A Monkey Baa Theatre Company Production

Diary of a Wombat

based on the book by Jackie French and Bruce Whatley
conceptualised by Eva Di Cesare, Sandra Eldridge & Tim McGarry
Monkey Baa acknowledges the traditional owners of country throughout Australia and recognises their continuing connection to land, waters and community. We pay our respect to them and their cultures; and to elders both past and present.
using this resource

designed for online use
Please consider the environment before printing this resource. It is suitable for online/interactive whiteboard use.

types of activities
There are 4 main categories of lesson experiences:
- group discussion
- make and create
- practical drama
- group project

age suitability
The production is intended for students in Foundation (Kindergarten/Prep) through to Year 4; thus the activities contained herein are best suited for K-4. This resource does not comprehensively detail adaptations to suit every age group: you can contact us for further ideas about content via email education@monkeybaa.com.au

curriculum links: content
Monkey Baa is Australia’s largest touring theatre company for young people. This production is touring to every state and territory in 2017. We have not comprehensively addressed syllabus outcomes in this resource, and invite you to contact us via the above email for further curriculum links applicable to your location.

Provided all original credits are maintained, this resource can be freely used for educational, non commercial purposes. Resource created by Monkey Baa for the 2017 tour.
Three actors sitting in a Darlinghurst coffee shop on a wet and windy April morning in 1997 seems an unlikely place for the birth of a theatre company, but that’s exactly where the seeds of Monkey Baa were first sown. During its first tour of The Bugalugs Bum Thief (adapted from the book by Tim Winton) in 1998 in a long wheelbase van, the cast lugged a heavy set into classrooms, libraries and community halls across Australia, performing to over 15,000 young people. And with that Monkey Baa Theatre Company was born.

Since then, we have been creating inspiring, award-winning theatre for young audiences. Our Creative Directors Eva Di Cesare, Sandra Eldridge and Tim McGarry have adapted over 15 classic Australian stories for the stage, with the common thread through all our work that young people’s interests are valued and respected.

We believe Australian stages should be filled with stories that represent all the extraordinary cultures living in this land, and that it’s important to create work that offers young people a truly multifaceted reflection of the world we all inhabit.

Unlike other theatre companies offering work for young audiences, we take a “whole of childhood” approach, creating plays and arts education programs for ages 3-18 and providing professional development opportunities for teachers. We strive to ensure that young people, wherever they are located and whatever their economic circumstances, have the opportunity to share in fantastic theatre experiences that reflect their own lives.

We are Australia’s widest-reaching touring company, having conducted over 25 national tours to 135 regional and remote communities across every state and territory of Australia, 3 international tours and over 2,500 performances, and engaged with 1.2 million young people.

As resident company at the custom-designed, fully accessible Lendlease Darling Quarter Theatre, we curate an annual season of theatre for young people in school holidays and term time, presenting Monkey Baa plays and work from other Australian and international companies.
Jackie French AM is an Australian author, historian, ecologist and honourary wombat (part time), 2014-2015 Australian Children’s Laureate and 2015 Senior Australian of the Year.

Jackie was born in Sydney, grew up on the outskirts of Brisbane, and is still not dead. She has lived for more than 40 years at the top of the gorge in the Araluen Valley, where her ancestors lived too. Only one school she attended burned down. This was not her fault. Some of Jackie’s books have sold millions of copies and won over 60 awards in Australia and internationally. Others were eaten by the wombats.

Instead of hobbies she has written over 200 books; built a house and power system; planted thousands of trees; harvests about 800 of them; lunches with friends; reads to her grandkids; tries to find her glasses; eats dark chocolates, what ever fruit is in season and the odd feral species. (Some are very odd). She coined the term ‘moral omnivore’ to describe her diet. There is a dispensation for dark chocolate.

Jackie has studied over 400 wombats, and been the (almost) obedient slave to a dozen of them. She is an enthusiastic cook, married to an enthusiastic eater. If you visit, do not bring cake. It is the duty of a guest to eat. Lots. Then eat some more. If you are worried about calories hike up the mountain and look for endangered species. But you will find more on a bush mooch than a bush walk. Watch out for the eight species of snake. Don’t worry. They’ll also be watching out for you.

Jackie is also dyslexic and patron of literacy programmes across Australia with a wide and deep - if accidental- experience in learning differences and methods, and their outcomes for students, as well as a passionate advocate for equal educational opportunity. She still can’t spell.
Bruce jumped into the unknown world of picture books after a career in advertising as an Illustrator and art director working in London then Sydney. Since 1992 Bruce has written and/or illustrated over 80 children’s picture books. Though based in Australia his work is published internationally and in 2014 was included in the Bologna Children’s Book Fair Exhibition.

His award winning titles include *The Ugliest Dog in the World, Looking for Crabs, Detective Donut and the Wild Goose Chase, Diary of a Wombat, The Little Refugee, Flood, Fire, And the Band Played Waltzing Matilda* and *Cyclone*.

His main inspiration has been his family, who feature in several of his earlier picture books, his wife Rosie Smith being co-author on many of his projects. He uses a variety of illustration medium including gouache, pen and ink, pencil, oils, watercolour and more recently CGI software. His aim is to entertain and surprise the reader with illustration styles that vary considerably depending on the text and the age group of his audience.

Bruce completed his PhD, in 2008 *Left Hand Right Hand*: implications of ambidextrous image making looking at the image making of the non-dominant hand discovering that in most people the ability to draw lies in using the ‘other’ hand. He has since illustrated 3 books with his non-dominant left hand.

Bruce is continually looking for new innovative ways to make images to tell his visual narratives.
line drawing - perfect for colouring in!
Created especially for Monkey Baa by Bruce Whatley
Join the dots and reveal what has gone to sleep!

Created especially for Monkey Baa by Bruce Whatley
There are 4 performers on the stage (not including puppets): There are 3 actors in the show, and one cellist. The performers are Michael Cullen, Shondelle Pratt and Julia Ohannessian. The ‘cellist is called Mary Rapp. You can read more about them at www.monkeybaa.com.au. Mothball appears on stage as a puppet. The Mothball puppet you will see on stage is large, and it is worthwhile informing students the puppet wombat is larger than a real life wombat.

The wombat’s ‘voice’ is a ‘cello:
Mothball’s character is represented by a puppet, but her ‘voice’ is characterised by a musical instrument called a ‘cello. You will also hear the actor operating the puppet make sounds with her voice such as grunting or breathing, and the actor is wearing a microphone to amplify these sounds.

There is barely any spoken dialogue:
The book is written as a diary, which is not usually a spoken form of text. It is also a diary as if written by Mothball the wombat - and wombats cannot speak (as far as we know...) So in the production, instead of giving the wombat the ability to speak like a human, the ‘cello music becomes Mothball’s ‘voice’, and the human characters speak. They do not say very much though! So, much of the text, emotion, atmosphere and story are created by music, and other theatrical elements.

There are some surprises in the set design:
Students can spot some of the surprising and interesting things that the set can do, and some surprising things that happen with the puppets! There are moving elements to the set, such as parts that revolve to show a change of place. Perspective and scale are also manipulated through use of puppetry and through the set design. It’s useful to discuss how time passing and changes in setting can be created on stage through changing costume, lighting, sound, set configuration and/or music.
## about the show
### cast & creatives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Name</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Director</td>
<td>Eva Di Cesare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puppetry &amp; Movement Director</td>
<td>Alice Osborne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Set &amp; Costume Designer</td>
<td>Imogen Ross</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Composer</td>
<td>Oonagh Sherrard</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lighting Designer</td>
<td>Matt Cox</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sound Designer</td>
<td>Kingsley Reeve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puppet Design &amp; Construction</td>
<td>Bryony Anderson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concept Team</td>
<td>Sandra Eldridge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concept Team</td>
<td>Tim McGarry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concept Team</td>
<td>Eva Di Cesare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage Manager</td>
<td>Kelly Ukena</td>
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<tr>
<td>Technical Manager</td>
<td>Russell Stewart</td>
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<tr>
<td>Performer</td>
<td>Michael Cullen</td>
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<tr>
<td>Performer</td>
<td>Julia Ohannessian</td>
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<tr>
<td>Performer</td>
<td>Shondelle Pratt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Cellist</td>
<td>Mary Rapp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate Sound Designer</td>
<td>Katelyn Shaw</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production Manager</td>
<td>Greg Davis</td>
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Check out Monkey Baa's [website](#) for full biographies of the creative team.
about the show

who does what in the theatre? draw a line between the job title and matching description

- actor: makes the final decisions about what you see on stage: the ‘boss’ of the show
- composer: writes the original music for the show
- director: conceives the ideas for all the set, costumes and props for the show and supervises their construction
- puppet maker: manages all the technical elements on stage and backstage
- stage manager: performs the show on the stage
- sound designer: selects sound effects and manages all the levels (volume) of all the sounds you hear on stage
- set & costume designer: makes the final decisions about what you see on stage: the ‘boss’ of the show
- lighting designer: decides what colours and types of lights shine on the stage
- puppetry and movement director: designs and constructs the puppets and repairs puppets if necessary
- decides what colours and types of lights shine on the stage
- shapes the movement of the actors and puppets on stage to help tell the story
Monkey Baa’s Creative Director Eva Di Cesare (who is also directing *Diary of a Wombat*) brought set & costume designer Imogen Ross to Cringila Public School, near Wollongong in NSW, for a series of workshops. The ideas generated fed into the creative development of the show itself.

Monkey Baa runs schools engagement programs, giving students and artists a chance to share ideas and collaborate creatively. These workshops centred on designing and making a wombat, and designing and making a home for the wombat. The sessions reflect Imogen’s professional practices as a designer.

time required
phases 1 and 3 are the longest. We spent almost a full day on phases 1&2, and almost a full day on phase 3.

curriculum & content links
sustainability; literacy; the arts; picture books; visual arts; ICT capability; creative thinking.

resources needed
various art and craft materials are needed, as outlined at the start of each activity.

age suitability
Foundation to Year 4 (Foundation will need adaptation to content).

Thank you Cringila Public for having us for our school engagement workshops!
colour palette
The set & costume designer collaborates to create the physical world of the play - the set, costumes, and props. One of the tools available to the designer is colour. *Diary of a Wombat* has a distinct colour palette, and the design reflects this palette on the stage. Designer Imogen Ross worked with the book's colour palette in mind as she chose the colours appearing on stage, in both the set and the costumes.

arrange colours to create a colour mixing chart showing the results of mixing two (or more) colours together
Examine the book and collate a list of colours appearing in the illustrations. Distribute brown plasticine, and have students choose the other colours they would like to incorporate in their model.

Once their model is complete, students use crayons/pastels and draw their wombat onto paper, representing the colours and textures in their model on the page.

Mix small amounts of other colours with brown and model the wombat. Add goggly eyes or beads for eyes. Use forks/toothpicks/chopsticks to add texture to the wombat and imitate wombat fur.

Share and display wombats and drawings. You can also try swapping wombats around and drawing other students’ models.
phase 2: add day of the week photograph the wombat outdoors

equipment: your wombat models; outdoor space; gardens and areas with a range of textures and materials is ideal; scrabble letters or similar to spell days of the week; a photo taking device

1. Place the wombat models outside. Place the letters spelling the days of the week into frame, students assisting each other with correct spelling. Take a photograph.

2. Change environments and day of the week, and take another picture. Incorporate natural and man made elements.

3. You can capture moments from the book in your photographs (such as the wombat with carrots, above). Students might like to photograph other wombats from the class. Reflect, share and display results.
Assign small groups of perhaps 3 or 4 students. Each group needs to choose just 1 wombat model to work with. Each group also needs to choose a page from the book they are going to replicate.

Use paper, plasticine, craft materials, fabric - any materials you have available - to build the 3D version of the page from the book. This reflects how the designer builds a to-scale model of the set called a model box.

Share and display results and creations. The class can read and respond to the models.
Monkey Baa's Eva Di Cesare brought Puppetry and Movement Director Alice Osborne to Fort St Public School, Sydney, for a series of workshops. These fed into the creative development of the show itself.

These workshops centred on designing and making a wombat puppet, and then bringing this puppet to life in self-devised scenes. The sessions also gave students an insight into Alice and Eva's professional practices.

time required
we spent about 2 hours on each session.

curriculum & content links
sustainability; literacy; reading picture books; visual arts; play building and making drama; puppetry; creative thinking.

resources needed
various art and craft materials are needed, as outlined at the start of each activity.

age suitability
Foundation to Year 4 (you may need to pre-make the entire paper puppet for very young students and just have them add ears, eyes and nose).
Premake the ‘frame’ which - the basis of the puppet. It should look a little like a shoe with no sole. The shape and durability of the head is important. You will need enough frames to have one per group of four students.

Fill the wombat’s head and body, using masking tape to hold the wombat together.

Now the students form the wombat’s limbs and affix them to the sides of the frame. Make sure they are securely held in place with masking tape.

Fold and shape extra pieces of paper into wombat ears and tape in place. The final step is to cut eyes and nose from Gaffa tape and add to the wombat.
puppet workshops

creating action depicting pages from the book, starring the paper wombats, focusing on bringing the puppets to life and giving them character. How does the puppet ‘breathe’? How does it walk, and run? How do the puppeteers make it as life-like as possible?

Ensure the scenes have a beginning, middle and end. Set a time limit of 3 minutes for each scene. Allocate roles, such as puppeteer, narrator etc. Present these scenes to the rest of the class.

Answers to Mothball the puppet questions on page 19: 1 = the real wombat’s paw; 2 = puppet’s paw; 3 = puppet’s nose; 4 = puppet’s fur; 5 = puppet’s ear.
One of these pictures shows part of a REAL wombat. Which picture is it?

Guess which parts of puppet Mothball are pictured in the photos.

Answers on page 18
Monkey Baa's Eva Di Cesare brought Composer Oonagh Sherrard to St Mary's Public School, Sydney, for a series of workshops. These fed into the creative development of the show itself.

These workshops centred on creating music, responding to music, and making drama accompanied by a musical soundtrack. Students had the opportunity to hear Oonagh play some of the actual music from the original score for the show.

**time required**
we spent between 60 and 90 minutes per session across 4 sessions to cover the content, but you would only need around 2 sessions of that length to cover the content we have included in this resource.

**curriculum & content links**
literacy; elements of music; responding to music; aural skills; recording music; play building and making drama.

**resources needed**
various percussion instruments; CD player; recordings of music as per list on page 28.

**age suitability**
Foundation to Year 4.

Thank you St Marys Public for having us for our school engagement workshops!
the ‘cello

How do you ‘voice’ a wombat on stage?
From day one, Monkey Baa Director, Eva Di Cesare knew that Mothball’s ‘voice’ would be portrayed by a cello. So, the violoncello, or ‘cello, is a crucial part of Monkey Baa’s production of *Diary of a Wombat*. The tone and range of the ‘cello is a wonderful fit for the wombat character.

The ‘cello is a stringed instrument. It is lower than both the violin and the viola, but higher than the double bass. The ‘cello has four strings. Sound is made by playing the strings using a bow, or by finger plucking the strings.

Composer Oonagh Sherrard is a ‘cellist. She wrote the music, but the ‘cellist you will see performing on stage is called Mary Rapp.

Oonagh Sherrard with her ‘cello, with the St Mary’s students.
music workshops

playing with percussion

equipment: a range of percussion instruments for example shaker eggs, tapping sticks, wrist bells, maracas etc; whiteboard; the book; writing materials

1. Show the students the percussion instruments. Discuss the instruments and their sounds. Draw connections between the instruments and sounds from daily life. What do the instruments sound like? Keep groups of the same or similar instruments seated together in ‘sections’ or sound families.

2. Task the students with creating a soundscape for a reading of *Diary of a Wombat*. Have them choose key moments that require sound effects, and have them match these moments to percussion sound effects. Write down when to make sounds and when it fits in with the text.

3. Match the timing of sounds to the narration. Communicate with gestures when the sounds should stop and start etc. Rehearse and prepare the sounds, while a student (or teacher) reads the book aloud, acting as the narrator.

4. Take turns being the conductor. Perhaps you can even create a written record of your class composition by devising a written code for the music. Work towards performing the whole text, with sound effects, without stopping.
Play recorded music (or live, if you can!).
There’re suggestions for music on page 28.
Ask the students to respond to the music as if
they are Mothball the wombat. Use movement
only to depict the wombat. Add vocal sound
effects, but no words.

Carrying on from this, the students are going
to work in small groups to create performance
pieces based on the book and accompanied by
the recorded music. Ensure the scenes have a
beginning, middle and end. The students are
still not using spoken words.

Allocate one page of the book to each student
to read aloud. Have them stop at every single
punctuation mark. Each time there is a punctu-
tation mark, play the music (from step 1) and
have the other students move as wombats.

Give the students time to rehearse their
scenes in small groups, then share their
scenes while the music plays as
accompaniment. It’s interesting to watch the
scenes with no music and make comparisons.
acting without words

using movement and mime to tell a story

Movement and physical action can be powerful storytelling tools on the stage. Given there is barely any dialogue in the play *Diary of a Wombat*, trying this movement activity with the students will give them an experience of storytelling without words prior to seeing the show. To extend their imaginations further, students perform these tasks as if they are wombats.

In order to build movement that tells a story, you are going to give the students a series of tasks. A movement task is simply a physical activity that has a beginning, middle and end. You can then add emotion to the task, and that emotion should change and develop so it is not the same at the beginning as it is at the end (some great parallels for storytelling structure here as well, especially complication/resolution). Listed to the right are example tasks to assign students. Give them the simple prop indicated as well. Be sure to remind them they can use the prop as something it is not, for example a doormat can become a car seat and so on. Students should devise vignettes that have a complete scene structure, and tell a story without words. Encourage students to maintain focus and commitment throughout the scene.
lesson ideas - literacy

**focus: connecting with prior knowledge; text type - diary entries**

resources: the book *Diary of a Wombat*; whiteboard & writing implements; paper & art supplies

The lead character in this book is an animal, a wombat. What do you know about wombats?

Has anyone read the book before? Looking at the title, what do you think the book is about? What is a diary? Read the book together as a class. Ask how Mothball’s diary is organised: Mothball’s diary is arranged by the days of the week. What are some of the things you did on different days of the week?

What is the TENSE of a diary entry? Look for indicators in the book of past tense.

Work in 7 small groups and write one day of the week onto paper for each group. Work together to decorate this page. Add details of Mothball’s activities to the corresponding day of the week. Compare and contrast with students’ (human!) activities from each day of the week.

Students work towards creating ‘A Week In The Life Of...’ diaries for themselves.

**focus: vocabulary knowledge; reading texts of differing text types; aspects of writing**

resources: the book *Diary of a Wombat*; whiteboard and writing implements

**Vocabulary list:** reading the story aloud again, ask the children to raise a hand if there is a word they cannot spell or do not understand. Model and explain what a ‘good reader’ would do when they come across words they are unfamiliar with.

Create a vocabulary list for this story. Create a worksheet and complete as a class: enter what the class thinks the word means, what it actually means, and a synonym for the word.

You could also play with changing the tense of the words, listing the same word in different tenses.

Then, play the drama game **Living Sentences**, which is all about bringing language to life. Sentences are going to be constructed and mimed by students. Choose two students and have them stand in front of the class. They are going to be the ‘monkey’ and the ‘banana’ in the sentence, ‘the monkey ___ the banana’. They should mime their nouns, and the class can guess the words. Once the group has established ‘monkey’ and ‘banana’, have a third volunteer step in to mime what they think the transitive verb might be - in this sentence, perhaps ‘ate’. Then the class can put together the entire sentence, ‘the monkey ate the banana’. As the class becomes more adept, construct complex sentences and sophisticated vocabulary. Discuss how there is often more than one possibility, for the verbs and pronouns etc. Use lines of text from the book and make them into **Living Sentences**.
Play ‘who am I?’ with pictures of different native Australian animals. Include a picture of an extinct Australian animal, such as a Thylacine (Tasmanian Tiger). Discuss why this animal does not exist any more – what happened to this animal leading to its extinction? Once an animal is extinct, can it come back again?

Respond to posters: in small groups, discuss World Wildlife Fund posters (see page 28 for link). Students read and respond to the poster, and come up with one word per person in response to the poster (for example, sad, evolution, danger, action etc). Still in groups, add a gesture or pose to each word, so that now each group member has one word with an accompanying gesture. One group at a time, perform the gestures for the rest of the class (first, without saying the words). Have the class guess what the words might be. Now perform the gestures AND SAY the word simultaneously, one person at a time, thus revealing the words to the rest of the class.

Research the endangered status of wombats in Australia. Collate research into a poster that raises awareness of the endangered status of the animal. Describe the message of your poster, and how it persuades the audience. The poster needs to have a slogan or sentence that sums up the message of why/how the wombats are becoming endangered and an image that supports this message.

Watch a video about indigenous Australian conservation practices. (See page 28 for some suggested viewing). Frame the ensuing discussion in the context of the examination of why and how species become extinct, and the human role in this phenomenon.

Read some of the source material listed on page 28. Create a comprehension worksheet or quiz to answer as a class. Discuss how indigenous Australians traditionally cared for the land, and how this compares with European agricultural practices.

Make comparisons between practices to find similarities, differences and parallels between European agricultural practices, and traditional indigenous Australian agricultural practices. Identify what we can learn from the First Australians. Ask questions and inquire into conservation initiatives, and how they are affecting animals like the wombat.

Do you know the name of the traditional owners of the land your school is on? What about your house, is it on the same land as the school? Use the interactive map link on page 28 to explore language. Perhaps you can even source the Aboriginal word for wombat in the language of the traditional owners of the land you are on. See if you can find some additional language for vocabulary from the book as well, or for other native Australian fauna.
Draw up these categories onto the board, or pieces of paper on the floor:
- stage action
- design
- lighting
- sound
- dialogue

Have the students contribute their recollections according to each of the categories. (Stage action is any physical staging that occurs as part of the story telling for example someone running onto the stage). Students are cementing the ability to read a dramatic text by categorising their observations according to key vocabulary associated with theatre.

Students can create a drawing that reflects the feeling of seeing the show. They can choose colours that they feel best capture the feeling of watching the performance. Share these with the class, reading each other’s drawings and respectfully responding.

Engaging all the senses, ask the students to describe an aspect of the performance using smell, taste, or touch - a sense not immediately associated with watching a theatre show. Their responses will be interesting!

Finally, invite students to share what they found the most surprising about the show.
further resources

websites
www.monkeybaa.com.au - Monkey Baa Theatre Company website
www.jackiefrench.com - Jackie French’s site
www.brucewhatley.com - Bruce Whatley’s site
https://www.britannica.com/animal/marsupial - information about mammals and marsupials
https://awpc.org.au/the-animals/wombats/ - article addressing illegal wombat hunting in Australia
http://www.abc.net.au/indigenous/map/ - AIATSIS Map of Aboriginal tribal languages
http://www.wwf.org.uk/get-involved/schools/resources - WWF Posters and school resources

books
We referred to the 2015 publication of Diary of a Wombat for these notes, published by Angus & Robertson. The book has been translated into more than 20 languages, and there is bound to be a version in a community language to suit your school cohort.

musical works
Here are some ‘cello works that are suitable for the responding to music activities on page 24; Peggy’s Minute Rag (by Elena Kats-Chernin)
Russian Rag (Elena Kats-Chernin)
Music for Children Opus 65 (Sergei Prokofiev)
Also, bassoon music by The Bassoon Brothers
acknowledgements

The creative team, cast, technical and administration teams

Monkey Baa’s education consultant Rachel Perry PhD

The Monkey Baa Education Advisory Panel (MEAP)

All of our national presenting partners for the tour

The thousands of teachers and students who engage with monkey baa every single year.

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