

## *Podcasting Like Thoreau*

A two-week unit

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**Class /Level:** Ap English Language and Composition / Grade 11

**Thematic Thread:** Being Awake, Aware, and Alive

**Unit Overview and Objectives:** Henry David Thoreau would have been a great podcaster. He appreciated the nuances of sound, he teemed with innovative ideas, he loved to write, and yearned to share his ideas through his books and public speeches. Sadly, podcasting was unavailable to him, but in this lesson, students will explore his ideas by creating their own podcasts.

After reading Thoreau's descriptions of the sounds he heard at Walden, students will visit their personal Waldens, listen to *and* record sounds there, and then write an piece describing those sounds. Finally, students will produce a podcast consisting of the sounds they recorded and their voices speaking their essays.

Specifically, students will:

1. Practice close reading and analysis skills, using excerpts from "Sounds," Chapter 4 of Thoreau's *Walden*.
2. Practice close listening and observation skills by visiting their own, personal Walden.
3. Practice descriptive writing.
4. Practice writing for a specific audience.
5. Practice public speaking, including tone, enunciation, inflection.
6. Gain exposure to podcasting as a media form, both for consumption and expression.
7. Learn how to use their smartphones' audio recorder and Audacity, a free audio production program.

**Focusing Questions:**

- How can we become more attuned to the sensory information all around us?
- How can we use language to capture and express what our senses experience?

**Pre-requisite background information:** Students will have been introduced to Thoreau and *Walden* by watching *Walden* film <https://www.walden.org/walden-film/>, reading excerpts from “Economy” and “Where I Lived and What I Lived For.”

**Learning Standards** - From Missoula County Public Schools’ ELA Curriculum Standards (Based on Common Core Standards)

1112.RL. 9 - Demonstrate knowledge of eighteenth-, nineteenth- and early-twentiethcentury foundational works of American literature, including American Indian works.

1112.RL. 4 - Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful.

1112.RI. 7 - Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem.

1112.WR. 4 - Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

1112.SL. 5 - Make strategic use of digital media (e.g., textual, graphical, audio, visual, and interactive elements) in presentations to enhance understanding of findings, reasoning, and evidence and to add interest.

### ***Step-by-step Lesson Plan with Handouts***

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#### **Day 1 (50 minutes) - Identify “personal Waldens” / Interrupted Reading of “Sounds” from *Walden***

*(Materials: computer, projector, Handout #1)*

1. (10 minutes) Show students “World Wide Waldens” website <https://www.walden.org/education/world-wide-waldens/>. Have them journal about their personal Waldens, with option of submitting their writing / photo to the website.
2. (10 minutes) Students form groups of four and discuss their personal Waldens.
3. (30 minutes) Students do interrupted reading activity for Thoreau’s *Walden* Chapter 4, “Sounds” - Handout #1
4. Homework: Finish reading and annotating “Sounds.”

Handout #1

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Period \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

### Interrupted Reading of excerpts from *Walden* Chapter 4 ~ “Sounds”

Directions:

1. A volunteer will read each paragraph aloud, while everyone else reads along. There will be a different reader for each paragraph.
2. All students will write about the passage for two minutes. You may consider imagery, diction, tone, and other elements of writing. You may also consider associations you make with the passage: question it, argue with it, or admire it. If you run out of things to say, reread it. Treat it like a piece of music and “listen” to it again.
3. Then you will have two minutes to share your responses to the paragraph with your partner.

<b>Excerpts from “Sounds”</b>	<b>Your responses</b>
<p>BUT WHILE we are confined to books, though the most select and classic, and read only particular written languages, which are themselves but dialects and provincial, we are in danger of forgetting the language which all things and events speak without metaphor, which alone is copious and standard. Much is published, but little printed. The rays which stream through the shutter will be no longer remembered when the shutter is wholly removed. No method nor discipline can supersede the necessity of being forever on the alert. What is a course of history or philosophy, or poetry, no matter how well selected, or the best society, or the most admirable routine of life, compared with the discipline of looking always at what is to be seen? Will you be a reader, a student merely, or a seer?...</p> <p>As I sit at my window this summer afternoon, hawks are circling about my clearing; the tantivy of wild pigeons, flying by two and threes athwart my view, or perching restless on the white pine boughs behind my house, gives a voice to the air; a fish hawk dimples the glassy surface of the pond and brings up a fish; a mink steals out of the marsh before my door and seizes a frog by the shore; the sedge is bending under the weight of the reed-birds flitting hither and thither; and for the last half-hour I</p>	

have heard the rattle of railroad cars, now dying away and then reviving like the beat of a partridge, conveying travellers from Boston to the country...

For the rest of the long afternoon, perhaps, my meditations are interrupted only by the faint rattle of a carriage or team along the distant highway. Sometimes, on Sundays, I heard the bells, the Lincoln, Acton, Bedford, or Concord bell, when the wind was favorable, a faint, sweet, and, as it were, natural melody, worth importing into the wilderness. At a sufficient distance over the woods this sound acquires a certain vibratory hum, as if the pine needles in the horizon were the strings of a harp which it swept. All sound heard at the greatest possible distance produces one and the same effect, a vibration of the universal lyre, just as the intervening atmosphere makes a distant ridge of earth interesting to our eyes by the azure tint it imparts to it. There came to me in this case a melody which the air had strained, and which had conversed with every leaf and needle of the wood, that portion of the sound which the elements had taken up and modulated and echoed from vale to vale. The echo is, to some extent, an original sound, and therein is the magic and charm of it. It is not merely a repetition of what was worth repeating in the bell, but partly the voice of the wood; the same trivial words and notes sung by a wood-nymph.

At evening, the distant lowing of some cow in the horizon beyond the woods sounded sweet and melodious, and at first I would mistake it for the voices of certain minstrels by whom I was sometimes serenaded, who might be straying over hill and dale; but soon I was not unpleasantly disappointed when it was prolonged into the cheap and natural music of the cow. I do not mean to be satirical, but to express my appreciation of those youths' singing, when I state that I perceived clearly that it was akin to the music of the cow, and they were at length one articulation of Nature. Regularly at half-past seven, in one part of the summer, after the evening train had gone by, the whip-poor-wills chanted their vespers for half an hour, sitting on a stump by my door, or upon the ridge-pole of the house. They would

begin to sing almost with as much precision as a clock, within five minutes of a particular time, referred to the setting of the sun, every evening. I had a rare opportunity to become acquainted with their habits. Sometimes I heard four or five at once in different parts of the wood, by accident one a bar behind another, and so near me that I distinguished not only the cluck after each note, but often that singular buzzing sound like a fly in a spider's web, only proportionally louder. Sometimes one would circle round and round me in the woods a few feet distant as if tethered by a string, when probably I was near its eggs. They sang at intervals throughout the night, and were again as musical as ever just before and about dawn.

When other birds are still, the screech owls take up the strain, like mourning women their ancient u-lu-lu... Yet I love to hear their wailing, their doleful responses, trilled along the woodside; reminding me sometimes of music and singing birds; as if it were the dark and tearful side of music, the regrets and sighs that would fain be sung. They are the spirits, the low spirits and melancholy forebodings of fallen souls that once in human shape night-walked the earth and did the deeds of darkness, now expiating their sins with their wailing hymns... They give me a new sense of the variety and capacity of that nature which is our common dwelling. Oh-o-o-o-o that I never had been bor-r-r-r-n! sighs one on this side of the pond, and circles with the restlessness of despair to some new perch on the gray oaks. Then- that I never had been bor-r-r-r-n! echoes another on the farther side with tremulous sincerity, and-bor-r-r-r-n! comes faintly from far in the Lincoln woods.

I was also serenaded by a hooting owl. Near at hand you could fancy it the most melancholy sound in Nature, as if she meant by this to stereotype and make permanent in her choir the dying moans of a human being- some poor weak relic of mortality who has left hope behind, and howls like an animal, yet with human sobs, on entering the dark valley, made more awful by a certain gurgling melodiousness- I find myself beginning with the letters gl when I try to imitate it- expressive of a

mind which has reached the gelatinous, mildewy stage in the mortification of all healthy and courageous thought. It reminded me of ghouls and idiots and insane howlings. But now one answers from far woods in a strain made really melodious by distance- Hoo hoo hoo, hooser hoo: and indeed for the most part it suggested only pleasing associations, whether heard by day or night, summer or winter.

I rejoice that there are owls. Let them do the idiotic and maniacal hooting for men. It is a sound admirably suited to swamps and twilight woods which no day illustrates, suggesting a vast and undeveloped nature which men have not recognized. They represent the stark twilight and unsatisfied thoughts which all have. All day the sun has shone on the surface of some savage swamp, where the single spruce stands hung with usnea lichens, and small hawks circulate above, and the chickadee lisps amid the evergreens, and the partridge and rabbit skulk beneath; but now a more dismal arid fitting day dawns, and a different race of creatures awakes to express the meaning of Nature there.

Late in the evening I heard the distant rumbling of wagons over bridges- a sound heard farther than almost any other at night- the baying of dogs, and sometimes again the lowing of some disconsolate cow in a distant barn-yard. In the meanwhile all the shore rang with the trump of bullfrogs, the sturdy spirits of ancient wine-bibbers and wassailers, still unrepentant, trying to sing a catch in their Stygian lake- if the Walden nymphs will pardon the comparison, for though there are almost no weeds, there are frogs there- who would fain keep up the hilarious rules of their old festal tables, though their voices have waxed hoarse and solemnly grave, mocking at mirth, and the mine has lost its flavor, and become only liquor to distend their paunches, and sweet intoxication never comes to drown the memory of the past, but mere saturation and waterloggedness and distention. The most aldermanic, with his chin upon a heart-leaf, which serves for a napkin to his drooling chaps, under this northern shore quaffs a deep draught of the once scorned

water, and passes round the cup with the ejaculation tr-r-r-oonk, tr-r-r--oonk, tr-r-r-oonk! and straightway comes over the water from some distant cove the same password repeated, where the next in seniority and girth has gulped down to his mark; and when this observance has made the circuit of the shores, then ejaculates the master of ceremonies, with satisfaction, tr-r-r-oonk! and each in his turn repeats the same down to the least distended, leakiest, and flabbiest paunched, that there be no mistake; and then the howl goes round again and again, until the sun disperses the morning mist, and only the patriarch is not under the pond, but vainly bellowing troonk from time to time, and pausing for a reply.

I kept neither dog, cat, cow, pig, nor hens, so that you would have said there was a deficiency of domestic sounds; neither the chum, nor the spinning-wheel, nor even the singing of the kettle, nor the hissing of the urn, nor children crying, to comfort one. An old-fashioned man would have lost his senses or died of ennui before this. Not even rats in the wall, for they were starved out, or rather were never baited in- only squirrels on the roof and under the floor, a whip-poor-will on the ridge-pole, a blue jay screaming beneath the window, a hare or woodchuck under the house, a screech owl or a cat owl behind it, a flock of wild geese or a laughing loon on the pond, and a fox to bark in the night. Not even a lark or an oriole, those mild plantation birds, ever visited my clearing. No cockerels to crow nor hens to cackle in the yard. No yard! but unfenced nature reaching up to your very sills. A young forest growing up under your meadows, and wild sumachs and blackberry vines breaking through into your cellar; sturdy pitch pines rubbing and creaking against the shingles for want of room, their roots reaching quite under the house. Instead of a scuttle or a blind blown off in the gale- a pine tree snapped off or torn up by the roots behind your house for fuel. Instead of no path to the front-yard gate in the Great Snow- no gate- no front-yard- and no path to the civilized world.

## Day 2 (50 minutes) - Discuss "Sounds" / Assign podcast

(Materials: Computer, projector, speakers, Handout #2 )

1. (10 minutes) Whole class discussion about "Sounds," making sure that students identified major writing techniques. Listen for: vivid details, precise diction, figurative language, imaginative analogies, allusions, ecstatic tone etc. Collect "Sounds" handout.
2. (10 minutes) Explain that if Thoreau wanted to share his thoughts and experiences today, in addition to writing in his journal and publishing a book, he may keep an audio journal and published a podcast.

Assess student knowledge of podcasting by asking

- a. What's a podcast?
  - b. What are podcasts about?
  - c. Where can you hear podcasts?
  - d. Why would YOU listen to a podcast?
  - e. What makes a podcaster different from a YouTuber
  - f. How does it change the way you tell a story when you're on the phone? How does it change the way you listen when you can't see someone? (questions from NPR's *Teaching Podcasting*)
3. (15 minutes) Listen to sample podcast: Kind World: So Chocolate Bar (7 mins, 23 sec.)  
<https://www.wbur.org/kindworld/2016/04/14/kind-world-22-so-chocolate-bar> In groups of four, students discuss what they noticed about telling stories in podcast format.
  4. (15 minutes) Assign "Podcasting like Thoreau" (Handout #2)
  5. Homework:
    - a. Make a plan to go to your Walden to listen, journal, and record sound.
    - b. Check out an audio recorder from library, if you don't have a smartphone.
    - c. Bring your earbuds, smartphone (or recorder) to class tomorrow.



Handout #2

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Period \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Podcasting Like Thoreau

**What?** Using Thoreau’s chapter “Sounds” as a model, you will write a descriptive essay about your personal Walden, focusing on at least two sounds you hear while you are there. Then you will record yourself reading your essay and create a 3-5 minute podcast. The podcast will include at least two “clips” of the sounds you are describing.

**How?** There will be several steps to creating your podcast

- Make a plan to visit your Walden in the next week.
- Check out a sound recorder from the library, if necessary.
- Practice using your phone/sound recorder.
- Go to your Walden.
- Sit quietly and listen listen for at least two minutes. Then listen again.
- Write your observations in a journal.
- Record at least two sounds you hear on your audio recorder.
- Compose a descriptive essay of at least 500 words by revising and expanding your journal.
- Record yourself speaking the essay.
- Upload your spoken essay and your sound clips into Audacity.
- Mix sounds to effectively express the experience of being in your Walden.
- Share your podcast with three of your classmates in a “listening party.”

**When?** Your completed Podcast will be due \_\_\_\_\_

**How Much?** Your podcast will be worth 80 points:

	Exemplary	Proficient	Developing	Unsatisfactory	POINTS
<b>Intro- duction</b>	10 points	8 points	6 points	<4 points	___/10
	Engaging introduction. Provides relevant information and establishes a clear purpose engaging the listener immediately.	Describes the topic and engages the audience as the introduction proceeds.	Somewhat engaging (covers well-known topic), and provides a vague purpose.	Irrelevant or inappropriate topic that minimally engages listener. Does not include an introduction	
	Tells who is speaking, date the podcast was produced, and where the speaker is located.	Tells most of the following: who is speaking, date of the podcast, and location of speaker.	Alludes to who is speaking, date of the podcast, and location of speaker.	Speaker is not identified. No production date or location of the speaker is provided.	

<b>Content</b>	50 points	40 points	30 points	<20 points	___/50
	Creativity and original content describes setting so well that the audience can almost hear (see, smell, feel) the setting.	Original content gives the audience a strong impression of the setting.	Content describes the setting with some accuracy and detail.	Content describes setting with insufficient accuracy or detail.	
	Author effectively incorporates 3-4 of Thoreau's techniques - vivid detail, precise diction, simile/metaphor, imaginative analogies, allusions, etc.	Author effectively incorporates 2 of Thoreau's techniques.	Author effectively incorporates 1 of Thoreau's techniques.	Author does not incorporate Thoreau's techniques	
	Satisfying, memorable conclusion that leaves listeners with something to think about	Satisfying conclusion	Adequate conclusion	No conclusion is provided.	
<b>Delivery</b>	10 points	8 points	6 point	<4 points	___/10
	Well rehearsed, smooth delivery in a conversational style and an appropriate tone.	Rehearsed, smooth delivery.	Appears unrehearsed with uneven delivery.	Delivery is hesitant, and choppy and sounds like the presenter is reading.	
	Highly effective enunciation, expression, and rhythm keep the audience listening.	Enunciation, expression, pacing are effective.	Enunciation, expression, rhythm are sometimes distracting.	Enunciation of spoken word is not clearly understandable	
	Correct grammar is used throughout the podcast.	Correct grammar is used during the podcast.	Occasionally incorrect grammar is used during the podcast.	Poor grammar is used throughout the podcast.	
<b>Technical Production</b>	10 points	8 points	6 points	<4 points	___/10
	Transitions are smooth and spaced correctly without noisy, dead space.	Transitions are smooth with a minimal amount of ambient noise.	Transitions are uneven with inconsistent spacing;	Transitions are abrupt and background noise needs to be filtered.	
	Volume of voice, music, and effects enhance the presentation.	Volume is acceptable.	Volume is occasionally inconsistent.	Volume changes are highly distracting.	
	Podcast length keeps the audience interested and engaged.	Podcast length keeps audience listening.	Podcast length is somewhat long or somewhat short to keep audience engaged.	Podcast is either too long or too short to keep the audience engaged.	
<b>TOTAL POINTS</b>					___

### Day 3 (90 minutes) Listen to sample podcasts / Practice using recording equipment

(Materials: Computer, projector, speakers, handout #3. Students: smartphones or audio recorders, earbuds)

1. (20 minutes) Play the following radio stories for the class.
  - a. "Radio Field Trip" from New Hampshire Public Radio. (4 mins 12 s)
    - i. Have students take notes on the noises they are hearing
    - ii. Ask students: Where is host Rick Ganley? How can you tell?
  - b. "Eyes off the goal: when sports rule and school suffers" from Radio Rookies (8 mins)
    - i. Ask students: Apart from sounds of Edward's narration — what sounds did you hear? How do these sounds help tell Edward's story? (Adapted from NPR's *Teaching Podcasting*)

2. (5 minutes) Show students youtube video on how to use "Voice Memo on their iphones"  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0jknAHMfz-c&disable\\_polymer=true](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0jknAHMfz-c&disable_polymer=true)

3. (20 minutes) Students practice recording in groups of two, following these directions:

PUT YOUR PHONE ON AIRPLANE MODE / USE YOUR EARBUDS TO LISTEN TO WHAT YOU'RE RECORDING

- a. Record your own voice

Say your name, grade and age into the microphone, and then listen back to the recording on the phone or recording device.

- b. Record your partner's voice

Come up with one interview question for your partner. Record the question and answer. Then, listen back on the phone or recording device.

- c. Record sounds from around the classroom

Each group member should record TWO sounds that last approximately 10 seconds from around the classroom. As a group, listen back to the recordings on the phone or recording device. (Adapted from NPR's *Teaching Podcasting*)

4. (45 minutes) Take the students to an outdoor place on campus that big enough to allow individuals to sit quietly by themselves. (A cafeteria or library could also work.) Students will

- a. close their eyes and listen
- b. write about what they heard in on handout #3
- c. listen and write again
- d. continue journaling about sounds, sights, smells, etc.

5. Homework:

- Students write a descriptive paragraph about their listening experience, incorporating some of Thoreau's writing techniques

Handout #3

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Period \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

### Listening and Journaling - Practice

Directions: Go to an outdoor (or indoor) place on your school's campus, where you can find your own place to sit, listen, and observe.

1. Close your eyes, breathe deeply, and listen for two minutes. What did you hear?

2. Close your eyes and listen even more carefully for one more minute. What more do you hear?

3. Now spend eight minutes describing the sounds you heard. Add impressions from your other senses: What do you see? What do you smell? What do you feel? You do not need to use complete sentences, unless you want to. You may also sketch.



Homework: Turn these notes into a descriptive paragraph about your setting. Use some of Thoreau's writing techniques: vivid detail, precise diction, simile/metaphor, imaginative analogies, allusions, etc.

## Day 4 (50 minutes) Sharing descriptive paragraphs / learning to use Audacity

(Materials: Computer lab with Audacity installed, handout #4. Students: smartphone or recorder & earbuds)

1. (10 minutes) Students share their descriptive paragraphs with partner & give each other feedback.  
Collect paragraphs.
2. (40 minutes) Students go to computer lab to upload their clips from yesterday and experiment with mixing them. (Students who don't know how to use audacity will start by watching following tutorial - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZWoycsTWLQk>)

### Students should practice using the following tools/techniques

- The “cut” or “split” tool enables students to splice one audio segment into two or more segments.
  - The “delete” tool enables students to get rid of any audio segments they don't want.
  - The dragging and moving function allows students to reposition audio segments where they want them. Typically students will use the mouse as a cursor to drag and move content
  - The timeline ruler or grid is the tool that measures the audio. Students use the timeline to assemble various audio segments into one project.
  - Tracks are layers of sound. Podcasts often have multiple tracks of audio playing simultaneously, such as music or sound effects played over spoken word. Students can align the various tracks using the timeline.
  - Volume can be adjusted in each audio segment. Students can also add effects, such as fade in or fade out.
  - “Save” and “Export” are important functions. Students must remember to save their work, and they will most likely want to export their project when they are done. (Adapted from *New York Times* “Project Audio”)
3. Homework: Go to your Walden to observe, journal and record (Handout #4)

Handout #4

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Period \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

### My Walden ~ Listening and Journaling

Directions: Go to your Walden. Find a place to sit, listen, and observe.

1. Close your eyes, breathe deeply, and listen for two minutes. What did you hear?

2. Close your eyes and listen even more carefully for at least one more minute. What more do you hear?

3. Now spend eight or more minutes describing the sounds you heard. Add impressions from your other senses. What do you see? What do you smell? What do you feel? You do not need to use complete sentences, unless you want to. You may also sketch.



4. Use your phone or recording device to record at least 30 seconds of two or more of the sounds you hear. Save and label the audio files, i.e. “river” or “cars on highway.”



**Day 5 (50 minutes) Write 500-word descriptive essay based on journal entries. (You may want to wait 3-4 days to give everyone time to go to their Walden and complete their journaling/recording)**

*(Materials: computer, projector, computer lab or Chromebooks for writing. Students: Hardout #4 completed)*

1. (5 minutes) Read “What was Thoreau’s usual method of writing?” at *The Walden Woods Project*, [www.walden.org/education/for-students/thoreaus-writing/](http://www.walden.org/education/for-students/thoreaus-writing/).
2. (45 minutes) Students write descriptive essay about their Walden, using their notes and journal entries as a starting point.
3. Homework: Finish Essay.

**Day 6 (50 minutes) Record descriptive essays (You may want to wait a few days to give yourself time to read/comment on student essays before they record)**

*(Materials: computer with speakers. Students: smartphone or recorder, earbuds)*

1. (5 minutes) Ask students to define the vocal qualities of a good podcaster. Listen for: clarity, inflection, appropriate tone, conversational style, etc.
2. (10 minutes) Listen to Episode 538 from “This American Life” (Segment 0:00 - 4:20) <https://www.thisamericanlife.org/538/is-this-working>. Discuss the effectiveness of Ira Glass’s voice/reading.
3. (15 minutes) Students practice speaking their essays to a partner, giving each other feedback on vocal qualities.
4. (20 minutes) Students find quiet places in the school and record their essays. (Music practice rooms are great for this.)

**Day 7 (90 minutes) Mix voice and sound clips to create podcast**

*(Materials: computer lab with Audacity. Students: smartphone or recorder, earbuds)*

1. (90 minutes)
  - Students upload their voice recordings and two or more sound clips recorded at their “Walden.”
  - Optional: students download royalty-free music and or sound clips from a site like *Bensound* or *Freesound*.
  - Create podcasts by mixing their spoken essay with sounds clips.
2. Homework: Finish podcast, plan snacks for listening party

**Day 8 (50 minutes) Listening party!**

*(Materials: computers or chromebooks to play podcasts, headphone splitters so 4 students can listen to a podcast. Students: earbuds)*

1. Students celebrate their accomplishments with snacks, final discussion, and listening!!
2. In groups four, students listen to each other’s podcasts. (Depending on class size, available time, and student willingness, whole class could listen to podcasts.)

2. Optional: students publish podcasts on Soundcloud.

### *Sources*

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