



## What's in a Word: Investigating the Language of the Brown v. Board Era

Curriculum Unit 04.01.09  
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### Unit Objectives

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Students at many levels are often daunted by the demands of reading and writing in upper-level literature courses, many of their fears can be allayed once they begin to understand the scope and power of language. This unit will focus on the development of the language used surrounding racial segregation, particularly in schools. A deeper study of that language will undoubtedly lead to a more profound understanding of language as a whole, beyond the scope of politics. The unit objectives are as follows:

- Identify the key issues surrounding *Brown v. Board*
- Identify the effects of the Court's decision
- Analyze the pictures in newspaper ads and magazines in the years immediately before, during and after *Brown v. Board*
- Compare and contrast the propaganda during the different "phases" of the *Brown v. Board* Era
- Create language that fits the purpose of a given picture
- Define *nuances* and recognize shades of meaning
- Define *connotations* and recognize positive and negative forms
- Define and identify *symbol*, *propaganda* and *icon*
- Identify author's intent and purpose
- Apply analysis and identification skills to other types of literature
- Develop an awareness of the power of choice in language

## Unit Outline and Specifications

This unit serves as an introduction that will aid us in our study of literature throughout the school year. We will begin by building background to the time period and its limitations and the issues that combined to result in the *Brown v. Board* case. We will then move through the “era” of the case itself and conclude with the “fallout” of this landmark decision. The result will be an eye-opening appreciation and understanding of the craft and use of language in politics and beyond. With this in mind, we will then seek to apply our newly honed awareness of language to other forms of literature.

### Duration: 5 weeks

- Week One: Building Background, the 1930's and 40's
- Week Two: *Brown v. Board*
- Week Three: *Brown v. Board*
- Week Four: Post-Brown effects
- Week Five: Application and Closure

### Materials

- “The Colored Fountain” from *Just Plain Folks* by Lorraine Johnson Coleman
- *Eyes on the Prize*, VHS, Volume 163, Chapter 2 (available at most public libraries)
- Learning Log (see attached). It is a journal that can be created out of loose-leaf paper and the sheet that is attached. These Logs are an important part in building fluency, higher-order thinking and for simply aiding in the “digestion” of fairly heavy subject matter. The questions may be altered according to the teacher’s preference.
- Martin Luther King, Jr.’s “I Have a Dream Speech” (attached)
- Copies of *Brown v. Board of Education* and *Brown II* Court opinions (attached)
- Student assessments (attached)

## Considerations

I have tried to include information that would be most easily accessible to teachers, hence all of the websites. Even if you don't have access to a school computer, many of the images can be printed at local public libraries from their computers. Additionally, the audio segments can be pre-recorded onto a CD; some of the segments can be purchased at local bookstores or are available at public libraries. All of the links to the websites were accurate at time of publication, but just in case they don't work when you need them, simply type in key words (integration, Little Rock Nine, Brown v. Board, Jim Crow) into any search engine and you will find a wealth of ready-to-use information.

Depending on your time and students' readiness here are some other issues to consider; there is SO much information, particularly on the web, about issues of tolerance and social justice. The following can be excellent extension topics as you deal with the power of language:

- lynching and the Ku Klux Klan (these topics provide startling and provoking images; careful with these since they are quite provocative)
- use of words like "Uncle" and "Auntie" versus "Mister" or "Mrs."
- Use of words such as "boy" and "girl" for Black men and women
- Timeline of appropriate references to people of color from "nigger" to "Negro" to "Afro-American" to "Black" to "African-American" and back to the acceptable use of the word "nigger"
- Connotations of the word Black in "black mood," "black ice," "Black is beautiful!" "Black pride," "Black power."

## Week One: Building Background

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This week will be an opportunity to capture student interest and set the stage for the study of the court case. It may be most effective to spend this week saturating students with the pre-Brown era propaganda and responding to the images that they see. We will look at icons from pop culture such as Uncle Ben, Aunt Jemima, Uncle Sam, the housewife, the "mammy" and the responses that these figures elicit. These icons have clearly changed over time from the stereotypical images of the 1940's to more realistic portrayals today. Our focus will be on carefully choosing the language we use to describe these images so that we can begin to lay the foundational idea that language creates pictures to suit an author's purpose, whether that is an actual author of a written work or an "author" of images and such. We will also read "The Colored Fountain" which will send home the seriousness and humiliation of segregation, especially for children. This essay deals with a young girl's disillusionment as she first learns that a "colored water fountain" doesn't shower out rainbow-colored water.

For the magazines and newspapers that you will need for this week, check your local library. You can also look for publications such as *McCall's*, *Look*, and *Life* (check the publication date to make sure it is before the 1950's!) at the library. They have some great advertisements. See also the site for the Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia. The documentary *Ethnic Notions* by director Marion Riggs can be used in part or whole to paint a vivid picture and provide compelling images of Black stereotypes. Additional images can be found on the Internet by typing in "black caricatures" or "black Americana."

#### Specific Objectives:

- Define "symbol" and "icon"
- Investigate the connotations, symbolism, and definitions of the words "black" and "White" and "color"
- Evaluate advertisements for their suggested meaning and keywords that they elicit
- Investigate the connection between language and pictures
- Recognize that language paints pictures that suit an author's purpose
- Investigate author's intent in advertising and propaganda
- Identify specific ways that public opinion was swayed according to popularly held beliefs regarding race

#### Day One

- Read "The Colored Fountain"
- Respond in Learning Logs and share responses with small groups/whole class
- Answer following questions based on the article: What is the problem? Why is it a problem? Who is affected?
- Define "connotation"

#### Day Two

- Define "symbol" and "icon"

- Comparison of images of Uncle Sam and Uncle Ben
- Show images and give brief background (patriotic symbol and icon for a brand of rice)
- Use Learning Logs to answer following questions: Whose “uncles” are these? Why is their appearance important? Who are possible “authors” of these images?
- Central question: What words do these images elicit?
- Discussion about these questions
- Construct a T-chart or other graphic organizer to organize information from the day’s discussion

### *Day Three*

- Comparison of Aunt Jemima, “mammy” image and 40’s-50’s housewife through clippings and video clips
- Give brief background on images
- Discussion about possible “authors” for these images
- Construct/add to graphic organizer from day before

### *Day Four*

- Define/discuss “propaganda”
- Investigate findings thus far by revisiting the graphic organizer: What have we learned so far about the authors? Their purpose? Their beliefs?
- Based on what we have learned so far, what do we associate with the following words: black, white, colored, color?

### *Day Five*

- Media hunt! We will investigate pre-Brown era newspapers, ads, magazines and commercials for further evidence of the racial temperature. This independent assessment will help students

practice the concepts that we have been discovering all week. You will need copies of newspapers, magazines, etc. SEE ATTACHED SHEET!

## **Week Two: Brown v. Board of Education**

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This week will focus on the more technical aspects of the court case itself. We will look at both sides of the case and read excerpts of the Court's opinion. The goal of this week is to get the facts of the case straight and to begin to apply our knowledge of author's intent, symbol, connotation and nuance to the Opinion. We may use some actual footage from news broadcasts at the time as we go through this week to "liven" it up a bit and keep the cookies on the lower shelf. Live audio is available online at <http://www.digisys.net/users/hootie/brown/case.htm> . I have provided excerpts of the Court's opinion, but if you would like to see the whole document so you can choose your own excerpts, it is available online <http://www.nationalcenter.org/brown.html> .

Specific Objectives:

- Recognize the basis of the argument in the case
- Identify areas of possible contention in the decision through analysis of the Court's opinion
- Use the Opinion to investigate author's intent
- Evaluate the language of the Opinion
- Recognize the disparity in the segregated school systems

Day One

- Show documentary on court case; students will take notes as they watch. We'll begin this week with the documentary film *Eyes on the Prize* Volume 163, Chapter 2. This can be rented at a local video store or checked out at most public libraries.

Day Two

- Finish documentary
- Recap images and language from previous week (remember the emergence of polarized sides)

and opinions regarding racial (in)equality; construct class T-chart

- Identify the conflict in *Brown v. Board*
- Identify the sides in *Brown v. Board*
- Construct graphic organizer and student handout that organizes basic case info; SEE *UNDERSTANDING BROWN V. BOARD OF EDUCATION ATTACHMENT!*

### *Day Three*

- Begin reading court opinion (highlighted sections only) with particular emphasis on the fallacy of “separate but equal”; SEE ATTACHMENT!
- What words do these authors use to convince, persuade and coerce?
- Analyze the words : separate but equal

### *Day Four*

- Continue discussion from yesterday

### *Day Five*

- Photo journey of separate and unequal conditions in American schools. What words do these images bring to mind? The following sites provide extremely compelling images.
- <http://www.library.vcu.edu/jbc/speccoll/pec02j.html> Prince Edward County, Virginia by Dr. Edward H. Peebles
- <http://americanhistory.si.edu/brown/resources/two.html> Smithsonian Institute
- <http://www.law.arizona.edu/brownat50/gallery.html> The University of Arizona
- Respond in Learning Logs to pictures

## Week Three: Brown v. Board of Education

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During the third week, we will continue our study of the case by investigating *Brown II*. We will compare the language of the opinions of these two cases and investigate their impact. What did the authors want us to believe? to see?

To reinforce the connection between words and pictures, we will also evaluate some of the more famous pictures from the time (Linda Brown and the Little Rock Nine accompanied by armed men, the faces of other students as they watch the “integration,” etc.). We will analyze these and other images for their symbolic importance and determine what words they elicit. From these responses, we will return to a discussion of symbol, connotation, and nuance.

Students must understand that *Brown I* caused unprecedented shockwaves so *Brown II* was created in order to ameliorate its seemingly caustic effects. The juxtaposition of these two cases will help students understand how an author’s purpose (dramatic social reform as in *Brown I* or appeasement of social upheaval as in *Brown II*) affects language.

Specific Objectives:

- Compare the opinions of *Brown I* and *Brown II*
- Identify the differences in the 2 opinions and investigate the rationale
- Analyze images from the integration period for their suggested import
- Investigate the need for *Brown II* (Why was it necessary?)

Day One

- Recap from last week
- Show one integration image which will lead into the question: Why was Brown II necessary?
- Read Brown II court opinion highlighting important words and phrases

Day Two

- Finish court opinion
- Discussion about the language



### Day Three

- Comparison of Brown I and II

### Day Four

- Begin assignment: Why was Brown II Necessary? SEE ALL DELIBERATE SPEED ATTACHMENT

### Day Five

- Finish assignment: Why was Brown II Necessary?

## Week Four: The Effects

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This week will include quite a bit of students responding to literature. I have found some of the actual letters sent to the President upon hearing about the Court's decision (NPR segment from "All Things Considered"). We will listen to and read these letters which include strong opinions from both sides of this issue. This week will help us as we compare how public opinion is being stirred and changed (because of *Brown II* or other circumstances?).

### Specific Objectives:

- Recognize the change in public opinion
- Analyze public opinion for author's choices (what were they communicating and how did they do it?)
- Identify the major issues of public concern concerning integration

### Day One

- Recap from last week
- Listen to letters from NPR series  
<http://www.npr.org/rundowns/rundown.php?prgId=2&prgDate=17-May-2004> . This site is

INVALUABLE. Students should respond in their Learning Logs. If you have problems accessing this site, go to [npr.org](http://npr.org), click on "All Things Considered," then "Previous Shows." Go to May 17th, 2004, and scroll down. This feature is titled "Letters to President Eisenhower."

- Students chart major issues of public concern regarding public opinion (How do you know? What words do these authors use to give that impression?) Students should respond in Learning Logs

### *Day Two*

- Analyze images of integration; the sites below have some wonderful images for students to view
- <http://www.ark-ives.com/photo/gallery/central.php> Arkansas History Commission
- <http://www.journalism.indiana.edu/gallery/faculty/counts/integration.html> Indiana University School of Journalism
- [http://library.thinkquest.org/J0112391/little\\_rock\\_nine.html](http://library.thinkquest.org/J0112391/little_rock_nine.html)
- What words do these elicit? Who are possible authors? What do they want us to believe? Who are these images for?

### *Day Three*

- Comparison of iconographic words and images from 1st week to Little Rock Nine and other integration images
- How have things changed?
- What words characterize that change?

### *Day Four*

- Discussion of nuances, connotation and symbol
- Activity with these terms; SEE *WHAT'S IN A WORD? KEY VOCABULARY ATTACHMENT!*
- Begin Dr. King assignment if time permits (details on Day Five)

## Day Five

- Dr. King's "I Have a Dream Speech" on audio  
<http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/Ihaveadream.html> ; hard copies for each student; SEE DR. KING'S SPEECH ATTACHMENT FOR HARD COPIES!
- Students will listen to and read this speech highlighting any key words and phrases
- Students will then make a list of the top words that they highlighted and explain why they chose what they chose and its significance to racial tensions
- Discussion

## Week Five: Evaluation and Application

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In Week 5, we are ready to take our knowledge of language, images, and their connection to each other and apply it to other forms of literature. This week will include student response to literature and student writing. Reading samples will probably deal with the same theme of this unit (equality and justice) to preserve continuity. Short essays will work best for this week's work.

I have included in Day Three some sources for multicultural non-fiction. Teachers can provide a whole essay or excerpts, according to your students' needs. Also, feel free to have several options for them to choose from or limit their choices according to what they can handle. It may be especially meaningful to include literary options from the ethnic backgrounds of your students. It may require some extra work, but it's worth it!

### Specific Objectives

- Apply knowledge of language-image connection, symbol and connotation to other forms of literature
- Analyze literature for author's purpose and craft
- Design a culminating assessment project that demonstrates knowledge of choice and its effects as it relates to language

## Day One

- Recap timeline of unit: compare icons of the 30's and 40's to Dr. King
- How have connotations of certain words changed? What symbols have changed/emerged?

### *Day Two*

- Guided practice with literary analysis
- Read a short article and identify images it elicits, key connotations, symbols and nuances, and author's purpose and craft

### *Day Three*

- Culminating Assessment
- <http://www.pampetty.com/multiadolescent.html>
- <http://teachers.henrico.k12.va.us/Specialist/franceslively/younglit.html>
- <http://teenink.com/>

### *Day Four*

- Culminating Assessment

### *Day Five*

- Culminating Assessment

## **My Learning Log**

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Name \_\_\_\_\_

Class Period \_\_\_\_

## My Learning Log

1. Questions to Choose From:
2. What were you thinking as you read this?
3. Did anything in this text remind you of anything in your own life?
4. What confused or surprised you?
5. Describe how you felt as you read this. Were you bored, interested, thinking about how you might react if you were in this situation?
6. If you could talk to the author of this text, what would you ask about or comment on?
7. Did the author keep your attention?
8. If you could enter the story, at what point would you come in? Why?
9. How far did you go before wanting to finish the material?
10. What questions are still unanswered?
11. What was the author trying to share?

## Media Hunt

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Directions: As you look through a 1940's newspaper or magazine, find the 3 most compelling (It makes you think, sticks with you or seems to jump out of the page!) advertisements and complete the following.

Advertisement #1

- This ad is for \_\_\_\_\_.
- These are the words that come to mind when I look at this ad: \_\_\_\_\_
- A possible "author" for this ad could be \_\_\_\_\_ (describe him/her) because \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- If I were alive when this was first published this ad would make me think about \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Advertisement #2

- This ad is for \_\_\_\_\_.
- These are the words that come to mind when I look at this ad: \_\_\_\_\_
- A possible "author" for this ad could be \_\_\_\_\_ (describe him/her) because \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- If I were alive when this was first published this ad would make me think about \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Advertisement #3

- This ad is for \_\_\_\_\_.
- These are the words that come to mind when I look at this ad: \_\_\_\_\_
- A possible "author" for this ad could be \_\_\_\_\_ (describe him/her) because \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- If I were alive when this was first published this ad would make me think about \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Understanding Brown v. Board of Education

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Directions: Use this sheet to help organize your understanding of this case. Remember our focus is looking at the language authors use and why they make those choices. But first, let's get the facts of this case straight...

- The major conflict of *Brown v. Board of Education* deals with the issue of \_\_\_\_\_.

- These are the 2 sides in the conflict and some of their beliefs:

Side 1: Side 2:

Their Beliefs: Their Beliefs:

- As I read through the Supreme Court's opinion, these are some of the lines that strike me as and important and why.

*The Supreme Court said... That means...*

(This is a direct quote from the opinion.) (Write this in your own words!)

### **The School Desegregation Case**

Brown v. Board of Education

347 U.S. 483 (1954)

Appeal from the United States District Court for the District of Kansas

(Excerpts from the Court's opinion)

...In each of the cases, minors of the Negro race, through their legal representatives, seek the aid of the courts in obtaining admission to the public schools of their community on a nonsegregated basis. In each instance, they had been denied admission to schools attended by white children under laws requiring or permitting segregation according to race. This segregation was alleged to deprive the plaintiffs of the equal protection of the laws under the Fourteenth Amendment....

Today education is perhaps the most important function of state and local governments. Compulsory school attendance laws and the great expenditures for education both demonstrate our recognition of the importance of education to our democratic society. It is required in the performance of our most basic public responsibilities, even service in the armed forces. It is the very foundation of good citizenship. Today it is a principal instrument in awakening the child to cultural values, in preparing him for later professional training, and in helping him to adjust normally to his environment. In these days, it is doubtful that any child may reasonably be expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunity of an education. Such an opportunity, where the state has undertaken to provide it, is a right which must be made available to all on equal terms.

We come then to the question...: Does segregation of children in public schools solely on the basis of race, even though the physical facilities and other "tangible" factors may be equal, deprive the children of the minority group of equal educational opportunities? We believe that it does....

We conclude that in the field of public education the doctrine of “separate but equal” has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal...

Brown II

349 U.S. 294 (1955)

(Excerpts from the Court’s opinion)

Full implementation of [integration] may require solution of varied local school problems. School authorities have the primary responsibility for ...solving these problems....Because of their proximity to local conditions and the possible need for further hearings, the courts which originally heard these cases can best perform this judicial appraisal. Accordingly, we believe it appropriated to remand the cases to those courts. ..

The...cases are remanded to the District Courts to take such proceedings and enter such orders and decrees consistent with this opinion as are necessary and proper to admit to public schools on a racially nondiscriminatory basis with all deliberate speed the parties to these cases.

## “All Deliberate Speed...”

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Directions: We have studied the basic facts surrounding *Brown v. Board of Education* and *Brown II* . We have also been looking at how authors use language to suit their purposes. Let’s take a closer look at some of the most famous words from *Brown II* to further discover the power of language.

- The phrase “all deliberate speed” is probably the most important in the Brown II opinion. Let’s figure out what the Supreme Court meant when they wrote these words down....

### ALL DELIBERATE SPEED

Definition (*Write these in your own words!!! Remember that there are several definitions for each of these words. Write down a few for each word.*)

The definition the Supreme Court most likely meant to use...

Positive/Negative

- Doing something with “all deliberate speed” can mean doing it quickly or slowly. What one word in that phrase changes its entire meaning? \_\_\_\_\_
- In *Brown II* , which meaning do you think the Supreme Court meant when they said that desegregation in the school system should be carried out with “all deliberate speed”? DEFEND YOUR ANSWER! Use language from the Court’s opinion and your own knowledge to answer this in



at least ONE WELL-WRTTEN PARAGRAPH.

### **What's In a Word?**

Key Vocabulary

NNZJBSZBAWKJSEUNP

JWFZCZSDHGNEGGON

KHOCJYCVSLGSZAECH

CVZRMRTYHRNXUUUIW

OUFBBSJXETUMNGVHM

NYOOFLUGGJATDNLKF

NLIKYOAPPYNRPABWF

OFTKBTUDRBCSOLAJA

THAZIORENEEROHTUA

ALNOYJSQBAMDBZOIO

TKNONOITARGETNIWL

IGUDPCIMSHDACXEH

OEPROZSZCMCJPOTOA

NFUFIQDTFRVDAOUTI

OPINIONJMDOAAGRRS

CXXCWTAKPEKWNRUPT

BZWNFHXHBLBVVFLSCT

AUTHOR

BROWN

CONNOTATION

ICON

INTEGRATION

JIM CROW

LANGUAGE

NUANCE

OPINION

PROPAGANDA

PURPOSE

SEGREGATION

SUPREME COURT

SYMBOL

14 of 14 words were placed into the puzzle.

Created by Puzzlemaker at DiscoverySchool.com

(<http://puzzlemaker.school.discovery.com/>)

What's In a Word?

Key Vocabulary

Solution

N + + + + + S E + N +

+ W + + + + S + + + + E + G + O +

+ + O + + Y + + + + G + + A + C +

C + + R M + + + + R N + + U + I +

O + + B B S + + E + U + + G + + +

N + O + + + U G + + A + + N + + +

N L + + + + A P + + N + + A + + +

O + + + + T + D R + C + + L + + +

T + + + I + + E N E E R O H T U A

A + + O + J S + + A M + + + + +

T + N + N O I T A R G E T N I + +  
I + + + P + + M + + + A C + + + +  
O + + R + + + + C + + + P O + + +  
N + U + + + + + R + + + O U + +  
O P I N I O N + + + O + + + R R +  
+ + + + + + + + + + W + + + P T  
+ + + + + + + + + + + + + + + +

(Over,Down,Direction)

AUTHOR(17,9,W)

BROWN(5,5,NW)

CONNOTATION(1,4,S)

ICON(16,4,N)

INTEGRATION(15,11,W)

JIMCROW(6,10,SE)

LANGUAGE(14,8,N)

NUANCE(11,4,S)

OPINION(1,15,E)

PROPAGANDA(16,16,NW)

PURPOSE(2,15,NE)

SEGREGATION(13,1,SW)

SUPREMECOURT(6,5,SE)

SYMBOL(7,2,SW)

### **Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have A Dream"**

Teachers and students may wish to consult the text of Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech, which he gave on the occasion of the March on Washington on August 28, 1963.

## Pulling it all Together...Culminating Assessment

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Congratulations! You have just completed a study of two of the United States' most important court cases and have begun your discovery of the incredible power of language. Authors make choices with words that influence readers. As we continue to study various authors and the choices they make with language, we will become more informed observers of life around us and our own writing will become much more sophisticated. Let's use this assignment to practice our skills at analyzing the language of some very influential authors.

Directions: Choose the essay that most interests you. YOU WILL NEED TO READ IT AT LEAST 2 TIMES. BE PREPARED! To complete detailed assignments like this one, one reading is not enough to get a firm understanding of the material. When you watch a movie more than once, you see things that you missed the first time. The same concept applies to reading! After you have read your article AT LEAST 2 TIMES, complete the following.

- In a few sentences, explain what this article is primarily about:
- This is what I think the author's purpose/intent is:
- In the chart below, choose 5 words or phrases that the author uses and explain how they are important to the author's purposes.

Words/Phrases I chose... How it's important to the author's purpose...

ANSWER THE FOLLOWING IN AT LEAST 1 WELL-WRITTEN PARAGRAPH EACH!

- What does this author want from you as the reader? How do you know?
- What should you consider (think about, be aware of) BEFORE you start writing (Remember our discussions about purpose, nuance, connotation, etc. Why are these things important?)?

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