

ESL – AREA OF STUDY

Immigrant Chronicle and China Coin

The choice to belong or not to belong involves obstacles. Belonging is being a part of or having a feeling of connectedness to a significant something. Humans naturally have desire to belong to a significant something to satisfy their psychological needs but sometimes choose not to belong. During the development of the sense of belonging and not belonging, there might be an obstacle such as cultural difference, generation gap, language, value of life and even race. This idea of belonging is explored thoroughly in “Feliks Skrzynecki” and “10 Mary Street” from “Immigrants Chronicle” by Peter Skrzynecki, “The China Coin” by Allan Baillie and the film “Avatar”.

“Immigrants Chronicle” is an anthology of Peter Skrzynecki’s poems which outlines the general life of migrants in Australia in the 1950’s especially Peter himself and his family. “The China Coin” is a novel about a Eurasian teenager named Leah, who embarks on a long journey to China with her mother, Joan, in search of the other half of a broken ancient coin that was sent to Joan with a letter from her father before he died. “Avatar” is a science fiction epic film directed by James Cameron. The story takes place in the year of 2154 on the planet called Pandora that is inhabited by the Na’vi and is about Jake Sully, a paraplegic former marine, who develops the strong sense of belonging with them by learning their way of life. Each character in each text deals with obstacles but they eventually find a way out and achieve their goals and build up the sense of belonging and not belonging.

Relationships are essential in creating a sense of belonging but many things can act as obstacles in developing relationships. “Feliks Skrzynecki” outlines the changing relationship between Peter and Feliks, Peter’s father, and Felik’s characteristics. Feliks is a stoic man who never complains about anything and values his cultural background, Poland while Peter becomes more embedded into Australian culture despite of Felik’s efforts to make him not to forget his background and it is caused by the barriers such as language difference, cultural difference and generation gap that make them tough to understand and belong to each other. The metaphor “watched me pegging my tents further and further south of Hadrian’s Wall” illustrates the misunderstanding and the sense of not belonging between Peter and Feliks. “10 Mary Street” describes Peter’s family’s first home that provides them a security and familiarity in their new country and it is the only place where Feliks feels comfortable and has a sense of belonging. The simile, “like a well-oiled lock” and metaphor “we became citizens of the soil” give an idea that how familiar and secure the house is to the family just like a well-oiled lock and they finally find the sense of belonging in Australia. However, “10 Mary Street” will be pulled down in order to be “gazetted for industry”, and the only place where Feliks belongs will be gone leading him to isolate himself from the rest of the society more than ever.

Through the journey in search of the other half of the coin in China, Leah has developed a strong sense of belonging to China as well as her extended family especially his cousin, Ke, who was a student protestor fighting for the freedom against the communist government. The symbolism in “She could see the two halves of coin twirling in the blue together” represents the final reunion of the family just like the two halves of the coin rejoined together but it also implies separation of the family according to the context. In fact, Joan and Leah are asked to leave China by the Australian embassy for the safety on the Qantas evacuation flight as the demonstration on Tiananmen Square becomes serious. Joan and Leah are worried about Ke and Li-Nan as they keep on hearing news about the demonstration where more and more students are killed by soldiers. Leah confronts with this barrier, demonstration, which will separate her from her Chinese extended family that will separate her from them physically but she will never forget about them because she belongs to them, they are her “family”. This is similar to the situation of Peter’s family in “10 Mary Street” in which they will be losing their home, the only place where they belong and feel comfortable due to the industrialisation of the suburb they live.

In “Avatar”, Jake Sully develops strong sense of belonging as he learns about Na’vi and falls in love with the Neytiri, the princess of Na’vi, who is initially attracted by Jake’s bravery. There is an eye-level shot of Jake and Na’vi inside the home tree where Na’vi live and he is trying to gain trust from them so that he can learn their way of life and gain their trust. However, there were several obstacles for Jake to overcome such as language difference, cultural difference and the attitude to the nature that blocked him to be a true part of their family. Jake confronts with barriers that make him not being able to belong to Na’vi just like Feliks in “Feliks Skrzynecki” and Leah in “The China Coin”, respectively to Australia and China.

Each character in three texts faces with barriers that stop them from belonging to a country or family. For Jake Sully in “Avatar”, he adapts to the new environment by respecting and learning Na’vi’s way of life and he becomes the important member of Na’vi. The obstacles from the general life style to attitudes to the nature were not able to stop him from connecting with Na’vi and belong to them. On the other hand, Feliks and Leah had no choice but giving up the part of who they are. Feliks lost his beloved garden where he belongs to and Leah had to leave her extended Chinese family behind but there was nothing they could have done.

Love or trust creates a powerful sense of belonging no matter how much a person want to be exclude from a relationship. It is true that Peter is a part of Australian culture but not Polish culture. There is a cultural difference existing between Peter and Feliks in “Feliks Skrzynecki”. The quote from the department officer “Did your father ever attempt to learn English” illustrates that Feliks is isolating himself from Australian society and only belongs to his beloved garden. However, when the officer asked Peter the question, he defended his father by swearing to the officer in his mind and it is shown in the critical descriptive language in “the curse that damned, a crew-cut, grey haired department clerk”. Furthermore in “10 Mary Street”, the garden is the symbol of Feliks’ sense of belonging to Australia even though he isolates himself from the society. Garden is a block of land where plants put down their roots into the soil and it is a symbol of putting down roots in a new country.

Even though Feliks tries to belong to Australia by learning language or adapting new culture, but he still has a sense of belonging in Australia by belonging to the garden which is, in fact, a part of Australia.

In the same way, when Joan got involved in an accident, Leah seemed really worried about her and. The emotive language in “How do you feel, Mum?” shows how much Leah cares about Joan now and the fact that she calls Joan as “mum” outlines how much their relationship has been changed throughout the book comparing to the beginning where Leah refers to Joan as “evil aunt who flies a broom”. It is love that changed the relationship. They started to understand each other and care how they feel.

Jake in “Avatar” develops a stronger sense of belonging to Na’vi than the one to humans as he discovers his new personal identity as a part of Na’vi and with Neytiri. However, Eytukan, the leader of Na’vi considers Jake as just another dreamwalker, Na’vi’s language for a human, who tries to invade Pandora. Even though he was accepted by Neytiri but he was not accepted or trusted by Eytukan. There is an eye-level medium shot where Eytukan describes Jake as “a demon in a false body” which demonstrates his wariness about the existence of dreamwalker within the tribe. The barrier of no trust makes Eytukan not to accept Jake as a part of family. Jake tries harder and harder to gain Eytukan’s trust with honesty about willingness to become a part of Na’vi and Eytukan starts to trust and respect Jake.

Each text explores the idea that even though one person wants to exclude another for any reason, there is always something that creates a sense of belonging between them. In Feliks’ and Leah’s cases, there was love of the garden and mother which created a sense of belonging to the country and mother. Jake’s situation was different from Feliks’ and Leah’s. He wanted to belong to Na’vi but

he was not accepted by them as they find out that he knew about human's invasion of the home tree. However, Jake's honesty and true affection converted the exclusion of Jake into the inclusion of him into Na'vi.

In conclusion, there are obstacles that interrupt the creation of the sense of belonging and not belonging and this idea of belonging is well delivered through three texts, "Immigrants Chronicle", "The China Coin" and "Avatar" in conjunction with the use of language techniques and visual techniques. Finally, these obstacles can be defeated if your decision of belonging or not belonging is determined no matter how long it takes to overcome them.