



OPINIONS & IMAGININGS II

Climate Action

A compilation of winning non-fiction, fiction and photos
by young Malaysians for the Maybank Foundation –
Perdana Leadership Foundation

“Empowering Youth for a Better ASEAN”

Writing & Photo Contest 2020







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 **Maybank** Foundation



OPINIONS & IMAGININGS II

Climate Action



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Writing & Photo Contest 2020

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Writing & Photo Contest 2020

Featuring the Closing Keynote Address of
Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad,
former Prime Minister of Malaysia

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This book is a compilation of the winning essays, photos and fiction by young
Malaysians for the Maybank Foundation – Perdana Leadership Foundation
“Empowering Youth for a Better ASEAN” Writing & Photo Contest 2020. The
entries have been edited for grammar clarity and consistency, while retaining
the original style of the authors.

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FOREWORD

Tan Sri Dato' Sri Zamzamzairani Mohd Isa

Chairman

Maybank Group and Maybank Foundation



The future of our planet hangs precariously on our present actions. According to a report released by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in early 2022, global greenhouse emissions would need to be halved by 2030 in order to keep the world under 1.5°C. "It's now or never" neatly encapsulates the sense of urgency needed for collective action to protect our shared home, Earth.

As one of ASEAN's leading banks, Maybank is cognisant of the responsibility financial institutions have in leading capital away from activities that could harm the planet, to supporting sustainable development. The Group's sustainability agenda under its M25 Plan focuses on supporting clients in transitioning towards a low-carbon economy, providing access to value-based solutions, tapping into opportunities in the ESG space, enabling communities and equipping employees with the necessary tools to drive this forward.

Under Maybank's sustainability agenda, four key sustainability commitments are to: (i) Mobilise RM50 billion in sustainable finance by 2025, (ii) Improve the lives of one million households across ASEAN by 2025, (iii) Achieve a carbon neutral position of its emissions by 2030 and net-zero carbon equivalent by 2050, and (iv) Achieve one million hours

per annum on sustainability and delivering one thousand significant UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)-related outcomes by 2025.

We often think of the future as this long, slow and vast stretch of time in which our current actions seem to not hold any profound consequences. Hence, we have a tendency to turn a blind eye to challenges that are further down the road. But climate change is already happening, and the evidence is clear. Planet Earth is seeing record high global temperatures, intense storms, increased drought and rapid species extinction.

We must act now or the future generations will bear the brunt of our inactions over climate change. It is possible that we would have robbed them of a habitable world. However, today's youth are far from passive players. They are not afraid to voice up and hold individuals, governments and relevant organisations accountable for their inadequacies.

The theme "Climate Action" for the third edition of the Maybank Foundation - Perdana Leadership Foundation Writing and Photo Contest, is fitting given the current situation. With the tagline "Empowering Youth for a Better ASEAN", this issue seeks to galvanise young Malaysians to do their bit to halt environmental damage and to consider how they can be an influence for good in the fight for climate action.

We were pleased with the thousands of ideas and images that poured in from Malaysian youth across the nation (and even from abroad). Each of the entries demonstrates a genuine concern for our environment, an encouraging level of engagement with current issues, and an inspiring level of creativity. These stories and images could not have come at a better time. Thank you to all participants who took part and my warmest congratulations to all winners.

Lastly, I urge you to listen to the stories and imagine the many possibilities of our climate future, good and bad. The hope is that this book will raise public awareness of the ways in which climate impact will affect future generations, and help us reconsider our actions so that we can leave the planet better than when we entered it.

Tan Sri Dato' Sri Zamzamzairani Mohd Isa
Chairman
Maybank Group and Maybank Foundation

FOREWORD

Tan Sri Azman Hashim

Chairman, Board of Trustees,
Perdana Leadership Foundation



Being young in today's world is both a privilege and a challenge.

It's a privilege because technology has meant that young people have access to multiple communication channels. A young person anywhere in the world with Internet access can become an individual broadcasting hub and reach thousands if not millions of people.

It's a challenge because nowhere in time has Earth been this perilously close to losing its ecology and becoming inhospitable to humans. More and more of our flora and fauna are dying, our ozone layer is thinning, and our polar ice caps are melting. Clearly, something needs to be done before we lose the only home we have in the universe.

This is where young people can play a role. By combining their tech savvy with environmental concerns, the youth can raise awareness, push for action, and propagate for better policies. The MF-PLF Writing and Photo Contest provides one of the platforms through which the young can communicate their concerns and hopes. Through this edition of the contest, young Malaysians have written thousands of words to argue for change, captured vivid photographs to portray the state of our environment, and woven stories that touched emotions and set off imaginations of what the world can become if we don't take action today.

The quantity and quality of entries tell us, the organisers, that young Malaysians are very much aware of the growing danger of environmental collapse and the need for climate action, and many are already involved in activities to protect Earth, such as replanting trees, recycling materials, and reducing waste. The entries also confirm that there are many talented writers and photographers among Malaysian youth.

Our heartfelt gratitude to Tan Sri Zamzamzairani Mohd Isa, Chairman of Maybank Foundation, for agreeing to collaborate with Perdana Leadership Foundation for the third time for this worthwhile programme. Many thanks go to Naza Corporation and MPH for their contributions and the Ministry of Education for endorsing this contest. Thank you also to Mercy Malaysia and Pustaka Raja Tun Uda for supporting this endeavour. My appreciation, too, to the many judges who evaluated the multitude of entries, and to the Organising Committee for their hard work in realising this programme.

I congratulate the winners of this edition's MF-PLF Writing and Photo Contest and urge them to continue writing and capturing images that can persuade other Malaysians to take responsibility for the environment.

Thank you to all young Malaysians who took part. May your participation in this contest empower you to more active involvement in caring for the environment.

Tan Sri Azman Hashim

Chairman, Board of Trustees,
Perdana Leadership Foundation

FOREWORD

Tan Sri Nik Mohamed Nik Yaacob

Executive Director

Perdana Leadership Foundation



I would like to warmly congratulate the winners of our Writing and Photo Contest and commend the thousands of participants. Each entry needed time and thought to be crafted to deliver their message on climate action, and I appreciated that it must not have been easy.

We received more than 8,000 entries for the contest, an encouraging number given that the contest took place during the pandemic. This is the second time that we invited entries for photographs and fiction in addition to the essays category, and once more, I am impressed by the creativity of our young Malaysians in utilising the mediums to explore the issue at hand.

This contest would not have been possible without the generous sponsorship of Maybank Foundation. This is our fourth collaboration with Maybank, a testament to the bank's commitment to discover, nurture, and reward young talent. I also thank MPH and Naza who are supporting sponsors, as well as Perpustakaan Raja Tun Uda and Mercy Malaysia, our supporting partners. Thank you also to the Ministry of Education for endorsing this contest. Apart from our sponsors and supporting partners, I thank the writers, photographers, teachers, and academics on our judging panel, as well as the organising team.

I hope that this contest has motivated our participants to keep up with issues that affect our present and future, and that the words and photographs in this publication will inspire young people everywhere to take action to heal the environment.

Thank You.

Tan Sri Nik Mohamed Nik Yaacob

Executive Director

Perdana Leadership Foundation

CLOSING ADDRESS

YABhg Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad

Former Prime Minister of Malaysia &
Honorary President of Perdana Leadership Foundation



Ladies and Gentlemen,

Firstly, I would like to thank the organisers, Perdana Leadership Foundation and Maybank Foundation, for inviting me to deliver the closing remarks at this prize-giving ceremony. My congratulations to all the winners of this writing and photo contest. I believe both skills are useful in this day and age of digital communications. So, well done. I would have liked to meet you but the pandemic and its new norms do not permit one to do that. So, I am speaking to you today via video feed.

Tackling issues such as climate change may sound enormous for a young person. You may succumb to the notion that you are helpless and powerless because of your age. If you were to reflect on the history of mankind, you will find that almost all the great people started at a young age – be it Caesar or Tun Razak, Bonaparte or Gandhi or Wilberforce. I chose to mention Wilberforce, a leading advocate against slavery at a time when slavery was a global practice, accepted and in some places encouraged and given legal protection. It was the norm, the accepted practice. Going against accepted values is always difficult.

But Wilberforce persisted even though it took almost half a century before the Slavery Abolition Act was introduced which effectively abolished

slavery in most of the British Empire. But in many parts of the world slavery continued. It was decades before it was fully abolished, abhorred, and criminalised. Of course, we can raise issues about modern-day slavery, a result of unbridled capitalism and greed but that will be a subject for another time.

Ordinary citizens can make major changes happen when they are organised, forceful, and persistent. The young of today have access to information and tools that an adult of only a few decades ago could only have dreamed about. With the worldwide web as an information resource and tools such as social media, there is a lot that the youth of today can do to tackle global issues.

The first step, of course, is to be aware of these issues and what is happening around the world. Young people need to arm themselves with knowledge to understand an issue. Knowledge is now easy to acquire as you only have to type the word and all the related data will appear on the screen for you to read. You don't have to find books in the library, turning pages, seeking the information that you need. To this end, young Malaysians must take education seriously. Without education, you would not have the credibility or authority to convince others of your cause. For example, we took a long time to realise that plastics, being non-biodegradable, pose a serious threat against humanity. Realising this, we need to adopt certain practices to reduce the threat. Convincing people of this need requires persistent campaigns in the media and other means.

Second, share your knowledge and raise awareness. There are many communication channels that are available to anyone with an Internet connection. Most young people I meet these days have some sort of presence online, whether it is a social media account, a blog, or a website. These are channels that can be harnessed to educate others and raise awareness. When I was a student, we did not have the Internet. I had to write articles for my school and university magazine, then later to newspapers, to get my views heard. There was a lag between the time of writing and publication, and my audience was limited to the readers of the magazines and newspapers. Today, if I have an opinion about a subject, I can write and publish within an hour on my social media, blog, or video channel. I can get comments and feedback within a few hours. My audience is international and theoretically limitless. It takes only a few minutes and a few clicks to create a website and social media account.

It takes a bit longer of course to arrange your thoughts and craft your message, but there are no gatekeepers to publication. You can publish almost instantly. This is power that is in your hands today that should not be underestimated.

Third, start volunteering. There are many organisations and societies that are open to young volunteers where you can be a part of the action and network with like-minded people. Each group takes a different form of action. Some groups organise activities while others lobby for change in policies. You have to know what level of action you are comfortable with. Some youth organisations also belong to a bigger international group and the actions at local level can be amplified on a global scale. If you cannot resonate with any group, it may be time to start your own. I understand that there was a speaker earlier who has done just that – started his own NGO at the age of 14 to clean up beaches and do his bit for turtle conservation. I am sure he never said to himself that he was too young to do something for the environment.

We can discuss and reflect on the successes and failures of campaigns carried out over the years and the strategies adopted. But underneath all these the most important element is the heart or the passion, based on good values and a belief system. It is this foundation that propels a person, young and old, to pursue what they truly believe in and not to be just a spectator in wanting the change to be realised.

Today, the world faces new challenges. These challenges will shape and affect the world in the future, where many of you will live the rest of your lives. By entering this contest, you have demonstrated your willingness to take the first step for a cause. That is a good thing. Every young Malaysian should feel empowered to effect positive change. Your action does not have to be big. It can be a tiny change. However small, if you are persistent and diligent, you can make an impact.

On that note, I wish to again congratulate everyone who participated in this contest. I hope this is the small step that leads you to that giant leap for mankind.

Thank You.



NON-FICTION,
ENGLISH
CATEGORY A
(13–17 YEARS OLD)

1st-10th
prize



“WHAT CAN SCHOOL
STUDENTS DO TO SAVE
THE ENVIRONMENT AND
SUPPORT CLIMATE ACTION?”



1st
prize

HII MAO XING

St Joseph's International School, Kuching, Sarawak

Dearest *Homo sapiens*,

I am truly sorry that you have to live in this world full of disease, natural disasters, and pollution. I, too, am experiencing similar hardships. Each day, I endure the glaring ultraviolet radiation from the sun. Each day, I tolerate the smell of noxious gases, and the pain as toxic waste poisons my body. Each day, I listen helplessly to the whimpering of animals humans have wronged, and to the cries of the trees you cut down.

I have sacrificed myself for the sake of humanity, but you have been destroying me and taking all of my resources. I have sent you constant reminders in the form of natural disasters such as earthquakes and floods to open your eyes to my condition, but you turn a blind eye to all my efforts. This letter is my wake-up call to you. Please do not continue to ignore me. You will only doom yourselves.

If you choose to acknowledge the danger you are in and the pain you have caused me, there are several things you can do to help put a stop to these disasters.

First and foremost, reduce waste. For example, reduce paper waste – this can also reduce deforestation, as numerous trees are chopped down for the production of paper. The use of plastic must also be controlled. Plastic waste has been flooding my body for ages, polluting the water and soil. Next, stop wasting water. Water is wasted more frequently than you might think. Clear, fresh water is a limited resource, and is essential

for the survival of all living things. Therefore, water should be conserved whenever possible, and should never be used indiscriminately.

Besides that, use electricity wisely, so as to conserve resources. The use of air conditioners should also be reduced. Air conditioners are one of the most common electrical appliances used by mankind, and they produce chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs). These chlorofluorocarbons cause halocarbons to react with the ozone layer, the thin layer of my atmosphere that protects me (and all of you) from the intense UV rays emitted by the sun. The halogen atoms break down the ozone into oxygen, which results in ozone depletion. This increases my vulnerability, and yours, to the rays of the sun.

Other than that, you should try to use reusable items instead of disposable ones. Although disposable products may be convenient and cheap, they are often used irresponsibly by humanity, and thus lead to unwanted pollution. A familiar example of disposable products is plastic bags and straws. Approximately one trillion plastic bags are used annually, which is nearly two million per minute. In addition to that, over half a billion straws are used daily by mankind, adding to the ever-growing plastic waste problem. Reusable items, such as cloth bags and metal straws, unlike disposable items, are made to be used repeatedly. This not only helps to conserve my resources, but also contributes to a healthier environment.

You should also attempt to recycle more. Many items you encounter in your daily lives can be recycled, such as used aluminium cans, empty plastic bottles, outdated newspapers, old magazines, and glass bottles. Recycling these items reduces the need for extracting, purifying, and processing raw materials to make more of such items, thus conserving resources. This also saves energy.

Aside from that, refrain from using vehicles that emit toxic gases. These gases, and those produced by factories, create the greenhouse effect, which is one of the primary factors contributing to global warming. Instead, you could walk or bike to your destination. By doing so, you can also improve your circulation, strength and flexibility, contributing to a healthier, happier lifestyle, not to mention reducing air pollution and sound pollution.

Last but not least, plant more trees. Research shows that 46% of my trees have been cut down in the past 12,000 years. While this may not seem like a large number compared to the time period, the total number of trees cut down each year is increasing rapidly. This is unfortunate because trees are quite crucial to life and to humans – they take in most of the carbon dioxide as well as other pollutants in the air that might harm you. Planting more trees lowers the probability of unwanted gases entering your lungs.

I have already done what I can to persuade you to accept my advice, so I hope that you have a change of heart, and take action now, before it is too late.

Best wishes,
Earth

**2nd
prize**

IVAN TENG WEN KEONG

SMJK Sam Tet, Ipoh, Perak

As a member of Generation Z, I live in an era in which the pursuit of happiness is mainly derived from buying and consuming more and more material goods. Because of this, it is unsurprising that the yardstick of a healthy economy is measured in terms of how much goods are produced as opposed to the well-being of the environment.

Globalisation has raised our standards of living, but we are now facing the adverse environmental reverberations of climate change, the true cost of convenience. Climate change is a global phenomenon and Malaysia is not exempt from it.

For the past few decades, Malaysia has been inundated by severe floods, drought, and extreme heat waves. However, citizens are still indifferent to these changes as evidenced by the prevalent open burning of trash and the continuous reliance on single-use plastics, which ultimately end up choking landfills.

Greta Thunberg, a world-renowned youth climate activist, has been advocating for action to combat climate change since she was 15. Greta is a great example of today's youth who are concerned for the environment. Young people like her represent a generation of change, and climate change education must begin at the most fundamental level in our society – in schools.

School students must be proactive in initiating climate change conversations because a conversation could turn into a brainstorming session for green solutions.

Climate change education is equally important because students need to be educated about their consumption choices. The youth need to influence and encourage each other to buy eco-friendly products and purchase their products from sustainably managed companies, which embrace corporate responsibility.

The World Economic Forum reported that changes in the consumption patterns of young people could influence their parents to become more sustainable and responsible consumers.

From a practical viewpoint, teachers can take students to local recycling centres or to beaches for ocean clean-ups. The extent of plastic waste in landfills and the ocean must be witnessed first-hand by students to trigger a change in their consumption patterns. Students should also be encouraged to explore careers in renewable energy sources to move away from traditional energy production methods. All this lies in the hands of today's youth.

Our current economy is built on the 'produce, use and dispose' model rather than reducing consumption in the first place. The thirst for brand-new products is a prevalent problem among students. To encourage sustainability and move towards a linear economy, students can set up their own thrift stores in schools to reduce disposal of old clothes. To promote repair and reuse, infographics can be produced on how to alter clothes that do not fit and how to live a zero-waste life to reduce our carbon footprint.

Every sheet of paper produced results in less shelter for wildlife, hence there is a need to replace paper textbooks with digital versions.

Students can take on the challenge to develop an application to record their daily carbon footprint, with credit points awarded for low-carbon practices such as car-pooling, taking public transportation, or even by making the transition to plant-based diets. Those who manage to collect the most credit points could be awarded at the end of the month.

Research has found that switching to plant-based diets can potentially offset 16 years of carbon emissions. Furthermore, livestock production takes up a large part of agricultural land, thereby shrinking the space available for carbon-absorbing landscapes such as forests.

To further support the adoption of a plant-based diet, small-scale organic gardens could be created in schools. Schools that lack physical space could try vertical hanging gardens instead and reduce the use of artificial fertilisers by creating compost from food waste as well. Finally, adding greenery to a room full of desks and chairs would certainly provide a breath of fresh air.

During the global lockdown triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic, global greenhouse emissions were reportedly reduced by 20–30% in some places, and even the canals in Venice were shown to be much clearer. The lockdown was a wake-up call for everyone, proving that curbing climate change is possible. Immediate action must be taken to avoid the devastating effect of climate change such as food and water shortages, air pollution, and more. Change must begin in school for students to be pioneers in charting a path towards a cleaner environment. The collective efforts of a few small steps could prove to be one huge step towards combating climate change.

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3rd
prize

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Awareness can inspire revolutions. Awareness can spark change. Yet, awareness alone is insufficient. It is irrefutable that awareness is the catalyst for any movement. However, without knowledge and context, a cause may lack firm beliefs and authentic passion. Therefore, the first step students must take is to adequately educate themselves using the wealth of resources available to them, such as websites, videos, and social media. This should be supported by education provided by schools that inform about the detrimental impact of global warming and how to battle it effectively. This ensures that the students' subsequent fight for climate action is genuine and well informed as they understand precisely what they are fighting for, and why.

An example of awareness without knowledge or context would be participating in social media trends such as tagging ten friends on Instagram stories and adding hashtags like #endclimatechange. Such behaviour is fruitless if not backed up with action, despite the ubiquitous belief among teenagers that a simple 'like' or share has a measurable impact on climate change. Turning the grave issue of climate change into an online trend without the intention of educating and promoting further action is not only counterproductive, but also invites the risk of the issue fading once it is no longer trendy. In addition, such actions birth performative activists, i.e., people who show off their awareness on a topic that they do not truly fathom or respect. They do the bare minimum to avoid being labelled as ignorant.

It would be much more advantageous if students could use their social media platforms to speak out and share information regarding climate change, thus spurring more people to fight with dedication to protect the Earth. Sharing links to online petitions for environmental conservation, or supporting organisations that actively improve the welfare of the planet by raising funds from donation drives would be significantly more useful to promote climate action. Signing impactful online petitions is easy, free and does not take up much time. Furthermore, although students may not have the financial resources to donate towards these causes, spreading the news to others within their social circles increases the chance that those with financial resources would be able to contribute.

Alternatively, students could participate in events that directly aid the environment, such as beach clean-ups. These could be independently organised with family and friends, or they could support public activities by non-profit organisations such as Seven Clean Seas. Clean-ups do not necessarily have to be held at a beach, as demonstrated by Trash Hero volunteers who organise weekly clean-ups in various locations. By participating in events held by organisations such as these, students can play a role in keeping their surroundings clean. However, their efforts should not stop there. Students shouldn't hesitate to execute their responsibility to pick up any litter they see, regardless of where they are. Besides that, wherever possible they could participate in climate rallies and peaceful protests against unsustainable practices. Arguably, this could be controversial as it challenges the practices of some of the nation's most economically crucial industries and in some cases, the government itself. Yet, without movements such as these, change will not happen. Climate rallies also serve as reminders to society of their role in preserving the health of the planet they inhabit. As mentioned before, awareness is the basis of everything.

Moreover, students could boycott single-use plastics and replace them with reusable products. For example, instead of purchasing drinking water in plastic bottles, students could proactively bring a reusable water bottle with them when they travel. This is particularly vital as plastic makes up 60% to 90% of pollution globally, and their lengthy decomposition period engenders prolonged ocean and landfill pollution. Where the use of plastic is unavoidable, students could clean used plastic products and peel off any paper labels before putting them into recycling bins. Proper

cleaning and separating of products prior to recycling is important as products that are found to have contaminants are thrown out.

A vast majority of young people have not yet been brainwashed by the profit-driven mindset possessed by world leaders. Consequently, the cupidity of firms involved in unsustainable business practices are destroying the future that children are looking forward to. What our elders are forgetting is this: money may be king, but without a kingdom, a king is nothing.

If we do not take action now against climate change, the leaders of tomorrow will not have a planet to live on. This is the message that students must voice out, whether through speeches, petitions, or rallies, in hopes that current leaders will alter their priorities and bring an end to the environmental injustice that has been wrought upon the Earth. It may be a difficult challenge, but by carrying out the aforementioned initiatives, youth can push for a greener world.



LOW YI PINK

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It was a hot, sunny day,
After school, I walked the coast by the bay,
I removed my shoes to feel the sand run through my toes,
And the breezy cool wind that tingled my nose.

As the high tides swayed left and right,
Plastic bags and straws from *teh tarik* stores took flight,
Dead fishes with fresh meat floated to shore,
People can't seem to help but to consume more.

Imperishable waste drift on the sea,
Spilled oil acts as the sea's "coatee",
Blood dripping from sea creatures served as contrast,
Caught by the fishing net, cast after cast.

Then I walked to the familiar restaurant by the cove,
I could smell the smoked *ikan bakar* grilling on the stove,
But in my heart, I could hear their cries,
Yelling out their little lungs till they're dry.

Inside the seafood restaurant the gusty chilly air,
From the air conditioner caressed through my hair,
The feeling was wonderful, I felt so refreshed,
However, the effect of CFCs emitted had me scared.

"The electric bill is high!" cried the boss in pain.
The air conditioner exclaimed,

"We do not inherit this planet from our ancestors; we borrow it from our children."

We are now in the midst of a climate crisis. Five of the warmest years have all occurred since 2015, with temperatures estimated to be 1.15 °C above the pre-industrial average. Products of global warming – rising sea levels, extreme weather conditions, and higher concentrations of greenhouse gases – continue to put developing countries at risk with billions of dollars projected to cover damages. This calls for heightened awareness and urgent action, including from the youth of the world who will inherit this earth.

This publication proudly presents the top winning entries of young Malaysian writers and photographers between the ages of 13 and 23 years who share their thoughts, fears, hopes, and imaginings on climate change through thoughtful essays, arresting photos, and creative short fiction for the Maybank Foundation – Perdana Leadership Foundation "Empowering Youth for a Better ASEAN" Writing & Photo Contest 2020.

This publication also features the text of the speech by former Prime Minister YABhg Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad which was delivered at the prize-giving ceremony.



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