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The Effects of Rewards in Reading Incentive Programs  
on Reading Motivation, Attitude and Participation in Middle School Students

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The Effects of Extrinsic Rewards in Reading Incentive Programs  
on Reading Motivation, Attitude and Participation in Middle School Students

Literacy is an essential part of the curriculum in education today. Educators strive to influence students to read and gain more experience as readers. There are several reasons why literacy in the classroom is so important to the education of 21<sup>st</sup> century students. In the workplace today, jobs are requiring that students have a greater ability to read and write fluently (The Time, Learning, and Afterschool Taskforce, 2007). The bar of expectation that the corporate sector has for workers has been raised. It is the job of the school system and educators to motivate, instruct and cultivate literacy in the classroom, so that the future workforce will be prepared (Bottoms, 2003). There is also a need for students to be prepared to not only be fluent readers in fiction, but in nonfiction like technical readings and in technology formats (The Time, Learning, and Afterschool Taskforce, 2007). If a student has difficulty reading, it can affect his or her future earning potential and the ability to gain a post-secondary education. There are several instructional practices that students can participate in that will raise literacy scores and make students better readers. The main practice for adolescents in middle grades is to simply read. Reading for at least an hour a day and at least eleven books per year will raise reading achievement (Bottoms, 2003). Students who read at least eleven books per year scored thirty points higher on performance assessments (Bottoms, 2003).

As part of literacy instruction in the classroom, many teachers and schools institute reading programs that use extrinsic motivation in the form of rewards as a means of reading promotion (Kohn, 1999). The main goal of a reading incentive program is to motivate students to read more, mainly from the expectation of receiving a tangible reward of some kind. In many programs the number of words, minutes, and books are calculated and the student is rewarded for meeting a certain goal that has been set based on his or her reading ability (Kohn, 1999). The manner of collection and the type of reward that is given to the student may vary based on the program being implemented, but the goal, to increase reading

and raise the reading comprehension of students, is still the same (McQuillan, 1997). The correlation between reading achievement and the act of reading is proven (Bottoms, 2003). With a student's progression from elementary into middle school, the motivation to read decreases (Pitcher, et al., 2007). This makes the implementation of reading incentive programs with rewards necessary at the middle grade level to ensure that students maintain reading habits, thus increasing reading achievement. The purpose of this study is to determine the positive or negative impact of extrinsic rewards, or lack thereof, on the motivation and reading attitude of middle school students. Further, this study examined the impact of the type of reward and its relation to reading, on reading motivation, attitude, and participation in the program.

### **Literature Review**

The views of a student regarding reading and the motivation to read revolve around his or her previous experiences with reading. These experiences could involve the value placed on reading at home as well as the student's own ability to read without difficulty. The beliefs about one's ability to read and the motivation for being a good reader are the framework for a child's motivation to engage in a text (Wigfield, 1997). Albert Bandura defines self-efficacy as the judgment of one's ability to be successful at a given task (1982). The reader's view of self-efficacy directly impacts a student's desire to read. In addition, the value placed on reading or any skill being undertaken is also a mitigating factor in the motivation to participate in the activity; the combination of these factors play together to make up a child's motivation to engage in reading (Wigfield, 1997). If a child views reading as a nonessential activity, or sees no value in participating, then the child will not want to engage. This view of reading can be formed in childhood when there is or is not a parent who reads to the child or models reading as an acceptable pleasure behavior (Strommen & Mates, 2004).

Another aspect of motivation is the reasoning behind why a child chooses to participate in an activity. The two types of motivation that foster engagement are extrinsic and intrinsic sources of

motivation (Fawson & Moore, 1999). Intrinsic motivation occurs when a child has the power of the desired behavior, meaning that the choice to participate in the activity is solely completed because the child wants to participate in the activity (Fawson & Moore, 1999). Reading for intrinsic motivation is purely done for the positive enjoyment obtained from reading the material (Becker, McElvany & Kortenbruck, 2010). Extrinsic motivation occurs when the motivating factor is found not from within the child, but an outside reward, meaning that the child completes the task to obtain the reward (Fawson & Moore, 1999). Examples of outside factors that impact a child's motivation to read are rewards, good grades, parental or school expectations, or any external recognition (Becker, McElvany & Kortenbruck, 2010).

Students with disabilities also often struggle with motivation in reading. This is due to difficulties in reading comprehension and their own self-concept. Eighty percent of students with learning disabilities have a specific learning disability (SLD) in reading (Melekoglu, 2011). Student with SLD may be as far as 3.4 grade levels behind other students of the same age (Melekoglu, 2011). These difficulties in reading can lead students to have a negative view of reading and a lower motivation to read. In these cases, addressing obstacles to reading motivation can encourage students to read more, increasing the chances of academic success for students with SLD (Melekoglu, 2011).

In contrast, gifted readers often have the motivation to read, but can sometimes struggle to find challenging texts that are stimulating enough to hold their interest (Weber & Cavanaugh, 2006). Gifted readers have the following characteristics: they read often, monitor their reading, they like challenging and rich texts, and they are enthusiastic about reading material interesting to them (Weber & Cavanaugh, 2006). The obstacle to maintaining the motivation to read for these students is being able to provide the amount of reading material that these readers require. Gifted readers can read large amounts of material when the topic is of interest to them (Weber & Cavanaugh, 2006). One way that schools can meet the needs of these students and maintain motivation is to provide eReaders that would allow students access to a larger variety of reading materials (Weber & Cavanaugh, 2006).

The main positive effect of reading incentive programs is that students are motivated to engage in reading (Pavonetti, Brimmer, & Cipelewski, 2002). “In a reanalysis of NAEP data, it was found that children’s reading motivation was the strongest predictor of their subsequent reading comprehension in 10<sup>th</sup> grade after controlling for reading achievement in 8<sup>th</sup> grade” (Guthrie et al, 2006, p. 92). This factor is important because research has shown that students who engage in reading have higher reading comprehension and do better on standardized tests (Pavonetti, Brimmer, & Cipelewski, 2002). By participating in a reading program, students are engaging in reading, which in turn helps a student to hone his or her reading skills. This fact will increase the probability that students will see reading in a positive manner, thus becoming lifelong readers (Pavonetti, Brimmer, & Cipelewski, 2002). Another positive aspect of reading incentive programs is the ability for schools to have a record that students are engaging in the reading standards set forth in state curriculums. In the English Language Arts and Reading Georgia Performance Standards (2011), students are required to read twenty five books or a million words per year; in order to accomplish this, students should read twenty minutes per night seven days a week.

There are some negative ramifications from the implementation of reading incentive programs. When a reward is attached to an activity, it can make the activity seem as though it is unimportant enough to do on its own, without a reward. In providing an extrinsic reward, the value of the act of reading for enjoyment is tainted, thus leading to decreased motivation to read (Carter, 1996). The motivation to participate in the programs is not necessarily due to the enjoyment of reading a good book, but more likely the extrinsic reward that is provided when a certain goal has been obtained. Another issue with technology based reading incentive programs is the lack of student choice. Students are limited to books that have quizzes and books that fall within the reading level of the student (Pavonetti, Brimmer, & Cipelewski, 2002). The choice of what to read is dictated not by interest but by point value. This loss of autonomy in book choice can have a negative impact on a student’s motivation to read. Children do not learn the needed skill of making their own literary choices. There are also implications for the collection

development of the library and the books that are made available to students. Instead of choosing books that are relevant to students, books are sometimes chosen based on the availability of quizzes (Carter, 1996).

There is much discussion about the value of using rewards to elicit motivation. In fact, there are two schools of thought, the first being that extrinsic motivation with rewards that are not related to reading, will actually decrease motivation to read. According to Kohn (1994) “at least two dozen studies have shown that people expecting to receive a reward for completing a task (or for doing it successfully) simply do not perform as well as those who expect nothing” (p. 2). Other studies suggest that the extrinsic reward has lasting effects and motivation decreases continue even after the reward had been discontinued (McQuillan, 1997). The other school of thought is that rewards that are related to the desired behavior, reading, will not decrease motivation to participate in the activity. In a study completed by Marinak and Gambrell (2008), the motivation to read did not decline when extrinsic rewards were books or in some way related to reading. Even so, if the reward was not tied to reading, the reward could lead to less intrinsic motivation to read. In fact, the reward given could actually be more harmful to motivation than no reward at all (Marinak & Gambrell, 2008).

McQuillan (1997) wrote a comprehensive statistical overview of ten reading incentive programs. The research can be broken up into two parts; those which show positive effects for incentives and those that do not. Of the five programs that showed the positive effects of incentives, the extrinsic rewards were parental acknowledgement, and reading related rewards, like books, read alouds, or sustained silent reading time. In these five programs, reading incentives did mean higher reading scores. Due to the fact that the incentives themselves, read alouds and sustained reading time, cause an increase in reading scores it is difficult to know which factor is responsible for the increase in reading scores, the incentive or the implementation of the program. . The rewards themselves could mean the increase in achievement, thus making the correlation between the reward and the improvement in reading scores inconclusive. The other five programs were three to five months long and showed negative results, lower or the same

reading scores, when students were rewarded for reading. The rewards given in these programs were not related to reading; instead they consisted of fast food coupons and certificates. These programs showed a negative impact.

In order to understand the ramifications of reading incentive programs, more research must be done to understand the impact of these reading programs on the culture of reading within a school. To gain the ability to effectively engage students an environment of reading must exist within the school in which a community of readers discuss books and demonstrate positive reading habits. Several studies have shown that when students have access to books and a more comfortable place to read, then the practice of reading increases (McQuillan, 1997). This aspect leads to implications for the environment that is created within the constraints of the media center and the results that occur from those changes. Further, more research must be conducted to fully understand the consequence of rewards in reading incentive programs. The decision of the program to offer rewards as well as the type of incentive has been shown to impact the motivation of students to read. The implication from this facet of the incentive program is directly conducive to the success of the program. Throughout this literature review the following issues have been discussed: the importance of literacy education, motivation, factors that influence reading, reading incentive programs (both technology and non-electronic), and the effects of these programs on students reading habits. In the review of the current research on these topics, additional studies can be made in these aspects of reading research to advance the different ways in which students can be motivated to read. This aspect of literacy education is essential to reading achievement, thus preparing students for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The purpose of the present study is to determine the positive or negative impact of extrinsic rewards on the motivation and reading attitude of middle school students. Further, this study examined the impact of the type of reward and its relation to reading, on reading motivation, attitude, and participation in the program. The research study will focus on answering the following research questions:

Is there a difference in academic reading attitude, recreational reading attitude, reading self-concept, reading value and the number of pages read between students provided with reading-related rewards and students provided with non-reading related rewards?

## Method

### *Participants*

Participants in this study consists of 55 sixth grade students, see table 1, in two separate language arts classes taught by the same teacher. The research study took place in a middle school in eastern Georgia. The age range of the participants was 11 to 12 years old. Learner characteristics include wide range of academic abilities; gifted, special education, and average abilities. In each class there are students with a Specific Learning Disability (SLD) in reading. Additionally, there was approximately an even distribution of male and female students. The participants include Caucasian, African American, and Hispanic ethnicities.

Table 1  
*Participants*

	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Other Factors for Learner Analysis</b>
<b>Class One (26 students)</b>	13 Male 13 Female	Caucasian 83.3% African American 3.3% Other 13.3%	5 Gifted Students 2 Special Needs Students SLD Reading
<b>Class Two (29 students)</b>	15 Male 14 Female	Caucasian 72.4% African American 10.3% Hispanic 6.9% Other 6.9%	6 Gifted Students 4 Special Needs Students SLD Reading

### *Materials*

The students' reading attitude was determined at the beginning of the research study using the motivational scale, Elementary Reading Attitude Scale (ERAS) developed by McKenna and Kear (1990). Using a pictorial format with the cartoon character Garfield, students are able to accurately depict their attitude towards academic related reading as well as recreational related reading. In scoring the surveys,

the researcher was able to utilize the academic, recreational and overall results as a gauge of attitude towards reading. The estimates for reliability and validity came from the national testing. To ensure the reliability of the survey, Cronbach's alpha was used to calculate the subscales and composite scores. The coefficients ranged from .74 to .89 (McKenna & Lear, 1990). In addition to measure the motivation of middle school readers, the Adolescent Motivation to Read Profile (AMRP) reading survey (Pitcher, et al., 2007), was administered at the beginning of the research period. The AMRP focuses on the self-concept of the reader as well as the view towards the value of reading. The multiple choice questions in the survey provide a raw score for the student's self-concept as a reader and the value placed on reading. The survey was developed from another survey, the Motivation to Read Assessment (Gambrell, Palmer, Codling, & Mazzoni, 1996), and was administered by eleven researchers at eight different sites nationwide to 384 adolescents (Pitcher, et al., 2007). The reliability for the AMRP comes from the original survey and consists of Cronbach's alpha statistic calculation, revealing a moderately high reliability for both third grade (.70) and fifth grade (.76) (Gambrell, Palmer, Codling, & Mazzoni, 1996). In order to accurately keep track of the amount of pages read by students, each class kept a weekly reading log, Appendix A. The daily rewards were distributed to students by showing their weekly reading logs and allowing the teacher sign off on the daily reward distribution.

### *Procedures*

The research study began with both English Language Arts classes taking the pre assessment surveys to measure reading motivation and attitude. After completing the surveys, the two classes began a reading incentive program with different rewards. The rewards and page goals were derived based on discussions with the Language Arts teacher and the fact that reading achievement and performance is based on students' reading for at least one hour per day (Bottoms, 2003). One class received rewards related to reading and for the other class the rewards were not related to reading. During the six week time period, students in both classes completed the reading logs as a way to measure student participation and the reward provided. Rewards were provided to students individually based on the amount he or she

read. Any type of book counted towards reading participation. Examples of the rewards that were related to reading are bookmarks or reading books, reading lunch in the Media Center, and the ability to star in a READ poster. These posters are specifically created using Adobe Photoshop and various backgrounds. Students are shown with their favorite reading books and the posters promote reading around the school. Examples of the non-reading related rewards are candy, free sit passes at lunch, or breakfast sandwiches one morning. Free sit passes allow students to sit at any table during lunch rather than with his or her class. There were no limitations on the type of book that could be read in order to gain a reward. The reward was based on the number of pages read overall during the six week period, see Table 2. Students completed the reading log on the honor system. The Language Arts teacher controlled the distribution of the daily rewards during the class period. At the conclusion of the study, the rewards were switched for each class. This aspect of the study served to lessen the treatment rivalry between the two groups of students.

Table 2  
*Program Rewards*

Reward Time Frame	Non-Reading Related Reward	Number of pages	Reading Related Reward	Number of pages
Daily	Candy	Every 25 pages	Bookmark/Reading book	Every 25 pages
Weekly	Ten minute free time break	Total of 175 pages for the week	Ten minute reading time	Total of 175 pages for the week
Weekly	Free sit passes at lunch	Total of 350 pages for the week	Reading Lunch in the Media Center	Total of 350 pages for the week
End of program	Morning Breakfast	Total of more than 2,000 pages six week accumulation	Reading Poster	Total of more than 2,000 pages six weeks accumulation

### *Data Analysis*

The data consisted of scores from two surveys, both the ERAS and AMRP, completed by both classes at the beginning and conclusion of the research time frame and the number of pages read by students. In order to understand the relationship between the variables in the study, reading motivation and rewards, the ANCOVA statistical analysis was conducted. The ANCOVA statistical analysis was

also used to compare the difference in reading attitudes amidst these treatments in the proposed study.

Likewise, the ANCOVA also was used to compare the differences in reading motivation during the study.

The scores assessed using pretest scores and the analysis determined possible group differences.

### Results

Within the pretest ERAS survey, the score range is 10-40, the range of scores combined is 20-80. Class one has mean scores for recreational and academic reading which are slightly lower than that of the norm mean of 27.9 for recreational reading and 24.7 for academic reading. For class two on the ERAS, the recreational reading score is slightly higher than that of the norm mean of 27.9 and is lower than the norm of 24.7 for academic reading. Table 3 is an overview of pre and post treatment data for each subscale tested with the ERAS and the AMRP.

Table 3  
*Pre and Post Treatment Data*

	Recreational Reading		Academic Reading		Self-Concept as a reader		Value of Reading	
	Pretest	Posttest	Pretest	Posttest	Pretest	Posttest	Pretest	Posttest
<i>Class One Reading Related Rewards N=29</i>	M= 23.34 SD= 7.25	M= 24.76 SD= 7.45	M= 22.55 SD= 6.1	M= 23.1 SD= 5.95	74.6% SD= 5.2	85% SD=3.4	63.4% SD=7.9	74.12% SD=6.5
<i>Class Two Non-Reading Related Rewards N=26</i>	M= 28.5 SD= 8.28	M= 28.5 SD= 8.7	M= 23.04 SD= 7.82	M= 22.7 SD= 7.73	78% SD=6.2	76% SD=5.2	65.75% SD=6.1	69% SD=6.4

As a part of the post treatment survey data, the mean scores for class one are also slightly lower than that of the norm mean of 27.9 for recreational reading and 24.7 for academic reading, but are higher than that of the pretreatment data. In class two, the recreational reading score is slightly higher than that of the norm mean of 27.9 and is lower than the norm of 24.7 for academic reading. The ANCOVA results are listed in Table 4.

Table 4  
ANCOVA Results

Dependent Variable: Recreational Reading

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
<i>Corrected Model</i>	3193.398 <sup>a</sup>	2	1596.699	187.715	.000
<i>Intercept</i>	9.363	1	9.363	1.101	.299
<i>RecPre</i>	3001.499	1	3001.499	352.869	.000
<i>Gp</i>	19.625	1	19.625	2.307	.135
<i>Error</i>	442.311	52	8.506		
<i>Total</i>	42339.000	55			
<i>Corrected Total</i>	3635.709	54			

Dependent Variable: Academic Reading

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
<i>Corrected Model</i>	2335.141 <sup>a</sup>	2	1167.570	401.002	.000
<i>Intercept</i>	6.230	1	6.230	2.140	.150
<i>AcadPre</i>	2332.823	1	2332.823	801.209	.000
<i>Gp</i>	10.484	1	10.484	3.601	.063
<i>Error</i>	151.405	52	2.912		
<i>Total</i>	31352.000	55			
<i>Corrected Total</i>	2486.545	54			

Dependent Variable: Self-Concept as a Reader

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
<i>Corrected Model</i>	1004.203 <sup>a</sup>	2	502.102	120.523	.000
<i>Intercept</i>	223.441	1	223.441	53.634	.000
<i>SCPre</i>	839.055	1	839.055	201.404	.000
<i>Gp</i>	89.947	1	89.947	21.591	.000
<i>Error</i>	216.633	52	4.166		
<i>Total</i>	57733.000	55			
<i>Corrected Total</i>	1220.836	54			

Dependent Variable: Value of Reading

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
<i>Corrected Model</i>	1772.204 <sup>a</sup>	2	886.102	89.471	.000
<i>Intercept</i>	224.602	1	224.602	22.678	.000
<i>ValPre</i>	1713.370	1	1713.370	173.002	.000
<i>Gp</i>	21.792	1	21.792	2.200	.144
<i>Error</i>	514.996	52	9.904		
<i>Total</i>	47275.000	55			
<i>Corrected Total</i>	2287.200	54			

As the pretreatment and post treatment data was compared using an ANCOVA statistical analysis, see Table 4, it was found that the some subscales showed statistical significance at  $p < .05$ . Using the data from the ERAS, the recreational reading subscale did not show any statistical significance at  $p = 0.135$ , nor did the academic reading subscale at  $p = .063$  between the two reward groups. In analysis of the AMRP data, the self-concept subscale did show substantial statistical significance between the reward groups at  $p = .000$ , the value of reading subscale did not show any statistical significance at  $p = .144$ . These results show that the class that received reading rewards showed a statistical significance increase in the self-concept subscale and no significant increase in the value of reading subscale. Tests for homoscedasticity and homogeneity of regression slopes were not significant, indicating that the assumptions for ANCOVA were not violated.

During the six week treatment, class one received non reading related rewards and class two received reading related rewards. Overall, the reading related rewards group read less than the other rewards group. The reading related rewards group read a total of 2,235 pages over the six week period, while the non-reading related rewards read a total of 5,952 pages. As students realized that the reward was reading related, reading participation in the program would dwindle and as other students realized that the reward was not reading related, more students would participate in the program by reading more pages. A t test of the data, show in table 5, there is a statistically significant difference between the reward groups on number of pages read at  $p < 0.001$ . The t test is based on group totals in class one and class two; it is not an individual measure.

Table 5  
*Group Participation*

<b>Week of Program</b>	<b>Class One: Reading Related Rewards</b>	<b>Number of students participating</b>	<b>Class Two: Non-Reading Related Rewards</b>	<b>Number of students participating</b>
<b>1</b>	775	6	726	7
<b>2</b>	589	7	845	9
<b>3</b>	412	5	956	10
<b>4</b>	275	4	1050	10
<b>5</b>	125	3	1250	11
<b>6</b>	59	2	1125	12
<b>Total Pages</b>	2235		5952	
<b>Average</b>	372.5		992	
<b>Standard Deviation</b>	275.5		190.4	

### *Discussion*

As the results are analyzed there is very little difference in the motivation of academic reading and recreational reading in relation to the rewards. The most notable increase found in the study was in the self-concept subscale in both reading and non-reading related rewards groups. Also, with the vast differences in the participation of students within the types of rewards, there was a statistically significant connection between the reward and the participation in the reading program. In conclusion the following results can be found, the non-reading related reward does increase participation in the program, but does not impact the motivation to read, either academically or for recreation. The type of reward does not have an impact on the value of reading but does have significant effect on the self-concept as a reader, more so when the reward is related to reading. As previously mentioned the main goal of a reading incentive program is that students read more (Kohn, 1999). In this study students that received the non-reading related rewards read more than those that did not, thus leading the researcher to believe that this goal was met in this incentive program in that students did in fact read more with the non-reading related rewards. The study did not find that motivation declined with the use of extrinsic rewards; in fact it stayed the same or increased which is in juxtaposition to the research that non-reading related rewards would decrease motivation (Marinak & Gambrell, 2008). The researcher also concludes that students gain a

greater reading self-concept from the reading rewards issued in the program. This could be due to the relationship that students correlate with the reward and his or her self-concept as a reader. During the program, students were more apt to read and keep track of their progress when the reward was not based in reading. The results of the study could be an anomaly within the reported data, see table 4, due to the fact that the participation in the study was very limited, see table 5.

These conclusions from the data can be used in reading programs in the Media Center and in the Language Arts classroom with the development of a reading incentive program. Specifically, the conclusions from the research study will be used to design and implement a reading incentive program in the researcher's school. This program will consist of a program based on a combination of non-reading related rewards and reading related rewards. The use of reading related rewards are included in an effort to increase the self-concept of students within the reading program, the inclusion of non-reading rewards will be used to increase participation in the program. This program will increase self-concept among students' thus increasing reading achievement and increase participation in the program. The researcher believes that this will occur due to the fact that the view of self-concept engaged by the reader impacts the student's desire to read (Wigfield, 1997), thus increasing participation in the program. In addition, the value placed on reading or any skill being undertaken is also a mitigating factor in the motivation to participate in the activity; the combination of these factors play together to make up a child's motivation to engage in reading (Wigfield, 1997). Research has shown that students who engage in reading have higher reading comprehension and do better on standardized tests (Pavonetti, Brimmer, & Ciplewski, 2002). By participating in a reading program, students are motivated and engaged in reading, which in turn helps a student to hone his or her reading skills.

As limitation to this research study, students had to keep up with the weekly reading log sheet to gain their rewards, it is possible that students may have lost their sheet and thus, did not receive as many rewards. The completion of the reading logs were based on the honor system and there was not a high percentage of participation in each class, see table 5. Logs were turned into the Media Center to gain the

weekly rewards. New logs were issued at the beginning of each week. In addition, most students chose the book mark as the daily reading related prize, rather than the reading book. This could have been because the books were older and not as visually pleasing to the eye. This could have affected the outcome of the study, as an implication for further study the impact of newer books as prizes could be explored. Students were also limited in the time frame in which he or she could claim their reward due to the fact that the language arts teacher controlled the dissemination of the daily rewards; this could also have impacted the outcome of the study. As a further consideration of the data, the language arts teacher also began a silent reading opening segment to class that lasted ten minutes. This could have increased participation in the program

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