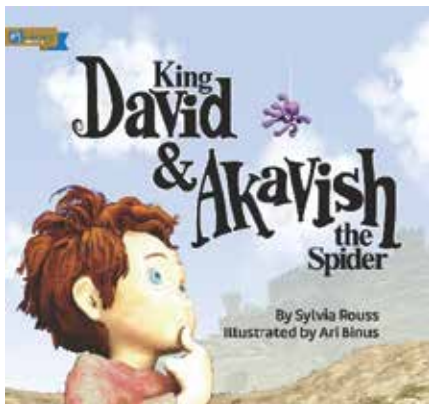




Global Day of Jewish Learning

Curriculum — Under the Same Sky: “The Earth is Full of Your Creations”



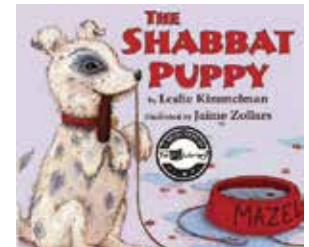
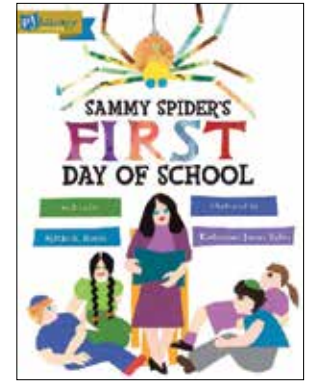
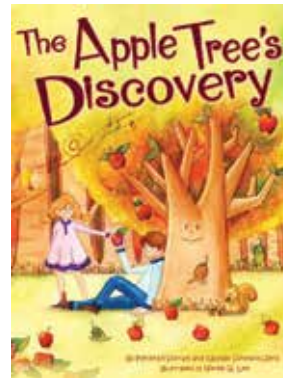
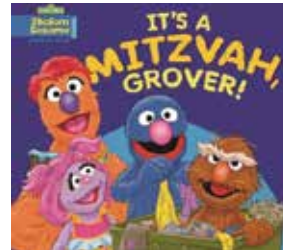
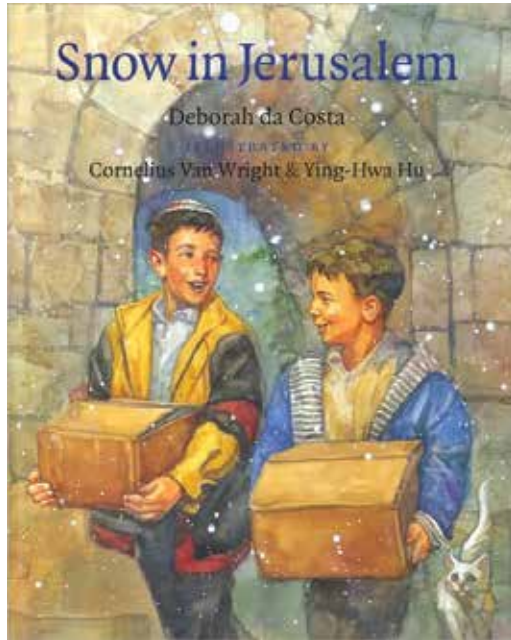
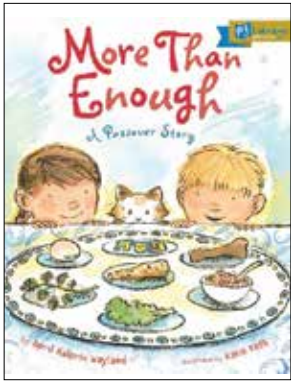
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Teaching it to our children means also making them partners in what is so very important.

— Rabbi Steinsaltz



PJ Library Curriculum

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT IDEAS FOR LEARNING ABOUT OUR WORLD AND NATURE

Introduction

A key to successful family engagement programming is focusing on a relevant theme and choosing age-appropriate books and activities to best highlight the values that parents want to pass on to their children.

The following curriculum outline provides guidance for creating family programming based around three child-friendly nature themes:

- Do Not Destroy (*Bal Tashchit*): The Importance of Conserving and Protecting Nature
- Kindness to Animals (*Tza'ar Ba'alei Chayim*)
- Appreciating the Wonders of Nature (*Le'He'arich et Pelei HaTeva*)

We invite you to select a theme, choose a book, craft meaningful discussion prompts, and mix and match activities to create a family program for all those living "under the same sky."



Do Not Destroy (*Bal Tashchit*): The Importance of Conserving and Protecting Nature

Introduction

Long before the concept of “going green” came into vogue, Judaism instructed its followers to do everything they could to protect and conserve the environment. The Jewish value of *Bal Tashchit* (an Aramaic term meaning “do not destroy”) is first mentioned in the book of Deuteronomy (20:19), where God prepares the people for war by instructing them to avoid destroying any fruit-bearing trees they may encounter in battle. The principle of *Bal Tashchit* is based on the premise that the earth was given to humans as a gift, and our primary responsibility is to safeguard the earth from all types of destruction. No sooner was Adam, the first person, created, than God instructed him to “work and guard” the earth (Genesis 2:15). Elaborating on what it means to guard the earth, the Rabbis explain that not only should people view and treat everything in the world as precious, but we must be careful not to damage any part of the world: Whatever is destroyed “cannot be replaced” (Midrash Rabbah, Kohelet 7:13). According to Jewish tradition, people should view themselves as partners with God in creation, striving to maintain and enhance the beauty of the world throughout every generation.

Jewish Text Sources

Genesis 2:15 — “And the LORD God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to work and to guard it.”

Midrash Rabbah, Kohelet 7:13 — “At the time that God created Adam the first [human], He took him and toured him amongst all the trees of the Garden of Eden. He said, ‘See My works, how pleasant and fine they are! And all that I have created, I have created for you. Set your mind not to ruin and destroy My world, for if you ruin it, there is none who can repair it after you.’”

Psalm 115:16 — “The heavens are the LORD’s heavens, but the earth God has given to the children of Adam.”

Midrash —

“When the world was created,
God made everything a little bit incomplete.
Rather than making bread grow out of the earth,
God made wheat grow so that we might bake it into bread.
Rather than making the earth of bricks,
God made it of clay
So that we might bake the clay into bricks.
Why?
So that we might become partners
In completing the work of creation.”

Deuteronomy 20:19-20 — “When you besiege a city a long time, in making war against it to take it, you shall not destroy the trees thereof by wielding an axe against them; for you may eat of them, but you shall not cut them down.”

Sefer Ha Chinukh, Commandment #529 — “This is the way of the pious and people of action...not destroying even a grain of mustard in this world...if possible they will prevent any destruction they can...”

Kiddushin 32a — “Whoever breaks vessels, or tears garments, or destroys a building, or clogs a well, or does away with food in a destructive manner violates the negative mitzvah of *bal tashchit* (do not waste or destroy).”

Do Not Destroy (Bal Tashchit): The Importance of Conserving and Protecting Nature

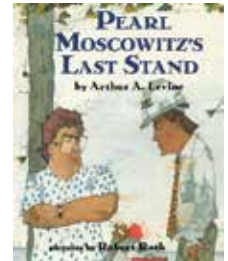
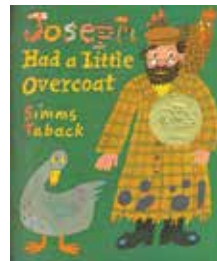
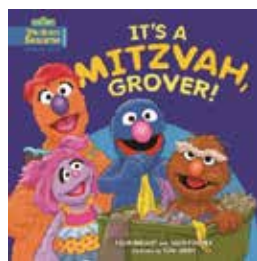
Bal Tashchit Takeaways for Parents and Children

- In order to practice “not wasting” we must continually consider how things can be reused, repurposed, and recycled.
- We must be careful not to “use up” or deplete any of the natural resources (water, gas, wood, etc.) that we find in the world.
- Our focus should be on beautifying the world, leaving it in an even more beautiful state than we found it.

Bal Tashchit Lessons from Child Development

- Children love enforcing rules, such as “don’t waste water” (while brushing teeth or washing hands), or “use both sides of the paper when drawing.” Following rules provides children with a sense of predictability, security and mastery.
- Children learn from observing and imitating the actions of others. When parents and adults model care and respect for the environment, children will incorporate these behaviors into their own daily activities.
- The most effective type of environmental education for young children involves allowing children to enjoy nature under the guidance and with the companionship of caring adults. (*Sierra Club*, 1999, “What Can I Teach My Young Child About the Environment?”). Children who learn to enjoy and love the environment when they are young will become stewards/caregivers of the environment when they grow older. It is important not to teach children in a didactic manner about the responsibility to care for the earth. Studying about the loss of rainforests and endangered species may be age-appropriate for middle school children, but is developmentally inappropriate for pre-school and elementary school students (Cohen & Horn-Wingerg 1993, Coffey 2001, Kellert 2002, Sobel 1996, Wilson 1997).

Suggested PJ Library Books (BT = baby/toddler; PK = pre-K; EE = early elementary)



26 Big Things Small Hands Can Do (BT) — Using soft illustrations and a simple text, this lovely picture book depicts numerous ways in which young children can help care for the environment.

It's A Mitzvah, Grover (PK) — When a storm damages a local park, Grover and his friends work together to clean the park and repair the destruction.

Joseph Had a Little Overcoat (BT) — An innovative tailor creatively refashions and recycles his fraying coat, educating readers on the value of recycling, while shedding light on the additional Jewish values of storytelling and community.

My Grandfather's Coat (EE) — While building a new life for himself in America, a grandfather continually transforms and repurposes his beloved coat. As the grandfather's coat slowly changes, so too does his family. Through his loving interactions with his daughter, granddaughter and great grandson, the grandfather conveys important lessons about Jewish continuity, recycling, and the passing of traditions and stories from one generation to the next.

Do Not Destroy (Bal Tashchit): The Importance of Conserving and Protecting Nature

Pearl Moscowitz's Last Stand (EE) — When Pearl learns that city workers intend to cut down a beloved tree in her neighborhood, she cleverly thwarts their plans. Not only does Pearl teach her city and her neighbors some important lessons in the values of conservation and diversity, but she provides guidance on how to remain true to one's principles and beliefs.

Discussion Questions for Children and Families

1. What do you recycle in your house?
2. What does recycling mean? What happens to the items in recycling bins?
3. Why is recycling important?
4. How can we help take care of oceans, rivers, forests and trees? Why is it important to care for nature?
5. What types of destruction and misuse of the environment have you seen?
6. What can we do to make sure that people take good care of the earth?
7. How can we reduce (cut back on) the amount of water or electricity that we use at home?
8. What else can your family do to protect the earth from harm or damage?

Suggested Activities



- Plant a garden in your community — invite families to plant and work in the garden.
- Participate in a gleaning project: Help to pick and gather what remains in the fields of a local farm (ensuring that no piece of food is wasted).
- Make crafts using recycled materials; make treasures from trash.
- Invite families to participate in a park, playground, beach, or neighborhood cleanup.
- Decorate cloth grocery bags.
- Make cloth bags from old T-shirts.
- Make conservation reminder signs, such as “Last one out shut the lights” and “Hush while you brush” (Turn off the water while you brush your teeth). Make them with recycled materials.
- Hold a repair fair where families can repair old books, old toys, old furniture, etc.
- Organize a toy or clothing swap where families can exchange used toys or clothes with one another.
- Contact an organization that will provide a truck/crate for collecting families' old electronic devices and computers.
- Foster concern for the environment by helping children spend time playing outdoors, where they can explore and fall in love with the environment. For example, hold a family nature hike or scavenger hunt at a local pond, forest, beach, stream, etc.
- Make paper with older kids (ages 7 and up), thereby increasing their understanding of recycling.



Introduction

According to Jewish law, all animals are to be treated with kindness and sensitivity. While the literal translation of “*tzaar ba'alei hayim*” is “the suffering of living beings”, this Jewish value refers to doing all that we can to **prevent** animals from experiencing hardship, pain, or suffering. Today’s rabbis continue to consider and make thoughtful rulings about how animals are to be treated. The Torah notes that although humans are allowed to use animals for food and work, animals may not be worked excessively, nor may they be denied food as they work (Deuteronomy 22:10). When animals are to be killed for eating, they must be slaughtered in the quickest and most humane way possible. There are also numerous obligations that animal owners must fulfill. For example: animals are to be fed first, before their owners sit down to eat; animals must be allowed to rest on *Shabbat* (Exodus 20:8); and one may not purchase an animal without having enough food and supplies to care for it.

Jewish Text Sources

Babylonian Talmud *Shabbat* 151b — “When a person has compassion on God’s creatures, compassion is shown him or her from Heaven. But when a person has no compassion on God’s creatures, no compassion is shown him or her from heaven.”

Leviticus 22:28 — “No animal from the herd or from the flock shall be slaughtered on the same day with its young.”

Deuteronomy 22:10 — “You shall not plow with an ox and an ass together.”

Deuteronomy 25:4 — “You shall not muzzle an ox while it is threshing.”

Genesis Rabbah 10:7 — “Even those things that you may hold superfluous in the world, such as fleas, gnats, and flies, even they are part of the creation of the world.”

Pirkei Avot 4:3 — “Do not be scornful of any person, and do not be disdainful of any thing, for you have no person without his or her hour, and you have no thing without its place.”

Jerusalem Talmud *Yevamot* 15:3, 14d — “A person may not purchase an animal, tame or wild, or a fowl, unless he or she has prepared feed for it.”

Tza'ar Ba'alei Chayim Takeaways for Parents and Children

- Animals are very important to people and nature. Every animal contains inherent worth and fulfills some vital role and purpose.
- Animals must be treated with great care.
- Through caring for animals we can learn empathy and how to treat others with kindness and sensitivity.

Tza'ar Ba'alei Chayim Lessons from Child Development

- ▶ Children as young as 11 months are more interested in live animals than toys.
- ▶ Children talk more about animals and ask more questions about animals than about toys.
- ▶ Young children feel a natural kinship with, and are inherently drawn to animals, especially baby animals (Rosen 2004, Sobel 1996).
- ▶ Studies of the dreams of children younger than age 6 reveal that as many as 80% of their dreams are about animals (Acuff 1997, Patterson 2000).

Suggested PJ Library Books: (BT = baby/toddler; PK = pre-K; EE = early elementary)



***How to Heal a Broken Wing* (PK)** — A young boy and his family find an injured bird and nurse it back to health, demonstrating practical ways in which even the youngest of children can care for an ailing animal.

***Sammy Spider's First Day of School* (PK)** — When Sammy the Spider visits Josh's preschool, Sammy inadvertently teaches the children some important lessons in how to care for animals.

***A Sick Day for Amos McGee* (PK)** — Zookeeper Amos McGee lovingly cares for the animals at the zoo, making certain that each one's individual needs are being met. When Amos falls ill, the animals take care of Amos with the same love and consideration that he has showered upon them.

***The Chameleon that Saved Noah's Ark* (EE)** — This innovative story of Noah's ark portrays the compassionate way in which Noah and his family cared for the animals, and emphasizes the fact that every animal has a unique role to play in the complex web of life.

***King David and Akavish the Spider* (EE)** — A lowly spider, a creature whom a young King David initially believes is unimportant, manages to save the king from great harm, thereby conveying the message that every animal is important and must be treated with care.

***A Hen for Izzy Pippik* (EE)** — When young Shaina finds a lost chicken, she is determined to care for it until its owner returns to town to reclaim it. Despite the protests of her friends and neighbors, Shaina steadfastly protects the chicken and its many subsequent offspring. In the end, Shaina and her entire town are rewarded for Shaina's unflinching commitment to care for the chickens.

Snow in Jerusalem (K, EE) — Set in Jerusalem, this poignant story shows how the simple act of caring for a cat can lead to the development of empathy, friendship, and concern for the needs of others.

Discussion Questions for Children and Families

1. How, on an everyday basis, can we be kind to animals? In what ways can a person be kind to animals even if she doesn't own any pets herself?
2. How do human parents take care of their young children? How can we help animals in similar ways?
3. Do any of you have pets? How does your pet help you?
4. Can you think of any other animals that help people? How about cows, or chickens, or horses — in what ways might they help people?
5. Are all animals important? What about bees, spiders, or bats?

Suggested Activities



- With families working together, make bird feeders or bird baths.
- Prepare items that can be donated to animal shelters, such as:
 - Cat hiding boxes
 - Dog chew-toys
 - Dog biscuits and goodies
 - Food bowls (decorate them)
 - Other animal stimulation toys
- Go on a scavenger hunt at the zoo, or on a farm, or at the beach:
 - Take photos of all the animals that you see
 - Search for and take pictures of specific animals (a brown animal, an animal with a tail, an animal that flies)
 - For each animal that you see, make a list of why that animal is important or ways that people can help that animal, or create a list of items that a specific animal needs in order to be happy
- Hold a carnival or fundraising event where the money raised will be used to “adopt” an animal in a zoo or support an organization that provides families in developing countries with needed animals. Visit a zoo or an aquarium. If possible, observe the animals at feeding time, or obtain permission for families to help prepare the food.
- Go to a museum that focuses on animals.
- Visit an animal shelter. Arrange for families to walk dogs or play with the animals.
- Take a hike in the woods. Keep track of animals that are seen; practice walking or moving like various animals; search for animal tracks.
- Go for a walk in the woods, on the beach, or in the park. Have families pick up and throw away all types of items that could harm animals (plastic rings, plastic bags, etc.).

Introduction

Jewish philosophers and theologians believe that the beauty of nature can help individuals connect with their spiritual side. Abraham Joshua Heschel, a renowned 20th century Jewish thinker, believed that our goal as Jews should be to live life in “A state of awe and radical amazement,” waking up each morning and looking at the world in a way that takes nothing for granted. The Hebrew word for “gratitude” (*hoda'ah*) shares a similar root to the Hebrew word for being Jewish (*yehudi*). The similarities in these two words allude to the fact that those who practice Judaism should strive to train their eyes to see the beauty of nature and to express gratitude for all the wonders they observe. To heighten appreciation for nature, Judaism has created numerous blessings, psalms, and songs of gratitude that can be recited every time one notices a natural wonder.

Jewish Text Sources

Rabbi Nachman of Breslov — “Every blade of grass sings poetry to God...How good and lovely it is then when one is able to hear this song of the grasses.”

Babylonian Talmud *Shabbat 77b* — Rab Judah said in Rab’s name: “Of all that the Holy One, blessed be He, created in God’s world, God did not create a single thing without purpose. [Thus] God created the snail as a remedy for a scab; the fly as an antidote to the hornet[’s sting]; the mosquito [crushed] for a serpent[’s bite]; a serpent as a remedy for an eruption, and a [crushed] spider as a remedy for a scorpion[’s bite].”

Rabbi Lawrence Kushner, *Honey From The Rock* — “To be a Jew means to wake up and to keep your eyes open to the many beautiful, mysterious, and holy things that happen all around us every day.”

Psalm 19:2 — “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the expanse of the sky tells of God’s handiwork.”

Daily *Shemoneh Esreh* prayer — “We acknowledge You, declare Your praise, and thank You...for Your miracles that greet us every day, and for Your wonders and good things that are with us every hour.”

Babylonian Talmud *Berakhot 54a* — “On five impressive landscapes our Sages determined one recites the blessing: ‘*Baruch Atah Adonoi, Eloheinu Melech ha’olam, oseh ma’aseh bereshit*’ (Blessed are You, Lord, Our God, King of the Universe, Who reenacts the work of creation). The five are: seas, rivers, mountains, hills, and deserts.”

Le'He'arich et Pelei HaTeva Takeaways for Parents and Children

- The world is full of beauty.
- Part of our responsibility as Jews involves taking time to see the beauty and wonder in nature and expressing appreciation for all that we see.
- To increase appreciation for nature, Judaism offers words of blessing and praise that can be recited upon spying one of nature’s many wonders.

Le'He'arich et Pelei HaTeva Lessons from Child Development

- Nature helps children develop powers of observation and creativity and instills a sense of peace and being at one with the world (Crain 2001).
- When children play in natural environments, their play becomes more creative and imaginative; they become more collaborative and cooperative with their peers; their language becomes richer and more descriptive (Faber Taylor et al. 1998, Fjortoft 2000, Moore & Wong 1997).
- Exposure to natural environments improves children's cognitive development by improving their awareness, reasoning and observational skills (Pyle 2002).
- Children require many opportunities to explore their environment in a natural way and slowly develop a loving relationship with the earth.
- Young children often develop an emotional attachment to what is familiar and comfortable to them. If they are to develop a sense of connectedness with the natural world, they need frequent positive experiences with the outdoors. Providing opportunities for such experiences and sharing them with young children is the essence of environmental education. Environmental education for the early years focuses primarily on young children exploring and enjoying the world of nature under the guidance and with the companionship of caring adults. (*Sierra Club*, 1999, "What Can I Teach My Young Child About the Environment?").

Suggested PJ Library Books: (BT = baby/toddler; PK = pre-K; EE = early elementary)



Good Night, Laila Tov (BT) — While enjoying an outing to the beach, followed by an overnight camping trip, a family finds ways to pause and acknowledge the many wonders they encounter.

The Apple Tree's Discovery (PK) — A young apple tree has difficulty seeing and appreciating the beauty of nature and the changing of seasons because it is preoccupied with a desire to grow stars on its branches. In the end, the tree discovers that there is a star within each of us, and that every living being possesses its own unique inner beauty.

More Than Enough (PK) — A family prepares for Passover, while rejoicing in the wonders of fresh fruits, rain, and the acquisition of a new kitten. The family uses the Hebrew word “*Dayenu*” each time they encounter an amazing new wonder in nature and/or within their family.

The Shabbat Puppy (PK) — Every *Shabbat*, a young boy and his grandfather spend time walking outdoors, observing and reflecting on the beauty of nature. Can the boy's young, rambunctious puppy join the grandfather-grandson outings without disturbing the peacefulness of these special *Shabbat* walks?

Appreciating the Wonders of Nature (LeHe'arich et Pelei HaTeva)

Picture a Tree (K) — A beautiful book on how to observe and appreciate trees by looking at them through a variety of lenses and perspectives.

New Month, New Moon (EE) — Set in Israel, this book follows the nighttime adventure of a family that journeys to the desert in order to view and learn about the spectacular birth of the new moon and the start of a new Hebrew month.

Discussion Questions for Children and Families

1. Can you describe one of the most beautiful or unusual things you have ever seen outdoors in nature?
2. What do you need to do in order to find beautiful and amazing things in nature?
3. What can we say or do when we find something unusual in nature?
4. Why is it important to spend time outdoors noticing some of the wonders of nature?

Suggested Activities

- ▶ Play “Gratitude Freeze Dance,” using *Dayenu*, *Halleluyah*, or some other Hebrew song that hints at gratitude. Have the children freeze whenever the music stops. Before resuming the dancing, tap several “frozen” children on the head, asking them to say something for which they are thankful.
- ▶ Invite families to go on a nature scavenger hunt. Take photos, gather specimens, and/or check off on a list specific items that they find.
- ▶ Go on a micro-environment scavenger hunt. Have families use a hoop or masking tape to mark off a small outdoor area, and then make a list of all the treasures that they discover.
- ▶ Have families go outdoors and build mini-sukkahs using some of the natural materials they find outside (branches, leaves, flowers, etc.).
- ▶ Make nature collages using a variety of materials collected during a walk outdoors.
- ▶ Consider making *shalom* (welcome) signs, family name signs, or picture frames using items that have been found in nature.
- ▶ Make nature block prints: Use paint and rollers or brushes to cover natural items with paint, then lay a piece of paper on top of the paint-covered items to create an interesting print.
- ▶ Gather and paint rocks, using them as paper weights, game pieces, or pieces for creating rock sculptures.
- ▶ Teach families the blessing to recite upon seeing a wonder in nature, and have them go outside and find items for which they can recite the blessing: “*Baruch Atah Adonoi, Eloheinu Melech ha'olam, oseh ma'aseh bereshit*” (Blessed are You, Lord, our God, King of the Universe, Who reenacts the work of creation).
- ▶ Have families decorate the cover of a nature journal, a book that will accompany them on hikes and outings and will serve as a place for drawing pictures and/or writing notes about the wonders they observe on their journeys.
- ▶ Hold a cloud gazing activity: Ask families to lie on blankets and describe the shapes they see in the clouds. Go to Pinterest to find some tasty cloud snacks that can accompany your cloud-gazing.
- ▶ Create a Storywalk™: Take apart a book and display its pages on sign posts. Ask families to walk outdoors, moving from sign to sign, following a trail and reading the book as they enjoy the wonders of nature.
- ▶ Decorate bags and create nature grab bags. Have families find various nature items and put them into their bags. Then ask family members to reach in and try to guess what they are feeling.





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