Marion Brady, Howard Brady

# **1: Introduction to Cultures**

# Introduction

This course is about you. It's also about your best friend, your parents, your teacher and someone your age who lives on the other side of the earth. This course is about people.

People are complicated—probably the most complicated things on earth. You must live with them, so the more you know about them, the better off you'll be.

People aren't all alike. Obvious differences—ways of dressing, or the kinds of food we eat—aren't important. Instead, differences in the ways people act and think really matter. You need to understand these differences to make sense of what goes on around you and around the world.

For the rest of your life, you and everyone else will face some really big problems. To come up with good solutions to those problems, you need to make sense of the different ways people act and think—their cultures.



# Beginning: Thinking about Thinking

Many people, maybe most, think you were born with a brain like blank writing paper. As you grew up, parents and others educated you by "writing" facts, advice, and other information on your brain. (The authors disagree with this theory.)

Eventually, you came to school where people assumed that this writing-on-brain process would continue, in a more-organized way, helped along by textbooks and teachers.

Your job at school has probably been rather simple mostly a matter of "writing" secondhand information in your memory and then "reading it back" on demand. It's a game called "recalling," with frequent "playoffs" or tests to see who has stored and can retrieve the most information.

If that's how it's been for you, it may take a little while for you to get used to *Investigating World Cultures: A Systems Approach.* "Recalling" isn't going to be the main game.



## Investigation: Mental Puzzles

You've been solving complicated mental puzzles all your life. That's what you're doing when you try to find the home of a new friend, fix a flashlight that isn't working, or deal with parents when they're upset at something you've done. In fact, just to get through an ordinary day, you have to solve complicated problems almost non-stop.

Here's a mental puzzle:

On the next page are photographs of two houses. Working in small groups of three to five people, study the photos and answer these questions: (NOTE: Record answers in your journal.)

(a) How are they alike?

(b) How are they different?

(c) Where would you go to find houses most like one or the other of these two types?

(d) How might the differences in the houses affect the actions and relationships of people living in the houses? (For example, which has the "friendlier" front door?)



## **Investigation: Thought Processes**

When you worked on answers to the questions about the two houses, you used four different common thought processes: (1) *comparing* (How are they alike?), (2) *contrasting* (How are they different?), (3) *recalling* or *remembering* (Where would you go...?), and (4) *hypothesizing* (How might the differences affect...?). These are names for four ways your mind processes information.

Other examples:

If you look out the window while talking on the phone, and you describe in words what you see, you're using a mental process called *translating*—converting information from one form to another.

If you find a link between where people in your town live and the kind of pets they have, you're *correlating*, or finding relationships.

If you decide what to do on Saturday based on what's important to you, you're *valuing*.

You use other thinking (or *cognitive*) processes besides these seven. Here's a long list that we like to use:

Recalling, applying, inferring, hypothesizing, generalizing, categorizing, relating, comparing, contrasting, correlating, describing, abstracting, extrapolating, predicting, sequencing, integrating, synthesizing, interpreting, translating, empathizing, valuing, envisioning, imagining, intuiting

Sometimes it's difficult to figure out what those processes are because they often overlap, or because an activity may require more than one kind of thinking.

With your group, discuss the following activities. What thought processes might each require? Identify or describe each process. (A one-word label for each thinking process isn't necessary.) Note: Many, perhaps most activities like these use more than one cognitive process.

- 1. Draw a map of the area where you live.
- 2. Discuss which is better: cool clothes, or a smartphone?
- 3. In the area where you live, from what direction do winds usually blow when storms approach?
- 4. Many different kinds of vehicles are used to transport people. Make a list of them (bus, ...).
- 5. Based on your experience, describe the different ways people react to bad news.

## Investigation: Thinking In School

What kinds of thought processes are most frequently required of you in school?

1: Working together, make a list of six or seven quiz or test questions—any school subject, any grade level. (For example: "Columbus discovered America in the year \_\_\_\_\_.")

2: When your list is complete, analyze each question to identify the thought process or processes needed to answer it.

3: Compare and contrast the thought processes used for typical school quizzes and tests with those used for the "two houses" investigation.

4: Discuss, then make a list: If a game had been played by one set of rules for many, many years, then somebody abruptly changed the rules, how might players react?

5: If what you do in Investigating World Cultures: A Systems Approach differs from most of the school work you've done, how might you react? Write a generalization.

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In Charles Dickens' novel Hard Times, written in 1854, Dickens has the local schoolmaster, Mr. Gradgrind, say:

"Now what I want is facts. Teach the boys and girls nothing but Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else. You can only form the minds of reasoning animals upon Facts; nothing else will ever be of service to them...In this life, we want nothing but Facts, sir, nothing but Facts!"

Would Gradgrind approve of the sample test questions you wrote? Why or why not? Do you think schoolwork has changed much since 1854?

What you'll be doing in *Investigating World Cultures* will be far less like what Mr. Gradgrind had in mind, and far more like the activity above in which you studied differences in two houses. Instead of using your head mostly as a place to store facts and other information to be recalled to pass a quiz or test, you'll be solving puzzles—the same kind of puzzles you routinely solve every day. The aim won't be to stuff your head with more and more information, but to improve your puzzle-solving ability.

## Investigation: Target Area

Making sense of "right here, right now"—your immediate experience—will be your most important project for the rest of your life. For a strange reason, that task is hard: it's so familiar you tend to ignore it. This is what's meant by the old saying, "a fish would be the last to discover water."



To help you, we want you to focus on a "Target Area" for continuing investigation.



If you're in a school, your Target Area is the school itself and the property it sits on. This will be your "laboratory."

If you're not part of a regular school, choose a familiar area—your place of worship, your immediate neighborhood, or a similar accessible area. (Make sure your area has 50 or more people in it at least some of the time, to make it complex enough to be interesting.)

- 1: Begin a list of major features within the Target Area's boundaries, Listing everything is impossible, of course, but you should be able to identify many important categories of things—organisms, structures, materials, resources, tools, etc.
- 2: Precision requires numbers and measurement to answer questions such as: How much? How many? How far? How big? Where, exactly? Begin your investigation by collecting precise data. For example:

What's the shape of the property? How long is each side? What's the area?

Where are the building(s)? What's their shape and size? How much of the total area do they occupy?

How many people are usually in the various spaces at various times? Males? Females?

How many groups? How big is each group?

3: The questions in 1 and 2 are only a start; you'll need to ask and answer many more to get a really accurate picture of immediate reality. To record this information, make drawings, graphs, lists, tables, etc. (If you do this right, it'll take a lot of time. Be patient and thorough.)

Make your Target Area record easy to find later on. You'll be adding to it, using information from other investigations.

# Looking Ahead

In this course, you'll be investigating cultures of (1) Other people in other places, past and present, and (2) Your own life and that of people around you—right here, right now.



# Investigating Patterns

Long before you started school, you learned to talk using complex sentences. How is it that you were able to do that? Not because someone had deliberately set out to teach you, but because you'd discovered the sentence-making formulas for your native language—the "master patterns" for putting together words to make sentences. You were then able to use these patterns to build absolutely original sentences by the thousands.

It's the **discovery of patterns** that gives us understanding and makes it possible for us to function in human society. Pattern awareness tells us what to do—how to act at a crowded drinking fountain, which spoon to pick up at a formal dinner, what to do when entering a classroom, and where to point a telescope to see a particular star at a particular time. As the days and years pass, you discover, one by one, thousands of such patterns—patterns of personality traits, patterns of wave action, patterns of historical change, patterns of growth.

Tides				
Today	High	Low	High	Low
Ponce de Leon Inlet	9:21 a.m.	3:13 a.m.	9:28 p.m.	3:47 p.m
Cape Canaveral	8:34 a.m.	2:12 a.m.	8:41 p.m.	2:46 p.m
Patrick AFB	8:36 a.m.	2:18 a.m.	8:43 p.m.	2:52 p.m
Melbourne Beach	8:47 a.m.	2:30 a.m.	8:54 p.m.	3:04 p.m
Sebastian Inlet	8:52 a.m.	2:32 a.m.	8:59 p.m.	3:06 p.m
Vero Beach	8:44 a.m.	2:19 a.m.	8:51 p.m.	2:53 p.m





## Investigation: Bedouin Greeting Patterns

Bedouins are nomadic, desert-dwelling Arabs in the Middle East. Their numbers are decreasing, but a few still follow tradition and live in camps. Anthropologist F. S. Vidal lived among the *Mutair* tribe of Bedouins in Saudi Arabia, and described a stranger's arrival at an encampment.<sup>1</sup>

- 1: Nearly everything described below is a pattern. Read the account carefully and list (in your journal) the three or more patterns you consider most important.
- 2: In your journal, explain why you think the patterns you've chosen are likely to be important to the Bedouins.

In the Bedouin camp, one of the children saw a stranger approaching on a camel. The men and children stood in front of the tents to watch him arrive. The women and older girls hurried away into the women's section.

All of them saw that the stranger was a Bedouin by his clothing. He wore a red checkered headcloth held by a rope around it, a long white shirt, and a dark brown cloak. Also, they knew that he must be an eastern Arab by the way he rode sitting high on the center of the camel's hump and not back over the rump as southerners do.

The stranger approached slowly from the open side of the tents, which among the Mutair always faces south. He did not approach in a straight line, but in a zig-zag fashion, first showing one side, then the other, coming closer all the time.



(Continued)

http://www.bedouinadventures.com/about-us-1/our-bedouin-tribe

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Marion Brady and Howard Brady, *Idea and Action in World Cultures*, Englewood Cliffs, N.J, 1977, Prentice Hall, pp 17-18. Material supplied by F. S. Vidal. © Marion Brady & Howard Brady

When he was within calling distance, he was greeted:

"The peace be upon you." ("Assalamu alaikum" in Arabic)

"And upon you the peace." ("Wa alaikum assalaam")

"God willing you did not get tired."

"It was not in vain." (meaning "I may be tired, but it was worth it now that I can enjoy your company.")

"Please come and rest. Make yourself at home."

"May God be praised."

"What is the news?"

"The news, by God's will, is good."

The greetings continued for some time, even after the stranger sat down with the men. Meanwhile, the boys got the coffee-making process underway. This was a small camp, and all the men were already assembled by the time the stranger dismounted. If the men had been scattered, the pounding of the coffee beans in a brass mortar (making it ring loudly) would have announced to all that a special occasion was being celebrated.

The coffee was served in tiny cups offered and accepted with the right hand. The guest was served first, followed by all the others. At these ceremonies, at least three rounds of coffee are always served. After three or more rounds, the guest will wiggle his empty cup to indicate that he wishes no more.



https://engagingcultures.com/adventure-tours/jordan-ecotour/

## Investigation: Greeting Patterns Here and Now

Patterns for meeting, greeting and conversation differ around the world. In Latin America, the handshake is thought of as an impersonal greeting or farewell. It is considered cold or unfriendly for two men to shake hands if they are good friends. A somewhat more friendly gesture is the left hand placed on another

man's shoulder during a handshake. An intimate and warm greeting is the *doble abrazo*, in which two men embrace by placing their arms around each other's shoulders. During conversations, a Latin American man will frequently hold the other person's arm with his hand. When Latin American men talk to each other, they often stand about 8 to 12 inches apart, measured nose to nose. To stand farther away from each other while talking seems cold and unfriendly to them.<sup>1</sup>



Photo: http://psicologosperu.blogspot.com/2010/07/tipos-de-abrazos.html

- 1: Find a location where people frequently meet and greet, and where you can overhear what they're saying. Observe, noting how greetings usually begin, how much talking each person does, their body language, tones of voice, how long most greetings take, and how greetings end. (Be careful not to offend or invade the privacy of those whom you observe.)
- 2: Write a description of greeting patterns you observed. Make sure your descriptions are very detailed, similar to the description of Bedouin greetings above.
- 3: How do patterns differ (a) between strangers becoming acquainted, and (b) between friends? Describe how greeting patterns between two friends are affected by the amount of time since they last met.
- 4. Describe what might happen during a conversation between an American and a Latin American who don't understand each other's conversation patterns. (You may wish to act this out to understand it better.)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Adapted from Edward T. Hall and William Foote Whyte, "Intercultural Communication: A Guide for Men of Action" (*Human Organization*, Vol., 19, No. 1, 1960, pp. 5-12), available at

 $http://spirituality and culture.com/uploads/Intercultural\_Communication\_by\_Hall.pdf.$ 

#### Investigation: Problems with Cultural Patterns

An American Peace Corps volunteer assigned to work in Southeast Asia told this story:

Not long after I arrived in the village, I thought of a way to save the women both time and hard work. All the fresh water used in the village came from a spring about a half-mile up the side of the mountain. Twice each day groups of village women gathered in the center of the village, carrying their clay pots. After all of them arrived, they climbed up the mountain and fill the pots with water. Then they carefully carried them back down the narrow, stony path to the village.

So, I collected bamboo poles, which I turned into pipe by knocking out the partitions between joints, and joined them end-to-end. I laid the pipe so it passed each home, and added valves whittled out of wood. I ran the bamboo pipes up the mountain and into the spring.

The fresh-water system worked just as it was supposed to work. The only trouble was, the women kept right on climbing the mountain together and carrying water down in their clay pots.

I followed the women up the mountain and watched their activities, and it finally dawned on me what I'd done wrong. So I went back and changed my water system so it emptied into a large barrel outside the village. Then it was a success.

# In your journal, explain the relationship between patterns and this volunteer's failure and success.

Differences in cultural patterns between people often lead to difficulties such as the Peace Corps volunteer experienced. For example, one of the authors was in India few years ago, helping sell some communications equipment. He found that one pattern of some Indian people, when listening to another person, is to rotate his or her head slowly back and forth, first a bit to the left, then a bit to the right. This means "I am hearing what you are saying."

*Explain why this might be a problem for an American talking to an Indian.* (You might find it helpful to act out this situation.)

## Investigation: Pattern Importance

When most of the people in a group share many important cultural patterns, they form a **society**. Most of the people who live in the United States share important patterns of action, so these people are part of "American Society."

The members of a society may share many different patterns of action, but not all are equally important. For example, the fact that most female members of a

society wear earrings is not as important as the fact that most people leave their parents and set up separate homes when they become adults.

Generally, a pattern is important if (1) the pattern affects, in some way, almost everyone within the society; (2) adults model the pattern to the young and expect them to follow it;, and (3) those who don't follow the pattern are considered "odd," or are the object of irritation, anger, or legal action.

Here's a list of patterns followed by at least some people in American society. Work with your team, and use the three characteristics of an important pattern to decide which of these would be considered important. Record your results in your journal:

- 1. Attending school during childhood and teenage years
- 2. Playing team sports
- 3. Being tattooed
- 4. Having the same last name as your father
- 5. Raising family food in a garden
- 6. Being able, some day, to choose your own husband or wife
- 7. Being personally clean
- 8. Voting in a national election
- 9. Using powered vehicles for transportation
- 10. Men opening doors for women.

# Investigation: Patterns in the Target Area

Within the boundaries of the Target Area, there are thousands, maybe hundreds of thousands of patterns patterns in the structure and organization of buildings, patterns in local weather, in plant and animal life, in the ways people act, in the use of time, and so on. Some are trivial, many are important.



- 1: Identify and list as many patterns as you can.
- 2: From the patterns you've listed, choose two that you think are important, describe them in detail, and tell why they're important.

Note: You'll investigate cultural patterns in greater depth in a later unit.

# For Teacher/Mentor—Overview:

The rationale for *Investigating World Cultures*, and general procedures recommended for the course are described in the "Overview for Teachers and Mentors." <u>http://www.marionbrady.com/Cultures/ooTeacher-MentorOverview.pdf</u>.

In terms of page count, this opening unit is, deliberately, short. Too often our learners feel overwhelmed by a huge textbook at the beginning of the course. The unspoken reaction is likely to be, "You mean I got to learn all that stuff?"

However, this opening unit, (done with care) is certain to require a significant block of class time, especially for the preliminary target area survey.

Note that this unit is virtually identical to that used in our course *Introduction to Systems*. We've assumed learners have not participated in that course, and this course introduces the same sort of social systems analysis.

#### **Investigation: Mental Puzzles**

The transition from conventional narrative textbook-based learning to active learning may be difficult for some students—particularly the ones that coped with passive learning effectively. We've heard students ask, "Why don't you just tell us what you want us to know?" Learners resist these investigative activities primarily because they are unlike the "read and recall game" they've come to expect to play in school.

Mindy Nathan, principal of an alternative school in Bloomfield, Michigan, wrote to us:

"...My kids LIKE and PREFER the surface requests of conventional test questions that don't demand thought. It's like a relief to them. Crossing the barrier – the chasm that exists in their preference for ease and rote response, and the deeper, meatier, cognitive processes – is a gigantic challenge...I am dealing with kids at the end of their frustration level, who have never experienced (or haven't recognized?) true joy in learning."

The activities point out to students that they constantly engage in "higher order" thought processes, and that doing so isn't more difficult than memory work, just different, and far more useful.

For poorly-motivated learners, the emphasis on "here and now" application of that which is being learned has been helpful with other course material we've developed, and we believe it's an essential part of this course.

The "comparing houses" investigation introduces, subtly, a major idea that will be developed more thoroughly later: Important relationships between habitat or setting and human behavior.

#### **Investigation: Thought Processes**

This involves the next level of abstraction—thinking about different kinds of thinking, which may be difficult for learners working individually. Working in small groups or teams should meet with considerably greater success. If necessary, consider posing additional situations that are easier to classify:

What's the name of the (principal, librarian, mayor, etc): (*Recalling*)

Arrange these ten books in alphabetical order by the author's last name. *(Sequencing, classifying)* 

Which of these (books, etc.) is bigger? (Comparing)

Describe today's sky appearance in words. (Translating)

What are the differences between these two scissors? (Contrasting)

Identify the verbs in the following sentences. (Applying criteria)

Here's a weight tied on the end of a string. If I let it hang, and start it swinging back and forth, then leave it alone, what happens? Why? *(Analysis, hypothesizing)* 

How could you solve the problem of homelessness in our town? (*This one could involve many processes.*)

And finally:

If a team is assigned a major problem to solve, which thought process is most important? (*Of course, they're all important.*)

Note that learner responses may differ from those we've suggested, and not be incorrect. Differences in opinion about abstractions such as these are likely.

#### Investigation: Thinking in School

This activity should help solidify the idea that the expected kinds of activity within *Investigating World Cultures* may differ significantly from other courses they've had.

#### **Investigation:** Target Area

This is a major activity—a foundation for much that follows. Its relationship to the study of culture may not be immediately apparent, but it's a necessary step to study of the "here and now" aspects of cultures that come later. An understanding of a group's *Setting* is an important element of cultural analysis, and is dealt with in depth later in the course, but begins here.

Properly done, even this first target area investigation can have huge educational impact. Kids will be learning active-mode investigation, measurement procedures, the importance of accuracy, and an attitude that whenever possible they should gather firsthand information for themselves, rather than trust secondhand information. We suggest you read the description of one master teacher that had a group of alternative-school learners focus on this task: <a href="http://www.marionbrady.com/documents/DrWilliamWebb-Testimonial.pdf">http://www.marionbrady.com/documents/DrWilliamWebb-Testimonial.pdf</a>

For materials you'll need 50- or 100-foot measuring tapes (or go metric with 10 or 25 meter tapes). Other materials or tools may also be needed—large protractors, 11 x 17 inch (or A2) or larger paper, some kind of level, etc.

You may choose to limit the area to be measured and mapped to something less than the entire school campus, particularly if the area is complex, as Dr. Webb did with his class. Or, alternatively, if the campus is complex, different work groups may be assigned different areas to measure and plot.

Some ingenuity may be needed if the target area space involves corners at angles other than 90 degrees, as in the example cited by Dr. Webb. Let the kids figure it out themselves.

We believe learner autonomy is essential to making this and other investigations effective, so teachers or mentors should refrain from jumping in with answers or opinions as much as possible. One essential message that should be communicated to learners is that mistakes are a necessary part of real learning, and making mistakes is OK, no big deal, no real block to classroom success. Multiple teams working on this will almost certainly end up with different results, at least slightly, and discussion of the differences should be part of the process.

We've counseled patience for the learners. Teachers and mentors must be patient as well. This activity will likely take several days, but they're well spent. The deskwork portion—creating the plan view of the target area and formatting the associated data—could be spread out over some time, with work on this activity interspersed with the investigations that follow.

# Patterns

## **Investigation: Bedouin Greeting Patterns**

We've not included geographic data for the Bedouins—the first of the contrasting societies that learners investigate. Some geographic data is embedded in the data piece. A detailed understanding of the location isn't really necessary for the investigation (beyond "Middle Eastern desert"), but may be included if the teacher or mentor feels it would be helpful. (We tend to be biased against loading learners with useless, soon-forgotten information.) Bedouin tribes, as a general ethnic classification, occupied regions with adequate water and grazing for their desert-adapted animals in many parts of the Middle East and North Africa.

The website https://sites.google.com/site/sauditribes/family-profiles/mutair has a map and background information on the Mutair tribe (apparently posted by a Christian group).

The problem learners may have with this data piece would be in generalizing beyond the specifics of the described patterns. A major generalization based on the stranger's approach patterns is, "act in ways to ensure a peaceful reception." The coffee ceremony complex of patterns are set up to "establish and maintain friendly relationships." If the greeting customs are followed precisely, the stranger and the men of the camp will develop a feeling for each other's personality and character—the significant reason for every greeting ceremony in every society.

One important pattern may not be noticed by learners—the repetition of "God willing" (*Inshallah* in Arabic) in the conversation. *Inshallah* is probably the most important Arabic word used when humans interact. Only God knows the future, and everything that happens, in the Muslim view, is under God's control. This is particularly true when planning or discussing anything having to do with the future, an uncomfortable topic for Arabs:

"Not only are fairly precise time schedules not part of Arab life but the mere mention of a deadline to many Arabs is a little like waving a red flag in front of a bull. Emphasis on a deadline has the emotional effect of backing the other person into a corner and threatening you with a club would have on you."

The source article for this quote (see footnote), by two prominent experts on human behavior, ought to be required reading for all of us. It provides a rationale for *Investigating World Cultures*.

#### Investigation: Greeting Patterns Here and Now

We agree with Alfie Kohn<sup>2</sup> that homework, by and large, has little or no effect on achievement and often has negative effects that far outweigh any potential benefits.

However, a kid that comes home and says, "My teacher says that for homework I have to go to the mall<sup>3</sup> on Saturday" is unlikely to view the experience negatively.

Some discussion of observation procedures should be done in advance. Stress one major caution—**sensitivity for to the privacy of those being observed**. Learners observing people in public places must make their observations seem casual and unremarkable; note-taking (or making discreet long-distance cellphone photos or videos) should be done in ways that won't be noticed by those being observed.

#### Investigation: Problems with Cultural Patterns/Investigation: Pattern Importance

These two investigations simply expand learners' understanding of the concept of cultural pattern, and are in-class activities.

#### Investigation: Patterns in the Target Area

There may be a tendency, at this point, for learners to look only for human behavioral patterns. Although this is our primary focus, other non-human

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup>Edward T. Hall and William Foote Whyte, "Intercultural Communication: A Guide for Men of Action" (*Human Organization*, Vol., 19, No. 1, 1960, pp. 5-12), available at

 $http://spirituality and culture.com/uploads/Intercultural\_Communication\_by\_Hall.pdf\ ,\ p.5$ 

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> See <u>http://www.alfiekohn.org/article/rethinking-homework/</u>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Or the closest airport reception area for incoming flights, for example.

patterns (e.g. room arrangement, location of safety equipment, patterns of heating or airflow, time patterns of bells, etc.) should also be noted, because ultimately they affect human patterns.

#### Some additional pattern questions:

What patterns do students follow while waiting to enter a closed door? What patterns are followed while eating lunch? What behavior patterns are associated with good news (e.g. unexpected free time)? Bad news (e.g. an unexpected test)? What greeting patterns are followed at various times and places in the target area? What patterns are associated with various levels of noise generated by students? Which patterns differ between males and females? Who runs the school? What do they do? Who makes which decisions? Should they or somebody else be making those decisions? Why? Who makes the formal rules? Who enforces the rules? What happens if some people think a rule is unfair?

The exercise of sorting patterns by importance, from the previous investigation, may be applied here as well.

Photo credits, Page 1:

https://ncfy.acf.hhs.gov/media-center/slideshows/five-groups-teens-who-need-pregnancy-prevention-more-some-might-think

https://asiancorrespondent.com/2007/07/young-people-of-asia/

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