Unit 3 Area of Study 2: Creating and Presenting

**Unit 3 Outcome 2:** Draw on ideas and/or arguments suggested by a chosen Context to create written texts for a specified audience and purpose; and to discuss and analyse their decisions about form, purpose, language, audience and context.

---

**Key knowledge**

This knowledge includes:

- the relationship between purpose, form, language and audience in a range of print, non-print and multimodal text types, with close attention to authors’ choices of specific structures and features; for example, style, images, design, point of view, tone and register;
- the ideas and/or arguments relevant to the chosen Context, including an understanding of the ideas and arguments presented in selected text/s;
- strategies for creating, reviewing and editing;
- metalanguage to discuss and analyse their own and others’ creative choices;
- the conventions of spelling, punctuation and syntax of Standard Australian English.

**Key skills**

These skills include the ability to:

- analyse the relationship between purpose, form and audience in a range of text types, with close attention to authors’ choices of structures and features;
- select and shape information, ideas and argument appropriate to the chosen form, audience, purpose and context;
- draw on ideas and/or arguments presented in selected text/s;
- use appropriate strategies to review and edit texts for fluency and coherence;
- use appropriate metalanguage to discuss and analyse their own and others’ authorial choices; use the conventions of spelling, punctuation and syntax of Standard Australian English.

---

**Chosen Context:** Exploring issues of identity and belonging

**Selected Text:** *Wild Cat Falling* by Mudrooroo
About the author

When Mudrooroo's semi-autobiographical novel *Wild Cat Falling* was first published in 1965, Colin Johnson (as he was then known) was regarded as the first Aboriginal Australian novelist. Subsequently, Mudrooroo has occupied a highly significant place in Australian literature for more than fifty years, being the author of many books dealing with Aboriginal subject matter. These include: *Wild Cat Falling*, *The Master of the Ghost Dreaming*, *Wildcat Screaming* and *Doctor Wooreddy's Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World*. He has also piloted courses in Aboriginal literature at various Australian universities and been active in Aboriginal cultural affairs.

Aboriginality questioned

In 1996, controversy erupted when Mudrooroo's sister publicly stated that their family had no Aboriginal ancestry. Consequently, the status of Mudrooroo's extensive bibliography of published works, including novels, poetry collections, historical and critical works, and theatrical and film scripts has been called into question. Mudrooroo was born Colin Thomas Johnson on 21 August 1938, on a farm near the small town of Narogin, Western Australia. His father had died a couple of months earlier, leaving Mudrooroo's mother to raise the children. By the time Mudrooroo was born, however, several of his siblings had already been taken into state care. Only Mudrooroo and an older sister were left behind with their mother, and then they too were taken away when Mudrooroo was 9 years old. On the face of it, this action would appear to be part of the government policy of enforced separation of Aboriginal children (especially mixed-race children) from their families, a policy that was in effect in Australia from the early 1900s through to the 1970s – the children becoming known as the “Stolen Generations.” Yet, when Mudrooroo's sister publicly stated that their family had no Aboriginal ancestry, she claimed that he had invented his aboriginality to advance his career, which effectively threw his legitimacy as a voice for Indigenous people into question.

In Australia, the legally accepted definition of an Aboriginal for purposes of eligibility for government programs and grants is that a person is of Aboriginal descent, self-identifies as such, and is recognised by an Indigenous community. Mudrooroo had largely declined to engage in the public debate over his Aboriginality, but his position as Head of Aboriginal Studies at Murdoch University became untenable when the Kickett family, as elders of Nyoongar people, with whom he had asserted ancestral links, issued a statement declaring that they rejected his “claim to Aboriginality and any kinship ties”.

The controversy was infused with a great deal of invective as Mudrooroo had historically been quite critical of other prominent Aboriginal writers and their Aboriginality, such as Sally Morgan, who he claimed “was not very black”. Some prominent Aboriginal figures came to Mudrooroo’s defence, but the author seemed slighted by the whole affair and largely withdrew from public life in Australia. He felt that he had been, regardless of genealogy, shaped as Aboriginal from the moment that he was born and that his history and writing should be sufficient evidence of his Aboriginality.

The issue of what constitutes Aboriginal identity is still being played out in the media and is often infused with a discussion of race-politics and neo-colonialism. The conservative columnist, Andrew Bolt had been found guilty for breaching the Racial Discrimination Act after he wrote two articles in 2009 implying that light-skinned people who identified as Aboriginal did so for personal gain and were not therefore ‘real’ Aboriginal people. Justice Bromberg, who handed down the finding in court, stated that people “should be free to fully identify with their race without fear of public disdain or loss of esteem for so identifying”.


In 2011, after having refused to further engage with the controversy for over a decade, Mudrooroo responded to the questioning of his identity in an essay published in the Journal of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature.

“How could I even think to say that I am not Aboriginal, when this instantly brings up the claim that I am Aboriginal especially when so much of my Australian life has been lived as an Aboriginal and also much of my writing is about Aborigines. Still, it has never been the most important part of me and this must be taken into account even more than any supposed genealogy. My Aboriginality is not based on a government definition; but on a life lived. I am an existentialist not a government definition.”

To read the full essay, please use the link as noted below:


In an appendix of the 2015 eBook of Wild Cat Falling, Mudrooroo continued to challenge the suggestion that he was “a person assuming a false identity” and proposed an alternative version of his past as well as a justification for the legitimacy of his writing.

“What I have termed the life story is an important genre of Aboriginal writing and I seek to continue this genre, though because of certain criticisms levelled as to the truth or otherwise of such writings I use Henry Miller’s idea of fictional autobiography believing that the truth lies in the discourse, rather than in the content and even outright lies may be part of that truth which can be discussed in close of counter reading methodology.”

Regardless of the veracity of Mudrooroo’s assertions, the controversy over his personal challenges with identity and belonging is a fascinating accompaniment to a thoughtful and seminal Australian text that explores the same issues.

(Sources: Information adopted from The Encyclopedia of Postcolonial Studies, 2016 and Mudrooroo: a likely story, identity and belonging in postcolonial Australia, 2004.)

The politics of identity

Questions to consider:

1. Why does the original 1964 foreword to the novel place such an emphasis on Mudrooroo’s Aboriginality?
2. Why did the Kickett family, as Noongar elders, publicly discredit Mudrooroo’s Aboriginal identity?
3. Why might Mudrooroo’s own family have wanted to question, or deny, the author’s identity?
4. Why was Mudrooroo such a controversial figure?
5. Is the author’s identity central to an understanding of Wild Cat Falling?
6. Can the novel be appreciated beyond the claim that it is the “first novel by any writer of Aboriginal blood” as claimed by the publisher?
7. What points does Mudrooroo make about his identity as noted in the extracts above?
Reviews of *Wild Cat Falling*

Read the three reviews of the novel as noted below and then answer the questions that follow:


‘Wild Cat Falling: Indigenous classic still relevant as class and race loom large’ by Colleen Keane, *The Age*, 16 February 2015.  

Questions

1. Has an understanding and appreciation of the novel changed over time?
2. Why is the novel still considered relevant?
3. How is Aboriginal Identity “differently regarded” fifty years from its original publication, as suggested by Colleen Keane in The Age?
4. Do these reviews present a common understanding and analysis of the text?

Set Writing Task:

Write your own review of the novel, *Wild Cat Falling*. You should draw on the entries included in your journal as starting points.

- Include a discussion of narrative features, characterisation, themes and ideas (as related to issues of identity and belonging)

At the conclusion of your review, complete a written explanation of the choices you made in the text’s construction (refer to pages 27-29 for details of what to include).
**Wild Cat Falling**

**Synopsis of the Plot**

The novel opens with the main character, a young, unnamed Aboriginal man, being released from Fremantle jail after serving an eighteen-month sentence. He experiences two days of freedom, during which he meets up with his old bodgie acquaintances and a university crowd. He makes contact with the latter via a chance encounter with a young woman, June, at a beach.

Doggled by feelings of hopelessness and futility, the main character quickly falls back into his old, criminal ways. He links up with an acquaintance, Jeff, and accidentally shoots a policeman who discovers them attempting to rob a hardware store. He escapes from the scene of the crime into bushland and is helped by an elderly Aboriginal man whom he remembers from childhood. The police, however, quickly catch up with the main character and the novel concludes with his arrest on the charge of attempted murder.

**Chapter Summaries & Questions**

**Part I: Release - Chapter One**

After eighteen months in jail, the narrator prepares to leave, but realises he has nothing to look forward to on the outside.

1. What has life in prison been like for the last eighteen months?
2. Describe the use of colour and mood in this chapter – what is its impact and tone?
3. We are given flashbacks and snippets of information – what picture is emerging of the protagonist’s past?
4. Discuss the impact solitary confinement could have on an inmate.

**Chapter Two**

Choosing a suit for life on the ‘outside’, the nameless narrator contemplates what he will do and whether he will catch up with the old gang.

1. Describe the ‘scene’ that the narrator used to be a part of.
2. Why do you think the narrator is not that interested even in sex?
3. How does the narrator feel about leaving prison and why?

**Part II: Freedom – Chapter Three**

The narrator is now out of jail and free. He wanders aimlessly on a bright, sunny day. Buying a packet of cigarettes, he enjoys the disapproval it gives him. At the beach he is touched by the sight of children building a sandcastle, but is frowned upon by a child’s mother whom he has just scowled at. He expects rejection so he likes to get in first, highlighting his inability to form positive friendships.

1. What memories of home and childhood does the narrator have and how do they contrast with the children at the beach?

**Chapter Four**

The narrator meets a young woman on the beach, sunbathing and they begin speaking. He wants to impress her with his toughness and ‘dangerous rebel’ side. June asks him to come and meet her University friends and he struggles to connect with her on a real level.
1. Why do you think the protagonist has so many problems communicating with others and forming relationships, especially with females?

Chapter Five

Catching a train to Perth, the narrator deliberately breaks several railway laws. He is defiant and rebellious. Sadness and regret fills him as he remembers his childhood poverty and the desire to help his mother, whose life was a struggle. The crime of burglary sees him transferred to a Boys Home, for education and ‘reform’. After catching up with some old friends, he goes to the old hangout - the ‘milk bar’ where his gang used to hang out.

1. Why do you think the protagonist’s identity and self-image, at least on the surface, is tied up with rebelliousness and being ‘bad’?
2. What emotions does the Boys’ Home conjure up within the unnamed narrator?

Chapter Six

After a night of drinking and bragging about crimes and jail times with the old gang, the protagonist takes Denise back to the room he has rented. Feeling drunk and having taken pills, he knows that Denise will never understand him.

1. How do the youths depicted in this chapter view their world?
2. To what extent is the narrator a prisoner of his own alienation?

Chapter Seven

Waking up with a bad hangover and very depressed, the protagonist heads out to the university to meet June. Whilst there he is reminded about the Boys Home which makes him feel even lower. He is challenged by the experience of being at the university, but tries to compensate by belittling others and masking his insecurities.

1. How was life at the Boys’ Home characterised?
2. What is preventing the protagonist from accepting the offers given to him?

Chapter Eight

The narrator feels somewhat uncomfortable at the university – the people, music and ‘vibes’ are different to his usual crowd. He wonders if June may be setting him up on purpose to feel inferior. However he finds the discussion with June and the students stimulating and seems to fit in well. He makes plans to catch up with June later at a party.

1. Why does the protagonist buy a copy of the play, Waiting for Godot by Samuel Beckett?
2. What does the reader learn about the protagonist through his reading choices and the fact that he was able to ‘hold his own’ in the discussions with the university students?
3. What is the irony of the subject the anthropology students are studying?

Chapter Nine

The protagonist sits at a Greek Café and begins to question everything that has happened to him until he is mired in misery and everything feels ‘fake and miserable’. He is not sure if he will go to Dorian’s party, but finds some interest in Beckett’s play. He spirals down the emotional rollercoaster as he
remembers his first foray into crime – as a result of desperation. After a quick break in, he then decides to go to the party.

1. Why does the protagonist suggest that Beckett’s play is “Like life”?
2. What does the reference to “Nigger-nigger-go-away-day” suggest about the narrator’s sense of belonging?

Chapter Ten

At Dorian’s party, the protagonist decides to stay even though it is quite different to a ‘bodgie’ party. He tries to ‘get into it’ but is turned off by everything as it all feels ‘phoney’ to him. He is rude to a new girl he meets and antagonises Dorian, stating that ‘I believe in nothing and nobody. There is no refuge or comfort anywhere for me.’ After feeling sick at the prospect of sex, he flees the party.

1. ‘I believe in nothing and nobody. There is no refuge or comfort anywhere for me.’ Discuss the significance for the protagonist as he utters these words.
2. How does the concept of ‘nihilism’ reflect the attitude of the unnamed narrator?

Part III: Return – Chapter Eleven

Sitting at the milk bar, the narrator recalls his seventeenth birthday and being arrested and then sent to prison. His friend Jeff comes to join him and they talk about their lives. The protagonist professes that he will not and cannot reform or turn his life around.

1. Why is it so hard for the protagonist to reform and start afresh?
2. Is he stuck in a victim mentality or is his harsh upbringing along with the society he is part of to blame?

Chapter Twelve

After Jeff suggests that they should go to the protagonist’s old home town and find employment there, the protagonist goes along with the idea but with a darker intent. They steal a car and drive the 97 miles in order to rob a store, but the protagonist begins to feel overwhelmed by the destructive path he is on.

1. Is the protagonist actively making the choices that lead to his downfall?
2. What does the protagonist really think of Jeff?

Chapter Thirteen

When arriving in his old home town, the unnamed main character leads Jeff to another burglary and steals a gun. When the burglary get interrupted, he fires it at the holder of a torch in panic and then the two separate as they both run away.

1. For a brief moment, the protagonist contrasts the drab greyness of jail with the beautiful, sunny days on the outside. Discuss the significance of this.

Chapter Fourteen

Absolutely exhausted, the protagonist meets an Aboriginal man he remembers from his past and the man recognizes him – telling him that he is Jessie Duggan’s son. He learns of his mother’s imminent
death and is very disturbed. After listening to the old man talk about what has been happening in the community, he is captured and arrested by the Police and taken to Fremantle Prison.

2. What is the significance of the protagonist feeling ashamed?
3. Is there a way that the reader could view this as a positive or hopeful ending?
4. Does the protagonist realise anything about the importance of his community and roots?

(Source: Adapted from Wild Cat Falling Mudrooroo: In the Context of Identity of Belonging, 2015)

Wild Cat Falling

Principal Characters:

The Main Character

The unnamed main character dominates the novel - the closest we get to his name is a reference near the end to “Jessie Duggan’s boy” (p.121). A part-Aboriginal man of nineteen, he has a great deal of trouble in his background. He is taken away from his Aboriginal mother at the age of nine – his white father having died when he was very young – and put in a Christian Brothers’ orphanage, a very unhappy experience for him. When he ultimately leaves the orphanage, he cannot settle into regular employment and drifts into a rebellious, criminal lifestyle. Although an intelligent, well-read individual, with a particular interest in music, his thoughts and actions are dominated by a sense of nihilism.

Jessie, the Main Character’s Mother

Jessie initially appears as an attractive Aboriginal woman on a widow’s pension. She tries to keep her remaining child, the novel’s main character, on the straight and narrow – her other children having been taken away by the welfare authorities (except for one who died in infancy). As her son drifts further and further away from her due to his rebellious lifestyle, she undergoes a major transformation. There is a marked deterioration in both her emotional and physical health. Finally, we see her living no longer in her government-assisted home, but in the camp of the Noongar people in difficult circumstances and great poverty. She has gone there to die. As an old Aboriginal man rightly tells the main character near the end of the novel, “She got nobody, only them, son” (p.122).

Denise

Denise is a part-time prostitute with whom the main character has had an off-again/on-again sexual relationship. She is part of the bodgie set the main character associated with before his last time in jail. Fundamentally, Denise is a good-hearted, salt-of-the-earth type.

Jeff

Jeff is an acquaintance of the main character. He has got to know him from the time they spent together in an orphanage and, also, in jail. Coincidentally, Jeff gets released from jail on the same day as the main character. He is not a particularly bright individual but very loyal to his friends.

June

June provides a considerable contrast to the Denise character – she is intelligent, thoughtful and good-looking, quite possibly the type of woman the main character would wish to go out with if his life circumstances were more fortunate. “She’s a nice doll this one” (p.88), says the main character of June – although couched in what might appear to be sexist language, this is quite a compliment coming from him.
Mr Willy

Mr Willy is the occasional lover of Jessie, the protagonist’s mother. Although he is over seventy years of age he acts as a surrogate father in one of the narrator’s childhood recollections.

The Old Rabbiter

The old rabbiter is an Aboriginal man who lives by himself on the outskirts of town. As a child, the protagonist could only really interact with the old rabbiter from afar as his mother asked that her son “never talk to him”, as he was a “real aboriginal”. At the end of the novel, the rabbiter is revealed to be a relative of the protagonist and attempts to guide him in understanding his Aboriginal heritage in the short time before he is arrested.

Wild Cat Falling – Extension Questions

1. Identify and explain the values and attitudes developed by Mudrooroo in the novel.

2. Discuss the extent to which the narrator in Wild Cat Falling is constructed to be sympathetic or likeable to the reader. What influence does this have on our reading?

3. Discuss how Mudrooroo has used point of view in the novel and how it influences the reader.

4. How does the construction of the protagonist as an unnamed character influence the reader’s understanding of the themes and ideas explored in the novel?

5. Even when surrounded by people, the protagonist in Wild Cat Falling feels isolated and fearful. Discuss this theme of isolation and fear in the novel.

6. What is the significance of the title of Wild Cat Falling?

7. The protagonist in Wild Cat Falling has been called a misogynist because of his attitudes to women and sex. How do you explain his attitudes and behaviours?

8. Describe the narrative voice in Wild Cat Falling. How does it shape or influence our reading of the novel?

9. Discuss the recurring motifs in Wild Cat Falling and what they tell us about the protagonist’s state of mind.

10. Discuss the importance of the need for the characters in the novel to challenge authority.

11. How do the historical, social and cultural contexts of the novel influence the reader, if at all? Discuss.

(Source: Adapted from Wild Cat Falling Mudrooroo: In the Context of Identity of Belonging, 2015)
Exploring identity and belonging in *Wild Cat Falling*

**The individual in society: finding a place to belong**

Mudrooroo presents a society where his narrator is consistently on the periphery, isolated from belonging due to assimilation gone wrong. The novel opens in prison where the protagonist is awaiting his release and although trapped within the prison walls, the narrator is far more comfortable inside them than outside. In prison, the microcosm of society, with its hierarchies and social classes are ‘more clear cut than outside’ (p. 5) and offers the narrator a place that he can belong: ‘the prison accepted me as I had never been accepted outside’ (p. 15). For most individuals, finding a place in society to establish a career, develop friendships and nurture family is at the heart of living in a civilised society, however, these opportunities were not always present for the narrator and so, for him, release from prison was frightening and lonely, he wanted to ‘pound on the locked gates and demand to be let in again’ (p. 25). Following his ejection from the one place that he felt accepted, the narrator is forced into the world from which he had been alienated, from his earliest memories.

Mudrooroo’s narrative oscillates between the present and the past and in a piecemeal manner provides the reader with the necessary knowledge to understand the challenges that the narrator confronted as a child and continues to battle as an adult. Through flashbacks, the reader learns of the protagonist’s early struggles as his fair-skinned Aboriginal mother who sought to raise her mixed race son as white. The struggles this presented for him made belonging anywhere a challenge. Growing up friends with the Noongar mob was forbidden by his mother even though there was some relation and some shared similar skin tones to the narrator, ‘some even as near white as me’ (p. 10). The narrator describes how his mother won’t allow him to associate with the Noongar mob yet he is teased at school by the white kids, leaving him with no friends and an attitude later in life that ‘friendship has no meaning for me’ (p. 48). Mudrooroo uses flashbacks to convey the difficulty of a mixed race Aboriginal person growing up in Australia without being accepted in any one group.

Upon release from prison the narrator has nowhere to go and nowhere he feels comfortable belonging. He makes his way to the beach and observes other members of society who sunbathe to achieve ‘the despised colour [the narrator] was born with’ (p. 31). He notes the behaviour of parents and children as the kids build sandcastles and cynically comments that, ‘maybe this is the kind of place white people dream of living in – pretentious, dominating and secure’ (p. 31). His observations are detached and cruel and compared to his own childhood experience: building a mining town from mud, which was later destroyed by other children. From this point on, after having his fantasy town destroyed he ‘began building towns full of white goblins’ which he ‘stamped into the ground in a rage’ (p. 32). The impact of institutionalisation upon the protagonist’s beliefs and choices in life cannot be underestimated. As a child the government authorities were looking for reasons to remove children like the narrator and place them into orphanages. The narrator’s nihilistic attitude to life stems from these imposed restrictions that later provide stability for him in prison. The narrator’s anger and resentment toward society is apparent and debilitating, but not surprising, as he adopts a ‘me’-versus-‘them’ attitude in his observations of the world around him.

Mudrooroo introduces June to the reader and depicts her as a foil to the narrator, an intellectual equal who is able to challenge the narrator’s beliefs and at the same time show readers the differences between the white upbringing she and her university friends have had and the life experiences of the narrator. June is a sounding board for the narrator to express his lack of place in society. He tells June, ‘they make the law so chaps like me can’t help breaking it whatever we do’ (p. 43) and ‘prison was the only chance [he] had of three meals a day and a decent bed’ (p. 43). Despite the interest he has in June, he is aware that they are from different worlds and although he attempts to fit in, he is aware that he must act ‘the big shot phoney’ (p. 69) in order to do so.
The narrator in Mudrooroo’s novel sees his appearance and clothing as a mark of his identity and as a sign of his social status. In prison he ‘donned the grey uniform of belonging’ (p. 16) which correlates to his belief that in prison he ‘was nearer belonging than anywhere’ (p. 118). Yet when he put on his ‘citizen-of-the-world-clothes’ (p. 16) he struggles to recognise himself and appears to be a stranger: The mirror reflects a person I take to be myself gazing back blank eyed. Critically I examine the image: the figure tall and slim, the face, neither handsome nor ugly, and the skin, due to lack of sun, now no darker than olive shade. (pp. 16–17)

Clothing and appearance are the outward image we project to the world and are often used to define an individual and where they fit in society – age, social grouping, wealth and class. The prison suit given to him fails to help him assimilate; instead he is further marginalised as it identifies him as former prison inmate. Therefore it is significant that the narrator quickly discards his prison suit for black jeans, a black shirt and black desert boots, so he can ‘glide like a black shadow into the street’ (p. 54). For the narrator, being nondescript, unseen and unknown is important and this reflects the identity he projects to society.

Questions

- Reflect on all the flashbacks of the novel and make a list of possible reasons that the narrator feels rejected by society.
- To what extent is the narrator to blame for his lack of social integration?
- Compare and contrast the university crowd to the Milk Bar gang. What elements of society do they represent? Why does the narrator feel more comfortable with one over the other?
- The narrator ‘drift[s] about the platform like one of those stray sheets of newspaper waiting for the wind to blow it away’ (p. 47). Find three other examples in the novel that show the narrator is lost, lonely and drifting. How does Mudrooroo use literary devices to show this (consider narrative voice)?

The impact of relationships in determining identity

Mudrooroo’s hero experiences dislocation from society from a young age, partly due to his mother’s insistence that he grows up as white. The narrator’s mother, Jessie Duggan, also suffers from an identity crisis which impacts on the relationship she has with her son and his identity formation. Jessie represents the impact that the forced removal of children had on families and after her white husband’s death ‘she had to put up a fight to convince the authorities that she … wanted to go on living white’ (p. 9). Welfare removed her older children, leaving her with her son who consequently lived in fear that he would be taken away too. His mother forbids play with the Noongar children even though he feels most comfortable with them as friends. Due to his mother’s lifestyle choices, however, they view the narrator as different and are not afraid to let him know, ‘my mum reckons she's stuck up because she married a white chap’ (p. 12). In addition to this Jessie wants her son to attend school and play with the white children even though they tease and reject him. Despite loving and caring for her son, his mother is the block that disallows any peer connections as a child and is the cause of him not valuing friendships later in his life.

The reader later learns that the narrator blames his mother for a lot of his problems, just like he blames society. When he returns to see his mother after release from the boy’s home he is greeted by a lonely, sick and hopeless figure, to which he ‘didn’t feel a thing’ (p. 113). From here, the narrator breaks his last meaningful connection, allowing him freedom from all relationships. When he learns later that his mother is dying in a Noongar camp he is cynical: ‘serve her right... pretending to be better than the rest of them, keeping me away from them, giving me over like a sacrificial offering to the vicious gods
of the white man’s world’ (p. 123). Undoubtedly, through her collaboration with white society, Jessie Duggan contributes to her son’s dislocation and resentment towards his world.

The narrator’s relationship with women is also a sign of his alienation and lack of compassion. After his prison release, he meets up with Denise, a prostitute with whom he has a casual relationship. She allows the narrator to be himself and he suggests that she may ‘mean something’ (p. 59) to him. As a result, he responds to his feelings with aggression, ‘taking her violently’ and leaving her ‘like a discarded doll’ (p.59). The narrator is unable to understand his feelings and allow himself to become close to anyone. This is also reflected in his relationship with June, the sophisticated, white university student he meets on the beach. She is ‘a change from the ignorant giggling chicks’ (p. 46) he has previously known and the narrator is drawn to her, meeting her the next day for coffee and later at a party. Despite his attraction, he blocks June by referring to their distance: ‘she is as far away from me as the wide blue sky’ (p. 46). Later at the party, he acknowledges that he ‘might even like her a lot’, yet in the next moment he refers to the ‘phoney emotion. Phoney crowd... Got no place here. Don’t want to stay’ (p. 89). Again, the narrator chooses loneliness and isolation over the establishment of any meaningful relationship.

Questions

- Consider the narrator’s relationship with Mr Willy. In what ways does he offer the narrator a sort of ‘father-figure’ role? Consider their day trip (pp. 33–6). How does this make the narrator feel?
- Relationships are important for our identity formation. How have the narrator’s relationships negatively affected his sense of belonging?
- Find three quotes that show the narrator’s isolation in and rejection of relationships.

Choosing not to belong

The narrator’s ability to disengage himself from his life and his identity is highlighted in the first chapter of Mudrooroo’s novel. He explains: ‘I trained myself this way so no phoney emotion can touch me. I go through the actions of life, like in a dream. Actor and audience.’ (p. 4) He establishes barriers because of his disconnected cultural history and confused upbringing. Mudrooroo’s protagonist goes on to define himself as an outcast where, ‘no one spares a glance for the half-caste delinquent, and this is how I want it’ (p. 31). He chooses to be an outsider, as demonstrated when he deliberately frightens the old lady behind the counter of the shop upon his release from prison. Furthermore, when on the beach and observing a mother and child who had built a sandcastle, he describes the mother’s reaction as she ‘smiles across at me as though we two grown-ups share a secret about childish fantasies’ (p. 37). Instead of responding in an expected manner, the narrator chooses to ignore social conventions: ‘I suppose she expects me to smile back, but I scowl’ (p. 36).

The narrator vents his anger at society by defying social norms and choosing to place himself on the fringes. He acts nonchalant and careless and offers some explanation as to why he chooses not to belong: ‘So what? If she rejects me, I rejected her first’ (p. 36). The narrator is not only shielding himself from society’s rejection but denying society a chance in the first place. On his way to Perth, he sits on the train with his feet up and smoking a cigarette, despite his awareness of the law against this ‘I stay as I am’ (p. 47). Flouting the law is yet another way he challenges the dominant imperial society and so he ignores the middle-aged couple who ‘look in disgust’ (p. 47).

Mudrooroo’s hero defines himself as isolated and indifferent, he doesn't even view himself as an Australian: ‘I suppose I’m not what they call Australian. I’m just an odd species of native fauna cross-bred with the migrant flotsam of the goldfields’ (p. 69). His harsh, critical perception reflects the lack of respect he has for himself and his origins. It is this negative attitude and lack of connection to an
identity that presents readers with a troubled character who actively seeks to push the boundaries of the society in which he lives.

While the narrator chooses a life of cool detachment, the reader can see that society is also to blame for placing the narrator on the outer. When he meets June and her university friends at a cafe, the narrator is treated as an object for their curiosity. The reader is encouraged to feel the narrator's scepticism as he listens to one of June's friends explain:

‘What I always think,’ she comes in, ‘it’s not the natives who need educating so much. It’s the whites.’ I guess from the way she looks at me that this is the closest she ever got to an Aboriginal. (p. 75)

The girl continues on and forces the narrator to ‘sit back mute and hide [his] feelings behind a cynical smile’ (p. 75). The attitudes of the dominant white culture marginalise the narrator, giving him cause to feel resentment toward the society that defines him as different. Later, the narrator hits rock bottom at the party as he explains to a girl that ‘nothing is mine or belongs to me and I belong nowhere in this world or the next’ (p. 92). He runs away from the party realising that there is ‘no refuge anywhere’ (p. 93). Mudrooroo concludes the section titled ‘Freedom’ with this statement and from this point on the narrator embarks on a downward spiral, seeking revenge against the society that ostracised him and forced him to become an angry, lonely person without hope in the world.

Questions

- Much of the narrator's isolation comes from his negative attitude. What are his views on life and why?
- To what extent is the dominant white society to blame for the narrator's lack of connection to his world?
- Find three quotes to show the narrator's rejection of the society he inhabits. What do they reveal?

Finding place in the past – belonging to a cultural identity

‘Black, black cat where are you going to go?...’ (p. 21). The narrator identifies himself as a black cat and Mudrooroo uses the recurring motif of a ‘wild cat’ throughout the novel as the narrator searches for his place in society. This task is not easy as his mother, who insists her son grow up white, denies him his cultural identity. He is told to stay away from the old trapper and those ‘dirty Noongar kids’ (p. 10). He is encouraged to associate with white children even though they mock him.

As a result of his lack of acceptance growing up, the narrator searches for a place elsewhere and finds this with the Milk Bar gang, ‘the anti-socials, the misfits, the delinquents, in a common defiance of the squares’ (p. 55). He goes through the motions of fitting in with them and adopts the fashion and the language that goes with belonging to this group: ‘Great kicks’ (p. 17), ‘prettiest doll’ (p. 46), ‘dig it’ (p. 68) and ‘rich daddies’ (p. 89). Despite being a member of the gang, he doesn’t identify with them and when he returns after his release he quickly becomes bored and depressed. He struggles to find a group that fits and realises that he doesn’t want to be a part of this element any more, but also realises that he can’t fit with the university crowd either: ‘no good pretending I could ever belong with them’ (p. 79). The narrator is able to join these groups and feign camaraderie, but he cannot identify with them.

It is not until the narrator discovers his cultural heritage that his life begins to adopt some peace and comfort. After shooting the police officer and running away, the narrator meets the old rabbiter he had encountered as a child. At first the narrator underestimates the wisdom and knowledge of the old rabbiter: ‘he can’t know who I am or what I’ve done and, anyway, he’s so old’ (p. 120). At first he is
harsh and judgemental: ‘what do I care for an old abo crank in beggar's clothes?’ (p. 125). It is not until the narrator is caught out stealing money from the man that his shame hits him more so than ever before. His ‘practised sneer’ is impenetrable on the elder who looks at him sadly as the narrator notes, he is ‘not judging me, only seeing how I am... no one ever made me feel this way before’ (pp. 125–6). The Aboriginal elder observes the narrator uncritically and with an acceptance he has not previously experienced; the old man views his real identity and this in turn allows the narrator to view his true self.

The Aboriginal elder allows the narrator to tap into his heritage and past by encouraging him to remember a dreamtime song that his grandmother would sing to him about a cat that wanted to live longer by reaching the moon but couldn’t fly. A crow tells the cat it can fly – it doesn’t need wings. In the narrator’s dream, he plays the part of the crow and the cat but the song has turned into a nightmare – the cat has been deceived by the crow and instead of flying to the moon it is falling to its death. The fear that it instils in the narrator is blinding. He is the wild cat falling and he wakes ‘with the doom pounding in [his] heart’ (p. 128). It is at this point in the novel that the narrator and the reader come to realise that his cultural heritage has always played a large role in the way he identifies himself, even though he was unconscious of this connection. The cat motif, which recurs throughout Mudrooroo’s novel, represents the narrator’s confused identity and when he learns about its origins in his dreams he is able to make sense of the person he is.

With this new awareness, the remainder of the novel sees a shift in the narrator. The Aboriginal elder offers him comfort as he journeys onward – ‘the bush seems more friendly now’ (p. 129) – as he reminisces about his childhood in the bush, living more traditional ways: ‘I was naked then and swung easily along with my light bundle of spears and boomerangs’ (p. 129). Mudrooroo’s narrative focuses on the surrounding landscape and its beauty as the ‘old man’s song’ (p. 129) stays with the narrator. His black clothes are suddenly too ‘heavy-hot’ and when he hears the police coming for him he realises that he values his life more than ever. He understands that he must not run away from his actions: ‘I feel different now. Like I was somebody else... Why not stick around and face up to something for a change?’ (p. 130). With his new philosophy, he sits and waits for the police and when caught he shows remorse for his crime. Most significant is the changed demeanour of the police when he shows this remorse: ‘Is it possible there is a hint of humanity in this man’s eyes?’ By coming to understand his cultural heritage and remembering the past, the narrator has begun the first step toward breaking down the animosity between him and the society he inhabits.

Questions

- Find references to the motif of the ‘wild cat’ and create a list of these. When do they occur and why?
- What is the significance of the novel’s title Wild Cat Falling?
- The narrator’s mother returns to the Noongar people to die. What does this tell you about the success of assimilation with the white population? What does this tell you about the Noongar people's acceptance? Find references to this in the text.
- What role do traditions and culture play in developing our identity and belonging? How does Mudrooroo explore this in his text?

(Source: Adapted from Insight Contexts: Exploring Issues of Identity of Belonging, 2016)
**Wild Cat Falling**

Intertextuality and *Wild Cat Falling*

Intertextuality is the complex relationship that exists between the text and another literary source that is important to an understanding and interpretation of that text. *Wild Cat Falling* makes a number of references to other literary texts that help frame and inform some of the themes and questions it explores.

James Dean (left), as the male lead of *Rebel Without a Cause*, and Marlon Brando (below), as the star of *The Wild One*, were cinematic icons who embodied the rebelliousness of disaffected youth in the 1950s.
Intertextuality and *Wild Cat Falling*

Philosophical ideals explored through intertextuality:

**Nihilism** is the belief that all values are baseless and that nothing can be known or communicated. It is often associated with extreme pessimism and a radical scepticism that condemns existence. A true nihilist would believe in nothing, have no loyalties, and no purpose other than, perhaps, an impulse to destroy.

**Existentialism** is a philosophical movement embracing diverse doctrines but centring on analysis of individual existence in an unfathomable universe and the plight of the individual who must assume ultimate responsibility for acts of free will without any certain knowledge of what is right or wrong, or good or bad.

**Absurdism** is a philosophy based on the belief that the universe is irrational and meaningless and that the search for order and meaning brings the individual into conflict with the universe.

Research Task (250-300 words):

You are to select and research one of the following intertextual references from *Wild Cat Falling* exploring its inherent meaning and understanding as well as the way that it can be incorporated into an understanding of Mudrooroo’s original text:

- Franz Kafka (*The Trial, Metamorphosis*)
- Albert Camus (*The Outsider*)
- Marlon Brando (*The Wild One*)
- James Dean (*Rebel Without a Cause*)
- Samuel Beckett (*Waiting for Godot*)

In your research you might like to consider the following questions:

- Where do these references occur in *Wild Cat Falling*?
- What is happening in the text when the intertextual references are made?
- How are the intertextual references made and used in the narrative?
- What is being explored through their inclusion (consider the meaning that is transferred)?
- What are the implications being made through the intertextual connections?
Structure and Style

*Wild Cat Falling* is structured into three parts over fourteen chapters. Part One – ‘Release’ covers two chapters and is filled with memories, feelings and incidents that the protagonist is reminded of as he is released from Fremantle jail. In Part Two – ‘Freedom’, the eight chapters reveal the protagonist’s life and how he perceives the world as hostile. Part Three – ‘Return’ is made up of four chapters and we see that at the same time as his life falls apart he has also found some connection to his own past and cultural identity.

These distinct parts remain connected through the relative constancy of the narrative voice as the reader is offered insights into the mind of the unnamed protagonist who continually merges the past while thinking of the present. He is often in an internal state of conflict which demonstrates his struggles to gain a sense of belonging or balance. The narrative is non-linear at times and uses flashback sequences to explore the connection of his past with his present circumstances. This means that although we are looking at the world through his sense of fear and isolation, we are also able to understand, if perhaps not agree with, the choices that he makes and their connection to his personal history and the wider world in which he exists. His memories help explain his fears and anxieties.

The narrative also infuses traditional elements from Aboriginal Dreamtime stories with the unnamed protagonist’s own understanding of his place in the world, such as ‘The Wild Cat and the Crow’. He often refers to himself as a cat throughout the narrative and it is central to an Aboriginal story he is later prompted to recall (the fact that he chooses a non-native Australian species of animal to identify with is worth considering). His ‘falling’ dream is also a recurring element of the narrative. This motif helps link his past with the present and builds on the anxiety and hopelessness of the protagonist.

Mudrooroo’s language choices are also worth noting. Many of the sentences, particularly in the opening chapters are truncated, grammatically loose and inconsistent. This is less evident as the protagonist’s outlook expands, perhaps suggesting through the language of the narrative that life in prison was restrictive and affected the way that he was able to think and respond. Mudrooroo also establishes contrasts in the text, such as the hypocritical and subjective morals of the boy’s home with the anarchic values of the bodgies. Words such as ‘black’ and ‘dark’ are also a feature of the narrative, and connect with the despondency of the protagonist, contrasting with imagery of invasive ‘light’.

The novel revolves around the protagonist’s understanding of his own journey and, as it is presented in a first-person narrative (for the most part), it suggests to the reader that he really does have some control over the events, even when he seems powerless to intervene.

Historical context of the novel

It is important to have an understanding of the world in which the novel is set in order to understand the circumstances that impact the characters and the choices that they make. Australia, particularly in relation to the social and legal treatment of its indigenous people. The short timeline below can help inform that understanding.

1937: Aboriginal Welfare—Conference of Commonwealth and State Authorities decides that the official policy for some Aboriginal people is an assimilation policy. Aboriginal people of mixed descent are to be assimilated into white society whether they want to be or not, those not living tribally are to be educated and all others are to stay on reserves. This leads to the destruction of Aboriginal identity and culture, and is seen to justify dispossession of land, and the removal of Aboriginal children from their families and communities. Mr A. O. Neville, Western Australian Chief Aboriginal Protector, said: ‘In 50 years we should forget that there were any Aborigines in this country’.
One of the reasons the narrator’s mother ‘forgot’ the traditions of and connections with her people ‘in the mission school’ (p. 121).

1938: 26 January: 150 years after European occupation the Aboriginal Progressive Association declares a Day of Mourning. An Aboriginal conference is held in Sydney. These are the first of many Aboriginal protests against inequality, injustice, dispossession of land and protectionist policies.

1943: An Exemption Certificate is introduced, exempting certain Aboriginal people from restrictive legislation and entitling them to vote, drink alcohol and move freely but prohibiting them from consorting with others who are not exempt.

Which is why the unnamed narrator talks about himself as a ‘quadroon’ man who could be permitted to drink at a bar (p. 70).

1949: Aboriginal people are given the right to enrol and vote at federal elections provided they are entitled to enrol for state elections or have served in the armed forces. However, it is not compulsory for Aboriginal people to be enrolled to vote, and thus not compulsory for Aboriginal people to actually vote, until 1984.

1950s: Segregationist practices continue, with separate sections in theatres, separate wards in hospitals, hotels refusing service of alcohol, and schools able to refuse enrolment to Aboriginal children.

(Source: Adapted from VATE: Inside Contexts 2015, Exploring issues of identity of belonging, 2015)

Bodgies and Widgies

The terms ‘bodgie’ and ‘widgie’ were used to describe a youth subculture that developed, in part, through the influence of American servicemen who were stationed in Australia during the Second World War. By the 1950s bodgie culture encompassed an attitude of anti-establishment which was evident in the fashion trends and music choices (such as jazz and early rock and roll). For conservative groups the terms were akin to juvenile delinquency. Their description at the beginning of Chapter Six in Wild Cat Falling gives a good indication of their style and values:

I look through the window of the lighted milk-bar and the familiar surroundings glow a “Welcome Home” to me. This joint is the meeting place of the bodgie-widgie mob. Here they all are — the anti-socials, the misfits, the delinks, in a common defiance of the squares. The juke-box, a mass of metal, lights and glass, commands the room, squat god worshipped and fed by footloose youth to fill their empty world with the drug-delusion of romance. It flashes me a sarcastic grin and blares a Rock ‘n’ Roll hullo. I’m back and the gang crowds round — the boys in peacock-gaudy long coats and narrow pants, the girls casual in dowdy-dark jeans and sloppy sweaters.

Questions to Consider:

- How does an understanding of the historical context of the novel help inform the actions of the protagonist and his mother, particularly in relation to dealing with authority and institutions of power?
- Does the historical context mitigate an understanding of the issues surrounding Mudrooroo’s Aboriginality?
- In what way does the origin and attitude of the bodgie culture help inform the dislocation of the unnamed protagonist?
Using the text as evidence and idea exploration

Set Task

a. Match the quotations in the table below with key ideas related to exploring issues of identity and belonging (e.g. social expectations, dominate and subordinate cultures, acceptance, rejection, labels, familial influence, etc.)

b. In the box marked ‘TD’ (for Text Discussion) use the quotation in a discussion about the ideas explored in the text.

c. In the box marked ‘ID’ (Independent Discussion) expand on the ideas suggested in the text that go beyond a discussion about Wild Cat Falling, and comment on the idea independently of the text

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“She... wanted to go on living white.” (p. 8)</th>
<th>Acceptance needed in order to belong</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TD  <em>The</em> unnamed narrator’s suggestion that his mother “wanted to go on living white” indicates that there is a clear distinction between black and white groups in the society depicted and that she required the approval of a dominant culture in order to live her life as she pleased.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ID  An inability to personally determine a connection to a group can impact the way that an individual constructs their own identity as it is beholden on others for recognition.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“You haven’t been with those dirty Noongar kids, I hope?” (p. 9)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ID</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“Funny how they oil themselves over and bake to achieve the despised colour I was born with” (p. 31)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ID</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“If she rejects me, I rejected her first” (p. 37)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ID</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Now I know that hope and despair are equally absurd” (p. 41)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TD</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“I sob and I cling to her. Nothing will ever be alright now. I have been tried and found guilty. And I am already nine years old...” (p. 53)</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TD</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“I sit back mute and hide my feelings behind a cynical smile” (p. 75)</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TD</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“I don’t want to belong to them anymore” (p. 79)</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TD</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“He feels belonging in this dark, not like in the day, naked and outcast. Nigger-nigger-go-away-day.” (p. 82)</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TD</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“This time I don’t feel anything like hate or love. Only feel sick” (p. 93)

“I understand that he went to live in a Native Settlement where he consorted with some of the most undesirable elements.” (p. 101)

“With the weight of a weapon in my hand I feel secure and confident.” (p. 117)

“‘You can’t lose it,’ he says. ‘You go away, but you keep it here.’ He claps his hands under his ribs’ (p. 126)
Exploring issues of identity and belonging

An introduction to the Context

Identity and belonging are concepts that exist in their own right but more often operate concurrently. When contemplating these ideas the central question ‘Who am I?’ is naturally raised. Upon reflection, many will discover that it is impossible to answer this without the measurement against others or by considering the influence of others in your life. Family, school, sporting groups, church groups and friends are just some of the human connections you may have and by belonging to these groups you begin to define who you are. As humans we are by nature social beings, therefore our sense of identity is often embedded in our interactions with other people.

In 1943, psychologist Abraham Maslow developed a theory based on five fundamental human needs. This hierarchy starts at the base with the physiological needs of food, water, sleep and breathing. The next level is the human need for safety and security; this is followed by a desire to belong, love and intimacy, then esteem and confidence. The final level, achieved last, is self-actualisation and achieving one’s individual potential. Maslow believed that the final level could not be achieved until all the others were mastered.

In a Western society, our family usually provides our basic needs as children and teenagers. Most will have a home to go to at the end of their school day, with accessible food and a comfortable bed for sleeping. In fact, families also go on to provide love and affection as well as a sense of belonging. Parents will also provide opportunities to belong to other groups such as school, sport, church and so on. Therefore in our modern lives, family helps us to achieve a large part of Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

Searching for a place in society is what most of us are brought up to aim to achieve and we naturally go about trying to find this: leaving home, buying a house, a car, getting a job, meeting a partner and maybe having a family. Becoming a functioning member of society can be a natural desire and belonging to it can help us to achieve happiness.

When our basic needs of food, safety and shelter are met we are then able to move on to consider belonging, self-esteem and self-actualisation. Sometimes, however, others’ perceptions of the individual can conflict with the way the individual perceives themselves, causing negative consequences for the individual. Society can be judgmental and fixed in its beliefs and so sometimes, when an individual doesn’t meet the expectations of that society, they suffer marginalisation as a result.

If we fail to find a sense of belonging and when rejected from a group, many people choose to protect themselves by hardening their exterior. Alienating oneself from groups in society can cause a breakdown in the clarity of identity formation. Actively choosing not to belong to a society and its groups can lead to isolation, anger and depression as well as a continual search to find somewhere to fit in.

However, we do not always actively choose the groups to which we belong. Some people feel very comfortable fitting in with groups they have always been familiar with and they never question the values, ideals and attitudes that they have absorbed from their upbringing. Others reject them or are forced by some unexpected change or trauma in their lives to reconsider whether they wish to continue belonging to that group.

Experiences of belonging and identity formation are not the same for everyone.

(Source: Adapted from Cambridge Checkpoints: VCE Text Guide, Wild Cat Falling by Mudrooroo, 2015)
Factors that shape identity

There are many factors that influence a person’s sense of identity. In broad terms these factors can essentially be grouped into three categories: biological, cultural and experiential.

In the table below, list as many aspects for each category that help form an individual’s identity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Biological</th>
<th>Cultural</th>
<th>Experiential</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Questions to consider:

1. Do you think that one category is more important in the construction of an identity?
2. In what way do the aspects you listed in each category interrelate?
3. How does time relate to each of the categories?
Shades of meaning

In pairs, think about the following words or terms as relating to the concept of identity and belonging:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Belonging</th>
<th>Not Belonging</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belonging</td>
<td>Isolation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fitting In</td>
<td>Withdrawal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusive</td>
<td>Solitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociable</td>
<td>Self sufficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Popular</td>
<td>Lonely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conforming</td>
<td>Aloof</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normal</td>
<td>Hermit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accepted</td>
<td>Lone wolf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connected</td>
<td>Secluded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Included</td>
<td>Alienated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affirmed</td>
<td>Non-conformist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respected</td>
<td>Outsider</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admired</td>
<td>Marginalised</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At home</td>
<td>Different</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wanted</td>
<td>Maverick</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needed</td>
<td>Unwanted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>Disconnected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fellowship</td>
<td>ostracised</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attached</td>
<td>Estrangement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kinship</td>
<td>Outcast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Togetherness</td>
<td>Detached</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closeness</td>
<td>Displaced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>Dispossessed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Excluded</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

You might also like to consider these points in your discussion:

- Where do these labels come from?
- Who assigns them (those who belong or those who do not)?
- What are they mean (consider their implication)?
- How are they used?
Building an understanding of the Context

You will need to engage with other texts that explore issues of identity and belonging in order to expand your knowledge of the Context. This is a critical component of Area of Study 2. A detailed exploration of supporting texts will help inform your writing and allow you to demonstrate a more sophisticated understanding of the issues presented.

Set Task

For the remainder of the school year you should be gathering together a portfolio of source material that explores issues of identity and belonging.

Consider the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Films</th>
<th>Pieces of art</th>
<th>Songs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Biographies</td>
<td>Historical events</td>
<td>Speeches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Novels</td>
<td>Parables and fables</td>
<td>Newspaper articles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memoirs</td>
<td>Plays</td>
<td>Essays</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family history</td>
<td>Philosophical treatises</td>
<td>Personal experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short stories</td>
<td>Television programs</td>
<td>Poetry</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By the end of this unit of study, aim to have explored at least ten pieces of stimulus material from the categories in the table above.

For each example you will need to:

- Explain how it connects to the Context
- Indicate whether it supports or contrasts the ideas and views presented in *Wild Cat Falling*
- Write an expository paragraph that explores a specific way that it informs an understanding of identity and belonging
The language of acceptance and rejection

Part of the language that we use on a daily basis to identify and label individuals and groups is infused with a sense of conscious or unconscious judgement.

For example: ‘People’, as a neutral form of a group of individuals, can be considered as ‘us’ when they are accepted and ‘them’ when they are rejected from a classifying group.

Consider the classification and labelling of groups within our society in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Acceptance</th>
<th>Rejection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Questions for discussion:

- How can words be used to create a sense of inclusion?
- How can words be used to isolate or disenfranchise people in a community?
- Is the use of these words a conscious or unconscious choice?
- What factors influence the word choices that people make?
Constructing a response

This part of the course gives you the most freedom to choose how you write – it offers the greatest range of forms and styles to select from, as well as the chance to be genuinely creative in your response. The following sections explain the key elements of the writing tasks, then outline some of the many possible ways of responding to prompts/stimulus material on your Context.

Expository, persuasive, imaginative

The instructions for Section B of the exam paper state that: ‘Your response may be an expository, persuasive or imaginative piece of writing’.

Although the boundaries between expository, persuasive and imaginative types of writing might seem clear-cut, it is likely that the form you choose will combine elements from more than one of these. For example:

- An essay might carefully consider different viewpoints on a prompt in an expository fashion, but then come down strongly in favour of one viewpoint in a persuasive style.
- An imaginative response such as a short story might present a strong attitude or opinion on a prompt in order to persuade the reader, or present different perspectives as equally valid in an expository style.

A summary of the possible forms available to choose during the exam:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writing Type</th>
<th>Possible Forms</th>
<th>Language Features</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expository</td>
<td>• Essay</td>
<td>• Formal style</td>
<td>• To explain or inform</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Personal Reflection</td>
<td>• Serious tone</td>
<td>• To consider different points of view on a prompt/stimulus material</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Personal Letter</td>
<td>• A reasoned, considered discussion of the prompt/stimulus material</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Biography</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persuasive</td>
<td>• Essay</td>
<td>• Use of persuasive language techniques</td>
<td>• To persuade, i.e. convince the reader that your point of view is correct</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Opinion piece</td>
<td>• Language for presenting and sustaining an argument</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Letter to the editor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Editorial</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imaginative</td>
<td>• Short story</td>
<td>• Can be poetic, descriptive</td>
<td>• To entertain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Drama (e.g. scene from a play, monologue, etc.)</td>
<td>• Can use informal or colloquial language if appropriate to characters, narrative voice, etc.</td>
<td>• To make the reader think about ideas in a new way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Poetry</td>
<td></td>
<td>• To move the reader emotionally</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Which form should you use?

No one form is ‘best’ for writing on your Context – every form presents its opportunities and challenges. Choose a form you are familiar and comfortable with. Here are some points to keep in mind:

- **The essay form** will be very familiar to you and gives a clear structure to work with. Aim for a clear, consistent argument throughout. Don’t just present a series of random thoughts on the prompt/stimulus material: this might be ‘expository’ but your piece will lack coherence.

- **Imaginative forms** give you scope for a highly individual response to a given prompt, and the possibility of using more lively and interesting language than in a formal essay. Stay focused on the prompt and its key terms – this is what you are being assessed on. Also make sure that your structure is clear – with a strong beginning and ending – and that you draw on ideas from a selected text.

- **Persuasive forms** such as opinion pieces and editorials will be familiar to you from your study of persuasive language in media texts. These forms allow you to present a clear and strong response and to use a range of persuasive language techniques (showing your understanding of the relationship between form, language and purpose). Don’t be too one-sided or strident in presenting your point of view – this will limit your exploration of ideas and arguments.

Form, language, audience and purpose

Any effective piece of writing has its language well-matched to its form, audience and purpose. Moreover, the Examination Assessment Criteria include ‘controlled use of language appropriate to the purpose, form and audience’ as one of four criteria for Section B.

**Language** includes your style and tone as well as your choice of particular words. In general, style and tone should be consistent throughout, although a shift in tone can be effective in generating a sense of closure in a persuasive piece or in a story or play scene. An essay needs a formal style and mostly serious tone; you have much more freedom in your language use in an imaginative piece, but consistency is still the key. Imagery is a vital element of language use in short stories and poetry.

If your audience is specified, it will usually be a cross-section of society. Even if your audience is not specified, you should assume that you are writing for an educated adult audience. This means your language needs to be accessible and interesting for a range of readers. Avoid specialised or technical language (unless you make its meaning clear), and avoid slang or offensive language. Think about the context you are writing for: would your piece be rejected by the publication’s editors on the grounds that it contains inappropriate language?

Some colloquial language might be appropriate in dialogue for certain created characters, but keep this to a minimum – it will limit the complexity of your ideas and overall discussion.

Your **purpose** is why you are writing: what impact do you want your piece to have on the reader? To make them see that an issue is not just black-and-white but has many shades of grey? To make them laugh? To make them agree with you? Be clear about this purpose in your own mind since it will give your writing greater coherence and effectiveness.
Written explanation (English)

A written explanation of your writing choices is required in the two Creating and presenting SACs for English (but not for EAL). It is not required in the final exam, but your writing will be more effective if you are conscious of your reasons for writing in a particular form and for using language in specific ways.

Use this checklist when preparing your written explanation.

➢ **Explain your choices** – e.g. say why you have used certain words and images, why you have structured your piece in this way, why you have created certain characters etc. Don’t just give a summary of your response.

➢ **Relate your choices to the prompt/stimulus material.**

➢ Discuss form, language, audience, purpose and context – remember FLAP+C.

➢ Explain how your response **draws on a selected text** for ideas and/or arguments.

➢ Write 200–300 words – you can write more, but not at the expense of your response to the prompt, which is the main part of what is assessed.

Two further points to remember:

➢ Write in paragraphs and complete sentences: this should be a fluent, well-written piece, not a list of dot points.

➢ You can write in first person (‘I used the image of a lake to suggest ...’) or in third person (‘The image of the lake is used to suggest ...’). For most students the first-person voice will come more easily and naturally but both can be effective.

(Source: Adapted from Insight Contexts: Exploring Issues of Identity of Belonging, 2016)
Expository essays

What is expository writing?

Definition: In an expository essay the writer attempts to explore or explain something to the reader.

An expository essay:

- Is written in the third person and uses the present tense (you can write in the first person if you constructing a reflective response)
- Explores ideas that emerge from the study of the selected texts for the Context in the direction dictated by the prompt
- Uses formal language
- Generally has a serious, authoritative tone
- Contains reasoned, objective discussion
- Contains an introduction, body paragraphs and a conclusion
- Should include quotes from chosen texts/references

How to write an expository essay:

- Your introduction needs to clearly set out the background and the ‘big ideas’ relevant to the prompt (don’t mention any texts that you plan to discuss later in your introduction).
- Your response should not completely agree nor completely disagree with the prompt statement, but should explore the statement in an in-depth manner.
- Discuss different perspectives on the prompt and begin by being balanced in your presentation of the different sides to any argument (you can reach conclusions in your discussion).
- Draw ideas and examples from a wide range of sources (however, the set text will need to be referenced in each body paragraph) and consider how they support, challenge or deepen your understanding of the prompt.
- Your conclusion should summarise the ‘big ideas’ that you explore in your response, without introducing any new ideas, as well as highlighting your findings or conclusions.
- Use language and a tone appropriate for your audience.
- Do not make reference to any text in your introduction or conclusion. This essay is about your ideas related to the prompt NOT about the text/s. The text/s should only be referred to as support for ideas explored.

Useful words and phrases for expository writing:

- This suggests that...
- Considering (the subject) from this perspective leads to an understanding that...
- It is interesting to consider the perspective of...
- It is also important to note that...
- Consequently...
- Another way in which the idea of (try to use synonyms of belonging and identity, etc.) might be considered is...
- (Author/director)... explores this idea in (name of text)
- The experiences of... seem to indicate...
- Alternatively, it could be considered that...
Context: Exploring issues of identity and belonging.

Prompt: A person’s sense of identity and belonging is defined more by their circumstances than any other factor.

“Existence is not singular (individual) and independent” – Mudrooroo, 2012

Knowledge of one’s self is derived from a complex rendering of cultural, biological and experiential forces. The conscious and unconscious relationships that exist between these factors in terms of identity formation cannot be fully understood in isolated terms. It is therefore too limiting to suggest that a precedence exists that positions one ahead of another. The transitory nature of existence, however, does emphasise the importance of experiences in shaping how one is externally viewed and personally considered. Ultimately, feelings of alienation and dislocation, as well as acceptance and connection, are the manifestations of the ways in which individuals are able to navigate the situations and events that impact their lives.

The compartmentalising of an individual’s identity can be instructive as a means of analysing the self, but it only serves as a reductive exercise in a diagnostic process. Human beings may be the sum of their parts, but those parts are interconnected. It is a far too simplistic assessment to infer that people only embody the labels that society extends to them. Mudrooroo’s 1965 novel, Wild Cat Falling thematically draws upon this idea when the unnamed protagonist attempts to subvert the power of rejection and alienation by ironically masking himself with the labels that he feels have been used to stereotype his existence. By acting as a degenerate to a woman he encounters on a beach he feels safeguarded in the knowledge that even if she does respond to the labels that he, as the wearer, embodies, at least “he rejected her first.” This self-destructive behaviour is a defence mechanism against the power of judgemental labelling being undertaken by people who only see an individual’s character in terms of the values associated with its superficial construction. Whether or not this assessment has a degree of validity, it still reduces a person’s existence to an essence of themselves rather than a feature in a complexly constituted being. This sort of one-dimensional imagining might enable the process for how one person erroneously views another, but it is unlikely to form the basis for how those individuals imagines themselves to be. However, the response given by John Hurt to revelations he received on the genealogical television program, Who Do You Think You Are? contradict this to some extent. He had lived his life under the impression that he was of Irish descent and claimed that the first time that he visited Ireland he felt “home”. When he is informed that “one of the bankers of [his] life” is false, he is emotionally devastated. John Hurt has not physically changed, his experiences can still be remembered, and externally, to the public at large, he holds the same persona. However, for Hurt, who laments, “I am not who I believed I was”, the circumstances of how he understands his own identity is irrevocably damaged. In this instance, the compartmentalising of the features of his own existence is reduced to an erroneously constructed essential self. Perhaps this suggests that even if individuals are complexly constituted organisms they still rely on a foundation for their identity and that it can be shaped by the ever-changing circumstances of their lives.

When the foundations for individuals to understand themselves are removed or damaged people can begin to feel alienated and lose a connection to their surroundings. This is essentially true for the inhabitants of the thirteen American colonies in the latter half of the eighteenth century. They considered themselves to be British right up to and including the moment that they, as a collective,
declared their independence in 1776. It was not until the long and bloody engagements had taken their toll that individuals began seeing themselves as Americans rather than, and distinct from, the British. The events, in this example, were the determining feature of a change in self-recognition. This suggests that changing attitudes, rather than the essential nature of something itself, helps inform the way that people feel connected to their environment. It perhaps also indicates that there is an element of fragility in the construction of how people consider the myriad ways that they fit into the world. A person’s sense of belonging could then be assumed to be dependent on the way that an individual characterises their surroundings. In the novel, Wild Cat Falling the dislocated first-person narrator has no connection to place. A cultural understanding of his environment is denied to him because of his mother’s wish that he grow up on “the white side of the fence.” Social barriers, to some extent, prevent this from transpiring. He therefore fails to develop a stable mental outlook and is not able to traverse comfortably or confidently in the world. This could indicate that the dominant culture that occupies a space might dictate the terms and manner in which a person is forced to interact. There are many reasons why an individual might never fully connect with those around them, but a solid grounding for acceptance is often necessary for this to eventuate.

The way that people are externally understood may have an influencing effect on the way that they see themselves, but it is not necessarily an overriding element. Individuals can be defiant and resolute in their own values and beliefs that belie any outward cultural or social pressure to bend or falter. This is certainly the case for Martin Pawley, a character in John Ford’s 1956 film, The Searchers. He is secure in his identity, regardless of the fact that his estranged, Indian-hating, ‘uncle’ Ethan is unwilling to accept a man into his family who is one-eighth Cherokee. The familial bond that Martin holds for the rest of his family is far more central to his sense of self, than any reflection of the invective bestowed upon him by his domineering uncle. The circumstances of his ‘othering’ does not seemingly impact his ability to feel pride or worthiness. Conversely, the unnamed protagonist in Wild Cat Falling constructs his identity in terms of what he is not and fails to deny the effect of the circumstances that form his superficial persona. It is not until a cultural elder helps him reconnect with a glimmer of a dreamtime story about a cat who wants to “live a long time like the old crow”, evoking a feeling of connectedness, that he is able to think beyond his negatively constructed sense of self. It would then seem that an individual’s ability to remain resolute in who they are, or to transform themselves beyond the circumstances that hold their identity captive, is predicated not solely upon external pressures, but is a combination of all the elements that work to define them.

While it is possible to identify people based on the labels that they embody, it rarely provides more than a superficial understanding of who they are, even when the construction is being undertaken by the person themselves. Individuals respond to stimuli in different ways and the determining factor in how this shapes them is often dictated by the strength they draw from the foundational elements that constitute their essential self. When a level of certainty is tested or removed it can cause a sense of dislocation. Whether this is prompted by active external forces or simply the way that an individual is internally conditioned to respond, the complex construction of an individual suggests that the experience cannot be fully delineated.
Written Explanation:

I have written an expository essay as a response to the prompt that draws upon the idea that identity formation and feelings of inclusiveness are the complex manifestations of multiple factors that are not easily deconstructed. I chose to write in an expository manner using the structure and style of a formal essay as I felt that it allowed me to logically sequence the ideas that I have been exploring. My use of a third-person perspective that incorporated analytical language also provided the means through which I could employ an authoritative tone. I included words and phrases such as ‘suggests’, ‘infers’, ‘would then seem’ and ‘could indicate’ to demonstrate that I was openly exploring an idea even when drawing conclusions from the process. I also included selective quotes and examples from Wild Cat Falling as well as other texts and sources that I engaged with while examining the Context to provide evidence for a specific discussion about the way that personas can be externally and internally constructed and understood. I prefaced the essay with a statement from Mudrooroo, that he had written in a journal article attesting to his ideological reasoning, as I felt that it informed the views he promulgated in his novel and were an interesting summation of the idea that identity was complexly constructed, which I wished to explore in my response. The essay, as written, might appear in a published collection of essays on ‘issues of identity and belonging’ that explore a multitude of perspectives for an educated and interested audience. The discussion within the response would therefore constitute one voice in a wider dialogue of the way that people understand themselves and others.

Set Task:

Read and annotate the expository essay and written explanation included above. Use the appropriate Outcome 3 criteria sheet (from the links below) to inform your annotations:

English students:


EAL students:

Writing Prompts

When constructing a written response to the prompts below you need to consider the set text, the Context, as well as the direction dictated by that prompt.

1. A sense of belonging is a fundamental human need.
2. Our identity is forged through our relationships and interaction with others.
3. Exposure to conflicting values can weaken a person’s sense of self and identity.
4. At some point in our lives, individuality is a threat to community and belonging to a group.
5. The need to belong and conform usually clashes with the true expression of individuality and freedom.
6. Wearing a mask can sometimes protect a fragile sense of self.
7. People who are alienated from mainstream society struggle to find their identity.
8. Relationships are the foundation upon which identity is formed.
9. Our identity is formed by our connection to the past.
10. It is better to feel safe and belong than isolated and scared.
11. Labelling and stereotyping people who belong to a particular group is usually intended to be demeaning and is always limiting.
12. When people strive to fit in to the dominant group, they risk losing their identity and integrity.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Task</th>
<th>Class Work</th>
<th>Homework</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
<th>Completed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The politics of identity (answer set questions)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reviews of <em>Wild Cat Falling</em> (read and answer set questions)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Write your review of the novel and an explanation of your choices</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter summary questions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extension Questions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exploring issues of identity and belonging in <em>Wild Cat Falling</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intertextuality research task</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical context (answer set questions)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using the text as evidence and idea exploration (short writing tasks)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factors that shape identity (grid to be completed)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shades of meaning (activity and set questions)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portfolio of source material (min. ten examples)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Language of acceptance and rejection (grid to be completed)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annotation of Expository Essay</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing prompts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>