

STUDY GUIDE

HAND IN HAND

AN ADVENTUROUS STORY OF INSPIRATION
AND WONDER FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY!



DVD
VIDEO

CREW OVERVIEW

Philip Leacock (Director)

Diana Morgan (Writer: screenplay)

Sidney Harmon (Writer: story)

CAST OVERVIEW

Philip Needs (Michael O'Malley)

Loretta Parry (Rachel Mathias)

John Gregson (Father Timothy)

Derek Sydney (Rabbi Benjamin)

Sybil Thorndike (Lady Caroline)

Finlay Currie (Mr. Pritchard)

USING THIS DISCUSSION GUIDE

Intended for use after viewing the film, this study guide provides catalysts for a biblically based discussion of various themes found in *Hand in Hand*.

The guide features three themes from the movie and is structured in such a way that groups can choose to discuss the entire guide at once or focus on one or two themes at a time.

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FILM OVERVIEW/NOTE TO GROUP

Special Note: *Hand in Hand* was released in 1960, and consideration should be given to its historical context. The film contains certain activities – e.g., becoming blood brothers, thumbing a lift, riding with strangers, etc. – that are now largely discouraged. Please note that this discussion guide allows for the film to be examined within its original context.

If your personal study or group discussion leads to questions concerning the film's content, we encourage you to use the opportunity for further exploration of ongoing historical, societal and cultural changes.

Awarded the Golden Globe® for Promoting International Understanding, *Hand in Hand* tells the story of two children – a Catholic boy and a Jewish girl – as their friendship leads to an unexpected exploration of their respective religions. Told from the innocence and awe of a child's perspective, the film offers a fascinating take on the power of friendship, the development of religious awareness and the beauty of looking at life with a sense of wonder.

Set in an English village during the early 1960s, the film opens with 7-year-old Michael O'Malley (played by Philip Needs) urgently insisting to his priest, Father Timothy (John Gregson), that he has just killed his best friend, Rachel Mathias (Loretta Parry). The priest, believing his distraught parishioner to be mistaken, asks for more information regarding the incident and the movie then switches to a series of flashbacks as Michael recounts for Father Timothy the circumstances and events leading up to the young boy's startling confession.



In flashback, Michael and his friends are bullying Rachel at school, but Michael has a change of heart and helps her escape the taunts of the other children. With the foundation of their friendship established, the two quickly become close as they spend time playing and exploring. One day, though, a saddened Rachel arrives at their secret playhouse with news that she's moving 30 miles away to Marlow. To ensure their bond, the two become blood brothers, certain that the connection will keep them together, as nothing could possibly be stronger.

Initially, Michael and Rachel's friendship is largely unencumbered by religious differences. The topic certainly surfaces at times — at one point, Rachel asks Michael why he crosses himself; at another point, Rachel and Michael argue over whether their shared pet is Catholic or Jewish — but these early challenges don't cause tremendous distress in their relationship. That changes, however, when a boy at school tells Michael that the Jews killed Christ. Michael, immediately enraged, angrily confronts Rachel and the accusation throws their friendship into uncertainty.

(Warning — spoilers mentioned below.)

The two friends decide that they must test the validity of their blood brotherhood by attending each other's houses of worship, and when they survive the visits, they are simultaneously relieved and emboldened by their victory. Feeling invincible, they set adrift on the river, but Rachel is thrown overboard. The flashbacks meet present time as Michael insists Rachel's death is the result of God's anger over their continued friendship, but Father Timothy takes Michael to Rachel's house where they learn she is alive and resting. They meet with Rabbi Benjamin (Derek Sydney) on the front porch, and both the priest and rabbi assure Michael that God is love.

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THEME ONE: FRIENDSHIP

Guiding Scripture: Proverbs 17:17 (NLT): “A friend is always loyal, and a brother is born to help in time of need.”

SCRIPTURES REFERENCED:

- 1 Samuel 18:1, 3 (NIV): “After David had finished talking with Saul, Jonathan became one in spirit with David, and he loved him as himself...And Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself.”
- Proverbs 17:17 (NLT): “A friend is always loyal, and a brother is born to help in time of need.”
- Proverbs 18:24 (NLT): “There are ‘friends’ who destroy each other, but a real friend sticks closer than a brother.”
- Ecclesiastes 4:9–10 (NIV): “Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up!”
- John 15:13 (NLT): “There is no greater love than to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.”
- Romans 12:9–10 (NIV): “Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves.”
- 1 Corinthians 1:9 (NIV): “God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful.”
- 1 Corinthians 15:33 (NIV): “Do not be misled: ‘Bad company corrupts good character.’”

DVD SCENES TO REVIEW

- Rescue from the Bullies (00:05:10–00:08:25, Chapter 2)
- The Soccer Game (00:18:55–00:20:18, Chapter 7)
- Blood Brothers (00:32:24–00:35:44, Chapter 11)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

One of the quintessential stories of friendship in the Bible is that of David and Jonathan (for a glimpse of their bond, read 1 Samuel 18:1, 3 – see Scriptures Referenced). Theirs is a story of sacrifice, loyalty and love – the kind of characteristics later esteemed by David’s son, Solomon, throughout the book of Proverbs (read Proverbs 17:17 and 18:24 – see Scriptures Referenced).

In *Hand in Hand*, Michael and Rachel’s connection is another glowing example of the power of friendship. Theirs is also a story of sacrifice, loyalty and love, and their commitment to each other is the driving force in the film. Interestingly, though, they aren’t friends at the beginning of the movie; instead, what later becomes a strong camaraderie is initially born of great adversity – specifically, a moral dilemma that puts Michael at risk of social alienation.

SCENE TO REVIEW:

RESCUE FROM THE BULLIES (00:05:10–00:08:25, CHAPTER 2)

- Based on this early scene in the film, how would you describe Michael and Rachel? Does it appear that their personalities are compatible? Why or why not?
- Describe Michael’s interactions with the other boys in his class. How does Michael’s friendship with these boys differ from the friendship that he later shares with Rachel?
- What kind of change does Michael undergo as he and his friends are taunting Rachel in the schoolyard? Why might Michael suddenly take issue with the bullying?
- How does Michael’s decision to save Rachel create an important foundation for their subsequent friendship? How does his decision relate to the concept of sacrifice?



SCENE TO REVIEW: BLOOD BROTHERS (00:32:24–00:35:44, CHAPTER 11)

- Given the time period, why is Rachel's news particularly devastating? How might things look different if Michael and Rachel lived in today's society with modern technology?
- After Michael and Rachel cement their blood brotherhood, Michael says, "Now we can never be separated!" What do you think of his confidence in the small ceremony?
- What aspects of this scene demonstrate childhood innocence? What is Michael and Rachel's motivation for cementing their friendship in such a way?
- What does the blood brotherhood mean for their friendship as a whole? How is it symbolic of their love for each other and their commitment to their unique bond?

READ PROVERBS 18:24 AND ECCLESIASTES 4:9–10 (SEE SCRIPTURES REFERENCED).

- How does the message of Proverbs 18:24 apply to this scene? What does it suggest about the emotional investment that Michael and Rachel have made in their friendship?
- Ecclesiastes 4:9–10 offer both obvious and subtle advice regarding relationships in general. How can that advice be applied to friendships specifically?

As you finish this theme discussion, take some time to consider how Michael and Rachel's friendship continues beyond these designated scenes. Talk about the various ways in which their unique bond helps them overcome several obstacles and promotes the idea of understanding – of how true friendship overcomes all barriers and labels. To conclude, read 1 Corinthians 1:9 (see Scriptures Referenced), a wonderful and heavenly model for friendship.

TAKE A MOMENT TO READ JOHN 15:13 AND 1 CORINTHIANS 15:33 (SEE SCRIPTURES REFERENCED).

- Though not a fulfillment of John 15:13 in its most literal sense, how is Michael's social sacrifice an embodiment of the heart of this verse?
- 1 Corinthians 15:33 is a wise reminder to choose friends carefully. How does the scene as a whole offer tangible examples of this caution against "bad company"?

After the incident at school, Michael and Rachel start playing together, visiting each other's houses and caring for Hector the mouse. Eventually, their closeness leads to a greater sense of loyalty both to each other and the friendship as a whole. That loyalty is tested, though, when Michael and Rachel happen across a soccer game – and Rachel finds herself suddenly excluded.

SCENE TO REVIEW: THE SOCCER GAME (00:18:55–00:20:18, CHAPTER 7)

- If you could read Michael's mind in this scene, what would it say? What is he thinking as he watches Rachel grow restless by the tree? As she starts walking away?
- Put yourself in Rachel's place for a moment. What would it feel like to be excluded from the game, to be pushed aside at a moment's notice?
- How does Michael ultimately express his loyalty to Rachel? How does Rachel respond to his overt demonstration of commitment to their friendship?
- Have you ever experienced a situation like this? Was there a time when either your or a friend's loyalty was tested? If so, what happened?

READ PROVERBS 17:17 AND ROMANS 12:9–10 (SEE SCRIPTURES REFERENCED).

- What does Proverbs 17:17 say about the connection between friendship and loyalty? Part of the verse includes, "a brother is born to help in time of need." What does this mean?
- Michael's loyalty to Rachel demonstrates the command in Romans 12:9–10 to honor others above ourselves. What is the relationship between honoring others and loyalty?

Just as Michael and Rachel's friendship falls into a comfortable routine (largely based around a secret playhouse that they've painstakingly cleaned and restored), Rachel tells Michael the devastating news that her family is to move to a town 30 miles away. Worried that they may never see each other again, the friends decide to become blood brothers and solidify their friendship in such a way that they "can't be parted, for never and never."



THEME TWO: DIFFERENCES

Guiding Scripture: Romans 15:7 (NIV): “Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.”

SCRIPTURES REFERENCED:

- Exodus 23:9 (NLT): “You must not oppress foreigners. You know what it’s like to be a foreigner, for you yourselves were once foreigners in the land of Egypt.”
- 1 Samuel 16:7 (NIV): “The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.”
- Matthew 7:1–2 (NLT): “Do not judge others, and you will not be judged. For you will be treated as you treat others. The standard you use in judging is the standard by which you will be judged.”
- Matthew 22:37–39 (NLT): “Jesus replied, ‘You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”
- John 7:24 (NIV): “Stop judging by mere appearances, and make a right judgment.”
- Romans 15:7 (NIV): “Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.”
- Ephesians 4:32 (NIV): “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.”
- James 2:12–13 (NIV): “Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment!”
- 1 Peter 3:8 (NIV): “Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble.”

DVD SCENES TO REVIEW

- Hector’s Funeral (00:24:33–00:28:42, Chapter 9)
- A Mother’s Opinion (00:42:14–00:43:34, Chapter 15)
- The Confrontation (00:43:35–00:47:03, Chapter 15)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

An integral part of *Hand in Hand*’s storyline is the growing tension between Michael and Rachel as they become increasingly aware of their religious differences. Toward the beginning of their friendship, the children are able to either digest or dismiss any uncertainty that arose concerning their respective belief systems. But, prejudice – of both the subtle and overt varieties – surrounds them, and eventually their worldviews begin to conflict in significant ways.

In one such case, Rachel has the unfortunate honor of informing Michael that their pet mouse, Hector, has died. After a somewhat heated debate as to Hector’s religious heritage (Michael argues for Catholicism; Rachel for Judaism), the friends bury Hector with an almost entirely Catholic service, and – for the first time – a substantial religious divergence rears its head.

SCENE TO REVIEW:

HECTOR’S FUNERAL (00:24:33–00:28:42, CHAPTER 9)

- Why do Michael and Rachel argue over Hector’s religion? What does the argument say about their dedication to their respective worldviews – even at such a young age?
- Rachel is unable to fully participate in the funeral. How is this scene a visual representation of the children’s religious differences creating a wall between them?
- Why does Rachel remain behind and say her own prayer at the gravesite? And what do you think of her final declaration, “You *are* a Jewish mouse”?
- Have you ever experienced a situation in which your worldview conflicted with someone else’s, possibly even a friend’s? If so, what happened?

READ EPHESIANS 4:32 AND 1 PETER 3:8 (SEE SCRIPTURES REFERENCED).

- How does the Ephesians verse advise us to treat others? Concerning the topic of religious differences, what kind of instruction does this passage offer?
- It's easy to live in a state of like-mindedness with people who share our convictions, but how does 1 Peter 3:8 challenge us to love beyond established comfort zones?

At another point in the film, Michael has a conversation with his mother concerning some of the differences between Catholicism and Judaism. During the conversation, Michael asks his mother a series of questions that begin at the lighthearted and innocuous end of the spectrum and quickly shift toward the serious and philosophical. When Michael finally wonders if he might one day attend services with Rachel at the synagogue, he receives a frank and shocking answer.

SCENE TO REVIEW: A MOTHER'S OPINION (00:42:14–00:43:34, CHAPTER 15)

- How does the interaction between Michael and his mother change during the course of the scene? What are Mrs. O'Malley's different reactions to Michael's questions?
- What does Michael learn as far as religious differences are concerned? What information does Mrs. O'Malley give to her son as they talk about Catholicism and Judaism?
- In what ways does this scene shed some light on the manner in which Michael has developed his sense of religion? His worldview in general?
- How would you describe Michael's reaction to the news that entering the synagogue for worship would be a sin? What does his reaction say about his increasing awareness?

TAKE SOME TIME TO READ 1 SAMUEL 16:7 AND JOHN 7:24 (SEE SCRIPTURES REFERENCED).

- What is the common theme in these verses? How can that theme be a guideline for the way we approach and treat people – including people of differing convictions?
- How is Michael and Rachel's friendship an example of these verses? How does their friendship help them understand what's important beyond their differences?

Despite Michael and Rachel's closeness, their friendship begins to suffer as additional information regarding their religious differences comes to light. And because the children don't have a fuller understanding of their own beliefs (let alone each other's beliefs), they succumb to the unfortunate act of passing judgment based on limited knowledge.

An example of this is an emotionally charged scene in which Michael discovers that the "Jews killed Christ." Instantly seeing his relationship with a Jewish girl – and, in his mind, a murderer – as a threat to his personal faith, he confronts Rachel with the traitorous accusation.

SCENE TO REVIEW: THE CONFRONTATION (00:43:35–00:47:03, CHAPTER 15)

- When Michael accuses Rachel of killing Christ, she answers, "I didn't kill him; I don't even know him." What is the greater religious significance of Rachel's response?
- How have the children's religious differences led to this moment? What are your thoughts as you watch Michael and Rachel have their first theological debate?
- Despite the strain that their differing worldviews have placed on their relationship, how do the children demonstrate their reluctance to abandon the friendship?
- What is their plan for reconciliation? Why might they feel the need to know whether God or their blood brotherhood is stronger? What would that prove to them?

READ EXODUS 23:9, MATTHEW 7:1–2 AND JAMES 2:12–13 (SEE SCRIPTURES REFERENCED).

- Even though Exodus 23:9 is a specific command from the Old Testament for the nation of Israel, how is the verse a guideline for the way we should treat others?
- What do Matthew 7:1–2 and James 2:12–13 say about the act of judging? How do these passages encourage us to think about the way we respond to differences?

After Michael confronts Rachel, the two decide to test their blood brotherhood in light of their religious differences. They visit each other's churches and in these longer scenes (listed below for optional viewing), the children experience different worlds — ones that are initially intimidating (perhaps even verging on terrifying), but ultimately comfortable, even welcoming.

OPTIONAL DVD SCENES TO REVIEW

- Synagogue (00:47:05–00:53:33, Chapter 16)
- Mass (00:54:00–00:59:22, Chapter 19)

Ultimately, Michael and Rachel's religious differences give way to friendship and understanding, especially when the rafting accident helps Michael to realize that God is love and that his friendship with Rachel isn't the focus of God's wrath or judgment. And even though the two friends might never find agreement on all points theological, they can overcome that barrier by acknowledging each other's humanity and importance.

As you conclude this theme discussion, spend some time considering the establishment and development of worldview. Think about the various ways that people come to a greater understanding of their religious beliefs and how those processes influence the way people operate. Read Matthew 22:37–39 (see Scriptures Referenced) for a reminder of the first and second most important commandments and for encouragement to love beyond differences.



THEME THREE: WONDER

Guiding Scripture: Mark 10:13–15 (NIV): “People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, ‘Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.’”

SCRIPTURES REFERENCED:

- Psalm 118:24 (NLT): “This is the day the Lord has made. We will rejoice and be glad in it.”
- Proverbs 3:5–6 (NIV): “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.”
- Matthew 17:20 (NIV): “I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there’ and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.”
- Mark 10:13–15 (NIV): “People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, ‘Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.’”
- Romans 8:38 (NLT): “And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God’s love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow — not even the powers of hell can separate us from God’s love.”
- 1 Timothy 4:12 (NLT): “Don’t let anyone think less of you because you are young. Be an example to all believers in what you say, in the way you live, in your love, your faith, and your purity.”
- Hebrews 11:1 (NLT): “Faith is the confidence that what we hope for will actually happen; it gives us assurance about things we cannot see.”
- 1 John 3:1 (NIV): “How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!”

DVD SCENES TO REVIEW

- African Adventure (00:16:31–00:18:33, Chapter 6)
- A New House (00:22:05–00:24:33, Chapter 8)
- Tea with a Princess (00:35:46–00:42:13, Chapter 12)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Since *Hand in Hand* is told almost entirely from a child’s perspective, it beautifully captures the wonder and imagination that so often accompany those early years. And while the scenes displaying this type of wonder are engaging, even at a superficial level, they also carry with them a deeper significance — a reminder to allow ourselves to embrace wonder, to be in awe.

Earlier in the film, Michael and Rachel spend the afternoon at Michael’s house helping his dad with the garden and watching their favorite adventure program on television. After the show, Michael speaks with enthusiasm about the day he, too, will adventure to Africa, and both his enthusiasm and confidence are evidence of his ability to look at the world with wonder.

SCENE TO REVIEW:

AFRICAN ADVENTURE (00:16:31–00:18:33, CHAPTER 6)

- Why is Michael unencumbered by the logistics of his dream to go to Africa? What are some benefits of not allowing reality to arrest his desire for adventure?
- What does the African adventure suggest about Michael’s imagination? What is the relationship between imagination and wonder?
- Even though Rachel would like to go to Africa, she shares that she’d also like to see the Queen. How does Rachel’s desire express her own sense of wonder and imagination?
- How about you? Despite the fact that reality presses in on every side, is there any kind of advantage to adding more wonder and awe to your life? To your faith?

READ MATTHEW 17:20 AND MARK 10:13–15 (SEE SCRIPTURES REFERENCED).

- In Matthew 17:20, Jesus says that with faith the size of a mustard seed, nothing is impossible. How is Michael's sense of wonder an example of faith?
- Why does Jesus encourage a childlike faith in Mark 10:13–15? What are some characteristics that children often have that would be ideal for all believers?

While out exploring, Michael and Rachel come across an abandoned structure. After a brief assessment of the interior, the children decide that they will fix it up and establish it as their special and secret playhouse. In this scene, Michael and Rachel's sense of wonder is conveyed through their ability to see the potential in something – to look beyond present circumstances.

SCENE TO REVIEW: A NEW HOUSE (00:22:05–00:24:33, CHAPTER 8)

- How do Michael and Rachel react when they first see the house? Do you recall the music that plays in the background? What kind of emotion does the music convey?
- Describe the conversation that Michael and Rachel have as they walk through the house. How might their conversation differ from that of adults looking at the same space?
- What does it say about Michael and Rachel that they are willing to put effort into fixing the structure? What do you think of their ability to see the potential in something?
- How do the children demonstrate their senses of wonder in this scene? What about the structure captivates them? Why is it worthy of their awe and fascination?



READ PSALM 118:24 AND 1 TIMOTHY 4:12 (SEE SCRIPTURES REFERENCED).

- What does Psalm 118:24 say about abandoning ourselves to awe and fascination with God? What does it say about living in wonder where God and his creation are concerned?
- Why does 1 Timothy 4:12 offer encouragement specifically to young believers? How is it an affirmation of the characteristics that young believers often bring to the faith?

In one of the more whimsical sequences of the film, Michael and Rachel meet Lady Caroline (Sybil Thorndike), who – realizing she has the unique opportunity to make a wish come true – takes the children on an afternoon adventure for tea at one of the “Queen’s” houses. The scene wouldn’t be possible without the children’s willingness to believe in the impossible.

SCENE TO REVIEW: TEA WITH A PRINCESS (00:35:46–00:42:13, CHAPTER 12)

- In what ways does Lady Caroline nurture the kids’ dreams of Africa, imaginary friends and blood brotherhood? How might the encouragement impact their confidence?
- How do Michael and Rachel’s youthfulness and wonder breathe life into Lady Caroline’s day? How would you describe Lady Caroline’s overall behavior and attitude?

At one point, Lady Caroline recites, “Love is not love / Which alters when it alteration finds / Or bends with the remover to remove” (Shakespeare, Sonnet 116).

- Why does Michael’s blood brotherhood poem prompt this response from Lady Caroline? How do Shakespeare’s words resonate not only here, but also throughout the film?
- How is Michael and Rachel’s sense of wonder displayed in this scene? How do they demonstrate an ability to believe in greater things? To hope for something impossible?

TAKE A MOMENT TO READ PROVERBS 3:5–6 AND HEBREWS 11:1 (SEE SCRIPTURES REFERENCED).

- What would it be like to “Trust in the Lord with all your heart” (Proverbs 3:5–6)? How can we incorporate that kind of belief, of wonder, into our lives?
- How does the children’s afternoon tea with Lady Caroline relate to Hebrews 11:1, specifically having “confidence that what we hope for will actually happen”?

At the end of this theme discussion, conclude with some thoughts about what it really means to have a childlike faith. Consider why Jesus would encourage people to “receive the kingdom of God like a little child” (Mark 10:13–15). Think about the beauty of wonder, and how it can – and should – be part of faith. Finish by reading Romans 8:38 and 1 John 3:1 (see Scriptures Referenced), and bask in God’s love, which compels us to stand in awe.



FINAL THOUGHTS

- What is the significance of the film's title, *Hand in Hand*?
- What role does Mr. Pritchard (Finlay Currie) play in the movie? How does his role represent a testing ground of sorts for Michael and Rachel throughout the film?
- Think about the range of adult characters in the film. Why are some of the adults given more screen time than others? What qualities do the more notably featured adults share?
- What do you think of the polite banter between Father Timothy and Rabbi Benjamin? How does the film use these two characters to demonstrate understanding?
- What are your thoughts on the last scene (01:09:35–01:12:37, Chapter 24) in which Michael discovers that the accident is not God's judgment but that God is love?

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