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| **Context** | | |
| **C. Production Context** | **1.** | To engage with ***This Is England*** it’s appropriate to acknowledge certain details of the context within which the film was made as a part of the Channel 4 / Film Four ‘studio’ that commissioned specifically and overtly British films about British subjects.  British cinema’s national identity has long embraced a willingness to tell stories about some of the lives on the edge of the mainstream culture. ***This Is England*** embodies this sensibility. |
| **2.** | ***This Is England*** was funded by Warp Films (based in Leeds), the UK Film Council and EM Media in Nottingham (where ***This Is England*** is set) and was distributed by Film Four. Of the film, its writer-director Shane Meadows, made the following observation:  *“I’m obviously first and foremost a British filmmaker on a global scale, but when it comes to narrowing it down, I really feel like my voice is in the Midlands and outside of London. Obviously, when you’re raising money, you have to go down there and play the game. But it feels quite different. You do feel independent. In London, there must be thousands of people in the business of making films, whereas in Nottingham or Sheffield, you’re probably talking about below a hundred. So there aren’t thousands of people scrapping for the same money and for the same jobs. I went out in Nottingham the other night and there’s a really beautiful community of people who are really supportive. It’s not this back-stabbing thing, high-rent, high-cost, high-tension. Up here we are independent filmmakers…”* |
| **D. Social, Historical and Political Context** | **3.** | ***This Is England***, like many British films over the decades, has sought to document the lives of ‘ordinary’ people rather than producing what we could term ‘escapist’ movies that offer an arguably more idealised version of how people relate to each other and overcome challenges. Key to the film’s social context is the culture of the skinhead community and the range of different skinhead groups within that. Indeed, Shane Meadows referenced the social context for the film when he commented that “It’s not to do with colour so much, it’s to do with identity and belonging.” |
| **4.** | One of the significances of ***This Is England*** is that it is located in a specific, provincial, location: the Derbyshire/Nottinghamshire border, about 120 miles north of London. On the film’s context Shane Meadows wrote a piece in ***The Guardian*** newspaper, around the time of the film’s release, in which he commented on elements that contributed to the meaning of the film, noting that:  *“Nowadays when I tell people that I used to be a skinhead, they think I'm saying I used to be racist. My film shows how right-wing politics started to creep into skinhead culture in the 1980s and change people's perception of it. This was a time when there were three and a half million people unemployed and we were involved in a pointless war in the Falklands. When people are frustrated and disillusioned that's when you get extremist groups moving in and trying to exploit the situation. That's what the National Front did in the early-80s. Skinheads had always taken pride in being working class and English, so they were easy targets for the NF who said that their identities were under threat. They cultivated a real hatred of the Asian community. In the film, Combo represents the sort of charismatic leader the NF used to turn skinheads into violent street enforcers. Suddenly, all skinheads were branded the same way. But most of the real old skins who were into the music and the clothes went on to be scooter boys to separate themselves from the racism. I always wanted* ***This Is England*** *to tell the truth about skinheads.”* |

**Knowledge Organiser Film Studies Component 1 – Varieties of Film and Filmmaking Section C – British Film – *This Is England***

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| 1. **Synopsis** | Shaun (Thomas Turgoose), who lost his father in the Falklands War, earns the respect of skinheads when he stand up to their teasing. He becomes part of the gang and  enjoys hanging out with his new friends. Trouble starts with the return of Combo (Stephen Graham), a racist ex-convict. With the gang divided into two factions, Shaun sides  with Combo and, unfortunately, finds in him a father figure. | | | |
| 1. **Cast and Characters** | | | | |
| Shaun | | Thomas Turgoose | Combo | Stephen Graham |
| Woody | | Joseph Gilgun | Lol | Vicky McClure |
| Milky | | Andrew Shim | Cynth | Jo Hartley |

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| **Key Scenes** | | |
| **E. Opening Montage** | **5.** | ***This Is England*** begins with a stunningly edited (organised) opening credits montage of archival news footage from 1982/83 which dynamically creates a context for the film. Accentuating the sense of a troubled, broken down nation ***This Is England’s*** title appears superimposed over a shot of a rundown housing estate. |
| **F. Combo’s Rallying Speech** | **6.** | Critically there is a scene that’s situated in the middle of the film in which all of the dramatic and thematic threads converge as the protagonist young Shaun Field and his new, slightly older teenage friends, get called to the home of the story’s antagonist Combo. He is seeking to recruit them to his racist campaign for the National Front. He even draws a line of spit on the floor and says that those who want to join him should cross the line. It’s a scene that’s dynamically constructed but which presents an ugly kind of attitude. |
| **G. Shaun’s Transformation** | **7.** | Contrasting with the later violent scenes, is the scene in which Shaun is given a skinhead haircut: the scene is notable for the warmth of the relationships between the boy and his newfound friends. The dramatic moment of this amusingly rendered scene is when Shaun is asked if he has a Ben Sherman shirt and the gang say that he can’t go out with them without wearing a Ben Sherman shirt. Shaun looks disappointed. Suddenly he does not belong. As part of their bonding with the Shaun, the gang then gift him with a Ben Sherman shirt. A three-shot montage shows Shaun being dressed in his new shirt and with braces and fleeting though these three shots are they mark a moment of transformation for the character. |
| **H**. **Combo’s Gang Threaten the Shopkeeper** | **8.** | The film’s visual style, rooted in a realist visual tradition that’s informed by cinema verite documentary aesthetics, brings an immediacy to the action. Throughout the film there are scenes that vividly suggest the violence that underlies the community in which the story is set. There is a key scene in which Combo threatens an Asian shopkeeper that Combo and his gang have robbed. Whilst there is no bloodshed in the scene it is highly unsettling and we know from the news that incidents such as this have and do occur. A handheld camera comes in with Shaun following ahead of him as he approaches the counter. The scene unfolds in real time and uses close ups to emphasize both the fear of the shopkeeper and the intense violence of Combo. |
| I.**Other Key Scenes** | **9.** | * Shaun meeting Woody’s gang * Combo’s entrance * Combo and Lol in the car * Milky’s assault * Ending section |

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| **Specialist Study Areas** | | |
| 1. **Narrative** | **10.** | Meadows employs a ‘linear narrative’ **s**ocial realist cinema adhering to conventional narrative structures to make the story more realistic. |
| **11.** | The film can be analysed using Todorov’s theory of narrative organisation:  *A state of equilibrium is defined*  Shaun lives with his mum, his dad was killed in the Falklands war, he is unhappy, he gets bullied at school.  *Disruption to the equilibrium by some action or crisis.*  Shaun meets Woody and his skinhead gang after he is involved in a bullying incident, they befriend him and ‘initiate’ him into their gang, dressing him in skinhead ‘uniform’  *The Character(s) recognition that there has been a disruption, setting goals to resolve problem*  Shaun joins the ‘splinter’ gang around Combo and gets drawn in to the racist National Front and their activities.  *The Character(s) attempt to repair the disruption, obstacles need to be overcome to restore order.*  Shaun witnesses the violent attack on Milky and realises that Combo is a vicious racist bully  *Reinstatement to the equilibrium. Situation is resolved, a conclusion is announced.*  The new equilibrium is that Shaun rejects the racist ideology of Combo, symbolically throwing the flag into the sea. |
| 1. **Ideology** | **12.** | ***This Is England*** is encoded with messages about alienation and belonging and the divisions that appear to separate communities and nations. The film’s protagonist, the boy Shaun Field, is established as an outsider who doesn’t want to be, and the first part of the film very humorously explores how he the young protagonist, wants to belong and so joins a local skinhead gang and begins to settle into their subculture - they become father figures. The idea of belonging in the film is present not just in terms of the racial tensions but also in terms of the idea of masculinity and late in the film the connection between masculinity and physical aggression is criticized, embodied as it is in the character of Combo. |
| **13.** | ***This Is England*** expresses the theme of community and the dangers inherent in denying that, and only seeking to emphasise differences. It reminds us that we are all in this together and that there’s a real mistake being made to think that it’s anything otherwise. Each of these films expresses the idea that society does exist and that it is a complicated experience that does not benefit from simplistic distinctions between ‘them’ and ‘us’. |
| **14.** | National identity and cinema are inextricably connected around the world. Within this national cinema dynamic is to be found the question of what it might mean to ‘be British’, or, more specifically, English. It’s a question that’s the basis of a longstanding narrative that relates powerfully to our filmic identity and, more immediately, our identity as an island nation, physically and culturally (and economically) separate to the mainland of Europe. |
| **15.** | The film, then, crystallizes the concept that the personal is political and that the political is personal and this is a relationship that informs so many films. By setting the film in the context of 1983, the film communicates a particular sense of aggression and violence (physical and ideological) that centres around borders being built and transgressed. In its dazzling opening credits sequence, we see moving images of miners fighting police, anti-nuclear protesters at Greenham Common, the Prime Minister of the time Mrs. Thatcher in the Falklands (where Britain was in conflict with Argentina regarding ownership of the islands), riots in cities and finally an image of British soldiers in the Falklands covering up a dead soldier laid out on top of a tank. This is a representation of England that sits in contrast to the images typically constructed of England in heritage cinema and in comedies across the decades. |