understanding the discussion that follows

The film comments that it is often not an easy thing to interact with others and make the connections that are so important for a sense of belonging. Amelie’s isolated childhood has left her fearful of close relationships, so that even though she very much wants to meet Nino, she is not brave enough to meet him face-to-face. Her lack of courage limits her and forces her to rely on others, such as Gina, to carry messages and try to explain to Nino what is happening. Dufayel, who looks after Amelie in much the same way as she looks after others, reminds her that she must be as brave for herself as she has been in caring for others. She is also limited by her sense of feeling different, as is Nino, who was bullied as a child and is therefore also a solitary person. Jeunet shows us a range of characters who are different in some way, and therefore have difficulties in fitting in, such as Lucien, whose easy-going nature makes him a bullying victim, or Georgette, whose hypochondria affects her relationships.

Final statement that connects the two texts and sums up the message

Peter Skrzynecki writes about the potential to belong in his poems, limited by the barriers of time and distance. The past is either an inaccessible secret or so remote from his own experience that he is not interested in it. There is, however, the possibility for enrichment through belonging in ‘Postcard’. In Amelie, on the other hand, we see that our interactions with others can be very enriching if we are prepared to be positive and embrace the idea of belonging.

Follow up

Look up the Notes from the Marking Centre and the Marking Guidelines for the 2010 Examination (on the Board of Studies website). Use these guidelines to identify what was valued and to assess the sample 2010 responses.

Sample response 2: Prose fiction

Prescribed text: Swallow the Air, Tara June Winch, 2006
Related text: Rose Blanche, Roberto Innocenti and Ian McEwen, 1985 (picture book)

The introduction outlines how each text shows belonging and answers the question

Our feelings of belonging can be affected by how we interact with others and how we are treated. Negative experiences can make us feel excluded, limited and confined. On the other hand, when others reach out to us and show us kindness and understanding, we are enriched and feel a sense of connection and belonging. This is shown clearly in Swallow the Air, a novella by Tara June Winch that traces May’s journey from a profound sense of displacement and not belonging, through a series of mishaps and adventures that help her to think about what belonging really means for her, to finally arrive at a sense of resolution and acceptance of who she is and where she belongs. In the picture book, Rose Blanche, by Roberto Innocenti and Ian McEwen, set in Nazi Germany, we come to understand that belonging to the dominant group can be a very limiting and unpleasant
experience that prevents clear understanding of a situation and that the rewards and personal satisfaction can come from connecting with those who have been marginalised.

In *Swallow the Air*, May has many interactions with others that make her feel excluded and limited in what she can do and what opportunities are available to her. The book opens with the unexpected death of her mother. This creates a yawning sense of loss that takes May several years to work through. The immediate result of her mother’s death is that she and her brother, Billy, must be cared for by her aunt, who means well but lives a chaotic and violent life and is unable to provide the support and protection the children need. At this stage, and for some time to come, May’s interactions with others are negative, limit her opportunities and cause her to see herself as an outsider and a misfit.

There are numerous examples throughout the book to show how she is excluded and feels displaced, beginning with the racist insult, “This gunna show ya where ya don’t belong dumb black bitch”, followed by a rape at knife point, a punishment for being both Aboriginal and female. The anger and violence at her aunt’s house are so intimidating that both she and Billy leave, despite their affection for Aunty and her concern for them. May has nowhere to go, so ends up in a squat, where the interactions are centred around drug-taking and this is the only point of connection between people. The callous disposal of the girl who overdoses prompts May to seek her long-lost father in Darwin, but this, too, only ends up reinforcing her sense of exclusion. When she accidentally sees him at a rodeo, it brings back memories of his violence and she realises that her recollections of a happy childhood with him were deceptive – her need to belong tricked her into a false happy memory. She starts to remember her father’s permanent anger and how she and Billy were so frightened by him that “we don’t huddle together, Billy and me – we are separated by the violence”.

At the heart of May’s sense of exclusion is her mixed racial heritage. She feels “too black and too white” to fit in anywhere. Joyce tells her that she needs to find her own mob and May feels that this could be the answer to her sense of displacement. However, her journey to the Wiradjuri lands only compounds the sense of loss and exclusion, when she finds people who no longer have a spiritual connection with the land, or have chosen to effectively deny their Aboriginality, as the best way of surviving and succeeding. This is summed up by her Uncle Percy, who says, “We weren’t allowed to be what you’re looking for … There is a big missing hole between this place and the place you’re looking for … we weren’t allowed to be Aboriginal”.

Despite all these experiences and interactions with others that lead her to almost despair of ever belonging, or knowing with whom she belongs, May meets people along the way who show her kindness and support and encourage her to persevere in her quest. On first meeting May, Joyce recognises that she is alone and needs help, telling her, “Don’t be shame now, everyone need somewhere to stay”. On her travels to find her father, her mob and her identity, she is helped by many strangers who support her in various ways. On the return trip to Sydney, she realises what Issy meant when she explained the Wiradjuri stories of land, water and sky. She
Carefully selected evidence

Place is explored as important for belonging

The topic sentence sets up a contrast with previous text

Power relationships of groups

Belonging to the wrong group can be limiting

Use of colour to convey meaning

Recognises that “this land is belonging, all of it for all of us”. This realisation helps her to turn her return to Sydney from defeat into victory, with an understanding that she belongs with her immediate family and that the beach she grew up on is her spiritual home. She has been enriched by both the good and bad experiences she has had with others, to arrive at a point of understanding about herself and the world, so that the jacaranda tree in the back yard, the scene of her mother’s death, is now a thing of beauty because it reminds her of happy times when her mother was alive. She arrives at the beach and experiences all the sensations of ‘home’. “At the water I am always home” is a realisation of what she needs so that she can feel that she belongs, and also connects her to her people, the Wiradjuri.

Belonging and exclusion are depicted quite differently in Rose Blanche. Whereas Swallow the Air uses the features of descriptive narrative to tell us of May’s interactions with others, Innocenti and McEwen use words and images to show how interactions can be both limiting and enriching. The book depicts a young girl, Rose Blanche, who lives in a German town that has a compound for Jewish prisoners on its outskirts. Thus, there are two groups in the story – the powerful German army and villagers and the imprisoned Jewish children. The words in the story tell us that the mayor and the villagers know that there are Jewish prisoners and that they do not care what happens to them, shown in their treatment of a boy who escapes. This dominant, powerful group sticks together for safety and to support each other in their treatment of the Jewish prisoners. They do not question what happens or what the soldiers do. In this case, their interactions are not enriching, but limiting, leaving them morally impoverished. They derive a sense of comfort and self-sacrifice from the things they give up for the soldiers and from their collective attitude to the prisoners, and this allows them to ignore the starving children in the camp with easy consciences.

However, it is the images in the book that best convey how limiting it is for the villagers to stick together and ‘belong’ to the oppressive group. Rose Blanche is shown throughout as being separate from the village she lives in, having more in common with the Jewish children. The cover of the book establishes her separateness from the others. She is shown looking through a window, away from the soldiers behind her in the room. The window is divided into squares, and these bars and other symbols of barriers and exclusion are used throughout to show how Rose is different from the rest of the village. All the images show her as separate from the other people, going her own way and rejecting the things they do. She is surrounded by images of fences and barriers in the town and is shown as free only when she escapes to the open countryside, where she discovers the secret of the camp. Here, she is shown for the first time interacting and trying to connect with others. Unlike the villagers, she is upset by the starving children and wishes to help them, which she does by smuggling food to them, going without herself. The images where she is pushing food through the fence and touching the hands of some of the children tell us that the real barriers are not fences and barbed wire, but the way we think about others and how we interact with them.

In the book, colour is used to show belonging and difference. The soldiers and villagers are shown as masses of grey and drab brown. Moreover, the dull depiction of the soldiers and the villagers means that the reader finds them unattractive and does not want to belong with this group. In contrast,
Rose stands out, not just because she is physically separate from the villagers, but also because she wears cheerful and attractive colours, pink, red and light blue. She is shown as having more in common with the children of the camp who, ironically, wear cheerful yellow stars. Despite the sad ending, where she dies alone in the forest, the final pages show us the beauty of her actions – she has become one with the beauty of nature. The message here is that it is better to be alone and separate and retain integrity than to be safe but belong to a group that commits evil.

In *Swallow the Air*, May journeys extensively and goes through good and bad experiences with others to finally arrive at a sense of her own identity and where she belongs. In *Rose Blanche*, Rose chooses to have little to do with others because she does not accept what they are doing. Her conscience tells her that she must do what she can to help the starving children, so she enriches them and herself by rejecting the values of the dominant group. Thus, both texts have something to tell us about how our interactions with people and places can enrich or limit us.

Follow up

Look up the Notes from the Marking Centre and the Marking Guidelines for the 2010 Examination (on the Board of Studies website). Use these guidelines to identify what was valued and to assess the sample 2010 responses.

Sample response 3: Shakespearean drama

**Prescribed text:** *As You Like It*, William Shakespeare, c.1599  
**Related text:** ‘Ulysses’, by Alfred Lord Tennyson, 1833 (poetry)

The people we know, the relationships we form, the worlds we live in and every encounter in our lives are experiences that reflect who we are and yet also shape a new sense of ourselves. We can be enriched by these contacts or we may find that we are limited. It all depends on the individual and how each individual chooses to participate in the worlds and with the people they encounter. This understanding of where each individual belongs in the scheme of life emerges in many texts through different times. Shakespeare’s play *As You Like It* and Alfred Lord Tennyson’s poem ‘Ulysses’ both offer us examples of characters who face different experiences that take them away from the safety and security of the homes where they belong, enriching them in many ways but also making them aware of the limiting nature of the place they call home.

Both texts deal with characters of high social standing who lead their communities and who have been exiled. In *As You Like It*, Duke Senior, his men and then his daughter Rosalind have been banished to the forest by his brother, Duke Frederick. While in the forest Duke Senior encounters many different people and learns to live with nature. The court he leaves behind represents rigidity, authority and lacks personal connection. In contrast the forest is a place of freedom and nature where relationships between people are more egalitarian. The strength of each character is indicated by the way he or she adapts to the forest. Duke Senior overcomes the confines of the court and becomes a better person, able to return to his court as a better leader. His brother Duke Frederick, who sought to overthrow his brother, also discovers goodness but he remains in the forest, knowing he is too weak...