors have helped to maintain your connection?

**2 Groups, communities and a sense of belonging**

**Trigger questions**

- Do you feel happier doing things alone or as part of a group?
- Have you ever pretended to be someone you are not in order to belong to a group or community?

**Ideas to get you started**

Groups and communities can provide security, support and acceptance. Human beings are not, by nature, solitary creatures. Contributing to the social fabric can enhance our self-esteem and self worth. A sense of identity is closely connected to belonging to something other than ourselves. We belong to families and to other groups, including racial, religious or cultural groups. You may also belong to a group of peers connected through a shared interest in
music or ideas. Belonging to a group often carries with it a sense of exclusivity or privilege. It also fosters the feeling that we are accepted and loved.

Belonging is often contradictory in nature. People may want to belong to a group or organisation out of a sense of fear. We might be afraid of being left out, ostracised or ignored. We may feel that if we don’t belong to a group we will be alone or no one will like us, and so on. It is often also difficult to belong if we hold different ideas, beliefs or values from the majority of a group or society. As a result, we may feel alienated. Fitting into a small community when you are a different race or religion from the majority might also be especially difficult. Other people actively choose not to conform to the rules of mainstream society. Refusing to conform to the expectations of the majority – especially in an institutional setting such as school or the workplace – can take considerable courage.

Experiences of belonging are not the same for everyone. For migrants or refugees who leave their homeland, a sense of belonging may be difficult to achieve in a new country. We have strong ties to land and place that often cannot be replicated elsewhere. In order to maintain a strong sense of national identity, migrants and refugees will often continue traditions, including those related to cooking and dress, in order to remain connected to where they once belonged.

Activity

- Identity and consumerism are closely connected. Many people believe that the clothes they wear, the brands they buy and the objects they own reflect some inner truth about themselves. In small groups, discuss the proposition that ‘you are what you buy.’ To what extent do you believe this to be true? What do you think these objects tell other people about who you are? Are these things an authentic or real expression of who you are? Do you think that these things help or hinder you making connections with other people?
Discussion questions

- In small groups, make lists of some of the positive aspects of belonging to a group and some of the negative aspects.
- Consider what your ideal community would look like. In what ways would this community contribute to your identity?
- Thinking about the various groups to which you belong, consider whether you ever feel trapped or caught between their different expectations. Do you ever feel that you have a fractured sense of identity?

3 Factors that challenge our identity

Trigger questions

- Have you ever given up anything for what you believe in?
- Does your peer group make it difficult or easy for you to stand by the things that matter to you?

Ideas to get you started

Our identity develops as we grow and change. We are not the same person when we are adults that we were when children. It might even be true that we are not the same person today that we were yesterday, and so on. The people and ideas we encounter on a daily basis change the way we see the world and how we see ourselves. Our identity can be challenged in both positive and negative ways by these encounters and experiences.

As teenagers our identity and sense of belonging can be challenged by peer pressure. We may not have a strong sense of who we are and where we belong and might be easily swayed by others with stronger personalities. Many young people participate in high-risk behaviour in order to be accepted. Other individuals may have very strong opinions and ideas but choose to hide or disguise these in order to be accepted by a peer group. Sometimes people are judged solely by their appearance, and others draw conclusions about their personality from their clothes or other external factors. How others see us has a big influence on how we see ourselves, in both positive and negative ways. Adolescence is an important time in which we can learn how to stand up for ourselves and what we believe. This is rarely an easy endeavour but finding the courage to be true to what we think and feel can be a life-defining moment.
What we believe may also be challenged and our identities reshaped as a result. Each of us is constantly learning new things. Beliefs come in many forms. They may be religious, political or personal. They may be given to us by our families or we may adopt them ourselves over time from other sources. Having beliefs of any kind can add meaning to our lives, connecting us to others and giving a sense of direction and purpose. An individual with passionate beliefs can challenge the status quo. It can be difficult, however, to maintain one’s beliefs if they are different from those of the majority. Sometimes, people are asked to make sacrifices for the things that they believe in.

**Activities**

- Create a mind map with yourself at the centre. Map all the factors that you feel challenge your sense of identity. Include factors such as other people, experiences and beliefs. Return to the mind map throughout your study of the Context to see if any of these factors have changed.
- Write a short reflective piece on a person in your life who has challenged the way you see the world. How have you changed as a result of your relationship with them?

**Discussion questions**

- Mark Twain said, ‘I have never let my schooling interfere with my education.’ In small groups, make two lists – one listing the things that school does prepare you for and another listing the things that it doesn’t prepare you for.
- In small groups discuss the following proposition: That our behaviour should always be consistent with what we believe.

**4 Choosing not to belong**

**Trigger questions**

- Can we feel complete if we don’t belong to the mainstream?
- Do you think that individuals who choose not to belong have a strong or fragile sense of self?
- Can choosing not to belong cause more harm than good?
**Ideas to get you started**

Individuals often have to compromise who they are and what they believe in order to belong. This can be difficult. In this way, belonging can often require sacrifices that may ultimately lead to unhappiness. While belonging suggests a desire to be connected to others, it may also result in a dependence on others and a subsequent loss of individuality, or what makes you unique. Belonging to a cult is an extreme example of the potentially negative aspects of being part of a group.

Choosing not to belong to the mainstream can be a difficult, yet rewarding, decision. At times through life we may be asked to acquiesce to ways of thinking that are in direct conflict with the things we hold to be fundamentally important. As a teenager you may disagree with the adult world. You may disagree with your teachers or even your friends. An individual may define themselves in opposition to social norms and expectations. It is true then that the ideas and groups we reject show us who we are just as much as the ideas and groups we choose to identify with.

**Activity**

- Choosing not to belong to mainstream society and its values, like the hippies of the 1960s did, can be more than a personal rebellion. It can be seen as a political statement. Use the internet and your library to do some research into the hippies and explore the sorts of things in the society of the time that they were rejecting. Make notes in your Context file. In what ways might their actions, clothes and lifestyle be understood as a political statement? Are there any groups in society today to which you might compare them? Are there any ways in which your own choices in life might be interpreted as political statements? If so, what are you attempting to say about who you are and what you believe?

**Discussion questions**

- Think about the ways in which your school encourages or discourages conformity. In small groups, consider the ways in which the school environment punishes those who set themselves apart as different from others.
Have you ever chosen not to conform to expectations in your family? In your Context file, describe why you did it, how you did it, and the effects and consequences of your choice.

EXPLORING THE TEXTS

Studying texts in this area of study has a particular purpose: you are drawing ideas from them to inform and expand your own thinking about the Context. The ideas you have developed when building the Context will help to focus your reading and discussion of the text. As you explore texts, consider how they are connected to the Big Ideas discussed above.

- How do the texts expand and support the way you think about these ideas and arguments?
- Do the texts introduce any new perspectives on the Context?
- Are there any features of the text that might influence your own writing?

**Bombshells by Joanna Murray-Smith**

*Overview*

Written for the energetic and versatile actor Caroline O’Connor, Joanna Murray-Smith’s play *Bombshells* comprises six monologues which are delivered by diverse female characters. In each monologue, Murray-Smith explores the factors that shape Australian women’s identities at different stages of life, and poses questions about the impact of society’s gender expectations on women’s sense of belonging and agency.

Meryl Louise Davenport

- The first monologue is delivered by Meryl Louise Davenport, an anxious mother of three. As we witness a chaotic day in the life of this frazzled and overwhelmed woman, Murray-Smith draws attention to the impact the media has on women’s sense of self and body image. This stream-of-consciousness monologue emphasises the pressure contemporary Australian women feel to ‘perform’ the roles allocated to them by society,
and exposes the deception Meryl undertakes in order to appear competent and gain social acceptance.

Tiggy Entwhistle

- In the second monologue, cactus enthusiast Tiggy Entwhistle makes an amateurish and awkward presentation – complete with slide show – to a meeting of like-minded individuals at a succulent society meeting (C.A.S.L.). While the presentation is ostensibly about the hardy and enduring nature of the cactus, it quickly becomes clear that the plant being discussed is a metaphor for Tiggy herself, who has recently been left by her husband and now feels that her identity and sense of purpose have been eroded.

Mary O'Donnell

- The theme of female competition is humorously reinforced in the third monologue in which the teenage Mary O'Donnell competes in the St Brigid’s talent quest. Mary is last year’s winner and feels certain of retaining her crown, until her rival Angela McTerry performs the same piece that Mary has prepared. This monologue explores the way in which Mary’s sense of self is bound up in her ability to ‘perform’ a role – a concern which pervades all of Bombshells – and also exposes the way in which a woman’s ‘public’ performance and persona often mask a very different private identity.

Theresa McTerry

- This distinction between an individual’s ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ worlds is examined further in the fourth monologue, delivered by Theresa McTerry on her wedding day. Like Meryl Davenport, Theresa is conscious of the alienation women feel if they do not live up to society’s expectations and so is relieved that Ted has ‘saved’ her from a life of socially unacceptable singleness. As the day draws on, though, Theresa begins to realise the extent of the sacrifices she will have to make as Ted’s wife, and suddenly the sense of ‘belonging’ offered by marriage seems both hollow and constraining.
Winsome Webster

- In the fifth monologue, Winsome Webster draws attention to the way in which single women struggle to find a sense of belonging in a society where relationships determine an individual’s status and value. While Winsome leads a busy life with a group of other widows, she acknowledges that their activities are designed to convey an outward expression of purpose and value, but mask a deep loneliness. Winsome’s life is changed when she meets Patrick, a blind student who ‘sees’ beyond her conservative façade and offers her a moment of unexpected happiness.

Zoe Struthers

- The final monologue is delivered by ageing diva Zoe Struthers. In this energetic parody Murray-Smith reinforces the discrepancy between a woman’s public and private life. Zoe’s songs of potent sexuality and personal agency seem at odds with the stories of her troubled personal life, revealed through her stage banter. Further, her final song, ‘The Terrible Country of Men’, reinforces a key sub-theme of the entire play – women’s vulnerable position in society.

Sample scene

‘Theresa McTerry’ (pp.24–6)

‘A bride in her fancy white underwear on stage … Lean-Cuisine-eating, wardrobe-obsessing desperation! No more pounding tick of the biological clock.’

Summary

In the opening section of the fourth monologue, Theresa McTerry dresses for her wedding and ruminates on how being a married woman will provide her with a sense of belonging she feels she cannot find elsewhere. As she reflects on her relationship with Ted, it becomes increasingly clear that Theresa wants to believe that she will only be happy and fulfilled as a married woman. She repeats this as if she needs to convince herself it is true.
Questions for exploring ideas

1. How does this passage show that Theresa’s notion of marriage has been influenced by both the media and popular culture?

2. How does this passage suggest that Theresa’s sense of belonging and acceptance is strongly connected to society’s expectations of women?

3. How do we know that Theresa’s decision to marry Ted was, at least in part, motivated by a fear of being alone?

4. How does this passage show that what Theresa is saying is not necessarily what she knows to be true?

Discussion questions

• In small groups, discuss the implications of *Bombshells* originally being intended for performance by one actor only. How do you think the play would differ if the six roles were played by six different actors? How would this change the ideas about identity that emerge from the play in its current format? What does the current format convey about the complexity of women’s lives in contemporary Australia?

• In small groups, discuss the following propositions. Locate examples from the text that support or challenge these ideas.
  o We are all performers and the masks we adopt hide our true identities.
  o Individuals must make sacrifices in order to be accepted by society.
  o Belonging will not always bring happiness.

Focus on the features of the text

As well as drawing on ideas from *Bombshells* in your writing about *Identity and Belonging*, remember that the language and style of your writing may also be inspired by the structures and features of the play. For example, the following aspects of the play may influence how you choose to use language in the texts you create:

• the play is structured around six separate monologues that are thematically linked

• stage notes are minimal and we learn almost everything about characters from their own words and gestures

These are only a selection of the key features of the text. What other features can you find?
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- with no other characters to interact with, the monologues are like soliloquies or asides where the audience is being addressed directly
- language is intimate and personal and feels like characters’ stream of consciousness, giving the effect that we are hearing their innermost thoughts.

Activities

- After you have read the play, make notes in your Context file about the characters whose actions are motivated by a fear of failing to meet society’s expectations. What are these expectations? In what ways are the women in Bombshells all similar? In what ways do they differ?
- Write a brief piece reflecting on a time in which you sacrificed your own desires or aspirations in order to gain social acceptance or meet society’s expectations.


Overview

Sometimes Gladness is a collection of poetry by Bruce Dawe. Many of the poems share similar thematic concerns with ideas related to identity and belonging. Dawe is widely considered a poet of the common people. His poems often illustrate people’s need to feel connected to something bigger than themselves. The characters in his poems are often happier and more fulfilled through this connection. The groups and institutions we belong to help to build a stronger sense of who we are. In this framework, many of Dawe’s poems are focused on his relationships with his wife and children and explore how he has grown as a result of these relationships.

Other poems in the collection reveal that the sacrifice often required to belong to a group can be difficult. ‘Migrants’ (p.126) demonstrates this process of adjustment and both the difficulties and rewards that it presents. People may struggle to adapt to a new environment and a sense of belonging may be difficult to achieve. Other characters, such as the marginalised and those living
on the fringe, fail to find a secure place in society. ‘Unemployed’ (p.183) is a good example of a poem about those who lack a sense of belonging.

Ultimately, our lives are always interwoven into the lives of others, and it is this belief that resonates most powerfully through Dawe’s poems. His poems show us that we embrace the world outside us in order to feel a sense of connection, and in order to affirm our own self worth. Dawe suggests that even those people who are outside the mainstream and isolated are not really alone because there are so many others like them.

**Sample poem**

‘Migrants’ (p.126)

**Summary**

This poem reflects on the experiences of migrants coming to Australia and the journey from alienation to eventual acceptance. It describes how adaptations need to be made by both the migrants and settled Australians if this sense of belonging is to be achieved. The poem is told from the point of view of the migrants.

**Questions for exploring ideas**

1. How does this poem show that people will never fit into a new environment without a willingness to adapt? To what extent do you believe this to be true?

2. Look at the first line and a half (from ‘In the fourth week’ to ‘they were there’). How does this image evoke the feelings of the migrants on reaching their destination?

3. How does the poet show that the way we use language is an important part of our identity?

4. Does the poet suggest that a community benefits by welcoming people from elsewhere into it?
Discussion questions

- In small groups, discuss the following propositions. Locate one or more poems to support or challenge each proposition and your point of view on it.
  - We learn most about ourselves by comparing and contrasting ourselves with other people.
  - We need to step outside our comfort zones in order to achieve personal growth and to expand our identities.
  - It is important for us to accept ourselves, even those aspects of ourselves which we do not like.

Focus on the features of the text

As well as drawing on ideas from Dawe’s poetry in your writing about Identity and Belonging, remember that the language and style of your writing may also be inspired by the structures and features of the poems. For example, the following aspects of Dawe’s poetry, evident in many of his nature poems, may influence how you choose to use language in the texts you create:

- a poetic style that is like speaking; although a simple style, it is deeply emotive
- an inclusive and empathetic voice that addresses the reader and includes them in the story unfolding
- the poems use recognisable aspects of Australian culture as symbols of Australian identity; for example, ‘Life-cycle’ (p.86) explores Victoria’s obsession with Aussie Rules football to tell a bigger story about the nation.

Activities

- Look for poems in the text that relate to one or more of the Big Ideas of the Context. What insights and ideas do these poems offer?
- Dawe’s poems contain many different characters. Compare characters from a few of the poems. What do these poems show us about the way these characters view themselves?
- Identify poems depicting environments to which people belong happily, and poems depicting environments in which people are unhappy. What features of these different environments can you identify?
Look at poems about treasured pets (‘Bimbo’, p.203) or about other animals (‘Dogs in the Morning Light’, p.23 and ‘Gorilla gorilla’, p.142). What do these poems show us about the ways in which animals can enhance our lives as humans? How do animals help us to reflect on what it means to be human?

The Catcher in the Rye by J.D. Salinger

Overview

Seventeen-year-old Holden Caulfield narrates his story from a hospital bed. We gradually discover this, and that he has had a breakdown as a result of the events he recounts. The novel’s events take place over a weekend in his life beginning with his expulsion from Pencey Prep, an expensive private school. Holden underachieves academically and rejects the values of his family, social class and school. Leaving school he provokes a fight with his roommate and departs hurt yet defiant.

Throughout the novel, Holden presents himself as both innocent and world-weary. His journey around Manhattan is a search for meaning and authenticity in a world he sees as dominated by ‘phonies’. Holden presents a public face, however, that is often as ‘phony’ as those he criticises. During the weekend, Holden drifts from one incident to another that testify to his desire to be something other than he is. Each is punctuated by a memory of his childhood. As a teenager, Holden is precariously balanced between childhood and adulthood, afraid of what the future will bring. As he spirals out of control it becomes clear that he is confused and uncertain about who he is and where he belongs.

Sample passage

Introduction to Holden Caulfield (p.1)

‘If you really want to hear about it … Where I want to start telling is the day I left Pencey Prep.’
**Summary**

In the novel’s opening, Holden addresses the speaker directly. His language is colloquial and his tone quite informal. As the narrator of his own story, it is clear that he will control what we will and won’t learn about him and what has happened to him. He does not commence the story with details of his birth or his family background. Information is revealed gradually and often not straightforwardly.

**Questions for exploring ideas**

1. Holden tells us that he won’t talk about his family, yet he reveals a great deal despite himself. Make a list of the information you learn about Holden’s family in this opening section.

2. How does Holden’s language tell us that there is something wrong at this particular moment in his life?

3. What are the things that impress Holden? What does this tell you about his identity?

4. Given that this is a first-person narrative, why do you think he doesn’t tell the reader his name?

5. Are there any language or structural clues that tell us that there is more to the story than he is initially sharing?

**Discussion questions**

- In small groups, discuss the following propositions. Locate examples in the text that support or challenge these propositions and your point of view on them.
  - Only we can choose where we belong.
  - You can’t expect somebody else to understand you if you don’t understand yourself.
  - Childhood is a critical time in determining who we are.
  - You have to break away from the past if you want to embrace the future.
Holden sets himself apart from others in the novel. He sees himself as different and a nonconformist. In small groups, discuss whether you think that Holden has a strong sense of what he doesn’t want to belong to. Does his rebellion have a purpose?

Focus on the features of the text

As well as drawing on ideas from *The Catcher in the Rye* in your writing about *Identity and Belonging*, remember that the language and style of your writing may also be inspired by the structures and features of the novel. For example, the following aspects of Salinger’s text may influence how you choose to use language in the texts you create:

- a first-person narrative raises the issue of the reliability of the story being told
- colloquial language appropriate to the times in which the story is told gives the narrative voice authenticity
- settings are vividly constructed through sensory details
- recurring images have symbolic meaning, such as the red hunting cap which is a symbol of Holden’s difference.

Writing activity

At the end of *The Catcher in the Rye* we learn that Holden will be returning to school next September, although he comments that he can’t know if he will apply himself: ‘I mean how do you know what you’re going to do till you do it?’ (p.192). We don’t learn whether he returns to school or if he applies himself. Write a one-page monologue in which you imagine Holden’s reflections on his first day at his new school. Consider the following: Do you think he will apply himself? In what ways have the events recounted in the novel and his hospital stay changed him? How does he see himself in relation to the other students? Does he find it easier to connect to others?
**Witness directed by Peter Weir**

**Overview**

The Amish are a distinct and tightly knit community who live their lives by strict social, moral and religious principles, such as pacifism. The film begins with the members of an Amish community leaving their home for a journey to Baltimore. On their way, Rachel Lapp and her son Samuel pass through Grand Central Station in New York. In the bathroom, Samuel witnesses the vicious murder of an undercover policeman. When they are questioned by police, Rachel tells the investigating officer, John Book, that the Amish ‘want nothing to do with your laws.’ The Amish feel themselves protected from the evil in the world because of their separation from mainstream society.

Book discovers that corrupt police are responsible for the murder and hides himself with the Amish for his own protection. He dresses as an Amish farmer, learning their ways. In giving Book sanctuary, the Amish risk exposure to the outside world.

John and Rachel fall in love. Rachel is warned that she risks being excluded from her community if the relationship continues. While Book is accepted by the community for his carpentry skills, it becomes increasingly clear that neither of them belongs in the world of the other. After a confrontation with the corrupt police, Book returns to his world. Although two very different worlds have collided, they have learned many things about each other and are stronger for the experience.

**Sample scene**

‘Gun of the Hand’ (DVD Chapter 7)

**Summary**

While Book showers, Samuel finds his gun in a drawer. Book discovers him handling it. Naturally, after what he has witnessed, Samuel is curious about the weapon. However the Amish are pacifists and the murder was his first encounter with a gun and the violent consequences of its use. Later, Samuel’s grandfather talks to him about the long history of Amish resistance to violence.
Introduction to the Context: Exploring Issues of Identity and Belonging

Questions for exploring ideas

1 Although he has lived a life separated from the mainstream of society, Samuel’s journey into the city is one that changes the way he sees the world. Do you think it is possible to experience something and not be influenced by it?

2 After Samuel is discovered with the gun, his grandfather suggests that once people come into contact with the bad in the world it becomes a part of them: ‘What you take into your hands, you take into your heart … Touch not the unclean thing.’ To what extent do you believe this to be true? Do you think a person has to be exposed to both good and bad to develop a strong sense of self?

Discussion questions

1 By the end of Witness Book has learned a lot about himself through his contact with people whose lives are dramatically different from his own. In small groups discuss the ways in which he has changed. Consider both internal and external changes.

2 Discuss the following proposition: That you can only really understand another person if you understand where they come from. Does Witness support this statement?

3 Given what you have learned about the Amish throughout your study of the film, do you think that the Amish are conformists or nonconformists?

4 While Book struggles to resist the impulse to fight the bullies intimidating Daniel, he makes a conscious decision to act, telling Eli, ‘it is my way.’ In small groups, discuss the ways this scene magnifies the difference between Book and the nonviolent Amish. Do you see this scene as a turning point in the narrative? Is there any way that Book could have remained with them after this event?
Focus on the features of the text

As well as drawing on ideas from *Witness* in your writing about *Identity and Belonging*, remember that the language and style of your writing may also be inspired by the structures and features of the text. For example, the following aspects of Weir’s direction may influence how you choose to shape your own texts:

- a focus on the small details of the Amish community creates a believable world
- point of view shots allow the viewer to identify closely with characters’ experiences – for example, the series of shots from Samuel’s point of view as he sees the city for the first time
- recurring images have symbolic meaning, such as wheat, which is symbolic of what is reaped when a community works together
- contrasting worlds are rendered through sound and editing; for example, the sounds of the city are distinct from the soundtrack associated with the Amish.

Activity

- In small groups, do some research into the lives of the Amish. As a group, make a list of the major ways in which their lives differ from yours. Individually, write a short piece, perhaps in letter form, in which you imagine you are describing your life to an Amish teenager (your age). In your writing do not simply describe your life and what is important to you, but how these things provide you with a sense of belonging and the ways in which your life might be surprising or shocking to your reader compared to their own.

CLARIFYING THE IDEAS

Your knowledge and views about the Context will have been informed by your reading of the set texts as well as wide-ranging discussion. As your study of the Context develops, it is important to clarify and refine your ideas, for example, by summarising key arguments and/or sub-themes, and by discussing and
debating these ideas. What you think or your point of view on the ideas is an important part of this aspect of your study.

Develop summaries

You can summarise key ideas and arguments about your Context in a number of ways.

- Make a list of statements that highlight important aspects of the Context.
- Create a mind map to summarise key ideas.
- Summarise ideas in a table (like the example below). Make a note of your own thoughts on each idea. Be sure to include a column for each of the texts that you are studying to show how these expand and develop your understanding of the Context. In Unit 4, make connections between your texts. What similarities do they share in relation to the Context? What different ideas do they help to clarify?

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<td><strong>The need to connect to others</strong></td>
<td>A desire to belong to a group or community is often about the need to make connections with other people.</td>
<td>Holden’s journey around Manhattan is motivated by his desire to connect with other people, reflected in his relationship with his sister Phoebe.</td>
<td>Book finds in the Amish the genuine human connections he lacks working the streets as a policeman.</td>
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<td><strong>Choosing not to belong</strong></td>
<td>Our identities are also formed by what we reject.</td>
<td>Holden rejects the ‘phonies’ he sees all around him.</td>
<td>The Amish choose not to belong to the mainstream of American society.</td>
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<td><strong>Belonging to a group involves self-sacrifice</strong></td>
<td>Although belonging to a group can be fulfilling, it often also involves giving something up.</td>
<td>Holden feels stifled by school and the need to conform. He feels that he is sacrificing who he really is.</td>
<td>Belonging involves significant personal sacrifice; for example, Rachel gives up the man she loves to remain accepted by the Amish.</td>
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In the news

Spend a couple of days collecting articles from the newspaper that build on your understanding of the key ideas explored above. Categorise them in your Context file under ideas. You may wish to consider the following, although your investigation need not be limited to these:

- Asylum seekers
- Australian values tests
- Football culture
- Celebrities

Stage a debate

A debate is a useful strategy for clarifying and presenting a point of view on the Context. The following topics will be a good place to begin, or you may wish to develop your own propositions based on the key ideas and arguments you have identified.

- That choosing not to belong takes more courage than belonging.
- That identity is challenged when different cultures collide.
- That a feeling of alienation from society can begin an important journey of self-discovery.
- That identity is imposed on individuals by the society in which they live.

Character-based activities

- Similar to the mind map you created when Building the Context, mapping out your own identity, create a mind map for the main characters in the texts you are studying. Think of all the factors, external and internal, that tell you who those characters are.
- Take a key character from each of the texts you have studied this year and create a scene in which they meet. Clarify what you think is important about these characters in terms of ideas in the text. Remember that they do not know each other so consider how they will introduce themselves to each other. Do they confide in each other? What advice or insights do they offer about the Context ideas from their experiences in the text?
TOPICS FOR WRITING

Studying a Context will help to highlight the connection between reading and writing. You will be able to draw on ideas and arguments from your Context to create your own written texts for a specified audience and purpose. The topics below will be useful for writing as you prepare for the SACs and the final exam. They are topics based around the Context and are therefore relevant no matter which texts in this Context you are studying.

1  ‘Who we are often depends on where we are.’

2  ‘Conforming to the needs of a group can stifle your true identity.’

3  ‘One person may have many identities.’

4  ‘I am not the same person today that I was yesterday.’

5  ‘Conflicts can strengthen our understanding of where we belong.’

THE TEXTS


OTHER RESOURCES

Films


**The Graduate** 1967, dir. Mike Nichols, MGM. Starring Dustin Hoffman and Anne Bancroft.


**Mrs Doubtfire** 1993, dir. Chris Columbus, 20th Century Fox. Starring Robin Williams, Sally Field and Pierce Brosnan.

**My Life as a Dog** 1985, dir. Lasse Hallström, FilmTeknik. Starring Anton Glanzelius, Anki Lidén and Tomas von Brömssen.


**Novels & short stories**

Bennett, Bruce and Haye, Susan (eds) 2000, *Home and Away: Australian stories of Belonging and Alienation*, University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands, WA.


Morgan, Sally 1987, My Place, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, Fremantle.


Poetry


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