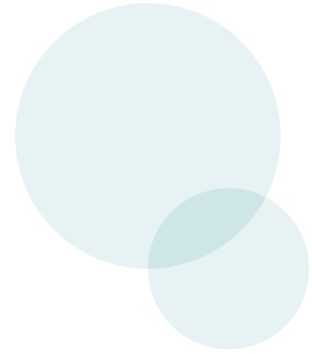


Everyone doesn't belong to a place

- Using a student-created fictional short story for English 1 and 2



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Everyone doesn't belong to a place is a powerful and emotional text written by Astrid Zapart, the winner of the Norwegian Writing Championship 2024, an annual English writing competition for writers aged 13–19. The participants are given just three hours to produce a creative text exploring a given topic. The topic for 2024, *Belonging*, created an open context for reflecting in English on feelings, experiences and identity, all elements of the interdisciplinary topic, Health and life skills, found in the English curriculum. Texts from the competition are evaluated using the criteria of creativity, language,

structure, and relevance to the topic to determine a winner. *Everyone doesn't belong to a place* stood out this year for its rawness and authenticity. Astrid Zapart captures the struggles and complexities of belonging in a war-torn world through not only the eyes of Sali, a young Afghan boy, but also the actions and thoughts of an American soldier. This text is an exemplary piece of young writing.

The story of the protagonist, Sali, takes the reader on a tragic journey that provides for deep discussions and reflections about identity, belonging and the power of the

written word. However, because *Everyone doesn't belong to a place* delves into difficult and complex themes, the teacher may need to address issues around glorification or endorsement of violence, including suicide bombings. While seeking to examine the motivations and struggles of its characters and shedding light on the turmoil faced by individuals caught up in conflict, the teacher can explore the depths of human emotions and experiences and foster empathy, critical thinking and nuanced discussions about the ramifications of war without condoning or romanticising any form of violence.

The following are some suggested tasks to use with the text:

Pre-reading:

- Ask students to brainstorm examples of the various factors that contribute to our sense of belonging, such as culture, family, language or religion. Then ask them to reflect on a time when they felt a sense of belonging, and what made that experience meaningful to them.
- How might the challenges faced by individuals and communities affected by war and conflict impact their sense of identity and belonging?

During reading (use examples from the text to support answers):

- How does the loss of Sali's brother impact his sense of belonging in the village?
- What motivates Sali to give food to the children playing football, and what does this action reveal about his character?
- Why does Sali consider running away, and what might his life be like if he did?

After reading (use examples from the text to support answers):

- How does Sali's decision to sacrifice himself ultimately contribute to the tragic nature of the story? What other elements of the plot or character development lend to this tragic quality?
- To what extent do you believe the events and characters in Sali's diary accurately reflect the realities of the war in Afghanistan? Do you think the story's tragic elements are representative of the broader experiences of civilians and soldiers affected by conflict? Why or why not?
- Is Sali a traditional hero or a tragic hero? How does his journey and ultimate sacrifice align with or diverge from the expectations of both archetypes? Consider aspects such as moral complexity, the impact of external circumstances, and the potential for redemption in your response.

Possible follow-up tasks:

Oral Task: Write a script for a dialogue between Sali and Jake where they discuss their respective notions of identity and belonging. Perform the dialogue with a partner in front of the class, emphasising the contrasts and similarities in their perspectives.

Written Task: Reflect on the author's choice to use diary entries as the narrative structure in Sali's diary. Write an essay analysing the impact of this format on the storytelling and on the readers' engagement with the characters and themes in the text. Support your analysis with examples and quotes from the diary entries.

Artistic Task: Create a visual timeline of significant events in Sali's diary, incorporating images, colours and symbols that reflect the themes of the story. Present your timeline to the class and explain your choices.

Musical Task: Choose a scene from the story and create an original song or instrumental piece that captures the emotions and atmosphere of the scene. You may use a song or instrumental piece written by someone else but be sure to give the artist credit. Present your piece to the class and explain how you see the music conveys the themes and meaning of the text.

ICT Task: Use a digital storytelling platform to create a visual representation of a character from the text, highlighting aspects of their identity and struggles with belonging. Incorporate multimedia elements such as images, audio and video to support your portrayal.

Culinary Task: Research traditional Afghan cuisine and prepare a dish that reflects a scene or character from *Everyone doesn't belong to a place*. During a class discussion, explain the significance of the dish in Afghan culture and how it relates to the story.

Performance Task: Work with a group of classmates to create a dramatic interpretation of a scene from *Everyone doesn't belong to a place*, using gestures, movements and facial expressions to convey the emotions and tensions in the scene. Experiment with different voice qualities and pacing to create an impactful and memorable performance.

Although some teachers and learners may react negatively to the content of *Everyone doesn't belong to a place*, I believe the short story warrants a place in the English language classroom, and the suggested tasks aim to support teachers in engaging their learners with the text and the discussions about feelings and identity that may follow.

For information about the Norwegian Writing Championship, use this link: <http://www.nmiengelsk.no/>