

Context

Peter Skrzynecki was born in 1945 into a Germany that was approaching the end of the Second World War. His father, Feliks, is Polish, and his mother Kornelia (nee Woloszczuk) is of Ukrainian heritage. Skrzynecki's poetry traces the family's journey by sea to Australia, their initial experiences in migrant hostels and their eventual establishment in suburban Sydney. Like huge numbers of people displaced by the war the Skrzynecki family migrated to Australia in 1949, when Peter was four years old.

The poems set for study are all from Skrzynecki's anthology of poems, *Immigrant Chronicle*. This collection was written in 1975 and deals essentially with the migrant experiences of the poet and his family.

The experiences of the Skrzynecki family are common to many people who migrated to Australia from post-war Europe. Skrzynecki focuses especially on his personal reaction to the experience of migration and his relationship with both Australia and his place of birth.

When studying the poetry, it is important to keep in mind the huge social changes that have occurred in Australia in the 30 years since the anthology was published. While recent migrants may still face many of the difficulties explored in the poetry, the concept of a multicultural Australia is more developed today. This is especially so in big urban centres such as Sydney and Melbourne. However, the often contradictory feelings of both belonging and disconnection that Peter Skrzynecki suggests in his poetry are as relevant to many people in today's Australia as they were to the poet in the 1970s.

The poems set for study all relate in different ways to the concept of belonging. Because migration is such a driving force in the anthology, there is a temptation to focus only on this idea. However, a close reading of each of the poems reveals that ideas about belonging and not belonging are threaded through all of Skrzynecki's poems on a number of levels.



You can find more information about the context of this text through the weblinks provided on www.nelsonsecondary.com.au/nelsonbelonging.



Your context as reader

When you are exploring texts for the Area of Study, it is always helpful to consider the context in which they are written, as well as the context in which you are reading. Your own experiences, attitudes and background will affect your response to the poems every bit as much as the experiences, attitudes and background of the poet.

Before you read through the poems, consider the following questions.

- 1 Do you have a personal or family experience of migration? How do you think this will affect your understanding of poetry that deals with this topic?

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- 2 What impact has mass migration had on your immediate community?
- 3 How would your community be different if large numbers of people had not come to Australia as migrants?
- 4 The way people make their journey to Australia has changed. The long sea journeys and migrant 'hostels' have all but disappeared. How do you think that these experiences would change the experience of migration?
- 5 Part of the experience of growing up is questioning where you belong in the world. This is the same for everyone – not just individuals with a history of migration. What ideas in the poems speak to everybody – migrant or not?
- 6 Skrzynecki's relationships with his family feature prominently in the poetry. How do they reflect your family relationships?