

Teaching Reading Comprehension through Social Studies Readings

by
Martha Youngblood

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The United States, unlike any other nation, is a country of migratory people who arrived in mass over a relatively short period of time. The immigration of people from various lands has created a dynamic everchanging environment for young people to grow up in. Educating an American student for the good life mandates that these young minds be schooled in the laws, customs and ways of people worldwide. Students today live in a world which is so closely linked together by technological advances that the villages of Kenya are a split second from the living rooms of each student in New Haven.

The impetus for developing a unit for teaching reading comprehension through Social Studies readings is the result of work with middle School Special Education students who were showing adequate progress in Reading, English and Math. The youths, however, lacked knowledge of the world around them. The students could relate a few facts about the United States and the state of Connecticut, but their need for a broader awareness of the world was obvious.

These students also scored well on the word attack section of the Woodcock Reading Mastery Test; however, they fell several years behind in reading comprehension and oral reading fluency. The students also did not perceive Social Studies as a real subject. Yet, in order to function in mainstream classes, the student is required to progress in all areas of the curriculum. Thus the marriage of Reading and Social Studies also served as the thrust to wean the Special Education student to the mainstream Social Studies classes.

This topic will deal with a curriculum unit in which the growth of the United States will be traced to the immigration of people from many lands of varying races, cultures, religions and basic life styles. The study of originating countries, through extensive oral reading assignments and oral discussions, will be the central focus of the lessons. Students will be further enriched by map studies, culinary experiences, multimedia exploration, vocabulary development and other pertinent educational pursuits.

The students have both pre- and posttests to determine if Reading Comprehension is increasing. Reading fluency should be evaluated by the teacher on an intermittent basis no less than once per week. The student should also be given teacher-made quizzes to determine if the student is increasing his knowledge of Social Studies facts.

The climax of the unit will tie the readings and discussions together by an investigation of the immigration of peoples from other lands. The student will be challenged to see our nation as one of endless immigration experienced by a free society.

The student will have forty minutes of instruction daily during the course of the school year. Eighty percent of the lessons should require the students to read orally with comprehension and understanding of materials. It is important to note that each student should be given an equal amount of length to read since research has shown that often the poorer reader is denied the right to read as much as the more proficient reader; thus, the weaker student continues to progress even more slowly. Also included in every lesson should be a discussion of the vocabulary used in the readings. Often students lack even the knowledge of basic Social Studies language.

Students' interest should be kept alive through lively stories, videos that depict life in other countries and projects that bring the lessons to life. It is also important that the instructor be well read in the areas to be covered. Texts used should be on the instructional level of the students, if possible. The texts currently used is *The Man and his Community Series*, which cites the countries and continents of Germany, France, Soviet Union, United Kingdom, India, Southeast Asia, Africa and South America. In addition, the teacher can provide books which can be read and reported on by the student. If the student's reading level is too low, the instructor may provide a teacher-made cassette that the student can use to strengthen both factual knowledge and comprehension.

The instructions should also incorporate a study of current events so that students can understand why it is so important to study Social Studies with such zeal. The teacher can use television broadcasts, daily news, weekly magazines and other available sources.

A project that could be used is the assembly of a current events collage on the country being studied.

The final section of this unit will deal with the process of immigration to the United States. This section will consist of teacher-made materials which will apprise the student of pertinent facts and information concerning numbers and periods of immigration. Students will become aware of reasons for immigration as well as problems faced by the newcomers. This text will have a question and answer portion which will testify to the students' newly attained knowledge. This section will also include readings by the teacher to the class. In addition, student books will be individually assigned and reported on.

The culmination of the unit will entail a Multinational Meal and Expo, that will further exemplify the advantages gained from living in a nation of immigrants. Hopefully the class will increase its factual knowledge of world affairs while improving their basic reading comprehension and fluency.

The primary focus should be reading skills. The student needs training in order to locate the main idea and important facts in a reading selection.

The readings at this point should be short. After the passage is read the class should determine the main idea. At the conclusion of several successful attempts the students may be asked to read a passage silently. The students are then asked to write down the central theme of the passage. Again the students' work is reinforced by a class discussion of this. The students then practice finding facts that support the main ideas of the passage read. The ability to locate the main idea and important facts is central to acquisition of Social

Studies skills.

Additional reading skills that help prepare a student to encounter mastery of Social Studies skills are the ability to sequence events and establish a time line. Readers also should be aware that everything that is printed in a book, newspaper or magazine is not necessarily fact. Students should be aware that opinions that people believe to be true can't be necessarily proven; while a fact is an occurrence that can be proved. Participants again should be given selections which are both fact and opinion and determine the difference between the two. This activity may be followed by students writing their own facts and opinions.

The use of an Index, Table Of Contents, Glossary, reference books and the ability to find the materials in the library should also be addressed. However, the instructor may wish to spread these skills over the course of the year while exploring the various countries. An example of this can be found charted in the appendix which will illustrate various skills that can accommodate each unit.

Reading fluency as previously mentioned should be an ongoing process. The first area addressed would be the students' ability to attack the word. Students should be helped with words in such a manner that he does not become intimidated by correction. It may also be necessary to address the speed and intonation at which the student reads.

An element of surprise is necessary so that students following the oral reading are encouraged to fully participate. A reward system that rewards both group and individual efforts may be advised.

In focusing on silent reading comprehension, students' skills can be strengthened through workbook activities. However, workbooks should be used as class lessons with a maximum amount of teacher involvement. Self contained Special Education students have great difficulty working independently, thus making this type of walk through imperative. This type of exposure to numerous exercises with close supervision may improve the success rate of students with future exercises.

The students may be asked to complete worksheets as the year progresses. The worksheets may be sent home to accompany a unit to read silently. The length of such a sheet should be kept at a maximum of ten questions and should be basic factual material that can be easily found in the passage. The next day these questions will be answered as the students read the passage orally. In addition to this the students will also study vocabulary on a daily basis. Terms that are included may describe land and water forms, types of government and religious terms, and many others. The use of the textbook glossary may be of great benefit. Thus, as the student becomes more successful he will attempt outlining, writing reports and giving oral reports. The instructor should constantly remind himself that these tasks may be difficult for the hesitant reader and that reports may be written as a class with a group recorder before individual attempts are made.

In starting any Social Studies unit, the student should have a basic overview of Globe and Map skills. The following represent a few aids which may be included in the unit.

The globe is the best representation of the earth. The globe shows the closest approximation of size, shape and location of land and water on the earth. However, a globe has its shortcomings, such as the ability to show closeup areas of single countries and difficulty of transportation due to terrains thus, the development of maps occurred.

Flat maps often distort the size and shape, as well as the location of land and water; however, they are very useful. There are various types of flat maps being used.

The Mercator map is the oldest type of map and has been used for over 300 years. An example follows. Sailors used this map to navigate their way across the oceans. This map makes the polar regions of the earth

seem much larger than lands around the equator. Maps that improve on the Mercator map are the polar map, the Mollweide map and a broken projection map.

The polar map is often used in aerial navigation because the shortest and most direct routes can be located. The polar map, however, distorts the outer sections of the map.

The Mollweide map is shaped like an egg and land and water areas have the correct size. The land shapes, however, are distorted. This distortion is corrected by the use of a broken projection map.

After a study of the various types of maps the student may be asked to identify the different types of maps as well as list the good and bad points of each.

Another area that should be covered before starting the study of individual countries and continents, would be a discussion of the land forms and water forms that will be found in other lessons.

The student should be aware that there are seven continents: Asia, Africa, North America, South America, Antarctica, Europe and Australia. The student should be able to identify each continent by its shape. The instructor may stress this point by having the student cut out each continent and reposition each in its proper place on another map.

The student should know that the continents have been divided into countries that are created by governments and separated from one another by boundaries.

There are other land forms to study: 1) An island, land that is surrounded by water on all sides; 2) A peninsula, a body of land with three sides surrounded by water; 3) An isthmus, a narrow strip of land connecting two larger forms. Examples may be given of these, such as the Isthmus of Panama, Iceland, an island, and Florida, a peninsula.

The largest water forms are oceans. There are four oceans: the Pacific, the Atlantic, the Indian and the Arctic. The other large bodies of water that are connected to the oceans are seas, gulfs and bays. A strait is a narrow body of water connecting two larger bodies of water; such as the Strait of Gibraltar, which connects the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea.

A canal is a manmade body of water that connects two larger bodies of water; such as the Panama Canal, which connects the Caribbean Sea and the Pacific Ocean.

A body of water completely surrounded by water is a lake. The student should be aware of rivers and tributaries and their endless flow to the oceans.

After identifying the land and water forms a lesson on directions may be prudent. This will comprise a discussion of the earth's axis and cardinal directions: north, south, east and west. Then a discussion of hemispheres will follow. The student will see that the earth can be divided into regions of the Northern and Southern Hemispheres, which are differentiated by the imaginary line called the equator. Also, the Western and Eastern Hemispheres will be identified; with the North and South American continents making up the Western and Europe, Asia, Africa and Australia included in the Eastern.

Skill work with map keys and scales also should be introduced in the early part of the unit. The use of local maps such as the map of New Haven can be very helpful since the students are familiar with the vicinity. The introductory lessons on map studies will carry over to the lessons that will follow during the year. In studying each country, we will briefly look at land, climate, government, history, education, arts, writers, sports, cities, natural resources, farming and other topics of interest to the students. Transportation and communication will also be examined. Students will also evaluate to see if/how the needs of the people, i. e. physical, social and

spiritual, are met. This will include a discussion of reasons for shortcomings and what, if anything, is being done to rectify situations.

Since this unit will conclude with the issue of U. S. immigration, the country of England was chosen as the first to be presented. The first permanent settlers were the Englishmen who landed in Jamestown, Virginia in 1607. Although there were explorers from other lands who came much earlier, they were not seeking the spirit of selfrule which these English so dearly sought. It is this spirit that lead to mutual pledges that the rights of all colonists would be honored.

The unit on England centers on the use of a time line to organize the students' thoughts. As an introduction, the students are assisted in making a time line of their own lives. Students may use a pictorial account of their own lives as well as a written account.

The study of the British Isles will include an overview of the terrain, since they are composed of two large and several small islands. The land of the Highland zone and the Lowland zone will be compared; noting the different uses of each zone. The oceanic climate, which is the result of the North Atlantic Drift will be shown to bring a very mild temperate climate to the region. The student will discover that the land and climate have influenced the type of dress and the culture of the British. Following this brief introduction, students will chart on a time line major historical events; starting with the people of the Stone Age, who built Stonehenge and continuing through the present day and the crown prince, Charles, the Prince of Wales. Students will also compare the Magna Carta and the Bill of Rights written in 1215 and 1688 to the U. S. Constitution, which just had its 200th birthday.

The industrial revolution will be traced from its early developments to the difficulties that face the present British Labor force.

The students will then travel in their readings to the Soviet Union, the largest country in the world. There will be explorations of the 5 land regions: tundra, forest, grasslands, desert and Caucasus. Each area will be examined to see the vast differences in climate and terrain.

The climate will be noted as the primary reason that the largest percent of the population lives in the forest region. This region, which has its winters warmed by the North Atlantic Drift is the location of many important Russian cities, such as Moscow, the capital, and Leningrad.

The Soviet people will be reviewed as folk of many heritages and languages. The Slavs will be traced from their days as primitive hunters and fishermen. They were followed by the Viking domination, which united their nation to form Kievan Russia. After the Mongol invasion in 1240, the princes of Moscow will be shown to emerge as the tsars who named this region Russia. The tsars will rule Russia from 1547 until 1917, the time of the Bolshevik revolution and rise to power. The Communist party will be traced from that date until the present day.

The students will discover how the current events of today relate to history of the past. Students will be exposed to current periodicals and newspapers investigating the impact that the Soviet Union has on the world today. After reading about the way of life in the Soviet Union, the students will move on to the study of France.

France is another important country of Europe, which has played a vital role in world history. In the study of this country, the students will focus on map studies. Students will fill in the important features as they read about and explore the mild climate and beautiful sights of France. We will follow this with brief discussions and readings on the other European countries of Spain, Italy, Germany, Portugal and Belgium, as well as other nations that belong to the European community.

As we leave the study of Europe, we will move on to the land mass of Asia. This large continent is the home of six tenths of the world's population and has many different languages, customs and religions.

The inhabitants of this region have many practices that are completely foreign to many U. S. students. Because of the many tribes in Asia, several unified nations did not form until after World War II. Prior to this, these nations were controlled by Western nations that brought greater benefits to the colonial rulers than to the natives of the land. The students will investigate how crowded lands with primitive agricultural methods struggle to feed their population. In addition, investigations into religious practices that have affected the governing of these lands will be explored. These religions, most of which originated in these Eastern cultures, can be linked to many of the daily habits of the people.

The use of a current almanac may serve as a very valuable tool since many textbooks are dated with regard to the current type of government in these countries. Students may also be interested in a comparative study of literacy rates for these countries, as well as comparisons of their life expectancies to the U.S. This can also be used to teach graphs and charts, as illustrated in the appendix.

Activities will continue that illustrate the land and climate of China, Japan and other Asian countries. From here, we will move on to study the land down under.

Australia, the country that is a continent, will be another land to explore. This country has a very mild climate. Most of the inhabitants are city dwellers. The other people live in an area referred to as the outback. The natives of Australia are called Aborigines. The colonists who became city dwellers were British prisoners; and their descendants have taken pride in reminding the world of their heritage during Australia's Bicentennial celebration. Taking a look at the zoological population is also a very interesting part of the lessons; especially in a country like Australia, which has so many unique species, i.e. the koala bear, the kangaroo and the platypus.

The countries of South America lie in the Southern Hemisphere, as does Australia. Both lands have seasons which are reversed from those of the Northern Hemisphere. South American countries have varied climates and there are three land regions.

South America was also a land of foreign colonies; however they are still continuing to work for the freedoms we enjoy in the United States today. The majority of the people are very poor and the countries are underdeveloped. South America, however, is very rich in natural resources. But, foreign companies have drained the wealth from the natives. South America has a very colorful history and has the only country which served as the throne of a European nation. Brazil became the seat of the throne of the Portuguese prince, Joao, during Napoleon's conquest in Europe. In 1821, Joao returned to Portugal and left his son, Don Pedro, to rule. Don Pedro declared Brazil's independence. During this same time period, other nations were also demanding their independence, however, the early years of independence were accompanied with great unrest and many of the countries were ruled by one dictator after another. South America has many features worth investigating through readings and studies.

Africa is the last continent that is explored, before moving on to our home continent of North America. Africa is a vast plateau bordered by coastal lowlands and the Atlas Mountains. Africa is home to the largest desert, the Sahara, which stretches from the Atlantic Ocean to the Red Sea. In contrast, to this waste land with scattered oases, is the fertile Nile Valley, one of the most fertile in the world. Another important land feature is the Great Rift Valley, which is so long it can be seen from the moon.

The climate in most of Africa is warm to hot except in mountain regions due to proximity of the equator. There are areas of Africa, such as the lands of South Africa, which have a climate so pleasant that it attracted many European settlers.

The people of Africa date back to the earliest of times. The first men were hunters who roamed the continent. Eventually, men began to grow crops build houses and establish kingdoms. Africa was the home of the great Egyptian civilization, as well as the kingdoms of Ghana Mali and Songhay in western Africa. African countries also spent many years dominated by European powers; however, after World War II many Africans demanded independence.

The conclusion of this unit is a study of the immigration of the people of various nations to the United States. The colonization of the United States, at the onset, was settled by people who came to make a life, not to exploit for riches; thus, the rugged individualistic ideals became very important. It is likely that because these settlers invested so much of themselves they yearned for freedom many years prior to those of other European colonized lands.

This portion of the unit will address the struggles and the outcome of the Americanization of these immigrants. In addition to textbook information, the students will read novels at their appropriate reading level and file a simple book report. Another source of information on immigration will be excerpts from books read to the class by the teacher. To complete this study, the students will be given a short teachermade booklet which will afford the student with other viable information.

Although this unit will require a year's commitment to cover the various nations and continents mentioned, it is hoped that each student will gain important skills in both reading and social studies. The unit may also be shortened by reducing the number of lands studied or by reducing the amount of time per day on the study. However, for the selfcontained teacher the requirements of all subjects can be met in addition to this unit. The students will also come to enjoy learning about people of the world and realize that their life in the United States is very good, in comparison to the people of other nations.



LESSON PLAN 1

India and Religion

Objective The student will explore the three main religions, Buddhism, Hinduism & Islam, and the effect they have on the lives of the people.

Introduction The teacher will tell the story of the beginnings of the Hindu religion with the epic poem of Ramayana. The hero of this story is Rama, the eldest son of a great king, who along with his beautiful wife Sita and his brother Lakshmana are banished through trickery so that his step brother is crowned King. While hunting one day, Sita is kidnapped and not found for many months until a talking monkey, who is really an angel named Hanuman, tells of her whereabouts.

Ramu and his brother defeat a wicked demon king. He returns home and is crowned. He rules for many years.

Readings The student will take turns reading out loud one page apiece. The teacher should correct mispronounced words as the student makes mistakes.

Vocabulary:

epic

empire

ancient

exile

avatar

sanskrit

oastesystem

Review *The teacher will put the following questions on the board and allow 15 minutes for students to answer. Next, the teacher will go over the answers with the students.*



Review Questions:

1. S. Gautama is known as *Buddha*.
2. Buddha believed that *selfishness* caused world sorrow.
3. Most Indians today are *Hindus*.
4. Around the third century in India, emperor Asoka encouraged the spread of *Buddhism*.
There are very *few* Buddhists today in India.
5. The Taj Mahal was built by followers of the *Islamic* religion.
6. Islams are also called *Moslems*.
7. *Hindus* believe that cows are sacred and will not eat their meat.
8. Mahatma Gandhi, a great leader in India, worked hard to settle the differences between *Hindus* and *Moslems*.
9. Mohammed Ali Jinnah, the Moslem political leader, believed that the area in which more Moslems lived should be established as the separate nation of *Pakistan*.
10. The Hindus in India once believed you were born into a class or *caste* in which you were destined to remain.
11. In India, the kind of *clothing* a person wears indicates what religion he belongs to.
12. The *Sikh* religion combines the beliefs of Hindus and Moslems.
13. Short Paragraph Composition: How do you think India's history has been shaped by religion. Points to consider: 1) strengths of religions have brought art and culture to the land; 2) The differences in faiths have caused political strife; 3) In a land that is so poor, Hindus allow cows to destroy what little there is to eat.

Activity *The teacher will select students to draw a mural showing the story of Rama.*



LESSON PLAN 2

Analyzing Graphs

Objective *The student will read and answer questions demonstrating his ability to analyze graphs.*

Introduction *The students will be shown various types of graphs and the students and teacher will discuss materials presented.*

Vocabulary:

circle graph

picture graph

line graph

bar graph

Activities *After introduction and vocabulary, the student will practice reading information from each type of graph. The student will answer 4 out of 5 questions about each graph correctly.*

The student will be tested on at least 3 of the 4 types of graphs. The student will answer 4 out of 5 questions correctly.

Students will correct test and discuss materials.

(figure available in print form)

GRAPHREVIEW

Life Expectancy of men and women in Southeast Asia



Review Questions:

1. Who has the longest life expectancy in most countries, men or women?
2. In which country do the men and women have the same life expectancy?
3. Which country has the lowest life expectancy for men and women?
4. Which country has the highest life expectancy?
5. Which country has the largest gap between men and women?



LESSON PLAN 3

American Immigration

Objective *The student will investigate the forces of American immigration and the development of the nation.*

Introduction *The students will discuss their country of origin and other ethnic groups of people that they are aware of in the community.*

Activities *The student will read text and teacher made materials on immigration and the effects immigration has had upon United States history.*

The students will make up 5 to 10 questions each. These questions will be used for a Social Studies bee.

The student will choose a book on his reading level to read. The student will hand in a written report and give a short oral presentation.

(figure available in printed form)

Appendix A Maps

Mercator Map

(figure available in printed form)

Broken Projection Map

(figure available in printed form)

Appendix B Maps

Mollweide Map

(figure available in printed form)

Polar Map

(figure available in printed form)

Globe



Teacher s Annotated Bibliography

Adelson, Joseph, *The Education Digest*, Dec. 1982,  Adolescence and Learning Social Studies. 

This article deals with children s ability to perceive the abstractness of democracy. The author sees the students viewing laws as more benevolent as they age. The article stressed that children should taught  up to rather than down to. 

Daikse, Dolores, *Educational Leadership: Journal of Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development*, March 1981, Vol. 38, No. 6,  Schools Don  t Teach Comprehension. 

The author observed reading during Social Studies instruction and found that the round robin method of reading did not improve poor readers. Also, it was found that there was too much emphasis on commercially prepared materials.

Medina, Elizabeth, *Learning*, October 1986, Vol. 15, No. 3,  Enhance your Curriculum through Story-Telling. 

The author stresses that teaching through stories enhances learning and the teachers of ancient times were all storytellers.

Newmann, Fred M., *The Education Digest*, Sept. 1986,  A Look Ahead. 

This article examines the challenge of teaching Social Studies, with a trend toward more indepth topics.

Reid, Ethna R., *Educational Leadership Journal of Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development*, March 1981, Vol. 38, No. 6, ♦Comprehension Skills can be Taught.♦

Comprehension is critical to develop students as lifetime readers. Students who have difficulty reading can learn comprehension skills through listening. However, the author noted very little positive effect with the use of prequestioning.

Schall, Jane, *Instructor*, Feb. 1985, Vol. XCIV, No. 6, ♦Come with Us to China..♦

This article presents a unit on China that can be used by the teacher.

Shake, Mary and Allington, Richard, *The Education Digest*, Sept. 1986, ♦Achieving Curriculum Congruency in Remedial Reading.♦

Many remedial reading programs have lost sight of the fact that the original goal was to coordinate with the core subject areas.

Tovey, Duane, *Middle School Journal*, May 1981, Vol. XII, No. 2, ♦Thought Language and Reading in the Content Area.♦

Students can increase comprehension and understanding when the students♦ interest is tapped.



Student♦s Annotated Bibliography

Ashabranner, Brent, *The New Americans♦ Changing Patterns in U. S. Immigration*, New York, Dodd, Mead & Co., 1983.

This book discusses the immigration of people in the last few decades, especially those from Asia and Latin America, including both refugees and illegal aliens. The book also addresses U. S. immigration as a whole.

Eiseman, Alberts, *From Many Lands*, New York, Athenum, 1970.

Eiseman paints a picture of immigration in the U. S. from the early colonists onward. This is a very good historical presentation of the building of America.

Heaps, William A., *The Story of Ellis Island*, New York, Seabury Press, 1967.

This book highlights Ellis Island and the role this point of entry played in the immigration process.

Hoff, Rhonda, *America♦s Immigrants: Adventures in Eyewitness History*, New York, Henry L. Walck, Inc., 1967.

Actual letters, journals and poems give a vivid description of the immigration experience.

Pei, Mario, *Our National Heritage*, Boston, Houghton Mifflin Co., 1965.

Dr. Pei traces the development of America through immigrants. He addresses the reasons for their trip and tells of their many contributions.

Rosenberg, Maxine, *Making a New Home in America*, New York, Lothrop, Lee & Shepard Books, 1986.

An elementary book which explores the experiences of 4 young immigrant children to this country.

Shippen, Katherine B., *Passage to America*, New York, Harper & Row Publishers, 1950.

This book is a story of what the immigrants gave to this country. It explains where the early settlers lived and worked and how their ideas shaped our nation.



Suggested Student Text

Abramowitz, Louis and Abramowitz, Jack, *The United States ♦ Its People and Leaders*, New York , Globe Book Co., 1975.

Drummond, Harold D. and Hughes, James, *The Eastern Hemisphere: Our World Today*, Boston, Allyn & Bacon, Inc., 1983.

Drummond, Harold and Hughes, James, *The Western Hemisphere: Our World Today*, Boston, Allyn & Bacon, Inc., 1983.



Materials and Sample Student Activities

Areas Studied or Country

England

USSR

France

India

Southeast Asia

Africa

South America

US Immigrants

Skills Project

TimeLine

Collage

Maps

Climate Study

Bar Graphs

Water Forms

Fact vs. Opinion

Book Report

Audio Visual Example

Secret Garden

Dr. Zhivago

Joan of Arc

Ghandi

China Beach

African Queen

Evita

Fortunate Pilgrim

Special Multi-National Foods

Truffles

Russian Tea

Croissant

Curried Chicken

Rice

Yams

Corned Beef

Hot Dog

Booklets, newspaper articles and other materials are available at Yale  New Haven Teachers Institute Office at 43 Wall Street. Video information may be obtained from author at Troup Middle School.



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