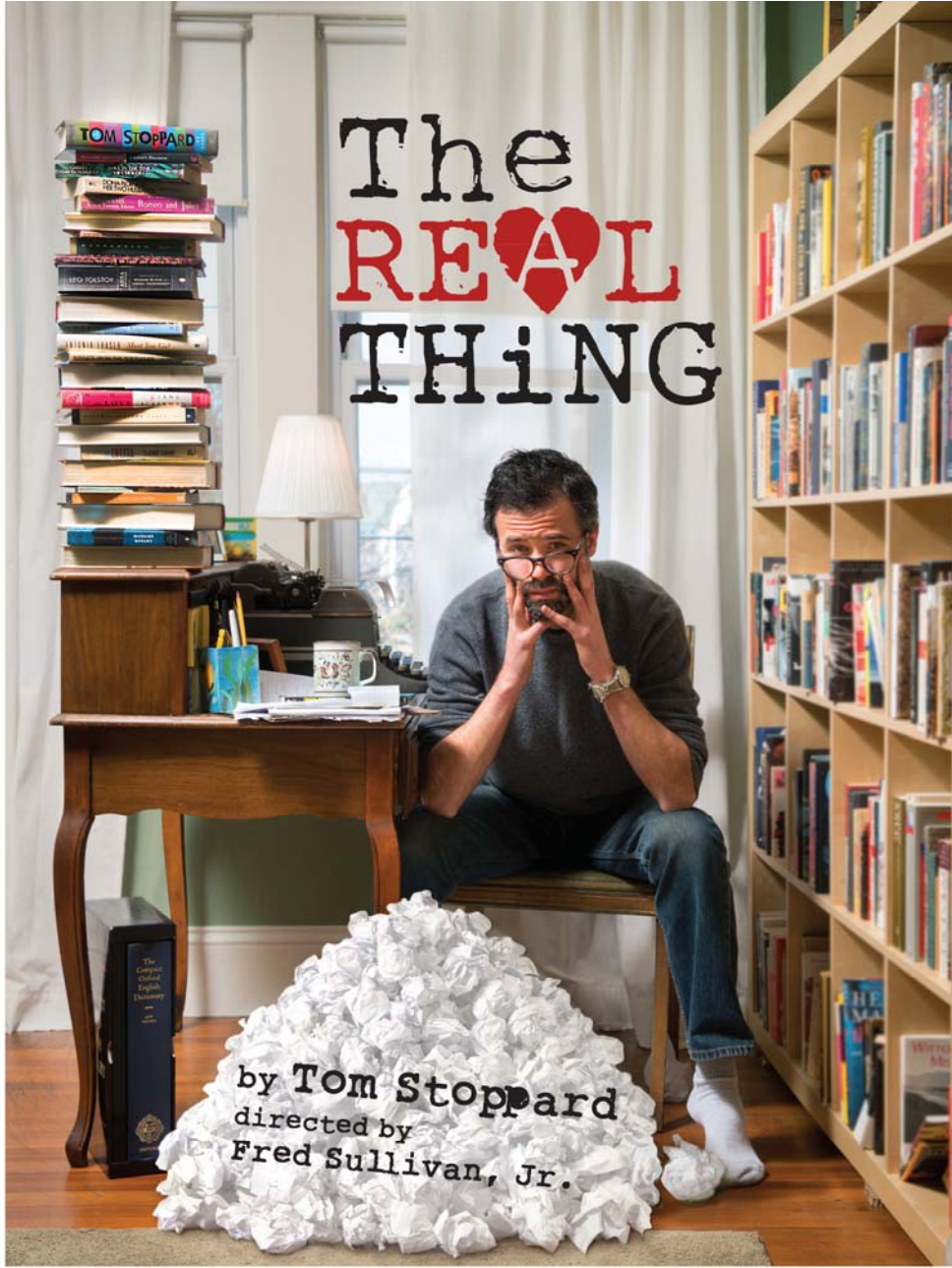


EDUCATIONAL DEPARTMENT



by Tom Stoppard  
directed by  
Fred Sullivan, Jr.

sandra feinstein-  
**GAM**  
theatre

# STUDY GUIDE

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*This study guide was prepared by  
Tracy Morreo, Susie Schutt and Steve Kidd*

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# Prologue

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Dear Educator,

The Sandra Feinstein-Gamm Theatre is pleased to offer you this study guide to share with your students designed to prepare them for our production of *The Real Thing* by Tom Stoppard.

This Study Guide is broken into five acts. In the first act, you will find a few more reminders for you and your students about the nature of performance and what is expected of all audience members attending the theatre. In the second act, you will find a biography of Tom Stoppard, the history of the play, a breakdown of the characters. In act three, Director Fred Sullivan Jr. articulates his vision and ideas behind our production, and Resident Scholar Jennifer Madden discusses the history of the production and Stoppard's other work. Act four examines the dominant themes in *The Real Thing*. Finally, we will close our Study Guide with act five, which offers questions for discussion. At the end of our study guide, you will be able to find information on how to learn more about The Gamm's Educational offerings.

As part of our Core Prep program, I would like to offer a workshop with your classroom/school before your visit and help prepare your students for the play. In these workshops, I will not only discuss the play and our production concept(s), but we will also get students out of their seats and up on their feet engaging in the themes, motifs and the language of the play. This type of kinesthetic engagement with language and literature ensures students deep comprehension and the sort of text-to-self connection that encourages students to invest in reading and literacy-learning.

Much of this work was discovered, developed and inspired by the ArtsLiteracy Project at Brown University. I had the good fortune to work with "ArtsLit" and the strategies and models for learning developed by the organization continue to serve as a foundational pedagogical tool for all Gamm Education programming.

Some benefits of ArtsLiteracy learning include:

- **Community Building in Your Classroom** (Applied Learning New Standards: A1; A2; A5)

- **Inspiration and Background on the Artist** (English Language Arts New Standards: E1; E2; E3; E5; E6; Applied Learning New Standards: A2; A3; A5)
- **Entering and Comprehending Text** (English Language Arts Standards: E1; E2; E3; E5)
- **Creating Text for Performance** (English Language Arts Standards: E1; E2; E3; E5)
- **Performing in Your Class** (Applied Learning Standards: A1; A2; A3; A4; A5)
- **Reflecting on Your Performance** (E2; E3; A1; A2; A5)

Moreover, the New England Common Assessment Program (NECAP) has developed GSE's (Grade Span Expectations) and GLE's (Grade Level Expectations) to help "capture the "big ideas" of reading that can be assessed."

We believe that all of our Literacy through Performance work helps to develop the following literacy skills.

### **WRITING**

- W-2: Writing in Response to Literary Text (showing understanding of ideas in a text). A "text" covers not only books and plays, but film and other kinds of media.
- W-3: Making Analytical judgments about text (how good was it? What stuck out?)
- W-4: Creating a Storyline
- W-5: Applying Narrative Strategies (how did they tell the story?)
- W-14: Reflective Essay

### **ORAL COMMUNICATION**

- OC-1: Interactive Listening (how well students listen; how much information they pick up hearing something once – asking a student to write a comprehensive account of a play certainly works)
- OC-2: Making Presentations (each senior in Rhode Island will be asked to put on a senior exhibition, capstone project or portfolio that includes a public demonstration on a particular subject. Learning about public performance is an obvious tie-in).

### **READING**

- R-4: Initial Understanding of Literary Texts (where is the climax in a story? How would you set this play in contemporary society?)
- R-5: Analysis and Interpretation of Literary Text/Citing Evidence

- R-11: Reading Fluency and Accuracy (part of the benefits of reading a script out over and over in rehearsal is an increase in reading fluency and accuracy)

Furthermore, attending a production addresses several Common Core Standards in Reading: Literature Standards, Speaking and Listening Standards, and, of course, Theatre Arts Standards in Aesthetic Judgment, Cultural Contexts, and Communication.

Please see more exercise and strategies for ArtsLiteracy learning at [www.artslit.org](http://www.artslit.org). We would love to hear from you about your experiences using this study guide. It is a great help to us as we build on our education program from year to year.

Steve Kidd  
Resident Actor/Education Director  
The Sandra Feinstein-Gamm Theatre

## ACT I: Theatre Audience Etiquette

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What is so exciting about attending the theatre - especially in a smaller space such as the Gamm - is that it is live! Live theatre is different from other forms of entertainment; unlike film and television you are encouraged to pay close attention and actively engage your imagination.

You are mere feet (and sometimes inches!) away from the actors. Thus, you the audience, play an active role in the experience. The actors can see and hear you and any distracting behavior (talking, text messaging, unwrapping candy, the ringing of cell phones, etc) can affect the actor's concentration, disrupt the performance, and ruin the experience for other audience members. So we ask that you refrain from talking or making any noise during a performance. Thank you!

### **The Nature of Performance**

Controversial British playwright Sarah Kane once observed: "There's always going to be a relationship between the material and that audience that you don't really get with a film... People can walk out or change channels or whatever; it doesn't make any difference to the performance... It's a completely reciprocal relationship between the play and the audience."

The performance you see will never be precisely the same, for it will never have the same audience; every performance is unique. Theatre scholar Robert Cohen observed the essential paradox of live performance:

- It is unique to the moment, yet it is repeatable.
- It is spontaneous, yet it is rehearsed.
- It is participatory, yet it is presented.
- It is real, yet it is simulated.
- The actors are themselves, yet they are characters.
- The audience is involved, yet it remains apart.

“Theatre is not just another genre, one among many. It is the only genre in which, today and every day, now and always, living human beings address and speak to other human beings... It is a place for human encounter, a space for authentic human existence...”

-Vaclav Havel, President of the Czech Republic and Playwright  
(From Robert Cohen's *Theatre: Brief Version*)

Discuss with your students the particular demands and benefits of attending a live performance. Perhaps have them brainstorm how theatre is different from film, television and sporting events.

## ACT II: Tom Stoppard and *The Real Thing*

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### About Tom Stoppard:

Sir Tom Stoppard is a prolific British writer of film, stage, radio and television. His work addresses themes of censorship, political freedom and human rights. He is key playwright of the National Theatre in London and is one of the most internationally performed dramatists of his generation.

Stoppard was born Tomas Straussler in July of 1937 in Czechoslovakia. He was forced to flee from imminent Nazi occupation as child refugee in 1939. His family settled in Singapore, where his father's company The Bata Shoe Company had a branch. Before the Japanese occupation of Singapore, Tom, his mother and brother were sent on to Australia. His father stayed in Singapore as a British army volunteer, knowing that he would be needed as a doctor. His father died in Japan when he was four years old. Stoppard's mother and her two sons were then evacuated to India in 1941. His mother met and married British army major Kenneth Stoppard in 1945, giving the Straussler boys his English surname "Stoppard".

After the war in 1946, the family finally settled in England. As a child, Stoppard had a desire to become "an honorary Englishman", fueled by his step-father's belief that "to be born an Englishman was to have drawn first prize in the lottery of life".

Stoppard left school at age 17 to begin working as a journalist for the *Western Daily Press*, later becoming a drama critic for the *Bristol Evening World*. Between 1953-4 he wrote short radio plays and then his first stage play, titled, *A Walk on the Water* (later re-titled *Enter a Free Man*) in 1960. Since then, Stoppard has written over 35 plays, several works for radio and television as well as co-written screenplays such as *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* and *Shakespeare In Love*, which won seven Academy Awards, including Best Original Screenplay. He also has won several Tony Awards and was knighted in 1997. Most recently, Stoppard's screen adaptation of *Anna Karenina* was made into a film starring Kira Knightly.

### **About *The Real Thing*:**

*The Real Thing* was first performed in 1982. It received several awards including a Tony in 1984 for Best Play and another in 2000 for Best Revival of a Play. In the original Broadway premiere, Glenn Close won a Tony for her portrayal of Annie and Jeremy Irons won for Henry. In the 2000 revival, Jennifer Ehle and Stephen Dillane also won Tonys for those same roles.

### **Characters and Setting (includes spoilers!):**

*The Real Thing* takes place in London in the 1980's.

*Max*, actor, married to Annie, in a play with Charlotte  
*Charlotte*, actress married to Henry, in a play with Max  
*Henry*, playwright, married to Charlotte, and later Annie  
*Annie*, activist and actress married to Max, later married to Henry



*Billy*, an actor, Annie's lover  
*Debbie*, daughter of Henry and Charlotte  
*Brodie*, a prisoner, Annie works on his behalf

## ACT III: Our Production

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### Who Made It Happen:

#### **On Stage:**

Max	Tom Gleadow
Charlotte	Marianna Bassham
Henry	Tony Estrella
Annie	Jeanine Kane
Billie	Marc Dante Mancini
Debbie	Betsy Rinaldi
Brodie	Steve Kidd

#### **Behind The Scenes:**

Directed by Fred Sullivan, Jr.  
Set Design by Patrick Lynch  
Costume Design by Amanda Downing Carney  
Lighting Design by David Roy  
Stage Management by Jessica Hill  
Assistant Stage Managed by Kira Hawkrigde  
Dialect Coach, Wendy Overly

### Production Notes:

#### **Directors' Notes:**

By Fred Sullivan Jr., *Director of The Real Thing*

What is the Real Thing? The Mad Men tell us it's Coca Cola. I, for one, could survive without soda. I'm not sure I could live without love. In writing about a playwright's complex second marriage, Tom Stoppard gorgeously articulates what primal profound meaningful love means to him in a deeply personal play. Like all Stoppard plays, *The Real Thing* makes me laugh and stimulates my brain but it also fractures my heart. It is an intelligent, resonating, romantic comedy that causes tears and uses startlingly original, fresh, raw situations and language to stir deep emotional response. I love this play.



Exactly half my lifetime ago, I appeared in *The Real Thing* at Trinity Rep in a production starring my hero Richard Kavanaugh as Henry. I played Billy (the role Marc Mancini is playing at The Gamm). I was 26 and can confess now that I had very little understanding of what this play is really all about. I knew I loved the writing and the music and the characters and Stoppard's surprising interlocking Chinese boxes of infidelity amongst theater people; but, at the time, my limited life experience kept me a safe distance from really *knowing* what this play is about. As I have matured, so has my understanding of the play and, like the best wines, over time it has revealed its deeper textures, its profound depths.

At every stage of my career I have been fortunate to work on Stoppard's plays: *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern are Dead* in high school, *Dogg's Troupe* *Hamlet* in college; I directed *Real Inspector Hound* in grad school and, as a professional, played Bernard Nightingale in *Arcadia* (a play I adore) at Breadloaf in Vermont. So Stoppard's particular genius has never wandered long away and this season felt like high time for another visit.

Tom Stoppard often writes plays about high art, about the theater and poetry (*Invention of Love*) because that's what fills his heart. Thus, he is often wrongfully criticized as being too cerebral or intellectual. In this play, he turns his writing to what all artists know to be the REAL THING: love, personal human relationships, our meaning, our yearning souls, our raw material, our identities...the *life* that art draws from, its beating heart. And what has yet to be said on this subject? With raw honesty, Stoppard finds a new, incredibly specific way in — a complex, astonishingly articulate, mature view that makes my mind race and my heart ache.

As in love, the complexities of art, the deep personalization required to navigate a story as intricate, passionate, painful and full of joy as Stoppard's, demands a level of trust and intimacy that can only be realized over time. Obviously, to anyone paying attention, Tony Estrella and Jeanine Kane make a great onstage couple. They are certainly my favorite couple to direct: Beatrice and Benedick in *Much Ado about Nothing* (twice), *La Bete*, the Proctors in *The Crucible*, the Cratchits in *A Christmas Carol* at Trinity, *Hamlet*, *A Doll's House* and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. These previous collaborations serve as a kind of decade-long rehearsal process for Henry and Annie. And I vow it will not be the last.

Revisiting this play 26 years on has been a wild joy. I love plays where our stage manager and I sit next to each other laughing *and* sobbing. That's a good sign you are working on a truly great play. Audiences have been having the same experience with *The Real Thing* for 30 years. We trust you will too.

## Dramaturgical Notes:

By Jennifer Madden, *Gamm Theatre Resident Scholar*

### *Heart and Head in Hand: Tom Stoppard and The Real Thing*

“A suspicion lingers in the heart of the constant theatergoer that if you are too clever, then you must be made of ice. This prejudice has misguidedly dogged, among others, that greatest of songwriters, Stephen Sondheim, like a peevish, affection-starved beagle. But it has never clung to anyone more tenaciously and erroneously than it does to the playwright Tom Stoppard.”

—Ben Brantley, *The New York Times* 2011

Columnist Mark Lawson writing for *The Guardian* (London) notes, “*The Real Thing* occupies a pivotal position in Stoppard’s output. It was the work that converted those who had found the plays in the first phase of his career – *Rosencrantz*, *Jumpers*, *Travesties* – too coldly intellectual in their spinning-off from literary, philosophical or political history. Stoppard was congratulated on his first drama of the heart rather than the head, although a few admirers disagreed that this represented a discernable shift in priorities.”

A drama of the heart it may be but *The Real Thing* is also a drama of the intellect. Stoppard refuses to separate thinking from feeling and many point out that the play’s protagonist, Henry, functions as an avatar and mouthpiece for Stoppard: Both are successful English playwrights known for their intellectual heft and dazzling verbal dexterity, criticized for elitist snobbery and hiding their supposed emotional queasiness with witty ripostes. Yet Henry (like Stoppard) is neither dispassionate nor remote. He is passionate in his love for language, pop music, and love itself. Nor is he so smug as to be blithely unconcerned with public opinion. Invited to be a celebrity “castaway” on the BBC Radio program “Desert Island DISCs,” Henry agonizes over selecting just the right music to comprise the eight songs (along with one book) that he would bring to a deserted island. Should he, as a prominent intellectual, opt for the expected choice of classical music (which he doesn’t care for in the slightest); or the silly but haunting love songs that he secretly adores? Henry, who once publicly called Jean-Paul Sartre “superficial,” frets that his fondness for *The Crystals* and *The Righteous Brothers* will expose him as frivolous and fraudulent.

Critics consider *The Real Thing* to be Stoppard’s most autobiographical work, depicting various events from the playwright’s own life. Ironically,

however, the seismic, dislocating personal traumas of the play occurred in Stoppard's life years after he wrote the play. And, like Henry, Stoppard himself was a castaway on Desert Island DISCs but not until 1985. (He chose mostly classical with a bit of Beatles and Bessie Smith thrown in for "a refreshing breadth of taste.")

*The Real Thing* premiered in London in 1982, where it was seen by an enthusiastic Mike Nichols, who brought it to the States. After an extensive overhaul (producers fired the original director and replaced the cast, while Stoppard tweaked and revised his script for an American audience) the play opened on Broadway in January of 1984 starring Jeremy Irons and Glenn Close. The "Broadway Edition," as it was known, seemingly improved upon the original production. Frank Rich of the New York Times observed: "The Broadway version of *The Real Thing* – a substantial revision of the original London production – is not only Mr. Stoppard's most moving play, but also the most bracing play that anyone has written about love and marriage in years." The play won several Tony awards including "Best Play" in stiff competition with David Mamet's *Glengarry Glen Ross* and Michael Frayn's *Noises Off*. *The Real Thing* returned to Broadway in 2000 with Stephen Dillane ("Game of Thrones") and Jennifer Ehle (Zero Dark Thirty) and won several more Tony awards including "Best Revival of a Play."

Critics of Stoppard's supposedly "chilly" intellectual playwriting support a false dichotomy: that intellectual rigor automatically translates as paucity of emotion, requiring us to choose between head or heart. Why should the passionate pursuit of ideas or a commitment to the purity of language be considered a cold enterprise or suggest a lack of warmth? Anyone who had the pleasure of seeing Stoppard's *Rock 'n' Roll* a play about the nature of Marxism, Central European revolution, rock music, and yes, love, at The Gamm in 2010 knows that the cerebral and the emotional are not mutually exclusive. Stoppard interrogates the personal and political with a lustful passion that translates both above and below the waist.

## ACT IV: Themes

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### Autobiography in Fiction

In *The Real Thing*, Henry's fictional play "House of Cards" is semi-autobiographical, about a husband and wife with trust issues. He has written the part for his wife Charlotte. Though their marriage ends, Henry goes on to have a relationship with Annie, and the conversations in "House of Cards" are echoed in a real-life conversation between Annie and Henry a few years later.

There are also parallels between Tom Stoppard and Henry: both are middle-aged playwrights known for their use of language, both undertake work outside the theatre, and both take up with another man's wife, while retaining relationship with their children. Like Henry, Stoppard had an affair with an actress (Felicity Kendal, who actually played Annie in the original production) which mirrors Henry's relationship with Annie. However, Stoppard notes he developed his plot before Kendal took the role.

### Jealousy and Commitment

*The Real Thing* starts off with a man, Max, accusing his wife, played by Charlotte, of cheating on him. It is eventually revealed that this is a play within the play, written by Henry. The character Max plays appears insanely jealous, going through his wife's things for evidence of her infidelity. Though Henry has written this play, he seems unable to be jealous of his wife or his lover, despite their wanting him to show signs of jealousy. He says "I love the way [love] blurs the distinction between everyone who isn't one's lover." He is very confident in his relationships and isn't aware of doubt or insecurity in his partner's. Even though he writes about jealousy and infidelity and its destructive nature in relationships, he is not aware of it within his relationship with Charlotte. Charlotte has a series of affairs because she assumes Henry, who shows no signs of jealousy, is already engaged in extra-marital affairs. Ultimately Henry is transformed by love, jealousy, and the commitments he has made to his new wife, Annie.

### Writing/Words

Henry is a writer who holds words to be extremely sacred. He says words can "build bridges across incomprehension and chaos." He is quick witted and verbose, making jokes and speeches on politics, love, and writing. Henry is asked to help Brodie, a political prisoner, write a play about his experiences, which upsets Henry, as he believes words should be treated with care. In many ways, Henry is always the smartest man in the room, outwitting his friends who continue to try to keep up with him. While

Henry's mastery of language is impressive, his lack of communication leads to the breakdown of his marriage.

Stoppard's use of fictional scenes and dialogue from other plays keeps the audience guessing what is real dialogue in the play and when a character is playing in a parallel scene. This is intensified by the fact that they are actors and writers, sometimes repeating language from their plays in real life.

## ACT V: Questions for Discussion or Personal Writing

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### *Autobiography in Fiction*

- *Why do you think Henry wrote "House of Cards" for Charlotte?*
- *Stoppard has said he writes plays instead of novels because he wants to believe in both points of view. What points of view are represented in The Real Thing?*

### *Jealousy and Commitment*

- *Charlotte says "There are no commitments, only bargains" when talking to Henry about love and marriage. What does she mean?*
- *Charlotte says "That is the difference between plays and real life-thinking time." in reference to Henry's play "House of Cards" and the potential break-up of his own marriage. How does Henry's reaction to infidelity change over time? How does he present it in his play?*
- *Debbie says about monogamy and marriage, "exclusive rights isn't love, its colonization." What does she mean?*

### *Writing*

- *What might we understand about Stoppard's relationship to writing from The Real Thing?*
- *What does Henry mean when he says "I don't think writers are sacred, but words are. They deserve respect. If you get the right ones in the right order, you can nudge the world a little"?*
- *What does the title The Real Thing refer to? How is it addressed in the play?*

## Epilogue

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Thank you for joining us for *The Real Thing* and for working with this Study Guide to ensure the best, most comprehensive theatrical and educational experience. Please be in touch if you would like us to visit your classroom before or after you attend *The Real Thing*. We hope you will join us for more student matinees at The Gamm. Our education program also provides classes for students in elementary, junior high and high school. Gamm Summer Intensive is the thing to do for summer time theatre fun and auditions are now being booked! To learn more, find us on the web at [www.gammtheatre.org](http://www.gammtheatre.org) or reach Steve Kidd at 401 723 4266 ext. 17.



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