Town Meeting

Involved citizens can make decisions about lakeshore land use that benefit the community, the economy, and the environment.
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Chapter 4 • Lesson 4

Town Meeting

Minnesota Academic Standards

Lesson introduces this Benchmark.
Lesson partially addresses this Benchmark.
Lesson fully addresses this Benchmark

Language Arts

Grades 3, 4, 5
III. Speaking Listening, and Viewing
A. Speaking and Listening:
Benchmark 1—The student will participate in and follow agreed-upon rules for conversation and formal discussions in large and small groups.
Benchmark 2—The student will demonstrate active listening and comprehension.

Grade 3
I. Reading and Literature
C. Comprehension:
Benchmark 7—The student will follow three-step written directions.

Grade 4
I. Reading and Literature
C. Comprehension:
Benchmark 9—The student will follow multiple-step written instructions.

Grade 5
I. Reading and Literature
C. Comprehension:
Benchmark 13—The student will follow multiple-step written directions.

History and Social Studies

Grade K—3
VI. Economics
A. Economic Choices:
Benchmark 1—Students will identify the difference between basic needs (food, clothing, and shelter) and wants (things people would like to have).

Benchmark 3—Students will understand and explain that the concept of scarcity means that one cannot have all the goods and services that one wants.

VII. Government and Citizenship
A. Civic Values, Skills, Rights and Responsibilities:
Benchmark 1—Students will demonstrate knowledge of civic values that facilitate thoughtful and effective participation in civic life.
Benchmark 2—Students will explain the rights and responsibilities of people living in a democracy, including the principle of majority rule and minority rights.

A. Civic Values, Skills, Rights and Responsibilities:
Benchmark 4—Students will explain that people have diverse viewpoints and that speaking and listening to others is important.

D. Governmental Institutions and Processes of the United States.
Benchmark 1—Students will describe examples of specific services provided by government.
(Town meeting forums, state agencies to manage natural resources...)

Grade 4—5
V. Geography
D. Interconnections:
Benchmark 2—Students will analyze how the physical environment influences human activities.

VI. Economics
A. Producers and Consumers:
Benchmark 2—Students will explain that in market economies, individuals earn income by working for firms to produce goods and services, and firms incur costs by hiring individuals and earn revenue by selling goods and services.

VI. Economics
B. Economic Choices:
Benchmark 2—Students will apply a decision-making process to make informed choices.
C. The Market Economy (Micro Economics):
Benchmark 1—Students will identify and compare and contrast various industries and the occupations related to them.
VII. Government and Citizenship
A. Civic Values, Skills, Rights and Responsibilities:
Benchmark 2—Students will explain some of the responsibilities of people living in a democracy.

Benchmarks

A. Civic Values, Skills, Rights and Responsibilities:
Benchmark 1—Students will explain the steps necessary to become an informed voter and an engaged citizen.
Benchmark 2—Students will explain the meaning of civic life and how all members of a community can be engaged.
Benchmark 3—Students will identify and research community problems and recommend solutions.

Science

Grade 4
I. History and Nature of Science
A. Scientific World View:
Benchmark 1—The student will explore uses and effects of science in our interaction with the natural world.
Benchmark 2—The student will discuss the responsible use of science.
Benchmark 3—The student will recognize the impact of scientific and technological activities on the natural world.

III. Earth and Space Science
A. Earth Structures and Processes:
Benchmark 1—The student will identify and investigate environmental issues and potential solutions.

Grade 5
I. History and Nature of Science
C. Scientific Enterprise:
Benchmark 1—The student will describe different kinds of work done in science and technology.
Town Meeting

Adapted from “Land Use Hearing” from YMCA Camp St. Croix Environmental Center, Nature’s Classroom, Inc. by Chris Olson, Spring 1986.

Grade Level: 3-5  
Activity Duration: three 45-minute periods  
Group Size: minimum of 10  
Subject Areas: Expressive Arts, Language Arts, Social Studies, Science  
Academic Skills: communication, debate, presentation skills, public speaking, reading, role-playing, small group skills  
Setting: indoor or outdoor gathering area with tables  
Vocabulary: compromise, concerned citizen group, consensus, public land use hearing  
Internet Search Words: public hearing

Instructor’s Background Information

Local governments in communities have formal procedures for addressing environmental and land use issues. Many people are unaware of the important role they can play in community decision-making. Citizenship and full participation in a democracy requires more than voting at the polls on Election Day. Simulating a public land use hearing introduces elementary school students to citizenship, illustrating how individuals can become informed and engaged as they participate in the democratic process.

Town residents with similar perspectives and values often form a concerned citizen group. These groups may have conflicting perspectives and values on certain issues, such as how to develop a piece of shoreline property in the community. At a public hearing, these groups can have their positions heard and considered. Citizen group members can also hear the opinions and concerns of others. Minority groups and interests can be represented in a town meeting format. Final decisions are be made based on the most compelling group presentation, the most accurate information and facts, or in an attempt to meet the needs of the greatest number of people and interest groups in the community.

With many sides of an issue presented and addressed in a town meeting setting, policymakers can make informed decisions. After considering the concerns and suggestions of all interested citizen groups, and when officials generally agree on how to proceed with a decision, they have reached a consensus. Without consensus, each party may need to sacrifice some wants or needs to reach a compromise. Public hearings offer a means of addressing
environmental issues and reaching solutions that serve the greatest good and balance human, economic, and environmental concerns.

This simulated public land use hearing is an opportunity for students to explore the public hearing process and to actively consider the human, economic and environmental concerns surrounding the issue of lakeshore property development. This activity juxtaposes what students have learned about fish, fish habitat, and environmental stewardship with the people's needs and the interests of various community groups. It offers an important connection to the “real world” by showing students how local governments often reach decisions affecting the community, and how each citizen can play a role in those decisions.

Students will also have an opportunity to consider how basic needs (food, clothing, and shelter), wants (desires beyond basic needs), and wide-ranging values can play a part in public meetings where groups attempt to reach consensus. Resources are limited, and it’s critical that society makes good decisions about how to best use resources to meet the needs, wants, and values of the most people—in the most viable and sustainable ways—while also considering the welfare of ecosystems in the natural environment.

The town meeting allows students to temporarily adopt a perspective and a specified set of values that may be different from their own. In this way, the students can learn about the process of decision-making in a non-threatening manner. Students will be able to transfer what they learn to other environmental issues in their communities that may require decision-making, consensus or compromise, and possibly a public hearing. Well-informed, skilled citizens are needed if we are to solve our increasingly complex environmental issues, including how to best use and manage our natural resources.

**Materials**

- Whiteboard and markers
- Butcher paper, one sheet for each group of four or five students
- Crayons, one box per group
- Blank paper, three sheets per group
- Pencils, one per group
- Concerned Citizen Group Roles Sheet, one per group
- Concerned Citizen Group Duties Sheet, one per group
- Overhead or projected copy of Lakeshore Property Sale Map

**Procedure**

**Preparation**

1. Make an overhead of the Lakeshore Property Sale Map.
2. Copy and cut out the various roles on the Concerned Citizen Group Roles Sheet.
3. Copy the Concerned Citizen Group Duties Sheet, one for each group of four or five students.
4. Gather the other materials.
5. You may choose to tailor the situation and concerned citizen group roles to address a current local issue about lakeshore use in your community.
**Activity**

**Warm-up**

1. Tell the class that you will be holding a mock public land use hearing. Define a public land use hearing with your students and emphasize that no one is on trial at a public hearing. Remind students that there are no winners or losers in this lesson, and that they’ll be learning how a public hearing helps communities reach important decisions. Remind them that playing their roles will require them to represent and defend some ideas and positions that may not necessarily reflect their own feelings and positions.

2. The students will pretend that there is a 30-acre piece of property for sale on a lakeshore at the edge of town. Project a copy of the Lakeshore Property Sale Map so students can see the area whose use they’ll debate. To help them visualize the size of 30 acres, explain that the area of a football field is approximately 1.3 acres. Thirty acres of land, then, is equivalent to 23 football fields. Another comparison—the Mall of America in Bloomington, Minnesota covered 94.6 acres in 2004.

Some facts about the property, lake, and town include:

- The property is undeveloped, with trees and plants growing along the very the edge of the water. Bulrushes and other native aquatic plants grow in the water. The water in front of the property has been known as a good place to go fishing.
- All around the lake are small to mid-size homes on five- to ten-acre plots. There is also one large farm with livestock (cows and pigs). The people live in homes year-round. Most of them have docks and cleanly cut lawns that extend to the very edge of the lake, although there are some spots between the houses with trees and aquatic plants.
- The town itself is growing. The lake used to be a few miles from town, but there are now houses and businesses from the lake to the downtown area. Many new people are moving to the area, and they need jobs, homes, schools, goods and services, and recreational opportunities.
- Some residents are worried that the fishing in the lake hasn’t been especially good for the past few years. They think this may be due to all the development around the lake. Discuss these facts about the property, lake, and town with the students so they understand them well.

3. The class will be broken into small groups. Each small group will represent a different concerned citizen group. Each group will be assigned a different role.
4 Write the following outline on the whiteboard:

Public Hearing
1. Preparation
2. Opening statements and proposals
3. Question-and-answer period
4. Final questions
5. Closing statements
6. Decision

Lesson
1 Divide the class into small groups of four or five students.
2 Explain how the hearing will proceed. Refer to the outline written on the board.
3 Give each group one role card from the Concerned Citizen Group Roles Sheet and other listed materials. Tell students that they will assume the roles listed on their role card. Their job is to decide, as a group, what they would like to do with the land if they could buy it. Read through the Concerned Citizen Group Duties Sheet with them.
4 Give each group a Concerned Citizen Group Duties Sheet that contains instructions for them to follow.
5 Send each group to a corner of the classroom. Give the groups 30 minutes to prepare the position statements, posters, and presentations described below.
6 Remind groups to clarify their specific “needs” (things necessary to survival or efficient operation) and “wants” (things the group would like to have happen on the piece of land) as a group. Lakeshore resources in the community are limited. Ask each group to develop a position statement on how they believe the lakeshore property should be developed.
7 Have each student groups make a poster that helps explain their position.
8 Before starting the public meeting proceedings, describe the meeting guidelines:
   • Each group has a designated spokesperson.
   • Only the student addressed by you (portraying the City Council) may speak.
   • A different spokesperson can be chosen for each new round of questions.
   • If citizens have a question during the public hearing, they’re to raise their hands to be recognized by the City Council (the instructor or group leader).
9 Presentation period: After all groups have had time to prepare a position statement and poster, each group will stand and present their poster to the class, making sure to state their group name, describe their group’s role, and explain what they’ve decided would be best for the land. They will then answer the two questions on the Concerned Citizen Group Duties Sheet.
   • When each group has had a chance to present, the instructor
will assign each group to pose a question to another group. (For example, you have the Youth group ask the DNR group a question.)

- After two minutes, the instructor will call on a group, which will then ask their question. The responding group will have one minute to prepare before answering the question. Each group will have one turn to ask a question and one turn to answer a question.
- Next, the instructor may choose to ask each group a question. The responding group has one minute to prepare before answering the question.
- Each group will then restate their plan to the class.
- The City Council (instructor) will then take five minutes to deliberate the hearing, review notes, and prepare feedback. The City Council will share one positive impression about each group, each presentation/plan, and one suggestion for improvement.

10 The decision:

- Option 1: At this point the instructor can act as the City Council members and approve a plan awarding the land to one group based on the most comprehensive presentation that considered the needs and aspirations of the majority, or best met the needs of the community (a consensus).
- Option 2: You may wish to have the students vote as a group to choose the most comprehensive and viable plan.
- Option 3: Students may choose to award the land to a group with certain stipulations based on concerns and ideas presented by other groups (a compromise).
- Option 4: Alternately, the City Council (instructor) could state that more information is needed and that an additional hearing must be scheduled. If this route is chosen, there is no expectation of an additional hearing in class. Explain that subsequent public meetings may be required to present additional information, or make adjustments to the plans. Tell students that this happens in real life. Provide students with specific reasons for postponing a decision.

Wrap-up

1 To end the hearing, thank the special interest groups and council members for their involvement and attention.

2 Remind the students that local governments hold town meetings in the “real world” to collect public input on decisions impacting the community. Politicians, interest groups, and citizens can voice their opinions and concerns at public meetings. It’s important to be prepared and well-informed about an issue before presenting your concerns and ideas at a public meeting. Challenge students to become informed and to voice their opinions when they feel committed to an issue.

3 Why are public hearings important? Who is a citizen? What
are a citizen’s responsibilities? How can one person make a difference in environmental issues? How can citizens learn more about local issues that may concern them? Did the groups clearly present the differences between needs and wants during the town meeting? What are some of the responsibilities of people living in a democracy?

4 Discuss the many ways in which citizens in a democracy can get involved and influence decision-making in their communities.

5 Comment on issues where children have made a difference in public policy and encourage students to learn more about getting involved in their community.

6 Debrief the students. You may want to ask:
   • Which course would others have chosen if they had been the decision-makers?
   • How did the students feel about the hearing? During the process, they may have experienced some frustrations and limitations that they want to express. Why do people get frustrated? How are people limited in public decision-making processes?

Assessment Options

1 Observe student involvement in small groups and during the hearing.

2 Evaluate the posters made for the hearing. Have student group members perform different roles in writing a proposal, organizing the poster, and presenting their posters.

3 Have student group members devise a fictional land use issue and create a short story based on this issue and how a community might resolve it. They may also illustrate the story and organize it into a storybook format.

4 Have students write a letter to a legislator or a letter to the editor discussing the impacts of all sides of a current land use issue related to shore line development in your community, or with regard to public waters used by boaters, water craft operators, swimmers, tourists, resort owners, conservation groups, campers, anglers, etc. As an alternative, have students choose a local environmental issue concerning lakes or rivers, and have them write a courtroom drama-style play about a public hearing for the issue. Present the play to another class.

5 Assessment options include the Checklist and Rubric on the following pages.
**Town Meeting Checklist**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Possible Points</th>
<th>Points Earned</th>
<th>Points Earned</th>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Instructor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>_____________</td>
<td>_____________</td>
<td>Student can follow directions and agreed-upon rules for working in a group, sharing ideas, and reaching group decisions.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>_____________</td>
<td>_____________</td>
<td>Student can explain user group.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>_____________</td>
<td>_____________</td>
<td>Student gives two reasons why different user groups can have different ideas regarding the best use of lakeshore property.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>_____________</td>
<td>_____________</td>
<td>Student can define <strong>consensus</strong>.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>_____________</td>
<td>_____________</td>
<td>Student can define <strong>compromise</strong>.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>_____________</td>
<td>_____________</td>
<td>Student can defend a viewpoint that may be different than their own in a role-play situation.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>_____________</td>
<td>_____________</td>
<td>Student can describe four different ways that community groups might want to develop a piece of lakeshore property.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>_____________</td>
<td>_____________</td>
<td>Student can work with group members in a town meeting simulation to prepare and present a proposal developing a piece of lakeshore property.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total Points**

22 | _____________ | _____________ | **Score** ____________

Checklists are tools for students and instructors. Checklists involve students in managing their own learning. They help students understand and set learning goals before the lesson begins, and help them monitor their progress during the lesson, ensuring that they meet learning goals and objectives by the end of the lesson. Students can also use checklists to discover areas that may need improvement. Checklists help instructors monitor each student’s progress throughout the lesson, facilitating appropriate adjustment of instruction to ensure learning by the end of the lesson. The instructor may wish to have students add several of their own learning goals to the checklist to personalize it, and to accommodate varied learning needs and styles.

**Grade**

- **19-22 points = A**
  Excellent. Work is above expectations.

- **15-18 points = B**
  Good. Work meets expectations.

- **14-17 points = C**
  Work is generally good. Some areas are better developed than others.

- **10-13 points = D**
  Work does not meet expectations; it isn’t clear that student understands objectives.

- **0-9 points = F**
  Work is unacceptable.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poster Presentation Criteria</th>
<th>4 Excellent</th>
<th>3 Good</th>
<th>2 Fair</th>
<th>1 Poor</th>
<th>0 Unacceptable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Group participation</strong></td>
<td>All members participated and discussed topic. Group agreed on what to do with the land; all contributed to the poster.</td>
<td>Group discussed what to do with the land, but the workload was put on a few students.</td>
<td>One or two students dominated the group discussion and planned the poster.</td>
<td>Group didn't cooperate well; group discussion on how to create the poster or on what to do with the land wasn't seen.</td>
<td>Group didn't produce a poster. Student disrupted group setting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lakeshore development perspectives and values</strong></td>
<td>Student demonstrates clear understanding that different user groups have different perspectives and values on the best use of lakeshore property. Demonstrates understanding of consensus and compromise in community decision-making.</td>
<td>Student demonstrates understanding that different user groups have different perspectives on the best use of lakeshore property. Demonstrates understanding of consensus in community decision-making.</td>
<td>Student demonstrates understanding that different user groups have different perspectives on the best use of lakeshore property.</td>
<td>Student has difficulty understanding that different user groups have different perspectives.</td>
<td>Student doesn't understand that different user groups have different perspectives. Doesn't work to reach consensus or find ways to compromise to reach a decision in the town meeting exercise.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Poster content and design</strong></td>
<td>Group poster shows how the land is developed. Map with key included. Explains how land development will positively and negatively impact people and the environment. Poster is well-organized and laid out, easy to view from a distance, and easy to read and understand.</td>
<td>Poster shows how the land is developed. Map with key included. States how it positively or negatively benefits and impacts people or the environment. Poster is laid out well, easy to view from a distance, and easy to understand.</td>
<td>Group created poster with a map and key, but failed to clearly explain what they did to the land and how it will impact people and the environment. Poster isn't well organized, but it's understandable.</td>
<td>Poster didn't include a map, key, or information on human and environmental impacts. Poster is disorganized and difficult to understand.</td>
<td>Poster not understandable or not completed.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Score _____ (Calculate score by dividing total points by number of criteria.)
Diving Deeper

Extensions

1. Have students bring in public hearing announcements from local newspapers. Choose one and prepare a class statement on the issue to present at the hearing. (This statement will become part of the public record on the issue.) Have students present their comments, or take their comments to the hearing and let them know how people responded to their ideas.

2. Have students attend an actual public hearing on an environmental issue. Compare it to your classroom public hearing.

3. Write to local officials about an environmental issue of particular concern.

4. See Lesson 4:5—Fisheries Management and You, for background information on fisheries management, regulations, special regulations, experimental regulations, and the fisheries regulations toolbox. Contact your local fisheries office for information about rule making and experimental fishing regulations. The Minnesota DNR works cooperatively with other agencies and with the community before enacting special fishing regulations. No toolbox regulation is implemented without public input and support.

5. Have students find information on the fish populations, habitat, and water quality of a local lake on Lake Finder by going to the Minnesota DNR website at mndnr.gov and clicking on “Lake Finder.”

6. Look at the current Minnesota fishing regulations booklet to determine if there are special fishing regulations already implemented for the lake. Have students research who the various participants of a special, experimental regulations, or regulations toolbox public meeting might be. Use all the information the students collect to create and conduct a town meeting to discuss and decide whether to implement special or experimental fishing regulations on the local lake.

7. Ask a fisheries manager or field staff person to participate in the town meeting.

There is no K-2 Option for this lesson.
Concerned Citizen Group Roles

- Copy this page and cut the roles apart. Give one role to each small group.
- Create additional or different concerned citizen groups (farmers, foresters, fishing club) if desired. You may wish to include groups similar to those in your community.
- Encourage each concerned citizen group to develop their own ideas for their proposal. Remind them that they must stay within their basic role. Groups must outline their proposals as clearly as possible during the first class period. The instructor’s role is one of a facilitator: asking probing questions, clarifying issues, keeping track of time, and answering factual questions, but not offering too many ideas. Let the students take charge.

Business (service)
This group of people wants to build on the property. They would build a business that would be a sports arena, amusement park, hotel, apartment complex, restaurant, resort, golf course, or marina. What type of business would provide the most jobs for the local community? What type of business would attract tourists? Is the lakeshore the best place to build the business?

Industry (product)
This group wants to make a product they can sell, and run a profitable business. An industry might make something that the people in town would use, such as food, clothing, furniture, boats, or fishing rods. A factory would provide jobs for people in the town, too. A parking lot would have to be built for the employees’ cars. What would be the best kind of industry to put on this property? This might be a good place to build a factory because it is close to town, and employees wouldn’t have far to drive to get to work. Is this the best place to build a factory?

Department of Natural Resources
The DNR is concerned with protecting and conserving natural resources and ensuring that they’re used in a sustainable way. Sustainable means that resources can be maintained for use by future generations—in other words, not all used up. What is an appropriate use of the land that will ensure that future generations can also enjoy good fishing, clean water, and a healthy environment? The DNR is also interested in teaching people how to conserve and wisely use natural resources. How could the shoreline property be used to provide a demonstration site to help others learn about the importance of shoreline vegetation? How does shoreline vegetation improve fishing? Would this demonstration site need a parking lot for those who came to enjoy it? Is there another way that people might want to use this property?

Lake Association
This group of people own property on the lake, and they’re concerned about keeping the water clean for themselves and others for drinking, swimming, fishing, and other uses. They might want to teach people how to keep the water clean for both people and animals. They may be concerned that new invasive species, pollution, overfishing, or too many rules and regulations might interfere with people’s enjoyment of the lake. What are some important concerns of those who own lakeshore property? How would they like to see the property used?
Town Government
Elected officials are responsible for making good decisions for people who live in the town. The town government would like to provide more jobs for its townspeople and attract newcomers to expand its tax base. The town government is also concerned about keeping the town a healthy place to live. With more tax money, the town could improve its schools, streets, and water treatment plant. What would be the best way to use the property for the good of the people in the town?

Youth Group
This group of kids wants the land to be a place where they can go to hang out. There isn’t a recreation center in the town, and the baseball fields at the playground are always busy. Some kids in the group like hiking, hunting, birdwatching, and fishing. The lake doesn’t have a public fishing pier. Some kids would like their older brothers and sisters to be able to find a job close to town. Many older kids have to move to another town to find jobs when they graduate from high school and college. The youth group had many discussions to reach their own agreement on the best use of the lakeshore property. Now they want to present their idea to be considered by the adults at the town meeting.

University
The University has scientists who want to study the area. It may want to develop a research facility or study station to learn about a specific subject, such as lake’s animals or a rare plant. Students could come to the study station to see plants and animals that they only read about in textbooks back at the University. University biologists know that an undeveloped piece of lakeshore property with a lot of plants provides good habitat for many kinds of birds, insects, and animals. Aquatic plants provide good habitat for fish, too. The university has other scientists—economists—who study how businesses create products, make money, and provide jobs. What other kinds of scientists might the university have?
Concerned Citizen Group Duties

1. Choose one person to read the description of your concerned citizen group aloud.

2. Within your group, discuss the facts about the property, the lake, and the town.

3. Do some research in the library or on the Internet to find more information about the issues that your citizen group might consider for the property, the lake, and the town.

4. Decide how your group would like to use or develop the land.

5. Make a poster showing how your group would use the land. Include a map of the area.

6. Make up a name for your group and put it on the poster.

7. Make a table tent with your group’s name on it.

8. Answer the question: How will your project benefit people in the town? How will your project benefit the lake? How will your project be a good use of the lakeshore property?

9. Answer the question: How will your project be good for the environment? Is your project a sustainable use of the property—will the resources of the property remain available for future generations? Will your project benefit the plants or animals?

10. Will your project have any negative effects on the property, people, plants or animals, town, or lake?

11. Which of the benefits are the most important for your citizen group and for the community? Why?

12. Be sure all members of your group participate. Make sure you consider the opinions of everyone in the group and arrive at a decision together.

13. Choose one person from your group to be spokesperson and explain your poster to your instructor.
Lakeshore Property Sale Map

Area for Sale

To Town

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