Final copy

Texts may show us that a sense of belonging can emerge from experiences and notions of identity, relationships, acceptance and understanding.

To what extend do the texts you have studied support this idea?

(2 texts and 1 related text)

While this is still not a perfect essay, it is far cleaner and clearer after our careful revision. I have not sought to change the student’s ideas, but rather to help him shape sentences and paragraphs that will serve him better.

The idea of belonging is an important and fundamental value in our lives. Belonging most commonly emerges from experience and notions of identity, relationships, acceptance and understanding. The sense of belonging is represented in various ways throughout texts such as “Migrant Hostel” and “Ancestor” by Peter Skrzynecki and Australia directed by Baz Luhrmann. Each of the texts has a wide range of ideas on how belonging is created though personal experiences and notion of identity, relationships, acceptance and understanding.

When a group of “new comers” is living in a new society, their sense of belonging will be challenged because of the lack of relationships and understanding of the new place that they have just begun to experience. “Migrant Hostel” shows us what migrants face in a new environment where their past experience signifies their heritage, and where they were truly belong, but may conflict with the needs of their new lives. The title “Migrant Hostel” -- an accommodation for migrants – is echoed in the detached tone of “arrivals of new comers”. “Sudden departures from adjoining blocks” expresses the constant changing of environment, relationship and identity of the migrant. The use of word such as “Sudden departures” also gives us a sense that the attitude of the migrant is a flowing through or passing though this particular group and not having any acceptance of this particular place (the Hostel). The rhetorical inquiry of “who would be coming next” shows the uncertainty of the people and a particular isolation. The use of simile In “Nationalities sought /Each other out instinctively – /Like a homing pigeon /Circling to get its bearing” creates a sense of the moving migrant seeking for compatriots to get support. This also represents that they are finding people with the same experience who thus have the same degree of belonging to a group. However, this also creates a paradox as “pigeons” represent freedom and lack of restriction, whereas the migrant in this new environment is
restricted. Here we can also find that the sense of belonging is not only based on experience, but is also related to the notion of identity. The migrants, “Recognised by accents,” quickly link up with people that come from a common heritage, who share the same identity. However, the place they are now in, the hostel, does not help them to achieve this point. People are physically staying together but are isolated in their minds which is shown by “Partitioned off at night /By memories of hunger and hate”. The “hate” is toward their situation; a migrant feels alone at night and starts thinking about their memories -- in another sense, their feelings about where they actually belong. Moreover, the sense of being an “outsider” relative to the place is brought out in “A barrier at the main gate”. Here symbolism is used; the “barrier” is a metaphor for their separation from the host society and implies the chance of belonging is limited. This is also depicted in the simile “like a finger/ Pointed in reprimand or shame” which shows how they do not fit in. The pessimistic ending picks up a contrast between new life, “begun”, and death, “dying”. “Migrant Hostel” portrays the migrant as having a sense of hoping to in a new social context despite past experience and notions of identity.

In “Ancestors” Peter Skrzynecki expresses a detachment from ancestors resulting in a lack of belonging in terms of relationship and understanding. Being separated from his heritage, the speaker experiences a kind of guilt about not being attached to his parents’ culture, but also a sense that this issue will have to be resolved, even if doing so may involve some distress and turmoil.

The use of active voice in the poem shows – there are no passive voice verbs at all -- his need to do something about the problem of belonging. The “bearded, faceless men” represent the shadow/spirit of his ancestors but the speaker may also be actually referring to photographs he has seen of these ancestors “standing shoulder to shoulder” – which also depicts the unity of these ancestors and the force they create is firm in his mind and forces him to find out what his roots are. “The eyes never close” shows that the moment is still and may be evidence that he is in a dream partly based on looking at such photos.

A questioning tone also carries on throughout the poem. This questioning is about his identity though examination of the past which is represented by the ancestors, creating a sense of reflection and investigation on his relationship to his ancestors. But we can see that throughout the poem Skrzynecki is refusing to explore the past of these ancestors because he is afraid of the tainted, torturous past which stops him continued searching for a home: “To what star do their footprints lead?” This not only evokes his
fear of the past but also shows that his uncertainty about re-rooting to his ancestral culture. The ancestors “Never speak “implying that those ancestors communicate to “you” in some other way. The poem is mainly a nightmare about the idea of ancestry/belonging, and Skrzynecki uses the blood allusion in “The wind tastes of blood” to show that the root is in our blood which connects us to our ancestors. However, the speaker’s sense of alienation from his ancestors has blocked his ability to belong and find the relationship between him and the ancestors. “Blood” therefore limits our understanding of our past, which is what we originally belong to.

In each of the poems of Skrzynecki we can see a common idea about belonging: that it is shaped through our experience, the notion of identity, relationship, acceptance and understanding. In the movie Australia Baz Luhrmann is dealing with the same sort of idea: that an outsider, Sarah Ashley (Nicole Kidman), is trying to fit into a country that is completely new to her. The way she belongs to the new continent is by understanding Aboriginal thought and accepting the way they live and trying to fit in with them. The rough cattle drover (Hugh Jackman) assists Sarah Ashley, helping her to save her remote cattle station. In this case, Sarah not only fits in to the Aboriginal society because of her acceptance and understanding, but also is affected by the drover. She, despite being an English aristocrat, is not really standing on the same side as other Anglos in the Northern Territory. One of the reasons the drover does not want to join the English aristocrats in the town is based on identity: that is when a person belongs to a group he or she will understand their thought and support them.

The relationship between the Aboriginal child and Sarah Ashley grows after they work together to save the cattle station. However, the director has briefly introduced the grandfather of this Aboriginal child, who has no connection with Sarah Ashley. Here we can see that the separation between the child and the grandfather indicates that the boy does not really belong to Sarah Ashley, but after what they have been through, the boy is finally being accepted by her as if he was her own child in white society.

Here we can see a connection between the experience of Peter Skrzynecki in “Migrant Hostel” and Sarah Ashley in Australia. Both of them experience a lack of belonging to a place because of a lack of understanding of the place. However, in Australia, Sarah Ashley has successfully understood and accepted the Aboriginal culture so that finally she is truly able to belong to the continent, which is different from most of the white people who live in the continent, who just physically belong to this place but do not spiritually belong to this place. The sense of belonging is shown in the final scene
of the movie when Sarah Ashley finally lets the Aboriginal boy go back to his grandfather and his roots. This is an acceptance of a culture, which is a way to belong to a new culture.

Learning about the experience of Peter Skrzynecki as a migrant to Australia through his poems and the experience of Sarah Ashley in the movie *Australia*, we can see that there are a number of important elements flowing around the idea of belonging -- identity, acceptance, relationship and understanding. Each of the texts shows us a strong will to belong and we can see that the ways people achieve belonging emerge from all these elements. Therefore it can be said that the texts have provided a wide range of ideas on belonging that support the statement that “a sense of belonging can emerge from experiences and notions of identity, relationships, acceptance and understanding.”