

Human Rights at Stake: Shirley Jackson's Social and Political Protest in "The Lottery"

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ABSTRACT

Nowhere is American author Shirley Jackson's (1916-1965) social and political criticism is so intense than it is in her seminal fictional masterpiece "The Lottery". Jackson severely denounces injustice through her emphasis on a bizarre social custom in a small American town, in which the winner of the lottery, untraditionally, receives a fatal prize. The readers are left puzzled at the end of the story as Tessie Hutchinson, the unfortunate female winner, is stoned to death by the members of her community, and even by her family. This study aims at investigating the author's social and political implications that lie behind the story, taking into account the historical era in which the story was published (the aftermath of the bloody World War II) and the fact that the victim is a woman who is silenced and forced to follow the tradition of the lottery. The paper mainly focuses on the writer's interest in human rights issues, which can be violated even in civilized communities, like the one depicted in the story. The shocking ending, the researchers conclude, is Jackson's protest against dehumanization and violence.

Key words: Violence, World War II, Holocaust, women, dehumanization, human rights

INTRODUCTION

Since its publication in *The New Yorker* in 1948, Shirley Jackson's "The Lottery" has been one of the most controversial stories ever written by an American author. The early readers of Jackson's story objected the gratuitous, violent conclusion, finding in it an oblique criticism of their society and an unrealistic portrayal of American life. As a result, many readers suspended their subscriptions in *The New Yorker* in protest against the story and Jackson was threatened with murder and was boycotted even by her parents. The readers' hostile reaction was mainly triggered by the setting of the story in what seems to be a modern American rural town, where the people congregate, waiting to stone the winner of a sinister lottery. The victim-winner is randomly scapegoated for no obvious committed sin or crime. The bewildered public not only refused to believe the story, but they also demanded to know the place "where these lotteries were held, and whether they could go there and watch" (Friedman 34).

Jackson, like any other professional writer, refused to elaborate on the implicit meaning of her story, even when the editor of the magazine asked her for a laconic explanation, as she herself recalled:

Mr. Harold Ross, then the editor of The New Yorker, was not altogether sure that he understood the story, and wondered if I cared to enlarge upon its meaning. I said no. Mr. Ross, he said, thought that the story might be puzzling to some people, and in case anyone telephoned the magazine, as sometimes happened, or wrote in asking about the story, was there anything in particular I wanted them to say? No, I said, nothing in particular; it was just a story I wrote. ("The Morning of June 28, 1948, and 'The Lottery'" 1991, 1459)

Commentators on Jackson's story mainly focus on Jackson's regional setting of her native Vermont, her treatment of gender roles, her Gothic style, and the genesis of her story. This study deals with the writer as an advocate of human rights and it explores her implied social and political protest against violence and inhumanity.

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When Jackson wrote and published her story (three years after the end of World War II), the vicious images of destruction and mass murder were still fresh in the readers' memory. The publication of the story coincided with the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, owing to the disastrous consequences of World War II, mass deaths, inhuman confinements, and the Holocaust. Jay A. Yarmove notes: "... there were many Americans who, after the end of World War II ... smugly asserted that such atrocities could happen in Nazi Germany but not in the United States. ... Jackson's story help[s] to create the specter of a holocaust in the United States" (245). The readers were disgusted with the brutality of the villagers in stoning an innocent woman. They forgot the annihilation of thousands of innocent people by the atomic bomb. Jackson's humane message might extend to remind the public of the vicious genocide, represented by the Holocaust, which many Americans feared to see, without being able to do anything to save the helpless civilians confined in the Nazi camps. The readers who misunderstood Jackson's humane message of the rights of civilians to live peacefully insisted on banishing the whole story as being alien to American character and culture. Jackson's husband, Stanley Edgar Hyman, who was a renowned critic, defending his wife in the face of the hostile public opinion towards the story, asserted:

Shirley Jackson's ... fierce visions of dissociation and madness, of alienation and withdrawal, of cruelty and terror, have been taken to be personal, even neurotic, fantasies. Quite the reverse: they are a sensitive and faithful anatomy of our times, fitting symbols for our distressing world of the concentration camp and the Bomb. (viii)

Jackson's political criticism is implied in the very silence of the townspeople in the story, who passively participate in this barbaric rite, without questioning its inhumanity and gruesomeness. Because of their silence, all of them, according to the author, are involved and should be condemned. The fact that Jackson does not name the rural town or give a specific time to the story emphasizes the universality of the theme. In one of the scant comments Jackson made on the story in the San Francisco Chronicle in 1948, she clarified:

... what I had hoped the story to say is very difficult. I suppose, I hoped, by setting a particularly brutal ancient rite in the present and in my own village to chock the story's readers with a graphic dramatization of the pointless violence and general inhumanity in their own lives. (qtd in Friedman 34)

The long history of abuse and violence in the town is epitomized in the old, shabby black box of the lottery which the townspeople are so resistant to change. The people believe that this box has been made out of the material of the previous, decaying one. This makes them so stick to it because they believe that it is reminiscent of the legacy of their ancestors:

... the black box now resting on the stool had been put into use even before Old Man Warner, the oldest man in town, was born. Mr. Summers spoke frequently to the villagers about making a new box, but no one liked to upset even as much tradition as was represented by the black box. ("The Lottery" 137)

It is believed that this annual rite of sacrificing an innocent villager is undergone for the welfare of the society. Old Man Warner is convinced that the lottery is necessary for the survival of the townspeople, since it provides fertile crops: "There used to be a saying about Lottery in June, corn be heavy soon" ("The Lottery" 141). Ironically, the old man believes that dispensing with the lottery will only lead the people backwards to primitive, stone-age times: "Next thing you know, they'll be wanting to go back to living in caves" ("The Lottery" 141). He is unaware of the fact that the lottery is itself an uncivilized and inhuman tradition, which only causes the death of innocent people. A. R. Coulthard attributes the arbitrary violence of the mob in the story to their innate sadistic nature, rather than to their belief in the significance of the "human sacrifice" in providing a good harvest:

'The Lottery' ... is a grim, even nihilistic, parable of the evil inherent in human nature. It is not that the ancient custom of human sacrifice makes the villagers behave cruelly, but that their thinly veiled cruelty keeps the custom alive. Savagery fuels evil tradition, not vice versa. (226)

Another effective technique, employed by the author, is the conversion of the traditional way of thought in order to shock the readers and urge them to reform and change their outdated social mores. The readers expect the lottery to offer a reward for the winner, but s/he untraditionally receives a fatal prize: stoning to death by the assembled villagers. This legacy of violence has a long history since the first villagers settled in this place: "There was a story that the present box had been made with some pieces of the box that had preceded it, the one that had been constructed when the first people settled down to make a village here" ("The Lottery" 137).

Jackson exposes man's instinctive tendency for violence and bloodshed: "although the villagers had forgotten the ritual and lost the original black box, they still remembered to use stones" ("The Lottery" 144). The people are blindly devoted to this tradition, even though the consequences of this irrational ritual are the brutal killing of a relative, neighbor, or an acquaintance. The human rights attested by the early founders of America in 1776 during its declaration of independence that "all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness," ("Declaration of Independence." U. S. National Archives) are all violated in the story.

The characters do not have the freedom to express their dissatisfaction with the primitive ritual of the lottery, and when they do, they are silenced. Two villagers, Mr. and Mrs. Adams, voice their desire to follow in the footsteps of neighboring villages that “have already quit lotteries” (“The Lottery” 141). But they are forced into silence by Old Man Warner, who is a symbol of tradition and who has participated in the lottery seventy seven times: “Pack of crazy fools ... Listening to the young folks, nothing’s good enough for them ... There’s always been a lottery” (“The Lottery” 141).

The children are brought up not only to be bystanders, but also to participate in this horrific ritual. The story opens with the boys, working hard to make “a great pile of stones in one corner of the square and guarded it against the raids of other boys” (“The Lottery” 136). One of the boys, Bobby Martin, prepares himself for the gruesome reward of the winner/loser by “stuff[ing] his pockets full of stones” while his playmates “followed his example, selecting the smoothest and roundest stones” (“The Lottery” 136). Even the Hutchinsons’ younger children, Nancy and Bill Jr., are not excluded from Jackson’s list of savage individuals. They “both beamed and laughed” (“The Lottery” 144) when they realize that their slips of papers are not the marked slip, which means that one of their parents is prone to be the sacrificial victim. Meanwhile, the younger Hutchinson son, “little Davy” is given “a few pebbles” (“The Lottery” 144) by the villagers who encourage him to stone his mother. Jackson intends to give her readers a shock of a remedial kind by forcing them to see the dark side of human nature. The story, as Helen Nebeker points out, is Jackson’s criticism of man’s unjustified cruelty towards his fellow humans, and it also represents “the innate savagery of man lurking beneath his civilized trappings” (100).

THE FEMALE VICTIM IN “THE LOTTERY”

The women in this rural town are marginalized and persecuted by the patriarchal order. They are denied their human rights of equality and dignity. They are subjected to different kinds of abuse, exemplified in the process of conducting the lottery. The male heads of each family draw for their households. Only when one family is chosen as the winner of the competition, women are allowed to draw for themselves. Fritz Oehlschlaeger stresses the patriarchal nature of the society in the story, arguing:

The lottery is arranged by families and households, women being assigned to the households of their husbands, who draw for them in the initial round. That the society is a heavily patriarchal one is suggested in many other ways as well. As the people gather at the outset of the story, the women stand ‘by their husbands,’ and Jackson sharply distinguishes female from male authority (61)

Women are not given the rights to protest the unjust tradition of the lottery, and when they do, they are humiliated and silenced. When the Hutchinson family is identified as the winner of the contest, Tessie decries the act as unfair. She hysterically endeavors to convince the congregation that her husband is not given a good chance, similar to the other men who have enough time to select their slips of paper: “You didn’t give him time enough to take any paper he wanted. I saw you. It wasn’t fair!” (“The Lottery” 142). But no one listens to her and her protest is viewed as a defiant act. Then, she is silenced and insulted by her husband, Bill Hutchinson, who firmly orders her to “Shut up” (“The Lottery” 142). As Tessie stands motionless, unable to show the marked slip to the crowd, Bill “forced the slip of paper out of her hand” and “held it up” (“The Lottery” 144) to show it to the public. Ultimately, when she is marked as the winner of the atrocious lottery, she is savagely stoned to death, not only by her neighbors and friends, but also by the members of her own family. Her final refrain “It isn’t fair, it isn’t right” (“The Lottery” 144) emphasizes her position as a victim. Her husband who is responsible for her dilemma is at the front of the crowd when the stoning begins. It is Tessie’s freedom of expression and humanity that is sacrificed. Such revolutionary voices are viewed as being dangerous for patriarchal societies like the one depicted in the story. Any woman who objects this unjust tradition is, thus, severely silenced. Tessie’s tragic end symbolizes Jackson’s protest against the oppression women endure in a male-dominated society. Even in a free and civilized society, women are abused and silenced and their human rights are desecrated. But Tessie’s hypocrisy and selfishness are also denounced. She does not protest until her family is threatened and her chances of being the victim escalate. Realizing that her fate is inevitable and her chance of getting out of this horrible situation is slight, she is ready to sacrifice her motherhood and familial bonds just to survive the vicious stoning. She reminds Mr. Summers, the town’s official administrator of the lottery, that her married daughter and son-in-law should also be included in the second round of the draw lots in order to reduce her chance of being the victim: “There’s Don and Eva,” Mrs. Hutchinson yelled. “Make them take their chance!” (“The Lottery” 142).

present study aimed at investigating the relationship among Iranian EFL learners' PS, LR, and their LA. Table 2 illustrates the descriptive statistics of EFL learners' PS. As the table demonstrates, among these learners, the minimum score is 27 out of 189 and the maximum score is 189. The mean and standard deviation of PS are 130.31 and 51.99 respectively.

Table 3 demonstrates the descriptive statistics of EFL learners' LR including deduction, inference making, and evaluation of arguments. As it can be seen, among the three categories of reasoning, evaluation of arguments has the highest mean which is 9.84 and the deduction has the highest standard deviation which is 4.15.

Table 4 displays the results of descriptive statistics of EFL learners' LA. Based on the table, the minimum score among the learners is 13 and the maximum score is 20 out of 20 ($M=16.81$, $SD=1.85$).

The correlation coefficients among PS, LR, and LA are presented in Table 5. As it can be seen, the highest correlation is observed between deduction and inference making, two elements of LR ($r=-.97$, $p<.05$). The next high correlation is related to the relationship between inference making and evaluation of arguments (two elements of LR) ($r=.93$, $p<.05$). After that we have a high correlation between PS and deduction ($r=.91$, $p<.05$). PS is also highly correlated with the inference making and evaluation of arguments ($r=.88$, $p<.05$). The lowest correlation but the significant is reported to be between PS and LA ($r=.31$, $p<.05$).

As far as the association between PS, LR, and LA is concerned, it can be concluded that the highest correlation in this association is between PS and deduction as a subpart of reasoning and the lowest correlation is between PS and EFL learners' LA.

Structural relations in this study were examined and the anticipated model was tested by means of the LISREL 8.50 statistical package. A number of fit indices were examined to evaluate the model fit: the chi-square magnitude which shouldn't be significant,

Chi-square / df ratio which shouldn't be higher than 3, the normed fit index (NFI=.60) and the comparative fit index (CFI=.60) with the cut value greater than .95, and the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) of about .06 or .07 (Schreiber, Nora, Stage, Barlow, & King, 2006).

As demonstrated by Figure 2, all the indices reached the acceptable thresholds: Chi-square / df ratio (2.82), RMSEA (0.070), GFI (.90).

The t -values and standardized estimates were inspected in order to check the strengths of the causal relationships among the variables. As designated in Figure 2, two estimates were displayed on the paths.

The first number on the path is regarded as the standardized coefficient (β) which clarifies the predictive power of the independent variable and presents an easily grasped picture of effect size. It has to be highlighted that the closer the magnitude to 1.0, the higher the correlation and the greater the predictive power of the variable is. The second measure is the t -value (t); if $t > 2$ or $t < -2$, the result is statistically significant.

Table 1. Descriptions of subtests 1, 3, & 4

Subtests	Descriptions
Inference making	Discriminating among degrees of truth or falsity of inference drawn from given data.
Deduction	Determining whether certain conclusions necessarily follow from information in given statement or premises.
Evaluation of arguments	Recognizing which arguments are regarded as weak and which ones are regarded as strong.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of learners' PS

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard deviation
PS	200	27.00	189.00	130.31	51.99
Valid N (listwise)	200				

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of learners' LR

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard deviation
Deduction	200	1.00	15.00	9.81	4.15
Inference making	200	1.00	15.00	9.74	3.97
Evaluation of arguments	200	1.00	15.00	9.84	3.86
Valid N (listwise)	200				

Table 4. Descriptive statistics of learners' LA

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard deviation
LA	200	13.00	20.00	16.81	1.85
Valid N (listwise)	200				

Table 5. The correlation coefficients among EFL learners' PS, LR, and LA

	PS	Deduction	Inference making	Evaluation of argument	LA
PS					
Pearson correlation	1	0.91**	0.88**	0.88**	0.31*
Sig. (2-tailed)		0.00	0.00	0.00	0.02
N	200	200	200	200	200
Deduction					
Pearson correlation	0.91**	1	0.97**	0.96**	0.36**
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.00		0.00	0.00	0.00
N	200	200	200	200	200
Inference making					
Pearson correlation	0.88**	0.97**	1	0.93**	0.37**
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.00	0.00		0.00	0.00
N	200	200	200	200	200
Evaluation of argument					
Pearson correlation	0.88**	0.96**	0.93**	1	0.36**
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.00	0.00	0.00		0.00
N	200	200	200	200	200
LA					
Pearson correlation	0.31*	0.36**	0.37**	0.36**	1
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.02	0.00	0.00	0.00	
N	200	200	200	200	200

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), * . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

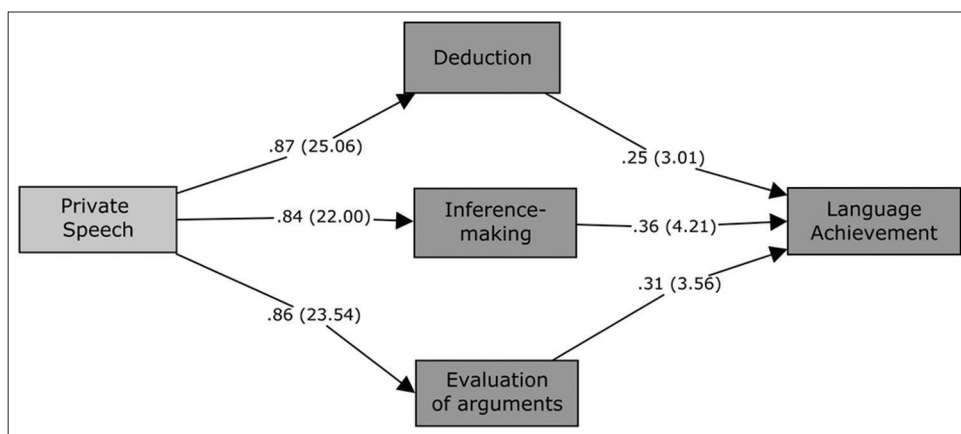


Figure 2. Schematic representation of relationships among PS, LR, and LA. Notes: $\chi^2 = 392.86$, $df = 139$, $RMSEA = .070$, $GFI = 0.90$

The results demonstrated that PS has a great predictive power and positive correlation for all three elements of LR, i.e. deduction, inference making, and evaluation of arguments: PS and deduction ($\beta = .87$, $t = 25.06$), PS and inference making ($\beta = .84$, $t = 22.00$), and PS and evaluation of arguments ($\beta = .86$, $t = 23.54$). On the other hand, three elements of LR, by themselves, have correlation and a great predictive power in relation to LA. As demonstrated in Figure 2, these relations are as follows: Deduction and LA ($\beta = .25$, $t = 3.01$), inference making and LA ($\beta = .36$, $t = 4.21$), and evaluation of arguments and LA ($\beta = .31$, $t = 3.56$). These three elements of rea-

soning are positively correlated with LA. Their magnitudes, are strong enough to reach significant levels and therefore warrant the significant relationships. Finally, it can be concluded that the PS can indirectly be positively correlated with LA as well. It can also have a significant predictive power for it.

DISCUSSION

The primary purpose of this study was to investigate the probable relationship between the advanced EFL learners' PS and their inference making, deduction, evaluation of ar-

guments, and LA. The researchers of the present study set out to examine such relationships based on the current models and theories of learning suggesting that PS can augment EFL learners' reasoning power as well as LA.

The findings of the current study also lend enough support to the claim that reasoning (as measured by making inference, deduction, and evaluation of arguments tasks) as a subpart of the general concept of critical thinking (W-GC-TA, 2010) (Mirzaee & Maftoon, 2016) can be enhanced by means of PS. Regarding evaluation of arguments, for instance, according to Hillocks (2010), arguments can be considered as one of the most significant constituent of critical thinking. Additionally, based on Hillocks "formal argument [is] a line of reasoning that attempts to prove by logic" (p. 305). Similarly, according to Dabaghi, Zabihi, and Rezazadeh (2012), language tasks might request more critical thinking when demand superior criticality from learners. Consequently, Freeley and Steinberg (2000) assert that people's reasoning inductively and deductively can be viewed as one feature of critical thinking. Moreover, Dabaghi et al. (2012) maintain, since argumentation is cognitively-demanding, the argumentative genre can be considered as one of the domains in which critical thinking might be related.

According to Jonassen, Carr, and Yueh (1998), when students utilize critical thinking in their reading process they, in fact, evaluate arguments, draw conclusions, pay attention to discrepancies in reasoning, and make inferences. All the above-mentioned qualities fall adequately within higher-order abilities associated with making meaning from text and reading between lines, such as inference-making, deduction, argument evaluation and interpretation, all of which are manifestations of critical thinking ability" (Ghanizadeh & Mirzaee, 2012a, p. 58).

The examination of the impact of the PS on the EFL learners' reasoning illustrated that PS made meaningful differences in the EFL learners' reasoning power. English (1997) maintained that the most and the least proficient reasoners produced different PS types that are relatively parallel in number. Similarly, English believed that there are noticeable variances in the recorded PS among various reasoners. For instance, in the present study, to solve the tasks, the most skillful problem-solvers produced PS. This exhibited their consideration of the task. English asserted the PS production by the proficient problem-solvers exhibited the nature of the reasoning tasks and resonated their ability to put conceptual relations into words. Alternatively, the less proficient reasoners produced PS that showed their lack of attention to the various dimensions of the tasks.

In a piece of research performed by Duncan and Cheyne (2002), they asserted "PS appears to be more than a stage or phase of ontogenetic development" (p. 901). Results of Duncan and Cheyne's study designated that "overt self-verbalization continues to play a mediational role in problem-solving and self-regulatory processes during early adulthood" (p. 901).

Generally, based on the findings of several studies PS can be considered as a way of thinking and a tool for prob-

lem-solving. These findings showed PS production was superior on difficult tasks than on easier tasks. Likewise, there were some pieces of evidence that showed the relations between PS production and task difficulty were not only limited to childhood. In fact, this relationship continued beyond childhood. It means that adults like children, have the superior cognitive demands to deal with difficult tasks. Consequently, they provoke more PS (Duncan & Cheyne, 2002). In a similar vein, El'konin (cited in Diaz & Berk, 1992) performed a research on PS in which he focused on the role of the reasoning power in learners as specified by their PS.

In another study, Phan (2010) suggested that "critical thinking, as a cognitive practice, helps in self-regulation in learning and teaching" (p. 288). He also claimed that the interaction between these aspects i.e. learners' critical thinking and self-regulation can enhance learners' development. Kupier (2002) noted that the enhancement of self-regulatory strategies such as PS, may lead to the students' enhancement of critical thinking abilities and reasoning. Additionally, Leung and Kember (2003) concluded that there were positive relationships between critical thinking (reasoning) and self-regulation (PS).

Regarding the relationship between EFL learners' PS and academic achievement, the results of the study showed the EFL learners' PS can indirectly and positively predict the LA. Different studies demonstrated that learners with higher degrees of self-regulation are considered as higher achievers and more motivated to attain educational goals (e.g., Zimmerman & Schunk, 2001; Ee, Moore, & Atputhasamy, 2003; Schunk & Pajares, 2001). Based on the results of a study done by Ghanizadeh and Mirzaee (2012), "it appears that the contributing role of self-regulatory skills in academic achievement also generalizes to EFL contexts and among EFL learners". They believe that "the more EFL learners attempt to be motivationally, behaviorally, and metacognitively active in their own learning, the higher they achieve" (p. 456).

Regarding the relationship between EFL learners' PS and academic achievement, the results of the current research indicated that there is a significant relationship between the two variables. This is in accordance with a research done by Lee and Loughran, (2000).

CONCLUSIONS

The aim of the current study was investigating the relationships between the advanced EFL learners' PS which was considered as being the externalization of the reasoning process throughout doing reasoning-gap tasks and their reasoning power as well as LA. The conclusions of the research have shown that EFL learners' reasoning power was influenced by PS. In addition, the current research has scrutinized the probable relationship between the PS and LA.

Besides, the present study has tried to provide an insight into the notion of PS. In fact, by more carefully examining the PS that foreign language learners produce, language practitioners can be equipped with an ex-

tra understanding of a variety of ways foreign language learners achieve and solve problems in language learning contexts and use this understanding to design and assess other associated activities. It follows that academic exercises necessitate offering cases for a stability of learner and teacher-led actions, which are wisely designed and extensively valid through carrying out reasoning-gap tasks and encouraging, engaging, and prompting the learners in internalizing their thoughts to improve their skills (Stanley, 2011).

To put the findings of the research in a nutshell, it should be indicated that the results of the present study designated that EFL learners' PS positively and significantly influenced the EFL learners' power of LR (inference making, deduction, & evaluation of arguments). In other words, the integration of PS tends to foster learners' LR, in general, and their inference making, deduction, and evaluation of arguments, in specific. Moreover, EFL learners' PS production has a positive correlation with their LA.

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