### FILM AUSTRALIA COLLECTION

# **WRONG SIDE** OF THE ROAD







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# A STUDY GUIDE BY JENNIFER CONNOLLY



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# Background

At the time of its original release in 1981, *Wrong Side of the Road* was hailed as the first narrative feature to centre on the experience of a contemporary Aboriginal group, instead of using them as bit players in the main action. The film was written in collaboration with the cast, which included members of the bands, *Us Mob* and *No Fixed Address*.<sup>1</sup> Real events in the lives of the band members were dramatised and interspersed with live footage of the bands performing.

The music of Wrong Side of the Road, with songs like *We Have Survived*, asserts that despite everything, contemporary Aboriginal culture is alive and kicking – in the country and in the city! The music of *Us Mob* and *No Fixed Address* drew on rock and reggae to reflect a contemporary Aboriginal 'resistance culture'. These were 2 of the first Indigenous bands in Australia to be writing songs in a contemporary style, about their own experience and reaching out to both black and white audiences.

Since directing the AFI winning *Wrong Side of the Road* Ned Lander has gone on to work as a writer, producer and broadcast executive for SBS Independent. He produced Rachel Perkin's first feature *Radiance*, and at SBS commissioned the documentary series *First Australians*. He recently completed the telemovie *Dangerous Remedy* starring Jeremy Sims, Susie Porter and William McInnes and is currently executive producer of Jeremy Sim's feature *Last Cab to Darwin* starring Michael Caton, Ningali Lawford and Jackie Weaver.

Co-producer and Co-writer Graeme Isaac was the supervising producer of the first short drama series by Indigenous directors, *From Sand To Celluloid* and *Shifting Sands*, which along with the Central Australian Photos by Carol Ruff © Ned Lander and Graeme Isaac, 2013

RONNIE ANSELL (CENTRE)



Aboriginal Media Association (CAAMA), in Alice Springs, helped develop Aboriginal film making and launch it in to the mainstream. He also produced the noted Arnhem Land documentaries *Dhakyarr Vs The King* and *In My Father's Country*, as well as the Indigenous feature musical *Bran Nue Dae* directed by Rachel Perkins.

After the release of the film, *No Fixed Address* continued to play and tour with various Australian mainstream bands including *Split Endz, Mental As Anything, Mondo Rock*, and *Cold Chisel* and supported international touring acts such as Peter Tosh and Ian Dury. In the mid 80's they also toured to the UK and toured through Eastern Europe before the fall of the iron curtain. In August 2011 *No Fixed Address*, along with the band *Coloured Stone*, were inducted into the Hall of Fame at the inaugural National Indigenous Music Awards. *Us Mob* was the subject of an ABC *Message Stick* documentary in February 2000.

This iconic 1980s film has been remastered and restored to the filmmaker's original vision by the National Sound and Film Archive.<sup>2</sup>



# **Synopsis**

Wrong Side of the Road follows two days in the lives of Aboriginal bands Us Mob and No Fixed Address as they trek from Port Adelaide to Point Pearce in South Australia, but it is more than a traditional road movie. The members of the bands play themselves, acting out incidents from their lives and those of their friends. The loose narrative is linked together with rocking songs and biting lyrics. The film is punctuated by run-ins between the musicians and white authority, and subplots centred on each member of the band. Vonnie's boyfriend is in jail, Pedro is considering guitting the band and Bart's dreams take him to his upbringing in a juvenile institution. In one of the film's central narrative threads Les, who was adopted out to a white family at a young age, is searching for his Aboriginal family, at a time when the 'stolen generation' history was not known by the broader Australian community.

The film does not dwell on injustice. It shows a gutsy people standing up to a racist society, and explores the uniqueness and resilience of the Aboriginal community. This uncompromising film and its empowering music are as relevant today as they were 33 years ago.<sup>3</sup>





# Curriculum and Educational Suitability

Wrong Side of the Road will have relevance to students of English, Media, History and Drama. The study of the film also has potential links to the National Curriculum General Capability of Intercultural Understanding and the Cross Curriculum Priority; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures. The film provides opportunities for students to engage in discussions about the Stolen Generation, racism in Australian society and the representation of Indigenous Australians, in various time periods and contexts, in Australian film. It is most suitable for Senior Secondary (Years 10 - 12) and students studying at a tertiary level.

Students and teachers need to be aware that the film contains course language and drug use.

References to 'text' in this guide refer to film and multimodal texts as well as the written word.

### Summary of links to the National Curriculum

The table on the following page provides a summary of links to the National Curriculum and the draft of the National Curriculum for Media and Drama.

### **Reference:**

http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au<sup>4</sup> http://www.acara.edu.au/verve/\_resources/DRAFT\_ Australian\_Curriculum\_The\_Arts\_Foundation\_ to\_Year\_10\_July\_2012.pdf<sup>5</sup>

http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/ SeniorSecondary/English/English/Overview-ofthe-senior-secondary-Australian-Curriculum<sup>6</sup>

LEARNING AREA	YEAR 10	YEARS 11-12	
ENGLISH	<ul> <li>YEAR 10</li> <li>Language</li> <li>Understand how language use can have inclusive and exclusive social effects, and can empower or disempower people (ACELA1564)</li> <li>Understand that people's evaluations of texts are influenced by their value systems, the context and the purpose and mode of communication(ACELA1565)</li> <li>Literature</li> <li>Compare and evaluate a range of representations of individuals and groups in different historical, social and cultural contexts (ACELT1639)</li> <li>Analyse and explain how text structures, language features and visual features of texts and the context in which texts are experienced my influence audience response (ACELT1641)</li> <li>Evaluate the social, moral and ethical positions represented in texts (ACELT1812)</li> <li>Analyse and evaluate how people, cultures, places, events, objects and concepts are represented in texts, including media texts, through language, structural and/or visual choices (ACELT1749)</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>YEAR 11</li> <li>Unit 1</li> <li>Investigate the relationships between language, context</li> <li>explaining how texts are created in and for different</li> <li>Analysing how language choices are made for different and in different contexts using appropriate metalang example, personification, voice-over, flashback, salid</li> <li>Evaluating the choice of mode and medium in shapi of audiences, including digital texts. (ACEEN003)</li> <li>Unit 2</li> <li>Analyse and evaluate how and why responses to texts or time and contexts.</li> <li>Create a range of texts:</li> <li>using imaginative, interpretive and persuasive elemetric contexts and audiences</li> <li>YEAR 12</li> <li>Unit 3</li> <li>Compare texts from similar or different genres a different texts.</li> <li>analysing and evaluating how similar themes, ideas different texts.</li> </ul>	a contexts (ACEEN001) rent purposes guage; for ence (ACEEN002) ng the response ats vary through: d in different cultural ents for different purposes, <b>nd contexts by:</b> or concepts are treated in
LEARNING AREA		YEAR 10	YEARS 11-12
DRAMA	and psychological situations, relationships	ed roles and characters conveying a subtext of social and status areas to develop ideas and issues to explore symbol,	Various links to studies across different national senior Drama curricula
HISTORY	YEAR 10 Depth Study: Rights and Freedoms Background to the struggle of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples for rights and freedoms before 1965, including the 1938 Day of Mourning and the Stolen Generations (ACDSEH104) The significance of the following for the civil rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples: 1962 right to vote federally; 1967 Referendum; Reconciliation; Mabo decision; Bringing Them Home Report (the Stolen Generations), the Apology (ACDSEH106) Methods used by civil rights activists to achieve change for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and the role of ONE individual or group in the struggle		MODERN HISTORY YEAR 11 Unit 2: Depth study area: Recognition and rights of indigenous peoples
MEDIA	YEAR 10 MAKING 10.3 Manipulate representations to invite alternate social, cultural and environmental viewpoints and audience interpretations <b>RESPONDING</b> 10.7 Evaluate the effectiveness of codes and conventions within a media arts work to engage audiences and communicate ideas and concepts		YEARS
MEDIA	MAKING 10.3 Manipulate representations to invite a and audience interpretations RESPONDING 10.7 Evaluate the effectiveness of codes ar	nd conventions within a media arts work to engage	11 & 12 Various links to studies across different national senior Media curricula



# **Pre-viewing activities**

### **Historical context**

### 1. An overview of the history of Indigenous Australians

Before viewing the film it could be useful to establish a historical context to enable students to better understand the issues raised, as well as the time period the film was made in. To begin, establish student prior knowledge about the history of Indigenous Australians, (including civil rights campaigns, Reconciliation and the Stolen Generation) by conducting a class brainstorm. This is an issue many students will have encountered in studies prior to Year 10; however, it is important to identify and clarify misconceptions before viewing the film.

After brainstorming students can access the following websites to look at these issues in greater detail. Students watching the film as part of the study of history will have an opportunity to undertake a more in-depth study after viewing.

http://australia.gov.au/about-australia/ australian-story/reconciliation http://australia.gov.au/about-australia/ australian-story/sorry-day-stolen-generations http://www.nsdc.org.au/stolen-generations/ history-of-the-stolen-generations/ the-history-of-the-stolen-generations http://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/ politics/stolen-generations-timeline

### **2. Racism in Australia then and now**

Ask students to rank how racist they believe Australian society was in the following decades by standing up and positioning themselves on a continuum from 1 (not racist at all) to 10 (extremely racist). -1900s, 1920s, 1950s, 1980s and now.

After this activity ask students to write a short summary that explains why their position did or did not differ for each era. Students could also reflect on how their own experience influenced their response.

\*It will be important for teachers to approach this task with sensitivity, taking into account individual backgrounds and experiences. The task could be a class discussion or a personal written reflection.

### **3. The 1970s and 1980s in Australia**

What was Australian society like at the time this film was set? Write a list of 10 questions and interview at least 2 different people about society in the 1970s/80s. Questions should cover topics such as popular music, food, housing, attitudes to government, family relationships and national identity.

Investigate society at this time in more depth by developing a table that summarises significant events and attitudes. Headings could include; music, the role of women, morality, attitudes to government, family relationships, major events, indigenous rights, multiculturalism and housing.

Refer to the following website for more information: http://www.skwirk.com/p-c\_s-14\_u-189\_t-508\_c-1881/1970s-decade-in-context/ nsw/history/australia-s-social-and-cultural-history-in-the-post-war-period/ social-and-cultural-features-of-the-1970s

# Indigenous australians in film and music

- Create a list of texts that you have viewed, read or listened to that have been written, produced or performed by Indigenous Australians. Share your work with the class and as a group put the texts in chronological order based the year the work was created.
- 2. Make a list of Indigenous Australian musicians



US MOB (L-R WALLY MCARTHUR, RONNIE ANSELL, PETER BUTLER, CARROLL KARPANY)

CHARACTER	ACTIONS AND REACTIONS	RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHER Characters	KEY DIALOGUE AND WHAT THIS REVEALS
LES – trying to find his family after being adopted out as a young child)			
<b>RONNIE</b> – playing in the band after being fired from his job as a jackaroo)			
<b>PEDRO</b> – Lead singer of <i>Us Mob</i> . Considering whether he should leave the band and get a job)			
<b>VONNIE</b> – sings with the band, her boyfriend is in jail)			
<b>BART</b> – drummer and singer in <i>No Fixed</i> <i>Address</i> )			
AUNTY VERONICA – a motherly figure who is related to several band members)			
<b>AMY SMITH</b> – is from Point Pearce and has concerns about booking the band)			
JON JON – is arrested and escapes at the start of the film)			
VONNIE'S Boyfriend			
LES'S FOSTER FATHER			
CITY POLICEMEN			
COUNTRY Policemen			

and songwriters. Choose one person to research and create a brief presentation about their work. The presentation should include basic biographical information, supporting images and examples of their work.

Some suggestions of Indigenous musicians to research include: *Jimmy Little, Kev Carmody, Essie Coffey, Bob Randall, Coloured Stone, Kuckles, Yothu Yindi, Warumpi, Geoffrey Gurrumul Yunupingu, Chad Morgan, Jessica Mauboy, Dub Vegas, Desert Sevenz ft. The Desert Pea Mob.* 

# **Viewing activities**

### **1. Central characters**

Use the table on the following page to take notes on the characters while viewing the film. You may choose to focus on a specific character and then share responses as a class after the film has finished.

### 2 Music

Music plays a major role in establishing mood, supporting the action and advancing the storyline in *Wrong Side of the Road*. As you view the film take note of:

- When live music is used
- Examples of song lyrics and the action occurring at the time.
- When recorded music is used and how this impacts on the mood in the scene.

### 3. The beginning of the film

The film begins with band members picking up Bart for a gig. Analyse the use of sound and lighting in this scene. Why do you think the director chose to begin the film this way? What predictions can you make about the film based on the first scene? What do we learn about the characters and their interrelationships?

### **4. Pedro's story (13'42)**

Pedro is unsure of the direction he wants to take and goes to look for a job at a rail yard where he used to work. What do we learn about him in this scene? Why was he treated so badly by the foreman?

### 5. Les' story (15'24) and (16'37)

Les is trying to find out information about his birth mother in these scenes. How does the use of camera angles enhance the mood? What was your emotional response to these scenes?



### 6. Riverside hotel (19'38)

How does the mise en scene indicate there will be conflict at the Riverside Hotel? How does the band deal with the situation? How would you react in this situation?

### 7. Aunty Veronica's house (25'15)

Aunty Veronica is a motherly figure who gives advice and shares history. In this scene we see her in a confrontation with a truant officer. How is the character of the truant officer represented in the film in contrast with Aunty Veronica?

There are a number of key issues explored in this scene, what are they? How does the use of music link to these issues?

### 8. Les visits home (32'05)

How would you describe the relationship between Les and his adoptive father? What decision does Les make in this scene?

### 9. Bart's flashback (35'25)

Bart is a small child when he is taken from hospital by welfare workers. What happens to him next in this flashback?



COUNTRY COP (CHRIS HAYWOOD) QUESTIONS RONNIE ANSELL WHILE PETER BUTLER LOOKS ON.

### 10. Ronnie's flashback (46'38)

Members of the band stop at a rodeo and this causes Ronnie to reminisce about his past. What do we learn about Ronnie in this scene?

### **11. Stopped on the way to Point Pearce (56'19)**

The band is stopped by the police on the way to their gig at Point Pearce. Discuss the way they are treated by the police in this scene. Include your observations about the interaction between Pedro and the police officer. What impact do the language choices in the dialogue have in this section?

### 12. The end of the film (1hr.03'54)

What was your reaction to the end to the film?

Will Les find his mother? What leads you to believe/disbelieve this?

Analyse how the use of music contributes to the story in this final section of the film.

# Christ Harwoods

## 2 Structure and style

Conduct a class discussion/debate about the style of the film. What codes and conventions does the film use? Is it stylistically conventional or unconventional?

The following quote from the producers of the film could be given to students to assist the discussion:

The reality is that the film's story was based on a series of oral history interviews done with the band and then worked into the framework of a road movie that allowed the interweaving of a number of stories and themes. We then workshopped with the cast to get them used to the filming process. In the final film, while the stories



# Themes

- What are the key themes explored in the film? How are these themes explored through the characters and plot?

- What do you think of the title? How does it relate to the plot and themes?
- How does the music enhance the themes of the film?





were based on real events and experiences from within the community, band members were sometimes playing out stories that were not their own. Les' character was based on another member of the cast who was looking for his family through the shoot. Also, the actual shooting process on set was one of dramatic construction, building scenes shot by shot, rather than through documentary observation. So while we chose to use a lot of hand held camera, while there is much improvised dialogue, and while the performances have a naturalistic feel, the film is a dramatic construction.<sup>7</sup>

Wrong side of the Road has been described as a docudrama. Docudrama is defined as a film or television show which combines conventions of documentary and drama. Docudramas are sometimes referred to as a nonfiction drama as they focus on real events and real people presented in a dramatised way. Unlike a straight documentary, a docudrama will tend to stick to the facts without giving commentary. The goal is to give people information and have them draw their own conclusions.<sup>8</sup>

Continue to explore the style of Docudrama by viewing and discussing other work in this genre. You will find examples using the links below.

### http://www.ranker.com/list/

list-of-all-docudrama-movies/reference http://www.flickchart.com/Charts. aspx?genre=Docudrama

Can Wrong Side of the Road be classified as a Docudrama? Write an essay that explores this question and analyses how the codes and conventions used in the film engage the audience and communicate ideas and concepts.

Develop, script and produce your own short film in a style similar to the film.

# **A** Plot/story

Analyse the plot and story of the film by completing these questions:

- Where is the story set? Analyse the choices made in relation to the different settings in the film focusing on the contrast between urban and country settings.
- What conflicts do the central characters face? How do they deal with these conflicts?
- How are the major conflicts in the story introduced?
- How is the dramatic confrontation set up as the film draws to its close?
- What is the climax of the film?
- Make a comment on the denouement. What do you think the ending of the film suggests will happen?

.....

# 4 Context

A context study, in terms of senior English, is described as a broad focus area where students study and respond to a range of texts that explore similar ideas. The analysis of texts could include exploring why language choices have been made (verbal and non verbal) – and how intended audiences and purposes influenced choices. After studying a variety of texts students respond to a prompt question/statement by completing a written piece in a persuasive, expository or imaginative style.

*Wrong Side of the Road* could be viewed and studied as part of a context study on Identity and Belonging or Encountering Conflict. Suggestions of





texts that the film could be studied in conjunction with include:

Identity and Belonging: *Beneath Clouds* (Ivan Sen, 2002), *Black Chicks Talking* (Leah Purcell, Brendan Fletcher, 2002), *Bran Nue Dae* (Rachel Perkins, 2010).

Suggested writing prompts for Identity and Belonging:

- It is difficult to possess a sense of belonging when we are unsure of our own identity
- Our identity determines where we belong<sup>9</sup> Encountering Conflict: *Rabbit Proof Fence* (Phillip Noyce, 2002), *Mad Bastards* (Brendan Fletcher, 2011), *First Australians, Mabo* (Rachel Perkins 2012), *Redfern Now Series 1, The Tall Man* by Clare Hooper and the song *From Little Things Big Things Grow* by Paul Kelly. Suggested writing prompts for Encountering Conflict
- The strength of someone is always shown in times of conflict
- Conflict is about justice and wrongdoing<sup>10</sup>

The written responses for these prompts should be between 800-1000 words.

5 History depth study 5 – Recognition and Rights of Indigenous People

Wrong Side of the Road could be used as resource for a Modern History depth study of the Recognition and Rights of Indigenous People, to give students an understanding of the issues faced by Indigenous Australians in the 1970s and 1980s. The fact that the film dramatises actual events from the lives of the band members is of particular interest.



When researching and writing a detailed report on this topic, students should demonstrate their understanding of:

- The nature of the relationship of indigenous peoples with their land and their response to perceptions of, and feelings about, the arrival of the colonisers
- The basis on which the colonists claimed sovereignty and imposed control, including conquest, treaty and the doctrine of 'terra nullius'; and the consequences for the legal status and land rights of Indigenous peoples
- The nature of government policies and their impact on indigenous peoples, for example protection, assimilation (including the Stolen Generations), and self-determination
- The role of individuals and groups who supported the movement for indigenous recognition and rights, including the methods they used and the resistance they encountered
- The economic, political and social challenges and opportunities indigenous peoples have faced, including the role of cultural activity in developing awareness in society
- The achievements of indigenous peoples at the end of the 20th century, including the right to vote, land rights/native title, and attempt at reconciliation
- The continued efforts to achieve greater recognition, reconciliation, civil rights, and improvements in education and health <sup>11</sup>

# **6** Media presentation

Use ICT to create a 2 minute, visual, historical account of the issues raised in *Wrong Side of the Road.* Use voice over, images and appropriate music to represent the film and to show your understanding of the themes and issues.

# 7 Drama

Film is a useful tool for performance stimulus. Students could view *Wrong Side of the Road*, identify the themes and explore these themes when developing their own performances. The open ending to the film provides potential for students to carry on each of the character-focused story lines.

Documentary Drama is a performance style that can be linked to the film. Students could adapt their own experiences into an ensemble performance in this style using music to enhance the narrative and establish mood, place and time.

# **Additional Resources**

### Australian History

http://www.skwirk.com/p-c\_s-14\_u-189\_t-508\_c-1881/1970s-decade-in-context/ nsw/history/australia-s-social-andcultural-history-in-the-post-war-period/ social-and-cultural-features-of-the-1970s

### Film techniques and structure

- http://education.cinematheque.bc.ca/pdfs/f\_h\_ guide03.pdf
- http://lessonbucket.com/media/year-10/ understanding-narrative/

### Representation of Aboriginal people on film

http://australia.gov.au/about-australia/ australian-story/indigenous-film

### Stolen Generations and Racism

http://www.racismnoway.com.au/teaching-resources/factsheets/index.html http://australia.gov.au/about-australia/ australian-story/sorry-day-stolen-generations

### Wrong Side of the Road Additional Information

http://www.abc.net.au/gnt/history/Transcripts/ s1151991.htm http://www.creativespirits.info/resources/movies/ wrong-side-of-the-road

### Music from the film

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jLxD\_-R8jv0 http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zuwPTxcu\_Ug

### Context

- http://www.vcestudyguides.com/guides/ context/encountering-conflict/ encountering-conflict-prompts http://www.vcestudyguides.com/guides/
- context/identity-and-belonging/ identity-and-belonging-prompts

### (Endnotes)

- Meaghan Morris, 'Wrong Side on right track for Aborigines', The Australian Financial Review, 30 October 1981
- Catherine Peake, 'Facts of life in black urban Australia', The National Times, 16 November, 1981
- Wrong Side of the Road.' Sydney Film Festival
   N.p., n.d. <a href="http://www.sff.org.au/films-con-tainer/wrong-side-of-the-road/">http://www.sff.org.au/films-con-tainer/wrong-side-of-the-road/</a>> accessed 19 Jan. 2014.
- 4 'Welcome to the Foundation to Year 12 Australian Curriculum Online.' *The Australian Curriculum V5.1*. N.p., n.d. <a href="http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/">http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/</a> , accessed 28 November 2013
- 5 'ACARA, Draft Australian Curriculum: The Arts Curriculum Foundation to Year 10. 2012' <http://www.acara.edu.au/verve/\_resources/ DRAFT\_Australian\_Curriculum\_The\_Arts\_ Foundation\_to\_Year\_10\_July\_2012.pdf>, accessed 28 November 2013
- 6 "English." The Australian Curriculum V5.1 : Overview of the Senior Secondary Australian Curriculum. N.p., n.d. <a href="http://www.australian-curriculum.edu.au/SeniorSecondary/English/English/Overview-of-the-senior-secondary-Australian-Curriculum">http://www.australian-curriculum.edu.au/SeniorSecondary/English/ English/Overview-of-the-senior-secondary-Australian-Curriculum</a>, accessed 28 Nov. 2013.
- 7 Ned Lander, 'Wrong Side of the Road Production Notes', accessed 19 Jan 2014
- McMahon, Mary, and Bronwyn Harris.
   "Docudrama." *WiseGeek*. Conjecture, 14 Nov, 2013. Web. http://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-a-docudrama.htm, accessed 8 December, 2013
- 9 'Identity and Belonging Prompts VCE Study Guides.' VCE Study Guides RSS. N.p., n.d. Web. <a href="http://www.vcestudyguides.com/guides/context/identity-and-belonging/identity-and-belonging-prompts">http://www.vcestudyguides.com/guides/ context/identity-and-belonging/identity-andbelonging-prompts</a>, accessed 7 December 2013
- 10 "Encountering Conflict Prompts VCE Study Guides." VCE Study Guides RSS. N.p., n.d. <a href="http://www.vcestudyguides.com/guides/context/encountering-conflict/encountering-conflict/encountering-conflict-prompts">http://www.vcestudyguides.com/guides/ context/encountering-conflict/encounteringconflict-prompts>, accessed 7 December 2013</a>
- 11 'Modern History.' The Australian Curriculum V5.1 Senior Secondary Curriculum. Acara, n.d. Web. <a href="http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/SeniorSecondary/Humanities-and-Social-Sciences/Modern-History/Curriculum/SeniorSecondary">http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/SeniorSecondary/Humanities-and-Social-Sciences/Modern-History/Curriculum/SeniorSecondary</a>, accessed 7 December 2013









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