

Introduction to Context: Identity and Belonging



NOTE: This handout is to be glued into your context journal.

- ⇒ Who am I?
- ⇒ Where do I belong?
- ⇒ What things have shaped me into the person that I am today?
- ⇒ How have they done so?

In the context *Exploring Issues of Identity and Belonging*, you will consider many issues related to questions of a sense of self and how we gain the feeling of belonging to a family, group, place or community.

What makes a sense of self? Each of us is an individual with our own talents and tastes and a unique outlook on the world. Some of the factors that define us are outside our control, such as our race and culture and the family we are born into. These factors also determine a secondary level of circumstances, for example the religion, the school and the socio-economic conditions we experience in our early years. However, identity is not just a simple matter of external circumstances, or of genetics: even identical twins, born and raised in the same environment, will differ from each other in their response to the world and the personalities they develop.

One human quality that we all share, despite our individual identities, is the need to belong. It is a paradox that we long to be free to be who we truly are and yet we yearn to belong to some kind of community. The warmth of a loving family, supportive friends or a group of people with a common cause sustains us and helps us to develop our own sense of self. However, the cost of belonging can be substantial. Families, for example, may have expectations of us that conflict with our own ambitions. Groups may demand unquestioning obedience and conformity. It is painful to be an outsider but there is often a price to pay for belonging. It can be difficult to balance these conflicting impulses, to be both independently ourselves and to belong to a wider community.

The title of this context gives equal emphasis to identity and belonging, suggesting that each is related to the other. The groups we choose to belong to and the ways we connect with others help to form our identity. Together, these issues go to the heart of who we are and how we present ourselves to the world.

Questions

1. In your own words, define the two key terms 'identity' and 'belonging'. What is meant by each of these terms?

Identity means...	Belonging means...
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2. Now look each word up in the dictionary and a thesaurus and write extra notes and synonyms for each word in the boxes below.

Identity	Belonging
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3. Some questions that we may ask when considering the context *Exploring Issues of Identity and Belonging* are:
 - ⇒ How do we define ourselves?
 - ⇒ How are we defined by others?
 - ⇒ Is identity just a collection of roles we play?
 - ⇒ Can one person have several identities?
 - ⇒ Is it more important to be an individual or is it more important to belong?
 - ⇒ Should we change our behaviour in order to belong?
 - ⇒ What happens to our sense of belonging if we find ourselves in conflict with those closest to us?
 - ⇒ What fears might make someone want to join a group?

Come up with 3 of your own questions that you think are relevant to our context.

A.
B.
C.

HINT: Use all of these questions and any others that you can think of to help you in creating your context journal.

4. Work in pairs or threes. Use the grid below to create statements relating to identity and belonging. You must use three words in each statement and you must make 8 statements in total: 3 vertical, 3 horizontal and 2 diagonal. The words do not have to be in the same order as they appear on the grid.

E.g. The first three words are 'values', 'culture' and 'change'. A statement using these three words might be:

"A person's values are often shaped by the culture they come from, however this can change if and when they learn about other cultures."

OR SIMPLY

"Our values can change when we come into contact with people from other cultures."

Values	Culture	Change
Childhood	Individuality	Experiences
Environment	Role	Relationships

My identity and belonging statements

1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	
6.	
7.	
8.	

Extension Task: Choose one of the statements that you created and write 500 words exploring the statement in an interesting way. You could put this in your context journal!