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ABSTRACT

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ED 454 551

Using Outstanding Translated Children's Books in the School
Setting to Promote an Understanding of Other Countries and
Cultures

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Abstract

The importance of translated children's books to the literary and cultural development of children is well documented, and the study of other countries is an important part of the school curriculum across grade levels. Therefore, purposes of the research were (a) to share results of research on outstanding translated children's books published from 1990-2000, (b) to provide a bibliography of these books that can be used by librarians, teachers, and students in a study of other countries, and (c) to present an application of a collaborative study on the use of translated books by a middle school librarian with teachers in a real-life setting.

Introduction

The study of other countries is an important part of the school curriculum across all grade levels. Internet access, internationally-based companies, and the ease of travel, has our students living in a global society and in the future they will be working in this global society. It is our responsibility as educators to prepare them to the best of our ability to be able to function in a world community. This presentation serves a three-fold purpose: (a) to share results of a study on outstanding translated children's books published between 1990-2000; (b) to provide a bibliography of these books that can be used by librarians, teachers, and students in a study of other countries; and (c) to present an application of the use of translated books by a school librarian and teachers in a real-life setting.

It is essential that we know geographical and cultural facts about nations. As important as this information is, it is perhaps more important that students acquire a deeper understanding of other people's lives. With this in mind the teachers and the librarian at Colleyville Middle School (Texas) have included a literature strand in the research project on countries of the world that is required of the students. The rationale for this project is rooted in a quote from Aidan Chambers:

It is through literature that we most intimately enter the hearts and minds and spirits of other people. And what we value in this is the *difference* as well as the human similarities of others: that way, as C.S. Lewis put it, we become a thousand different people and yet remain ourselves (Tomlinson, 1998, p.3).

Through the use of literature individuals emerge from faceless populations and students begin to reject stereotypes. They recognize the role that history, setting, and current circumstances play in shaping all of us.

Children deserve the best literature from their home country and from abroad. Yet books from other countries, particularly translated children's books, have a difficult time making their way to the library shelves in the United States. Perhaps this difficulty comes from having such a wealth of good books written and illustrated by those in our own country, yet book budgets do not expand enough to add some of the best from abroad. Reading the books from other cultures, countries and languages is commonly regarded as one important avenue of experiencing common ties, such as the need for love, family, safety, and humor that bind us together. According to Lynch-Brown and Tomlinson, translated books help children "develop a bond of shared reading experiences with children of other languages." (Lynch-Brown and Tomlinson, 1998, pp. 197-198). Yet, as author, poet, and editor Naomi Shihab Nye (1992) contends, "Those of us living in the United States often suffer from a particular literary provinciality, imagining ourselves to be the primary readers and writers of the planet." She concludes, "We need translations to help us value the literature and cultures of other languages." (pp. xii-xiii).

Outstanding translated children's books that are true to a culture, its people, and their heritage in both text and illustrations, and that are "readable," can help children value another culture at an early age. Whether culturally specific or not, outstanding translated children's books open the literature of other cultures to children, librarians, and teachers who otherwise would never be aware of its existence. The power and appeal of illustrated books for all ages from other cultures and other languages provide a diversity

of viewpoints, with illustrations and styles unique and different from our own. In an interview translator, linguist, and publisher Dagmar Herrmann said "I believe from a very tender age children ought to be exposed to writers and illustrators around the world -- writers with a different view and illustrators with a different touch." ("Talking Translations," 1994, p. 40-41).

According to *The Bowker Annual* (1998), some 4500 to 5000 children's books are published each year in the United States. Children's literature authorities differ slightly as to the number of translations included in this large number. Yet there is agreement that there is a small number of translations, most being picture books, published in the United States each year. Horning, Kruse, and Schliesman (1994, p. 9) of the Cooperative Children's Book Center (CCBC) estimated that of the total number of children's books published in 1994, fewer than 100 were translated children's books and that the number was probably closer to 80. In 1999 Horning, Kruse, and Schliesman (2000) reported that the CCBC had received only 46 review books that were published in the United States in English after being translated from other languages, with only six of length substantial enough to make them eligible for the Batchelder Award. *CCBC Choices* selected 8 titles for inclusion in their 2000 listing, of which 5 were picture books.

To encourage the publication of translated children's books in the United States, the Mildred L. Batchelder Award was established in 1966. This award is selected by a committee appointed by the Association of Library Services to Children of the American Library Association and awarded to the publisher of the most outstanding of children's books translated from another language into English and published in the United States (Mildred L. Batchelder Award, 2000). Although primary attention is given to the text for

Batchelder consideration, outstanding picture books for older children have been selected as Batchelder Award Books. They include *Rabbit Island* (1978); *Hiroshima No Pika* (1982); and *Rose Blanche* (1986) as well as Batchelder Honor books, *Vendela in Venice* (1999), *Star of Fear, Star of Hope* (1995) and *Anne Frank: Beyond the Diary* (1993).

Study of Translated Books by Maureen White

Selecting quality translations for the school library collection is essential if students are to have a valid portrayal of the people and culture of the countries they are studying. Because research on countries is conducted through the language arts department as well as the social studies curriculum, books must be evaluated for both literary value and factual accuracy prior to purchase. The librarian relies heavily on reviews and studies published in professional journals in this area of collection development.

A study of the status of outstanding translated children's books published between 1990-2000 will provide data needed to analyze the factors relevant to outstanding translated children's books, including languages, genres, and subjects. This study should provide worthwhile information for those who study, publish, teach, and share children's literature. The author completed a study on successful translated children's books published prior to 1990 that was reported in the *Journal of Youth Services in Libraries* (White, 1992). A similar study on translated children's picture books published between 1992-1997 was reported in *Knowledge Quest* (White, 1998). Data and findings from this study, which looks at data between 1990-2000, allows the authors to draw conclusions as to trends in publishing related to language, genre, subjects, and reviews of outstanding translated books and translated picture books.

Books were selected for study that met the definition of an outstanding, translated children's book. The Association for Library Service to Children's definition of *children* was used: anyone from birth through 14 years of age. An *outstanding* book was identified as having met one of the following criteria: (a) received an award (b) included on an identified recommended list or (c) received a favorable review in a selected children's review source. Review sources selected were *Booklist*, *Bulletin for the Center of Children's Books*, *Horn Book*, and *School Library Journal*, which according to *The Bowker Annual* (1996), are the primary critical review sources for school and small public libraries. A *translated* book was one originally written in a language other than English and subsequently translated into English and published by a United States publisher. Though there are a number of outstanding books created by authors in English-speaking nations other than the United States, the greater difficulty for U.S. librarians comes in identifying and accessing translated books. Therefore, this study was limited to translated books.

Although this study did not produce a definitive listing of translated children's books, it provides a measure of those books that received favorable reviews from selected journals. Every effort was made to identify translated children's picture books from journals, *Books in Print* and the Library of Congress Online Catalog.

Languages

Most reviews identify the original language of the book in the bibliographic information, but this was not always the case. Sometimes a reviewed book will not be indicated as a translation, yet certain authors and publishers are known for publishing translations of a specific language. Knowledge of publishers and authors come into play

during this process. If there was a question the MARC record from the Library of Congress was obtained to (a) verify the original language and (b) determine whether the book is a translation or an adaptation or retelling, which were not eligible for this study.

Table I provides an overview of the original languages of outstanding translated children's books. Throughout the 1990's the dominant language translated by publishers in children's books was German followed by the French, Swedish, Japanese, and then by the Dutch, Italian, Danish, Spanish, and Russian languages. The close connection between English and the Germanic and Romance languages was evident in the languages being translated. Major publishers of translations with strong ties in the U.S., such as North-South for German picture book translations and Raben & Sjogren (R&S) for Swedish translations increased the opportunities for the publication of books from these languages. Dutch publications for the older reader are finding their way to the States primarily through the publishing efforts of Front Street. As noted in Table 1, the German and French translations continue to come, with other languages experiencing a slight decrease in terms of the number of positive reviews from the four review journals surveyed over the past 10 years.

Insert Table 1 here.

Genres

Personal examination of the books and the information obtained from *Books in Print* and the Library of Congress were used to identify genres. Genre categories were consistent with genres common to those described in children's literature textbooks. Genres were consistent with those described in children's literature textbooks, including Lukens (1999). The most popular genres of translated books included the major genres

of children's books being published today in the United States: Realistic Fiction, followed by Information Books and Fairy tales/Folklore. During the period of the 1990s, Picture Books, which includes books from all other genres, accounted for the majority of translated children's books. Of these picture books, slightly more than 50% were stories of animal personification in which animals act as real people. A number of the picture books were appropriate and useful for all ages. It was decided to include stories of animal personification in Realistic Fiction when the story was realistic and not a pure fantasy. A book such as *Dragon Sword and Wind Child* (1993) would be considered a fantasy. See Table 2 for genres of translated children's books reviewed in selected journals.

Insert Table 2 here.

Subjects

Subjects of translated children's books closely parallel other children's books published in the United States. Popular subjects included Animals (specific)-Fiction, Fairy Tales/Folklore, Family relationships-Fiction and Friendship-Fiction. Holocaust books or realistic fiction related to World War II were subjects not typically found in non-translated books published in the United States, but this subject was found more often in translated textual books published between 1991-1997. A notable exception was the 1996 Batchelder Honor book, *Star of Fear, Star of Hope*, a picture storybook. In 1998, 1999, and 2000, textual translations gave more attention to personal problems, such as death, loneliness, and child abuse, than in the past. Interestingly, in 2000 there were four books, designated as "Toy and movable books." While translated picture books focused more on subjects related to family, friendship and animals. For each book

selected for study, subject headings were taken from the children's subject headings assigned by the Library of Congress for analysis. See Table 3 for a listing of subject headings that were assigned to more than 3 translated books.

Insert Table 3 here.

Reviews

Reviews of translated children's books by major review sources ensure that the books are noticed by children's librarians. The average number of reviews for the past 10 years (1990-2000) was 81.6 per year. The largest number of reviews appeared in 1998 with 99 reviews from the selected sources. The smallest number of reviews appeared in 1994 with only 56 reviews cited. Providing the most reviews was *School Library Journal*, followed by *Booklist*. *Horn Book* and *Bulletin for the Center of Children's Books* selected a smaller number of translations for review each year, but they also review a much smaller number of books than does *Booklist* or *School Library Journal*. See Table 4 for a number of reviews by year from review sources used in this study.

Insert Table 4 here.

Trends

The majority of outstanding translated children's books, including picture books, are from the German and the French languages, reflecting the close ties of language, culture and literature between these nations and the United States. The North-South publishing house continues to send us a large number of picture book translations from the German language. The large number of Swedish titles is a result of the cooperative ventures between the publisher Farrar, Straus, and Giroux and the Swedish firm, Raben & Sjogren (R&S). Books from the French language come from a variety of publishers and

include a number of information books on the subject of art and artists as well as picture books for the younger reader. Front Street has given us a small collection of outstanding translations from the Dutch language. A new publishing house, Barefoot Books, has been instrumental in publishing several Italian translations. Connections between foreign publishers and publishers in the United States seems to be the primary impetus for continued translations of a particular language.

Genres of realistic fiction (including stories of animal personification), information books, folklore, and fantasy are frequently translated genres of children's translated books. These genres are also popular in non-translated children's books in the United States. Information books seem to be on the increase for all books, including picture books. Awards for information books, including the Orbis Pictus Award, increasing number of articles and books addressing the value and popularity of nonfiction literature, and exceptional authors who write in this field, have brought attention and increased publication of this literature.

Subjects with universal appeal are the subjects of translated children's picture books. Animal stories, information books and fairy tales/folklore are major subjects of the books selected for study. Information books on art appreciation and famous artists were most common for this genre. Books based on personal problems (e.g., death, emotional problems) are on the increase, although these books may be more difficult to sell in the U.S. market as we have more of a tendency to avoid serious subjects in younger children's literature than does the literature from abroad.

Reviews of translated children books and particularly picture books continue to come from major review journals. Although the four review journals selected for use in

this study are still the major journals used for selection by librarians, additional critical review sources have become available online. Online sources, such as *Amazon.com*, *BarnesandNobles.com* and *Borders.com*, places into the hands of children's librarians not only the four review sources used in this study, but also additional review sources less likely to be subscribed to by school and small public libraries. These include such critical review sources as *Kirkus Reviews*, *Publisher's Weekly*, *Library Journal* and *The New York Times Book Review*. In a future study of translated children's books, these resources will also be included to increase the possibility of inclusion into the database of books to be studied.

In spite of the fact that publishers continue to produce a relatively small number of translated children's books, there is available a wide selection of outstanding translations. There is a particularly outstanding selection of picture books from all genres, subjects and from a variety of languages being published. Many translated books have received positive reviews and a few were placed on notable lists and/or received children's book awards. It is our responsibility as children's librarians teachers, and/or parents to access these books of quality and share with children. If we begin this venture of sharing outstanding translated children's picture books with children at an early age, we validate to children that outstanding literature does not just come only from our own country, but comes from many other countries and languages around the world.

Application of Study by Nancy Bluemel

Planning of the research project on countries is a collaborative effort between teachers and the librarian. It was organized in the following manner:

1. Prior to beginning research in the library, each student meets with the teacher in the classroom to select the country he/she would like to know more about. Travel packets which detail specific information the students must discover while working in the library are distributed.
2. Students come to the library media center as a class every day for 3-5 days for time periods that range from 45 minutes to 1 ½ hours. After this time, they will be expected to gather any additional information they may need before or after school until the date the final project is due to be submitted to the teacher. On the first day in the library two things are accomplished.
 - a. The librarian teaches students which print and electronic resources will be most beneficial to their fact-finding mission.
 - b. The librarian assists each student in selecting a piece of authentic literature to read at home while they are conducting their research in the school library.
3. On the second day, prior to beginning their research, the librarian discusses with the students three things to be aware of as they read the book they have selected. They are given these instructions.
 - a. Watch for details woven into the storyline, such as references to food, weather, leisure activities, family celebrations, etc., which can help you to have a clearer picture of life in the country in which your book is set.
 - b. If the book is historical fiction or of a biographical nature, are you familiar with the events or famous people described in the story? If not, learn something about them so the story will be more meaningful to you.

- c. What, if any, impact do current, historical geographical, or cultural circumstances have on the actions of the characters? This will require some critical thinking on your part and may possibly require a search for additional information.
4. Throughout the research process, the students continue to compare the facts they are finding with “leads” in the literature which will help them to a better understanding of the country they have chosen to study and the people who live there.
5. Two assignments are to be completed at the end of this project.
 - a. Students must submit a pictorial diary, which is based on the facts they have discovered in the research portion of their study.
 - b. Students conduct “book chats” in which they tell their classmates briefly about the setting and plot of the work of authentic literature they read. They explain how this book helped expand their knowledge and understanding of the people of the country in a way that the facts they gathered could not. They are reminded in preparing for the “book chat” to consider references to cultural, historical, and geographical circumstances in the story and how those affected the lives and actions of the people.
6. An international book display is held in the library to promote the reading of authentic literature. Everyone is encouraged to put their “book chat” information into a written format titled, “May I recommend a trip to . . .?” (See Appendix.) It is placed next to the book to inspire others to check it out.

Outreach

Colleyville Middle School has a Library Club, which is an extracurricular organization comprised of students interested in literature, promoting school library programs, and community service. The group's advisors are the school librarian and a language arts teacher.

An annual event for the club is the presentation of an evening of reader's theater for elementary school age children is held at a local bookstore. Using retellings and translations of folk and fairy tales from around the world, club members write their own scripts. With simple props to aid the young audience in character identification, they read their "classic" tales. In many instances, they invite audience participation.

This program which is held every spring and advertised by the bookstore has become very popular with local children and their parents. Reaching out and sharing translated literature within the community opens another avenue with which to expose both young and old to the literary cultural roots of the nations of the world.

Conclusions

Combining the reading of authentic literature with research has proven to be an excellent way to give students an emotional and not just factual insight into other countries. It has also provided a benefit that the teachers and librarian were not expecting. Many students said they never would have checked out the books that they were required to read. They began reading them reluctantly; finished them enthusiastically saying, "That was a really good book." We have inadvertently created an audience for international literature in our schools.

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Table 1

Languages of Translated Children's Books Reviewed in Selected Journals

Language	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Afrikaans	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Chinese	1	0	0	1	1	1	2	0	0	0	0
Croat	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
Czech	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Danish	5	1	5	1	3	1	0	3	2	0	1
Dutch	3	3	0	3	2	3	4	4	6	3	4
Finnish	2	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0
French	10	9	14	11	11	11	12	11	13	11	8
German	18	20	21	19	19	26	28	33	25	23	18
Hebrew	3	2	0	1	0	4	1	0	1	0	1
Hindu	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Hungarian	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	2
Iroquois	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Italian	1	3	0	4	4	1	8	2	0	1	3
Japanese	6	4	9	6	4	3	1	1	2	4	0
Kikamba	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Korean	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Norwegian	1	2	2	1	1	0	1	0	2	1	2
Polish	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Portuguese	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Russian	3	1	3	3	2	2	3	0	1	1	

Sango	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Spanish	1	4	3	0	3	4	4	2	1	3	0
Swahili	0	0	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
Swedish	9	8	7	5	4	3	6	3	1	3	5
Turkish	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ukraine	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Viet	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Yiddish	0	0	1	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0
Und/Multi	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	1

Table 2

Genres of Translated Children's Books Reviewed in Selected Journals

Genre	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Fairy & Folklore	9	0	15	14	7	7	8	9	5	8	3
Fantasy	5	3	1	6	2	2	8	8	3	4	4
Realistic Fiction	31	38	32	29	32	20	32	26	30	31	24
Historical Fiction	2	4	0	1	3	7	3	5	2	1	2
Information/Bio	12	15	17	10	19	10	19	11	12	6	6
Poetry	2	0	6	3	0	1	3	1	3	2	0
Religion/Myth	3	2	2	1	0	1	0	20	0	0	1
Classics	7	2	7	7	4	5	4	6	2	4	1
Picture Books	37	25	39	24	27	27	53	36	34	31	29
Series	4	5	7	6	3	7	11	2	4	1	3

Subjects of Translated Children's Books Reviewed in Selected Journals

Year	Major Subject Headings (more than three listings)
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1990	Fairy tales/Folklore - (Specific Country) Friendship - Fiction Animals & (Specific Animal) – Fiction
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1991	Countries (Specific) - Fiction Animals (Specific) - Fiction Family Life - Fiction Friendship - Fiction World War, 1939-1945
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1992	Animals & (Specific Animal) - Fiction Animals - Poetry Fairy tales/Folklore (Specific Country) Friendship - Fiction Noah's Ark
------	--

1993	Biography - (Specific Person) Dogs - Fiction Fairy tales/Folklore - (Specific Country) Family - Fiction Friendship - Fiction Holocaust Survivors - Fiction War – Fiction
------	--

1994	Animals & (Specific Animals) - Fiction Countries - (Specific) Dinosaurs Fairy tales/Folklore (Specific Country) Friendship - Fiction War – Fiction
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1995	Animals & (Specific Animals) - Fiction Art & Art appreciation-Fiction Biography - (Specific Person) Fairy tales/Folklore (Specific Country) Family life - Fiction Friendship - Fiction Holocaust survivors - Fiction Human Behaviors - Fiction World War II – Fiction
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- 1996 Animals & (Specific Animals) - Fiction
 Humorous stories
 Artists (Specific Names), Painters
 Fairy tales/Folklore (Specific Country)
 Holocaust, Jewish
- 1997 Animals & (Specific Animal) - Fiction
 Fairy tales/Folklore (Specific Country)
 Friendship - Fiction
 Jews/Holocaust
 Personal attributes (e.g., Self-acceptance, Bashfulness, Cooperativeness)
 Witches – Fiction
- 1998 Animals & (Specific Animals) - Fiction
 Family relationships – Fiction (e.g., Sisters – Fiction)
 Fairy tales/Folklore (Specific Country)
 Poetry
 Emotional problems – Fiction (e.g., Death, Loneliness, Prejudices)
 Feelings (e.g., love, courage) – Fiction
 Geographic locations – Fiction
- 1999 Animals & (Specific Animals) - Fiction
 Fairy tales/Folklore (Specific Country)
 Personal problems – Fiction (e.g., Death, Child Abuse, Emotional problems)
 Geographic places (Specific) - Fiction
 Artists – Fiction
 Family relationships – Fiction (e.g., Sisters – Fiction)
 Friendship - Fiction
- 2000 Animals & (Specific Animals) - Fiction
 Family relationships - Fiction (e.g., Mothers and daughters, Grandparents)
 Geographic places (Specific) - Fiction
 Art history and Art appreciation
 Holocaust/Jews - Fiction
 Personal problems - Fiction (e.g., Fear, Grief, Anger, Stealing)
 Toys and movable books
 Fairy tales/Folklore
-

Table 4

Translated Children's Books Reviewed in Selected Journals

Year	BCCB	Booklist	Horn Book	SLJ	Total
1990	11	4	8	48	91
1991	12	24	9	34	79
1992	3	23	3	44	73
1993	10	23	9	34	76
1994	9	28	4	15	56
1995	14	30	7	34	85
1996	13	22	5	54	94
1997	9	32	6	40	87
1998	9	42	7	41	99
1999	7	20	9	47	83
2000	5	25	6	39	75

Appendix A

May I recommend a trip to . . . ?

Author:

Title:

Setting:

Time Period:

Synopsis of Plot:

This book helped me expand my knowledge and understanding of the country in which this story took place and of the people who live there in the following ways:

Student's name _____

Appendix B

Recommended List of Translated Children's Books

Useful for Cultural/Country Studies

Each selected book has received at least two favorable reviews, was named as a Children's Notable Book or received an award. The bibliography is organized by year with countries or cultures indicated in parentheses. In addition to works of realistic fiction and historical fiction, outstanding translations of poetry, information, and folktales are included that may be useful to the type of application presented in the study.

2000

Carmi, D. (2000). *Samir and Yonatan*. Translated from the Hebrew by Yael Lotan. New York: Arthur Levine/Scholastic. 2001 Batchelder Award. (Ages 9-12).
Israel and Palestine

Enzenberger, H.M. (2000). *Lost in time*. Translated from German by Anthea Bell. New York: Holt. (Ages 12-14) Germany

Moeyaert, B.(2000). *Hornet's nest*. Translated from the Dutch by David Colmer. Asheville, NC: Front Street. (Ages 12 & up) Holland

Pressler, M. (2000). *Anne Frank: A hidden life*. Translated from the German by Anthea Bell. New York: Dutton. (Ages 12 & up) Germany/Holland

Visconti, G. (2000). *The genius of Leonardo*. Illustrated by Bimba Landmann. Translated by Mark Roberts. New York: Barefoot Press. (Ages 8-12) Italy

Vos, I. (2000). *The key is lost*. Translated by Terese Edelstein. New York: HarperCollins. (Ages 10-14). Holland

1999

Ada, A. F. (1999). *Under the royal palms: A childhood in Cuba*. Illustrated by

Nina Barnett. New York: Atheneum. (Ages 9-14) Cuba

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