

# EMPATHY IN LANGUAGE TEACHING:

Stepping into your students' shoes

IATEFL Conference

Glasgow, 6th April 2017



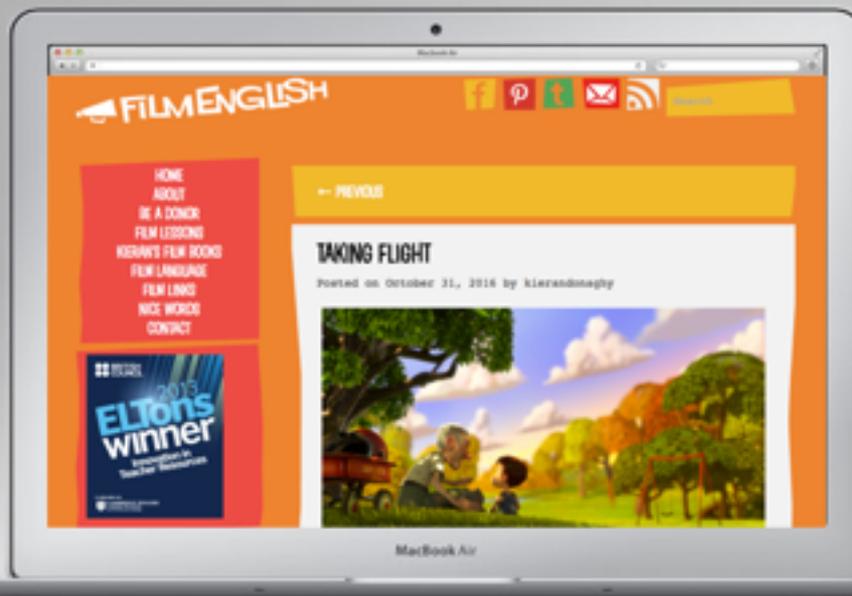


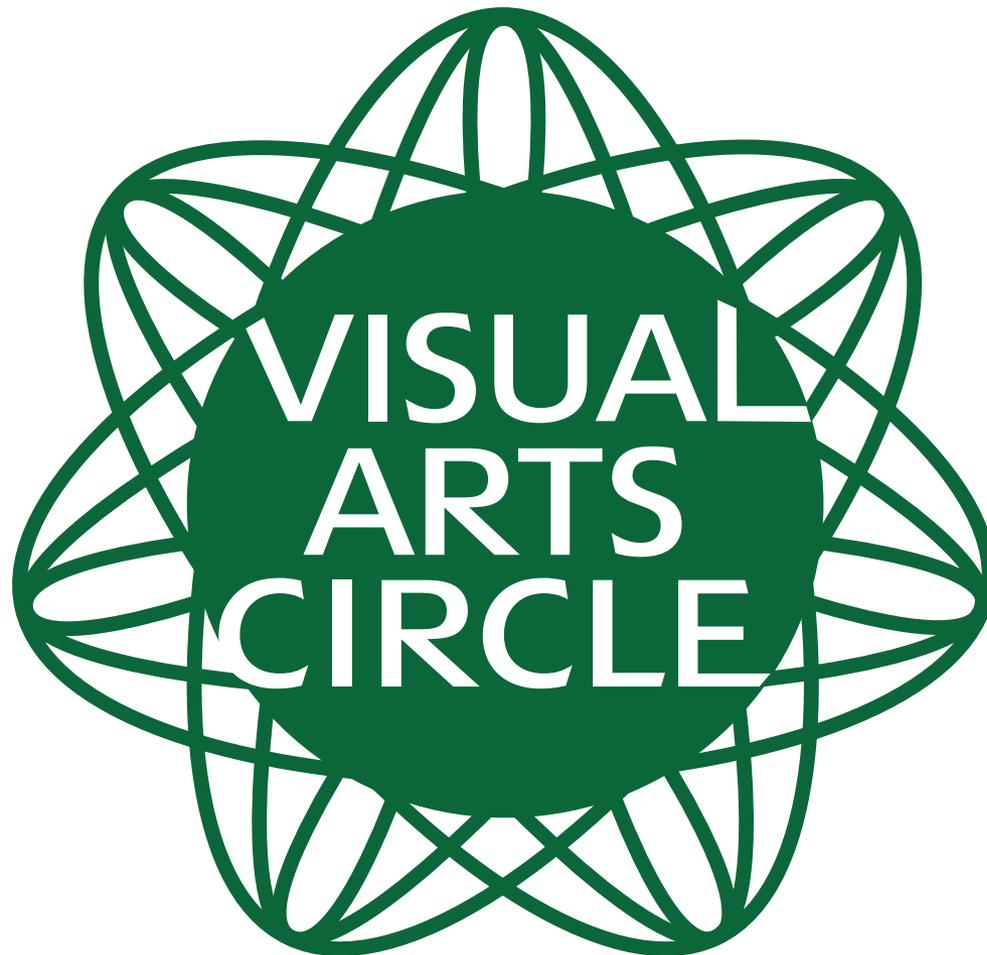
RESOURCE  
BOOKS FOR  
TEACHERS

*series editor*  
ALAN MALEY

**CLASSROOM DYNAMICS**

Jill Hadfield









# Overview of the session

- 1. What is empathy?**
- 2. Why is empathy important in language education?**
- 3. How can we as teacher be more empathetic?**
- 4. How can we help our students be more empathetic?**

**What is empathy?**





**“It goes beyond sympathy. Sympathy is to understand what someone feels. Empathy is to project your imagination so that you actually feel what the other person is feeling. You put yourself in the other person’s place.”**



**Roman Krznaric**

**'Empathy inspires with a unique combination of teaching, storytelling and a serious call to action'**

*Brené Brown, author of *Daring Greatly**



# EMPATHY

**WHY IT MATTERS, AND HOW TO GET IT**

**ROMAN KRZNARIC**

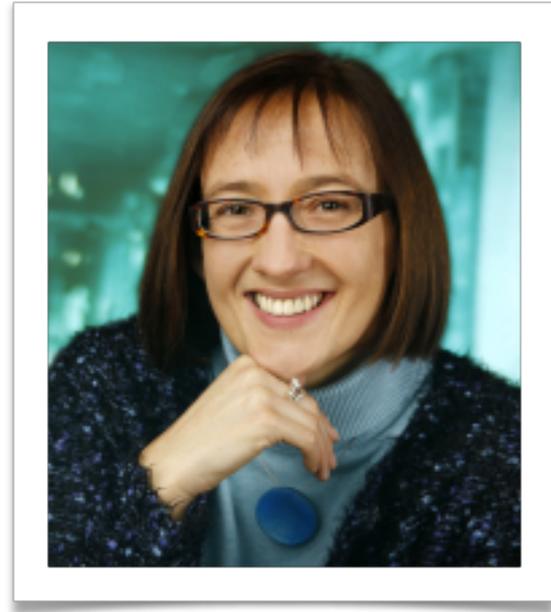
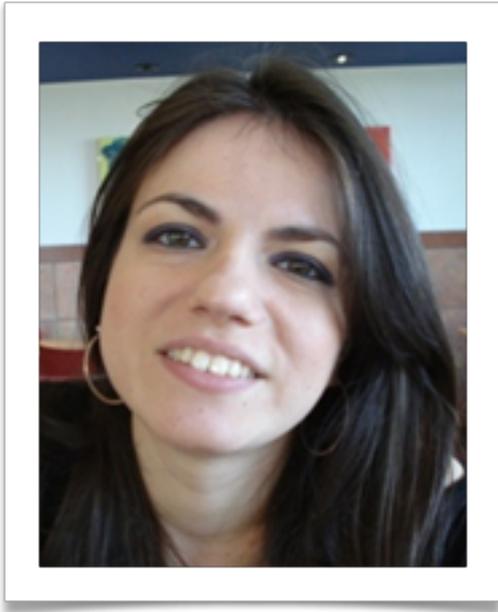
*'One of Britain's leading lifestyle philosophers' Observer*

**‘Empathy is the art of stepping imaginatively into the shoes of another person, understanding their feelings and perspectives, and using that understanding to guide your actions.’**

**Roman Krznaric 2015**



**Why is empathy  
important in language  
education?**



**Christina Gkonou and Sarah Mercer**

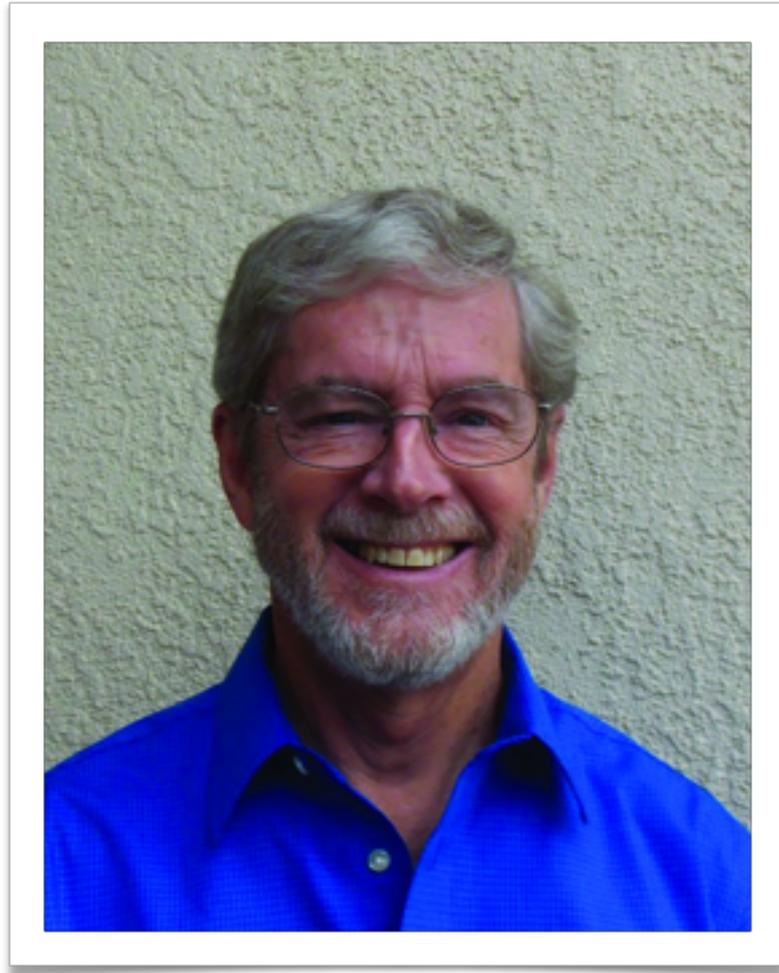
ELT Research Papers 17.03

## **Understanding emotional and social intelligence among English language teachers**

Christina Gkonou and Sarah Mercer

**“On the whole, the teachers pointed to four main characteristics of quality relationships with their pupils: empathy, respect, trust and responsiveness.”**

**“The most notable characteristic mentioned directly or indirectly by all the teachers was the importance of being empathetic and trying to put themselves in the shoes and minds of their learners.”**



**H. Douglas Brown**

**“Language is one of the primary means of empathising”**

**“Communication requires a sophisticated degree of empathy. In order to communicate effectively, a learner needs to be able to understand the other person’s affective and cognitive states”**

**H. Douglas Brown**

**How can we as  
teachers become  
more empathic  
toward our students?**

**Have a growth  
mindset.**

**Be an 'empathic detective'.**

**Make a mental note every time you notice an instance of empathic thinking or action in yourself or others.**

**Be bilingual,  
trilingual or a  
polyglot.**

**Gain as much  
experience as a  
teacher as  
possible.**

**Find out and  
remember as much  
as possible about  
your students and  
their lives.**

**At the start of a course ask  
students to write an  
autobiography describing  
their past, present and  
future dreams and  
ambitions.**

**Reveal things about  
yourself and your life  
to students.**

**Try to use self-deprecating humour with your students.**

**Smile and make  
eye contact.**

**Allow judicious use of L1  
when students want to  
communicate something  
which is important to  
them.**

# Focus on commonalities

**Rather than finding differences, focus on commonalities. Give students opportunities to find common ground (things they have in common).**

**Activities to help  
students become  
more empathic.**

**Make your students learn  
and use the names of all  
the students in the class.**

# Ask empathic questions

- How does that make you feel?...
- Do you know at times I've also felt scared?...
- How would that make your [brother/sister/friend] feel?...
- What do you think [a particular character] felt?...
- Why do you think he/she made those choices?...
- What emotion is that?...
- If you had superpowers, how would you use them to help...
- What were you like when you were nine years old?...

# Empathy roleplays

**Give students a lot of questions to help them empathise with their character.**

- **What is this person like?**
- **What age are they?**
- **What are they like physically?**
- **What would their house be like?**
- **What do they do?**
- **What kinds of things do you think they like and dislike?**
- **What sort of things do they know about?**
- **What and who do they care or worry about?**
- **What do they believe in?**

**Ask students to empathise with another student, that is, to step into their shoes and see things through their eyes for a while.**



**Jill Hadfield**

# I AM YOU

**Imagine you are your partner and complete the sentences.**

I like the colour \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_ .

My favourite time of day is \_\_\_\_\_ .

When I was at school I used to \_\_\_\_\_ .

I enjoy \_\_\_\_\_ .

I particularly dislike \_\_\_\_\_ .

The kind of music I like best is \_\_\_\_\_ .

I sometimes worry about \_\_\_\_\_ .

My ambition is to \_\_\_\_\_ .

I like people who \_\_\_\_\_ .

People like me because \_\_\_\_\_ .

## IF I WERE YOU

**Complete the sentences as if you were your partner.**

If I found some money in the street I would \_\_\_\_\_ .

If I found a rat in the bedroom, I would \_\_\_\_\_ .

If I could travel anywhere in the world, I would \_\_\_\_\_ .

My idea of a good night out would be to \_\_\_\_\_ .

If I won a lot of money I would \_\_\_\_\_ .

A perfect day for me would be where \_\_\_\_\_ .

If someone offered me the chance to work abroad for a year I would \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ .

**Ask students to write autobiographies not from their own point of view, but as if they were someone else.**

**Help students to  
really listen and to  
show that they're  
listening.**

# Empathic listening

**Your partner will tell you a short anecdote. Listen carefully. Show you are interested and encourage your partner to continue by using phrases like:**

- Go on!
- What happened next?
- What did you do then?
- So what did you do?
- Really?
- How did you feel then?

# Empathic listening

**Your partner will tell you something about his/her feelings. To your surprise he/she is describing exactly how you feel about the subject too! Join in and agree with her. You can use phrases like:**

- Oh yes!
- Me too!
- I feel just the same!
- I know just how you feel.
- I know what you mean.
- That's how I feel too.

# Listening circles

**Put students into a circle. Give them prompts such as:**

What is something you're passionate about?

What is your favourite place to relax?

Who has had the most influence on your life?

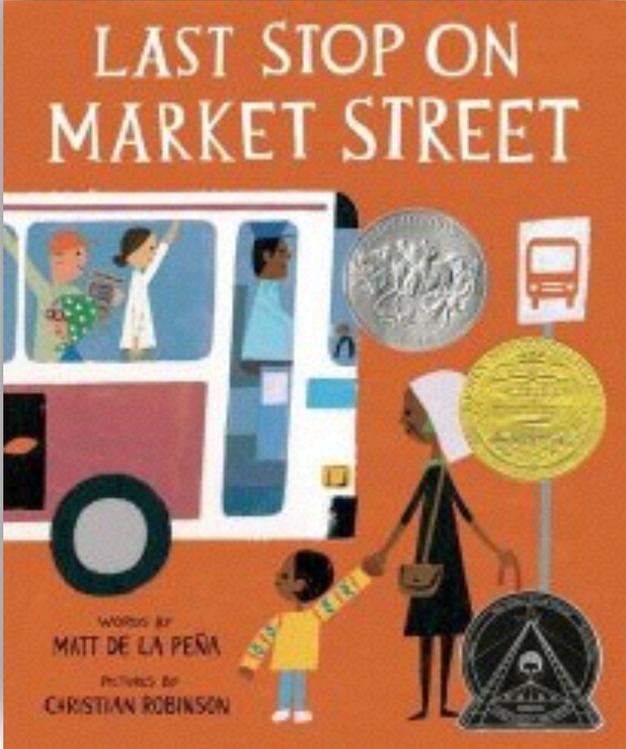
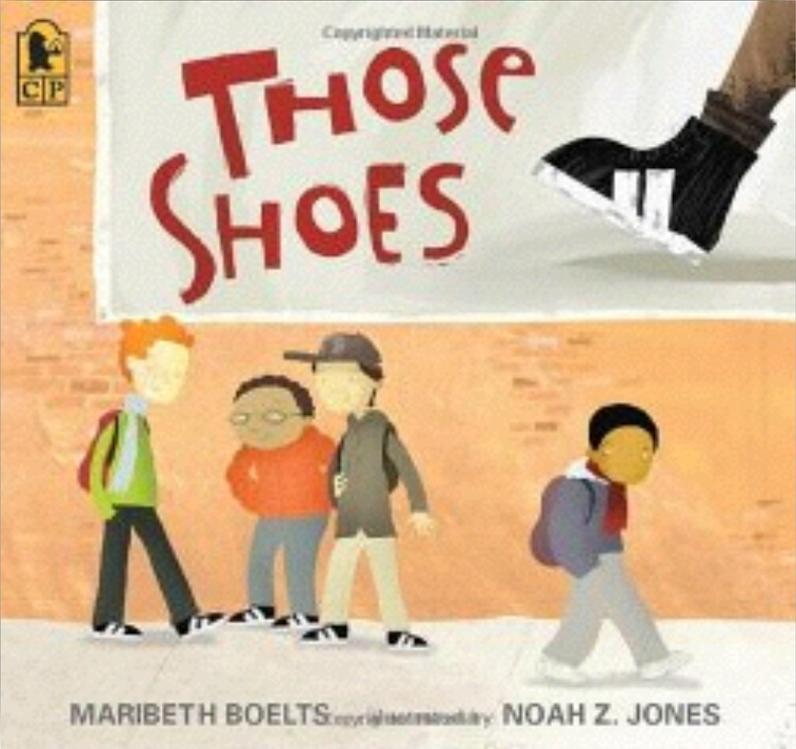
What has been a pivotal event in your life?

**One student talks for one minute. The other students just listen.**

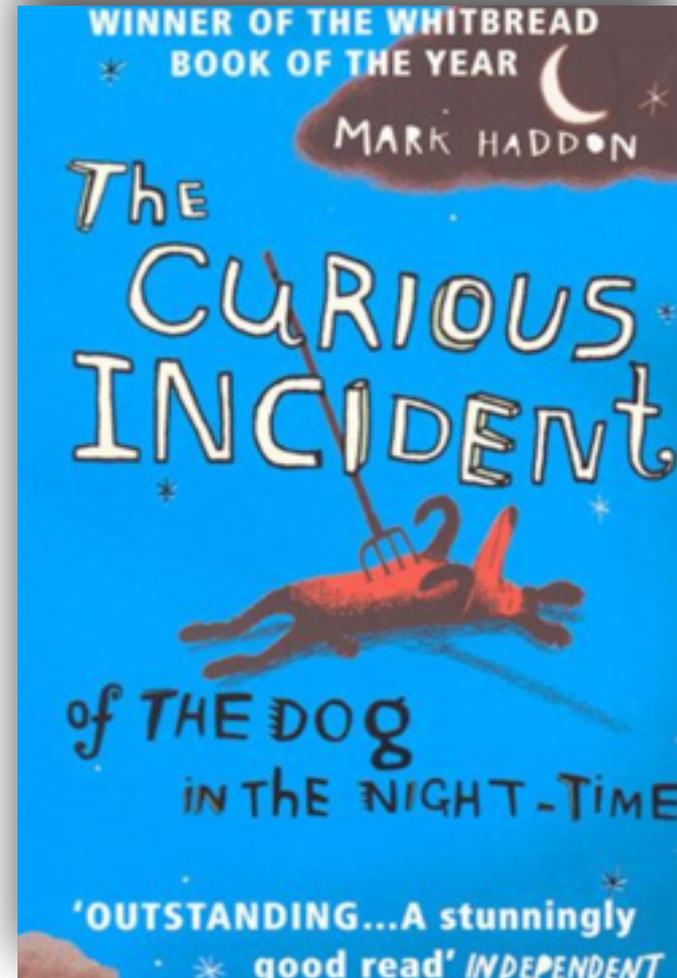
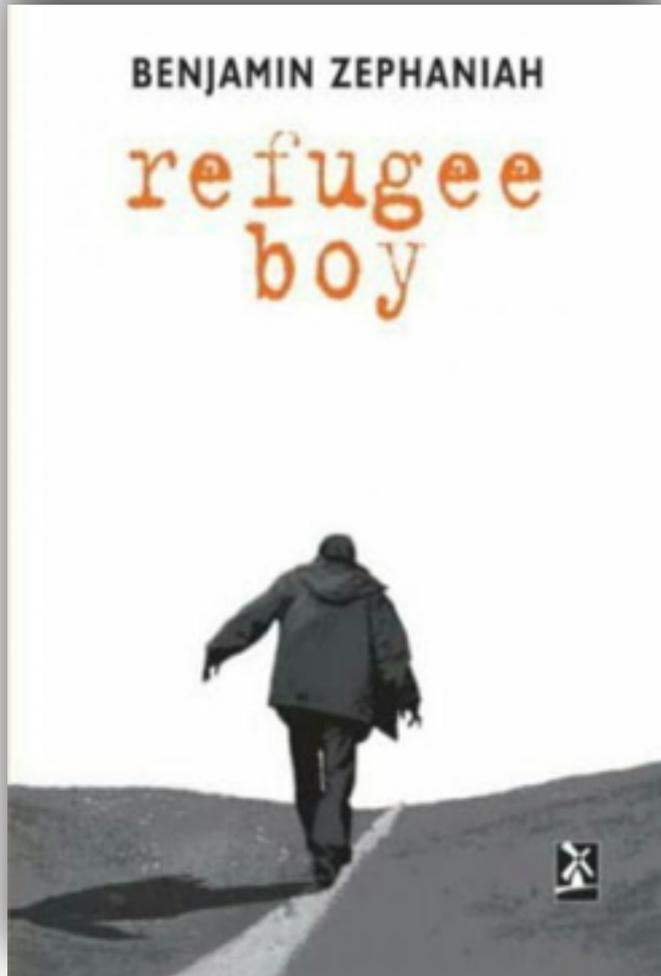
**Encourage students to read literary fiction about people different from them.**

**Literary fiction focuses on the psychology of characters and their relationships, and helps to extend empathy.**

# Picture books expand empathy



# Read about marginalised people



# Empathic reading questions

- How would you feel if you were [person/character]?
- How do you think [person/character] might be feeling? How do you know?
- Can you think of a time when you felt the same way?
- What led him/her to make that (pick one) choice?
- What would you have done differently in that situation?
- Which character in the story do you relate to most and why?

**Use film to  
expand  
empathy**



**Roger Ebert**

**“The movies are like a machine that generates empathy. It lets you understand a little bit more about different hopes, aspirations, dreams and fears. It helps us to identify with the people who are sharing this journey with us.”**

**Roger Ebert**

**Watch films about people  
who are very different  
from us and about  
marginalised people.**

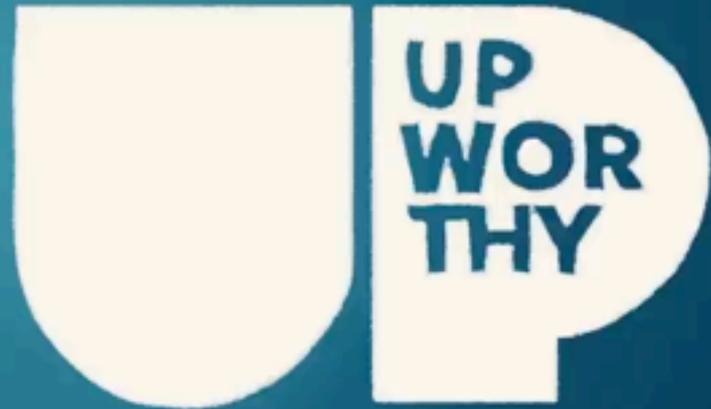


**Watch stories about  
people who see the  
world differently  
than us.**

*from*

STORY  
CORPS

&



*from*

STORY  
CORPS

&



I wanna see you

LIVE

WITH YOUR HANDS

UNFOLDED



**“We might have the most brilliant materials and resources but without the right kind of interpersonal dynamics, these affordances will never achieve their potential.”**

**Christina Gkonou and Sarah Mercer**

# Take home messages

- Empathy is good for society and individuals.
- Empathy is not fixed and can be expanded.
- Empathy is particularly important in language education.
- Literature, films and art can expand empathy.
- Empathy can bring harmony to the classroom.
- There is a need for specific empathy training on pre-service and in-service courses.



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