ENGLISH CONTEXT SUMMARY NOTES

“Exploring issues of identity and belonging”

Includes:

- Wild Cat Falling
- The Mind of a Thief
- Summer of the Seventeenth Doll
- Skin

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Understanding the context

Where do we get our belonging?

- Family [parents/ grandparents / siblings / extended family]
- Peer group / friendship circles / social networks
- Clubs [personal interest, community service / motorcycle / choir / service]
- Sport [playing / coaching / umpiring / spectating / administrating]
- Political associations / community action groups
- Education [school / university etc]
- Media [notions of identity from news, current affairs, fictional media texts]
- Commercial organization [employer/employee / customer]
- Professional organization
- Profession [lawyer, truck driver, teacher]
- Skills and abilities
- Ethnicity
- Society [dominant values / cultural practices]
- Nationality
- Gender
- Spiritual faith
- Generation [Baby-boomer / Generation X / Generation Y]
- Location [street / neighbourhood / village / town / city]
- Civilization [western / eastern ]

Consider the lack of belonging:

Alienation:

Disconnection, disconnectedness, break, discontinuity, disintegration, dissolution, dissociation, withdrawal, moving apart, growing apart, split, detachment, isolation, seclusion, avoidance, lack of unity, separateness, separatism, no connection, no common ground, unrelatedness, distance apart, breach, rift, split, disjoining, severance, breaking up, splitting up, segregation, displacement, disjointing, dislocation, breakdown, rupture, fracture, partition, cutting off, dissection.

Outsider:

Alien, foreigner, loner, nonperson, nonconformist, misfit.
**Gathering ideas**

You will need to put a file together over time that addresses the issues in this context. Remember that this is relevant to the end of year exam as well as your SACs.

- start a file.
- keep notes from class discussions and brainstorm sessions.
- take notes from wider reading, viewing and listening, wherever that may be:
  - other texts, newspapers, magazines, websites, images, films, documentaries, television programs, radio programs etc.
  - note particular words and phrases used by others that may be useful to your understanding of the topic and that you may use in your writing.
  - also keep key quotes from texts that you may be able to use.

Make comprehensive notes to begin with. You never know what may be useful in time as you consider and develop your understanding of the issues. It is important to consider the many different issues that are related to the context, and not only those that are presented to you in the associated text.

**Identity table**

A good idea is to start with yourself. Complete the following.

*Name:*

*Ethnicity/Nationality:*

*Spirituality:*

*Born and raised:*

*Mother’s and father’s occupations:*

*Schooling/education:*

*Moulding background events:*

*Happy memories:*

*Sad memories:*

*Proudest moment:*
Most shameful moment:

Fears:

Expressed emotions:

Closest people:

Issues:

Who has loved:

Who has disliked:

Positive personality attributes:

Negative personality attributes:

Who do you influence:

Who influences you:

Expectations:

Occupation [student/part-time job]:

Talents/abilities:

Accomplishments:
  - Professional:
  - Sporting:
  - Artistic:
  - Academic:
  - Other:

Greatest achievement:

Biggest failure:

Hobbies/sport:

Opinions and ideas about current issues:

Physical identity – hair style / clothes / etc:
Background

**Consider the following:**

- What is belonging?
  Society, family, peer group, ethnic background, religious affiliation, personal interests, etc.
- Aspects of belonging –
  Fellowship, membership, community, association, making one of, being one of, team spirit, esprit de corps, camaraderie, fraternization, hobnobbing, familiarity, intimacy, mateship, togetherness, friendship, social circle, home, family, acquaintances, compatibility, conformity, sociableness, gregariousness, friendliness, affability, acceptability, cordiality.
- What is an individual?
- How does this influence who the individual is?
- How does an individual become who they are?
- How do we understand self and our place in world?
- What is a person's identity?
  personality, uniqueness, individuality, make-up, character, physical appearance, distinctive features, mannerisms, traits, features, attributes, differences, skills, selfhood, psyche, spirit, idiosyncrasies, achievements, defining features, qualities, eccentricities, peculiarities, quirks.
- What is society?
- What is the place of the individual in society?
- Where is the individual/society interface?
- What expectations can society make on the individual?

- Consider the inherent tension in the meanings of 'individual' and 'belonging'. To be an individual implies a measure of difference, yet belonging implies a measure of shared attitudes and values. How does the individual and society negotiate these issues?
- Conversely, consider how belonging actively bestows identity on the individual by giving him/her a set of recognizable attitudes and values that he/she can adopt as his/her own.
- Consider the dynamics of identity. To what extent is an individual's identity given to him/her through the influences of others: family, ethnicity, culture, education, work, spiritual faith etc? And to what extent is identity a personal achievement that the individual sets out to put into place for him/herself? Is it a voyage of self-discovery – a kind of revelation over time during which we progressively discover ourselves?
Exploring issues of identity and belonging

Themes and issues related to the context

Introduction

This is a broad context and may be approached from a variety of viewpoints. 'Identity' may be used to describe personal identity, being the idiosyncratic aspects of a person that makes them unique. A person's identity comprises the many different aspects of their life and activities, such as language, dress, behaviour, friends, employment and social groups. A person's social identity are the memberships that a person makes of groups in society that help to define the individual. Many people gain a sense of positive self-esteem from their identity groups and that helps to develop feelings of community and belonging.

So, this issue involves two parts: where we gain our individual identity and where we gain our sense of social belonging. There seems to be a certain tension between the two, that individual identity and social belonging are opposites, and that they are naturally in conflict with each other, and this may be true to some extent. But it may be equally true that they inter-relate and also offer support to each other, as we gain identity from the various groups in society that we belong to, and that we choose the various groups we wish to belong to as an expression of our identity.

It could even be said that there are really three aspects to this issue, being the nature of individual identity, the nature of social belonging, and the necessary reconciliation that must exist between the two so that neither one nor the other is either completely dominant or completely submissive.

Belonging

Our first experiences in the world are concerned with belonging. We are born into a family, where there may usually be parents, siblings, grandparents, and all of the extended family of uncles, aunts and cousins. Our experiences of life are concerned with those around us, and we come to understand that we have a very close association with them. This is our first sense of belonging, and we accept the attitudes and values of this group of people.

As we grow up our experiences of belonging widen. We move outside of the immediate family group to gain a sense of belonging in other ways. We go to school, where we learn that belonging has wider implications. We now not only belong to a family, we also belong to a group of people in a class and also in a school. And again, we take up and accept the attitudes and values that are espoused by the school and its students and teachers.

As we go through school and continue to grow up, we come into contact with wider groups of people. We form friendships and we take up memberships of various groups. We develop a network of friends, and this network will often be based on finding belonging amongst people who share with us at least some similar attitudes and values towards life. We also take up memberships of groups. And it is often our personal interests that decide what those groups will be. However, there may also be important family input into these decisions as family members, especially parents, also exercise important influence over where we belong – especially in childhood. Often our parents wish to actively influence the friendships that we make and the groups that we belong to. These