



STEP AFRIKA!

ONSTAGE RESOURCE GUIDE



2022/23

[OVERTURE.ORG/ONSTAGE](https://overture.org/onstage)

Dear Teachers,

In this resource guide you will find valuable information that will help you apply your academic goals to your students’ performance experience. We have included suggestions for activities which can help you prepare students to see this performance, ideas for follow-up activities, and additional resources you can access on the web. Along with these activities and resources, we’ve also included the applicable Wisconsin Academic Standards in order to help you align the experience with your curriculum requirements.

This Educator’s Resource Guide for this OnStage presentation of **Step Afrika!** is designed to:

- Extend the scholastic impact of the performance by providing discussion ideas, activities and further reading which promote learning across the curriculum;
- Promote arts literacy by expanding students’ knowledge of music, science, storytelling and theatre;
- Illustrate that the arts are a legacy reflecting the values, custom, beliefs, expressions and reflections of a culture;
- Use the arts to teach about the cultures of other people and to celebrate students’ own heritage through self-reflection;
- Maximize students’ enjoyment and appreciation of the performance.

We hope this performance and the suggestions in this resource guide will provide you and your students opportunities to apply art learning in your curricula, expanding it in new and enriching ways.

Enjoy the Show!

We Want Your Feedback!

OnStage performances can be evaluated online! Evaluations are vital to the future and funding of this program. Your feedback educates us about the ways the program is utilized and we often implement your suggestions.

Follow this link: https://surveymonkey.com/r/onstage_2016

and fill out an evaluation. We look forward to hearing from you.



Photo Courtesy of Eduardo Castillo

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Education Categories

-  Language Arts  Social Emotional  Social Studies



Photo Courtesy of David Azagury

Step Afrika!

An African proverb says, “If you can talk, you can sing; if you can walk, you can dance.”

Step Afrika! embodies this inclusive, affirming message, proving the power of the arts to bring people together.

Blending technique, agility, and non-stop energy, Step Afrika! is the first professional dance company devoted to stepping. Stepping is an art form that uses the body as an instrument. It is a kind of percussive dance that was born on the campuses of HBCUs, Historically Black Colleges and Universities. Stepping employs foot steps, claps, and spoken word to make rhythms – and magic.

The company’s productions blend traditional stepping, along with background on the distinctive styles of the fraternities and sororities that created this dance form, with traditional African dance, such as the South African gumboot dance, and contemporary dance.

First established in 1994, as part of an exchange with the Soweto Dance Theatre of Johannesburg, Step Afrika! has become one of the top African–American dance companies in the country.



Photo Courtesy of Step Afrika!

About Step Afrika!



Photo Courtesy of Eduardo Castillo

Step Afrika! is about combinations, and not just when it comes to dance steps. Combinations of traditional and contemporary dance forms, as well as cultural influences, figure prominently in their work. The company strives to promote unity and acceptance while living its values of teamwork, discipline, and commitment.

C. Brian Williams, founder of Step Afrika!, learned how to step when he was a student at Howard University, a noted HBCU, and a member of the famous Alpha Phi Alpha, the nation's oldest African-American fraternity. But when Williams was in South Africa and saw a young boy doing the traditional South African gumboot dance, he had a sudden, and perhaps life-changing insight. He was struck by how much it looked like stepping to him. This inspired him to try to find a way people from Africa, the United States, and all over the world could share their dances.

The result was an international dance festival, the exchange with the Soweto Dance Theatre of Johannesburg, and the birth of Step Afrika!

Today, Step Afrika! is an award-winning company based in Washington D.C. It has toured more than 60 countries around the world, from Angola to Croatia to Zambia. Performing in the White House for President Obama and making the chandeliers shake was a highlight for the company, as was the creation of an interactive stepping exhibit at the Smithsonian's National Museum of African-American History & Culture. The company also performed at the Presidential Inaugural Celebration for Joe Biden.

Step Afrika! has an extensive educational component, offering in-school performances and workshops, plus a summer camp that combines the company's values of teamwork, commitment, discipline, and academic achievement with excellence in performance and artistic training.

Williams continues his work as the executive director of Step Afrika! Mfoniso Akpan is the artistic director. The company consist of full-time dancers, many of whom are graduates of HBCUs themselves.

About Stepping & Gumboot Dancing

Stepping, as it is known today, is often described as a dance form originated by students at HBCUs, specifically the members of the “Divine Nine,” the historically Black Greek Letter Organizations (BGLOs).

But its roots stretch all the way back to the traditional dances practiced by people in Africa, who were later kidnapped, enslaved, and brought to America. They brought their dances with them, as a way to preserve their culture, their sense of community, their identity, and their ability to express themselves.

Different dance practices became more important than ever after slaveholders passed laws preventing enslaved people from using drums, due to fear of slave rebellions.

Fast forward a few hundred years and, in stepping, the body is used as a musical instrument. It is a form of percussive dance that creates rhythms with hands and feet and sometimes props.

In its early form, as it was popularized by African-American college students in sororities and fraternities, it was a blend of African tribal dance, call and response folk songs, and military march themes. Stepping was a way for students of color to express themselves, foster and feel pride in their community, and provide support for each other in a world that could seem unwelcoming, if not outright hostile.

Today, stepping also includes elements of Motown, hip hop, tap dancing, break dancing, gymnastics, and Afro-Caribbean music, and public recognition is growing daily.



Photo Courtesy of Eduardo Castillo



Photo Courtesy of Wikimedia

Interestingly, stepping has many characteristics with another form of dance that also helped sustain and inspire people of color during difficult times.

Gumboot dancing originated in the oppressive conditions of the gold mines during Apartheid in South Africa, where the owners tried to dress the workers in the cheapest uniforms they could find – no shirt, a bandana to catch the sweat, and gumboots. They tried to keep the miners from communicating with each other, and strictly enforced harsh rules to keep the miners from even talking to each other.

However, the gumboots the bosses selected actually tripped up their schemes.

By making rhythms with their boots, miners were able to communicate with each other even if they didn't speak the same language. They could warn each other of dangers in the mines, support each other, and, very importantly, do so without their bosses knowing what was going on. During the massive protests which brought down Apartheid, gumboot dancing, along with other forms of music and dance, became a vehicle for political protest

Making Music with Their Bodies

When enslaved Africans were first brought to the United States, they brought their cultural traditions and practices with them, especially their drums, which were very important, for celebration, communication, and identity.

When slave owners learned that these enslaved people were using drums to communicate with friends and family on other plantations, they banned drums. The indomitable (which means impossible to defeat) and inventive enslaved Africans used their bodies to make sound and kept their rhythms alive.

**“If you can talk, you can sing,
if you can walk, you can dance.”**



Photo Courtesy of Eduardo Castillo

There are many similarities between South African gumboot dancing and stepping. Both dance forms:

- Feature precise and synchronized movements, performed at a high speed
- Use different languages and ethnic references to emphasize togetherness
- Showcase complex, high speed footwork
- Were not originally accompanied by music, but that has changed with time
- Employ call and response, a musical technique with deep African roots
- Highlight improvisation
- Blend powerful group action with opportunities for individuals to shine



Photo Courtesy of Step Afrika!

Vocabulary

Choreographer – A person who devises, sequences, and directs movement in a dance piece

Polyrhythm – Playing more than one rhythm at once, part of the African musical tradition
Syncopation – Playing off the beat

Apartheid – A harsh and oppressive system of government based on racial discrimination, which lasted in South Africa from the late 1940s until it collapsed in the early 1990s

Resources

The Step Afrika! Company [website](#)

A video with background on [Step Afrika!](#) and their new work in 2020.

A brief video of Step Afrika! in [action](#)

A brief video on part of the [history of stepping](#)

[Background on stepping](#) from Tufts University

Article on [step dancing](#)

Background on [gumboot dancing](#)

Here's a website devoted to using [body percussion in the classroom](#)

Chapter 3 is a scholarly article on gumboot dancing and stepping, with [lesson plans and discussion ideas](#)

Summary of [study comparing dancers and athletes](#)

Discussion

During the 1960s and the struggle for civil rights for African Americans in the United States, stepping provided students at Historically Black Colleges and Universities, a way to build the strength of their communities and express their pride. In South Africa, during the popular uprising against apartheid, gumboot dancing was a way for protesters to express themselves and draw strength from each other. Can you describe other situations in which music and dance played an important role in social movements?

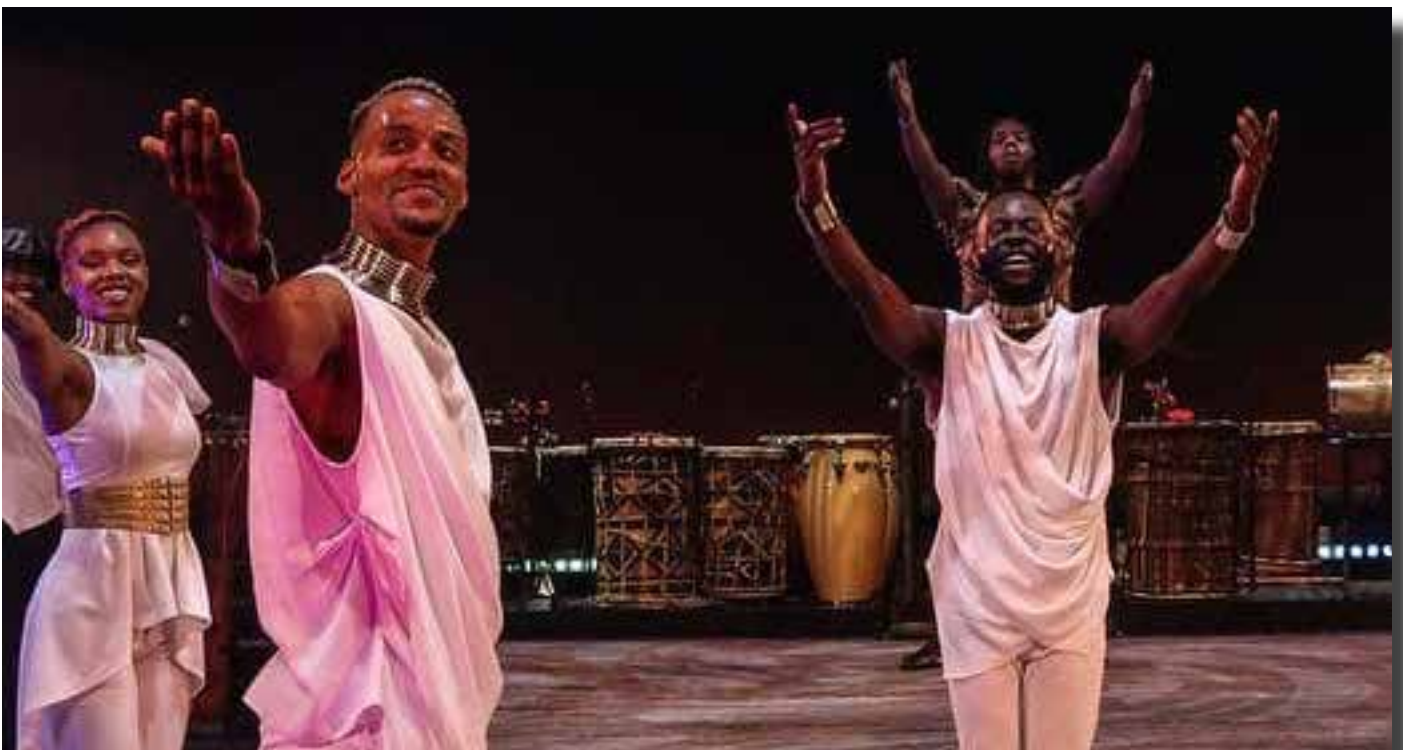


Photo Courtesy of Step Afrika!

Learning Activity - The Message of Music

From Teaching Tolerance

This lesson challenges students to analyze and to reflect on messages presented in songs — and to express their own views about important issues addressed in some songs.

Grades: 3 – 5

Learning Objective: At the end of the lesson, students will be able to:

- Analyze and write about how a song’s lyrics can evoke feelings
- Compare two songs and give examples of metaphors in each song
- Write about the lyrics of songs, critically examining a song’s messages and expressing a personal viewpoint about a tolerance-related issue that’s important to them

Materials:

- Article: “The Other Education.” Find it [here](#).
- Song Analysis Handout. Find it [here](#).
- Lyrics of popular songs (and their messages); such as:

“Count on Me” (2011) Bruno Mars (Friends can help each other. Find them [here](#).)

“Mean” (2010) Taylor Swift (Anti-Bullying message: Stand strong even when people are cruel. Find them [here](#).)

“The Climb” (2009) Miley Cyrus (Keep trying, never give up. Find them [here](#).)

“Man in the Mirror” (1988) Michael Jackson (Change in the world begins with you. Find them [here](#).)

“Ebony and Ivory” (1982) Paul McCartney (People can live in harmony. Find them [here](#).)

“Imagine” (1971) John Lennon (The world can be a better, more peaceful place. Find them [here](#).)

Vocabulary

relevant (rel-uh-vuhnt) (adjective) related or connected to a subject or matter

stereotype (ster-ee-uh-type) (noun) an unfair belief or idea that some people have particular characteristics or are the same

tolerance (tol-er-uh-ns) (noun) a fair, open, objective, and permissive attitude toward those whose opinions, beliefs, practices, racial or ethnic origins, etc., differ from one’s own

lyrics (lir-iks) (noun) the words of a song

metaphor (met-uh-for) (noun) a word or phrase is used to refer to compare something with another thing to show or suggest that they are similar without using the words “like” or “as”



Photo Courtesy of Kwabena

Learning Activity - The Message of Music (continued)



Photo Courtesy of Step Afrika!

Instruction

1. Introduce the lesson by playing a song from the above list. Ask: “What makes you enjoy a song? A good sound? Interesting words? When you listen to a song, do you really listen to the words? How often do you think about the meaning of a song?”

2. Pose the following questions to students, and record their answers on an easel pad or whiteboard:

- How many of you like listening to music?
- What are the reasons you listen to music?
- How does music make you feel?
- What might you learn from music?



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3. Ask students to work in pairs. Offer these instructions: “I’d like each one of you to list at least five of your favorite songs. Then check with your partner to see if you listed similar or different choices. Is it okay to have different musical choices than your friends? How might you describe a favorite song to a friend? Would you be open and willing to listen to a new song if a friend recommended it?”

4. Ask students: What do you think makes a good song – catchy music? interesting words? something else?

5. Ask this question: “When you listen to a song, do you really hear its words or are you just hearing the music?” Explain that sometimes the same person who sings a song writes the words (lyrics) and music. Other times, one person composes the music, another writes the words, and a third person may sing

Learning Activity - The Message of Music (continued)



Photo Courtesy of Wikimedia

the song. Many songwriters want to share a message or point of view with the audience. Ask: “Can you think a song that conveys a songwriter’s message?” Instruct students to refer back to the list they created at the beginning of the lesson for possible examples.

6. Distribute printed lyrics or provide a Web link to the song, “Ebony and Ivory.” Explain that, “Ebony and Ivory” was written in 1982 by Paul McCartney. Tell the class that McCartney wrote songs and was also one of the four musicians in the famous band, The Beatles. Discuss how the ebony and ivory in the song’s title refer to keys on a piano—that black keys are often made of ebony and white keys have been made of ivory. Instruct students: “After you listen to the song or read the lyrics, draw a picture or write about what you think the message of the song is.”

7. Ask students to share their ideas. Tell the class that the song uses something called a metaphor. Next, read this definition: “A metaphor is a figure of speech in which a word or phrase that ordinarily represents one thing is used to represent something else.” Then ask: “Can you identify any metaphors in the song? What do you think ebony could be a metaphor for? Ivory? The piano keyboard?” [Note: While the song is explicitly about keys on the piano, many commentators have noted that it also is clearly about people getting along, integration and racial harmony.]
8. Ask students: What message might Paul McCartney have wanted to communicate in writing the words to the song? Would that same message be important or relevant today? Why or why not?
9. Distribute song lyrics or provide Web links for the other songs, and give out the Song Analysis handout. Invite children to read the lyrics to a couple of songs. After they have done so, tell them that these songs were written many years apart and ask, “What similar messages do these songs share, even though they were written at different times? What conclusions can you draw about their message? How does this message apply to your school? Your community?”
10. Break the class down into small groups of four or five. Ask each group to brainstorm about other messages that songwriters could sing about that would be relevant to tolerance in your school or community. Say, “Think about tolerance of other groups including those with disabilities, those of different religions, ethnic backgrounds, or viewpoints, or those who come from different neighborhoods.”
11. Next, invite students: “Imagine you are a songwriter and write a song about one of these issues. Pick the issue you’re most interested in. Write a paragraph about the song and the issue you’ve chosen. Include why the issue is important to you, why it is relevant in your school or community, and what message you want your song to share.”
12. Finally, create a title for your song and a CD cover that illustrates what its message will be.

Add-Ons

- Use the music from one of the songs in this lesson (or another song you like) to write lyrics for your “new” song.
- Interview parents or other community members about the songs that inspire them. Then create a music mix of inspirational songs for your community.

Learning Activity – Art Expression Through Music

Gale Bournazian-Ybarra

Santa Lucia School, Templeton, Calif.

Teaching Tolerance

Grade Level: 6 – 8

Stepping and gumboot dancing have their roots in specific historical and political situations. This learning activity engages students in a similar experience of their own, using different art forms.

Learning Objectives: After completing this activity, students will:

- Know that dancers, musicians, and writers explore historical and political topics through their art forms
- Practice sketching their feelings and making collages
- Understand how artistic expression can help people explore historical and political topics

Materials

- Pieces of recycled cardboard for sketching
- Drawing materials for sketching
- Scissors
- Glue
- Magazines, newspapers, ribbons, foil, yarn, old books, buttons and glue to make collages
- Clear spray for a group collage
- Virginia Hamilton's *Many Thousand Gone: African Americans from Slavery to Freedom* (or other relevant text) to read aloud
- Access to "No More Auction Block for Me," sung by Paul Robeson, or a different version if preferred, available [here](#)

Introduction

History is often taught through books, but art can also unlock the past. Songs, for example, can reveal a lot about historical events by exploring the emotions they evoked in musicians, singers and songwriters. This activity uses music, sketching and collage to study some emotions surrounding the experience of slavery in the United States.

Communicating, Talking and Listening

1. Begin with a classroom group discussion. First, remind students that all responses are valid and deserve respect. Then ask:

What is music? Is music meant purely for our enjoyment? What messages can music communicate? Are some lyrics meant to protest wrongdoing? What are the various genres of music? What emotions do various songs elicit?

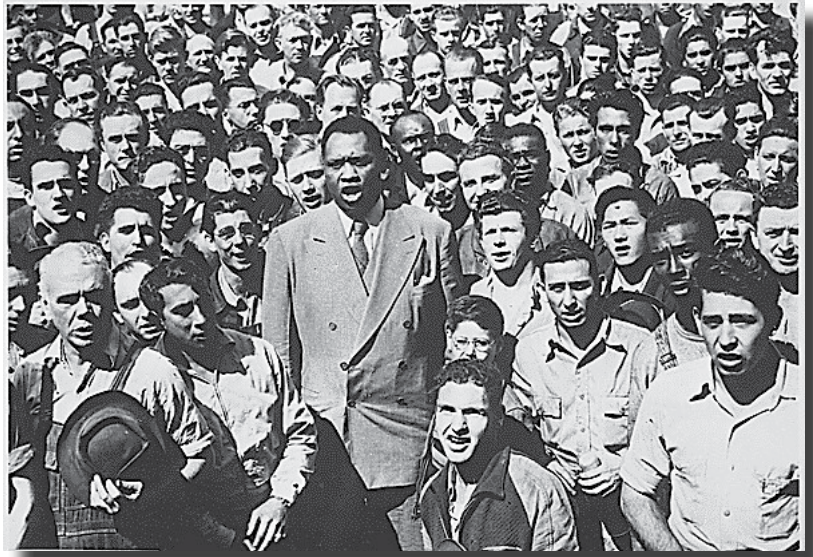
2. Ask students to close their eyes and listen to the song "No More Auction Block for Me," sung by Paul Robeson.

Learning Activity – Art Expression Through Music (con't)

Art Expression

3. Let students choose from various sizes of recycled cardboard, and instruct them to sketch whatever they are feeling after listening to the song. You can replay the song as they are sketching. Then tell them they will be turning their sketches into collages; they may want to wait on the details, which can be added later using various recycled objects.

4. Provide magazines, newspapers, ribbons, foil, yarn, old books, buttons and glue for students to use to collage their drawings. As students work, read aloud short stories from Virginia Hamilton's *Many Thousand Gone: African Americans from Slavery to Freedom* (or other relevant texts).



Paul Robeson at demonstration

Coming Together

5. Have students sit in a circle and take turns displaying their creations, identifying which feelings the song elicited in each of them.

6. Close with a group discussion:

- What did you learn from this song?
- What did society gain from this song?

7. Finally, apply a clear spray to each collage, and display them by making one large classroom collage out of the smaller individual ones.

Academic Standards

English Language Arts

Speaking & Listening

Comprehension and Collaboration

SL. 4.1: Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions.

Theatre Education

Standard 3 – RESPOND

TP.R.4.i – Analysis – Identify separate elements in a theatrical work.

TP.R.5.i – Reflection – Assess personal participation in a performance

TP.R.6.i – View Performance – Demonstrate developmentally appropriate audience etiquette.

Standard 4 – CONNECT

TP.Cn.5.i – Cultural Social Context – Explain how theatre relates to self, others, and the world

TP.Cn.8.i – Cross Disciplinary – Identify how theatre connects to literature and social studies

Dance

Standard DD 3: RESPOND – Students will critically interpret intent and meaning in order to evaluate artistic work. Students will demonstrate developmentally appropriate etiquette skills with guidance in response to a performance, as well as grade appropriate practices of Dance Literacy, Reflection, and Analysis.

Standard DD 4: CONNECT – Students will relate prior knowledge and personal experience with dance to cultural and historical context, including developmentally appropriate Cultural Social Awareness and Cross Disciplinary connections.

Music

Standard 3: Respond

MG3.R.5.i: Recognize and define grade- appropriate foundational musical elements.

MG3.R.7.i: Utilize appropriate music terminology in the evaluation /reflection of music performances.

MG3.R.8.i: Demonstrate proper concert/audience etiquette.

Standard 4: Connect

MG4.Cn.5.i: Compare the historical and cultural aspects of music with other disciplines.

MG4.Cn.6.i: Explain how music relates to self, others, and the world.

MG4.Cn.7.i: Examine and evaluate musical connections, similarities, and differences.

MG4.Cn.8.i: Describe roles of musicians in various music settings and world cultures.

Social Studies

Behavioral Studies

SS.BH1.b.4 Describe how culture, ethnicity, race, age, religion, gender, and social class can help form self-image and identity.

About Live Performance

Theater, unlike movies or television, is a LIVE performance. This means that the action unfolds right in front of an audience, and the performance is constantly evolving. The artists respond to the audience's laughter, clapping, gasps and general reactions. Therefore, the audience is a critical part of the theater experience. In fact, without you in the audience, the artists would still be in rehearsal!

Remember, you are sharing this performance space with the artists and other audience members. Your considerate behavior allows everyone to enjoy a positive theater experience.

Prepare: Be sure to use the restroom before the show begins!

Find Your Seat: When the performance is about to begin, the lights will dim. This is a signal for the artists and the audience to put aside conversations. Settle into your seat and get ready to enjoy the show!

Look and Listen: There is so much to hear (dialogue, music, sound effects) and so much to see (costumes, props, set design, lighting) in this performance. Pay close attention to the artists onstage. Unlike videos, you cannot rewind if you miss something.

Energy and Focus: Artists use concentration to focus their energy during a performance. The audience gives energy to the artist, who uses that energy to give life to the performance. Help the artists focus that energy. They can feel that you are with them!

Talking to neighbors (even whispering) can easily distract the artists onstage. They approach their audiences with respect, and expect the same from you in return. Help the artists concentrate with your attention.

Laugh Out Loud: If something is funny, it's good to laugh. If you like something a lot, applaud. Artists are thrilled when the audience is engaged and responsive. They want you to laugh, cheer, clap and really enjoy your time at the theater.

Discover New Worlds: Attending a live performance is a time to sit back and look inward, and question what is being presented to you. Be curious about new worlds, experience new ideas, and discover people and lives previously unknown to you. Your open mind, curiosity, and respect will allow a whole other world to unfold right before your eyes!

Please, don't feed the audience: Food is not allowed in the theater. Soda and snacks are noisy and distracting to both the artists and audience.

Unplug: Please turn off all cell phones and other electronics before the performance. Photographs and recording devices are prohibited.





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