Way With Words

Game Mechanic for Concept #1

15-03-18

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What is covered in this document?

- All information related to the first game mechanic for phase A
  - What is a game mechanic?
  - How does it apply to us?
  - What is our mechanic?
  - How it is structured?
  - How will users experience the mechanic?
  - How can it be adapted to younger and older students?
  - What does it looks like? (Grade K example)
  - What's next?

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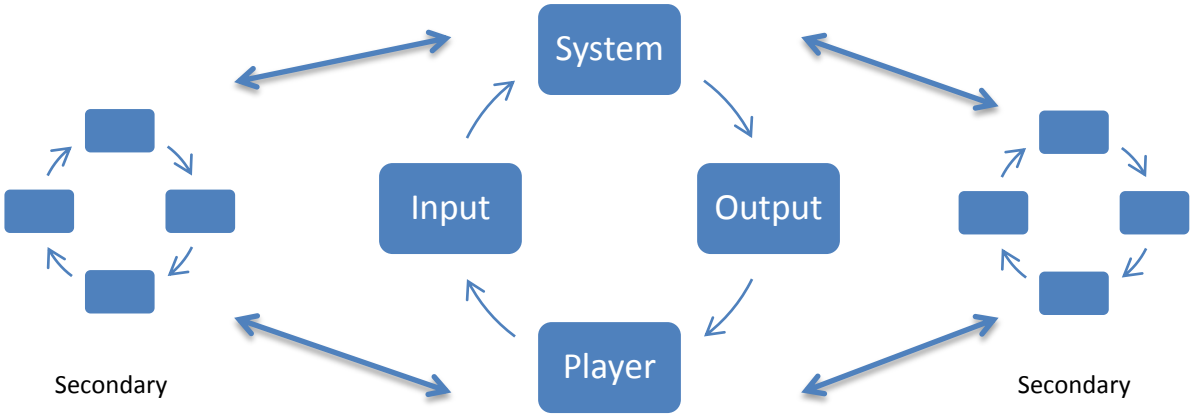
What is a game mechanic?

- *Note: There is no clear/exact/final definition, as every designers has his/her own approach.*
- A game mechanic is a **set of rules** used to create **interactions** between **the player and the system**.
  - It has to be fun to interact with, even after hundreds of times.
- A game mechanic requires player **input** to initiate an interaction.
  - This input has to be based on the player's skills, randomness, or other game-related attributes.
  - The mechanic also includes signals that tells the player what, where, and when to expect inputs.
- Once interacted with, the system calculates a result then provides **output** to the player, as positive/negative feedback.
  - This feedback helps the player understand what are good and bad behaviors.
- When **multiple mechanics** are interacting together, a **gameplay** appears, which drives the player's **behaviors and reactions**.
- Games usually rest on a **single core mechanic**, which is enriched by **multiple secondary mechanics**.



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How does it apply to us?

- In our case, we want the core mechanic to involve a precise player skill, which is his/her **understanding of the Foundation Skills**.

- Every (or most) interactions in the game have to **challenge** and **reward** that understanding.

- The game has to be **driven by mastery of the Foundation Skills**, but it also has to include **other kinds of skills/input** (ex.: analysis, speed skills, or even randomness) in order to **feel like a game** rather than more instruction and practice.

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Our mechanic

- We called our core mechanic **Way with Words**.
- We wanted a **flexible** system that can **cover all possible lessons** while being interesting for each of our **Target Users**.
  - Using words as input and output seems to naturally solve most constraints.
- As the first concept is more about **adventuring**, **exploration,** and **discovery**, we wanted the mechanic to be usable in different contexts.
  - Those contexts might include reading books, meeting characters, identifying objects, solving riddles, and answering needs.
- We looked at **different games** that also operate with similar constraints:
  - Scrabble – *Word crafting from scrambled letters*
  - Letter Quest: Grimm's Journey – *Word-based combat game*
  - The Yawhg – *Text-based adventure game*

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Scrabble

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Letter Quest: Grimm's Journey

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The Yawhg

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General Structure

- The mechanic consists of:
  - **Narrative elements** (images, text, audio) presented to the player.
  - A custom **letter rack** containing a selection of letters adapted to a situation.

- Then, the player has to:
  - Look at the different **narrative** elements
  - Look at the different **letters** available to him
  - Matches the scrambled letters to **spell a word** corresponding to the narrative elements

- The words to spell are **based on the Foundation Skills**, and correspond to each lesson the decodable words learned in.

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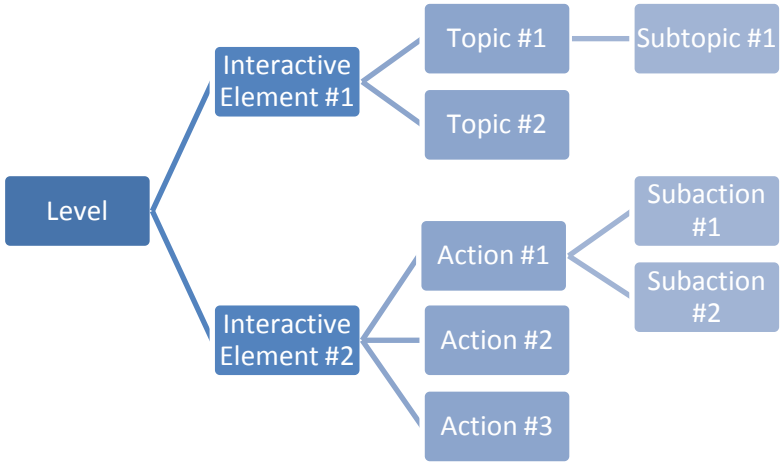
Applied Structure

- In each level, the player will encounter different **interactive elements**: characters, objects, or other kinds of interactive objects.

- Each interactive element needs to be **named** before being able to interact with it. This requirement will be explained by the overarching story.

- Once named, the elements will have additional available **interactions**.
  - This could either take the form of a conversation, different chapters of a book, or simply additional actions given to a tool.



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User Experience

- Steps-by-steps, a user experience could look like this (using Lesson 107, Grade 2):

1. After a day in the forest, Johnny arrives in a small clearing, where he sees a rabbit, and a balloon stuck in a tree, surrounded by a group of hornets.
2. He approaches the rabbit, names it, and understands that the rabbit is looking for something.
3. He places the letters “F”, “A”, “N”, “C”, “Y” from his letters rack and unlocks a new dialogue: the rabbit tells Johnny that he would love having the balloon stuck in the tree, but fears the hornets.
4. The mechanic gives Johnny all necessary letters to inquire about either the balloon or the hornets.
5. He decides to ask about the hornets, and the rabbit explains that the hornets think the balloon is a candy.
6. Johnny leaves the rabbit and goes to meet the hornets, starting by spelling the name. He discovers the insects have the letters to make the words “candy” and “rabbit”.
7. Spelling “candy”, Johnny discovers that the hornets think the balloon is a huge candy, although they find it too unsweet for their taste.
8. During his expedition in the forest, Johnny found an apple, which pretty much fits the kind of candy the hornets are looking for. Since he owns an apple, the letters required to spell it are displayed on his letter rack.
9. He spells “A”, “P”, “P”, “L”, “E” and unlocks a new conversation where the hornets are willing to trade the balloon for the apple. He accepts the trade and earns a balloon.
10. He goes back to the rabbit and spells “balloon”. Since he now possess a balloon, the balloon dialogue with the rabbit changes from enquiring about the balloon to proposing the balloon as a gift.
11. The rabbit, happy to now be so fancy, decides to accompany Johnny in his adventure.

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Adaptation to lower Grades

- For students working on earlier skills, different elements can be adapted to help them:
  - Letters could be replaced by **sounds/syllables**
  - For the **pre-alphabetic skills**, players would have **access to images or V.O.** rather than letters to complete their interactions.
  - Since we have a limited amount of words, we will need to **limit the amount of actions/interactions**
  - Keywords are **highlighted** in the texts

- For younger students, different elements can be added to reach them:
  - Direct, clear **positive feedback** (ex.: 3 Stars system)
  - Simple story with **familiar characters**
  - Few to **no secondary mechanics**
  - No long-term impacts of decisions: gameplay is based on more **immediate rewards and feedback**.
  - Fewer letters to choose from in the **letter rack**
  - **No penalty** when lagging in a challenge
  - **Stronger hints/help** when failing

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Adaptation to higher Grades

- Students working on later skills require different elements to grab their interest:
  - Letters are used to compose **long words**
  - Keywords aren't always **highlighted** in texts
  - **Many more words** to choose from
  - There may not be direct hints to the word, so the student has to **grasp the meaning of the text** in order to find the word
  - **More letters are available** on the letter rack, which requires additional decoding capacity
  - **Texts are longer** and much more complex

- Older students are the hardest to reach, as they have very different needs:
  - **Secondary mechanics** are increasingly used
  - Player is required to **make choices**, which can affect the path the player takes and can ease/hinder his progress (although no game over is possible)
  - **Additional challenges** may be presented to "spice up" the Way with Words mechanic, for example a timer would shuffle the letters (or automatically pick the wrong choice), or a challenge can tolerate a limited amount of failures
  - **Management of limited resources** (ex.: power-ups that affect situations or potions to heal failures)
  - Story is **mature, serious, and meaningful**, and should be composed of complex characters

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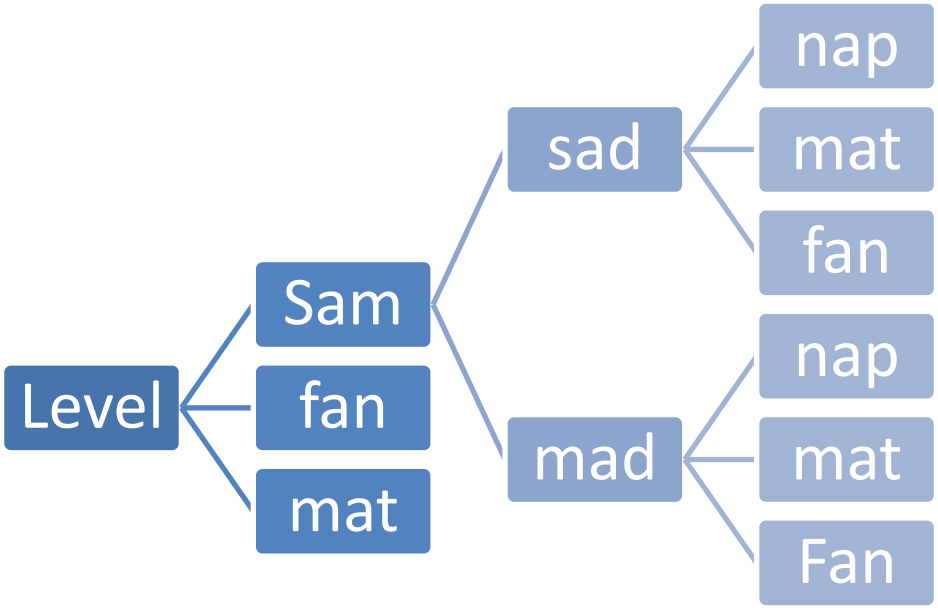
Example of K Grade Challenge

Using GK Phonics Lesson 12

plus High Frequency Words:
“a”, “am”, “I”, “is”, “for”, “need”, “not”, “me”



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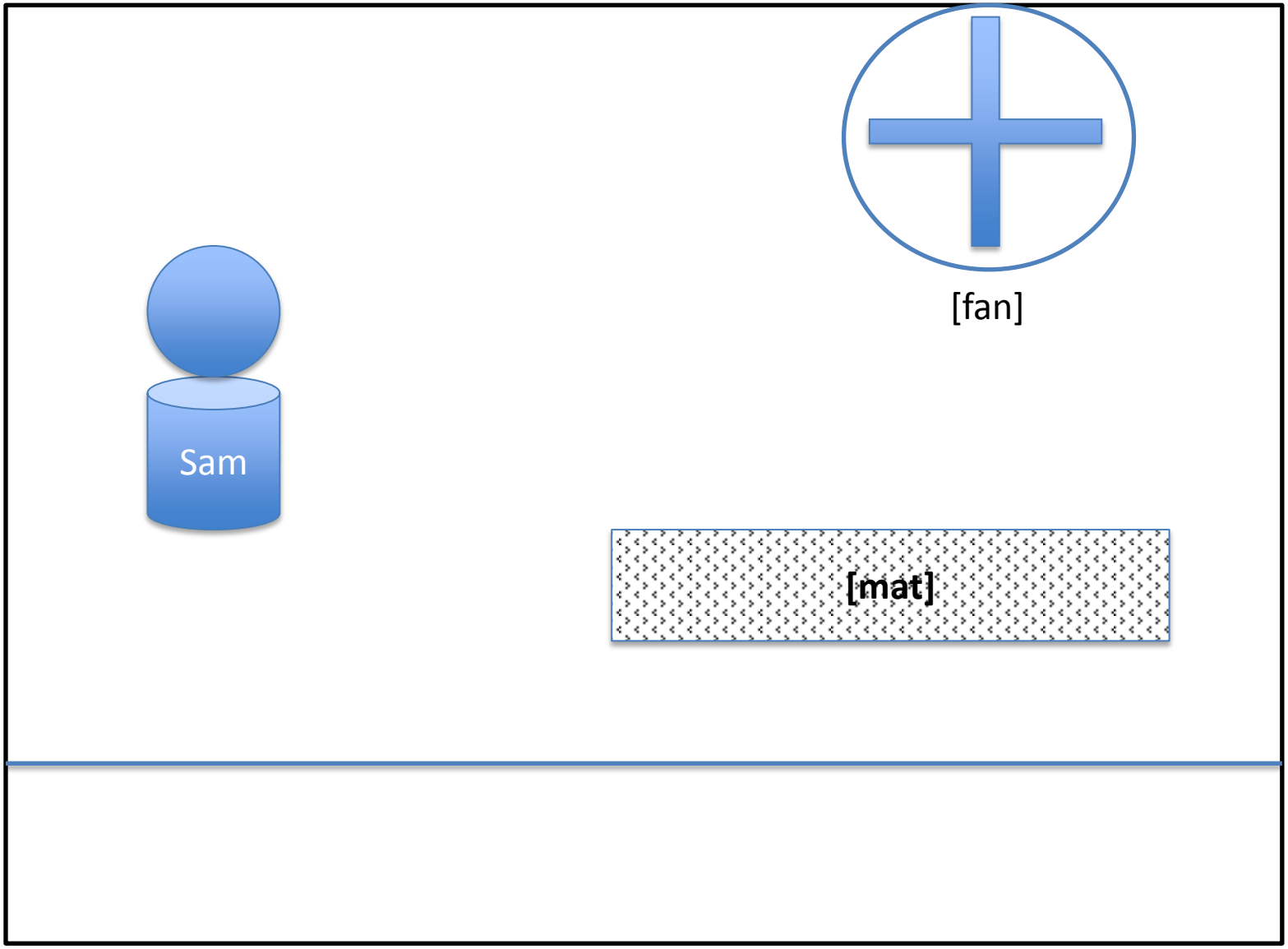
player chooses what to interact with: Sam, fan, mat



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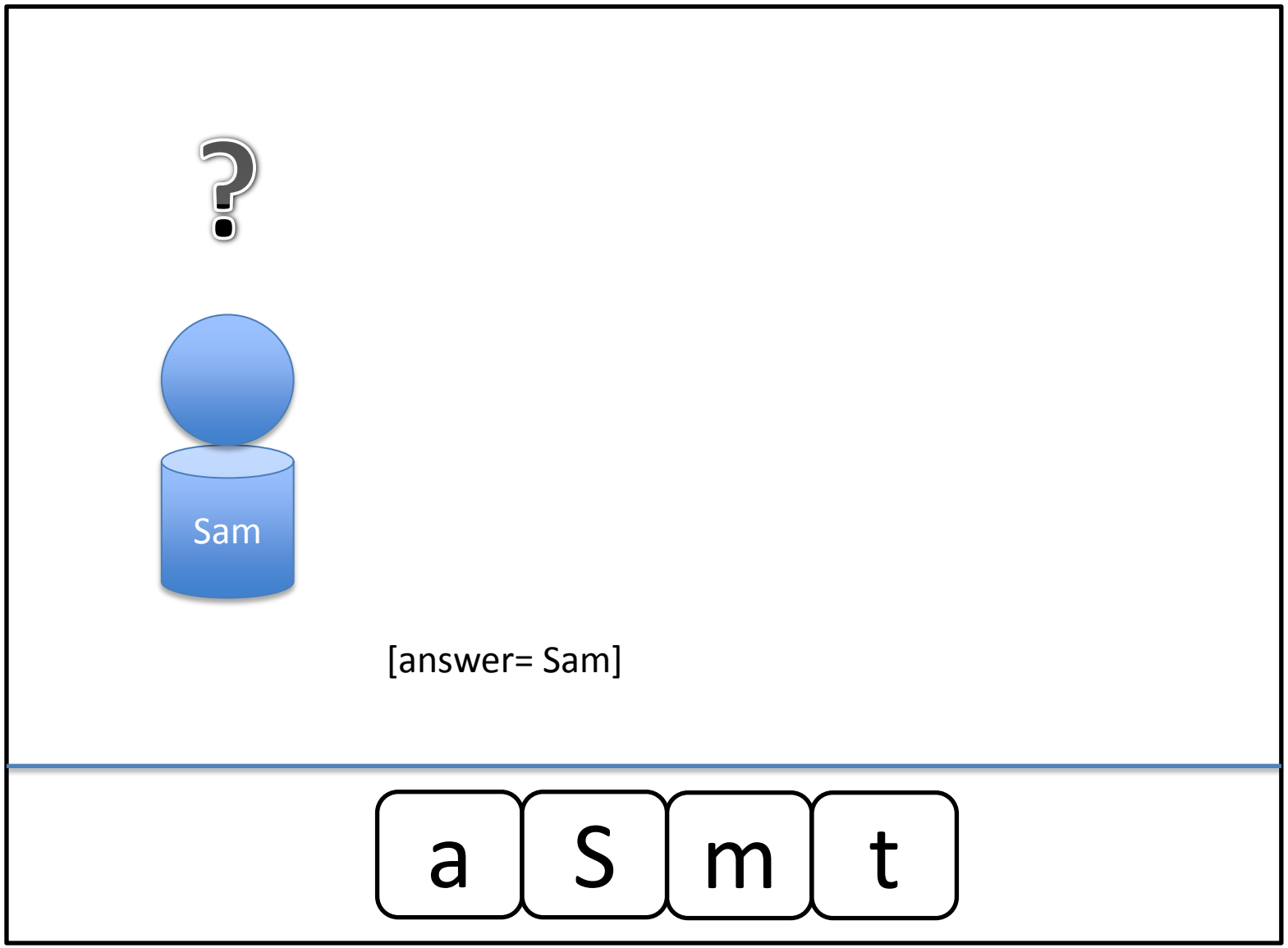
[interaction with character Sam]



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[Hint after pause]
I am ____.

[answer= Sam]

a S m t

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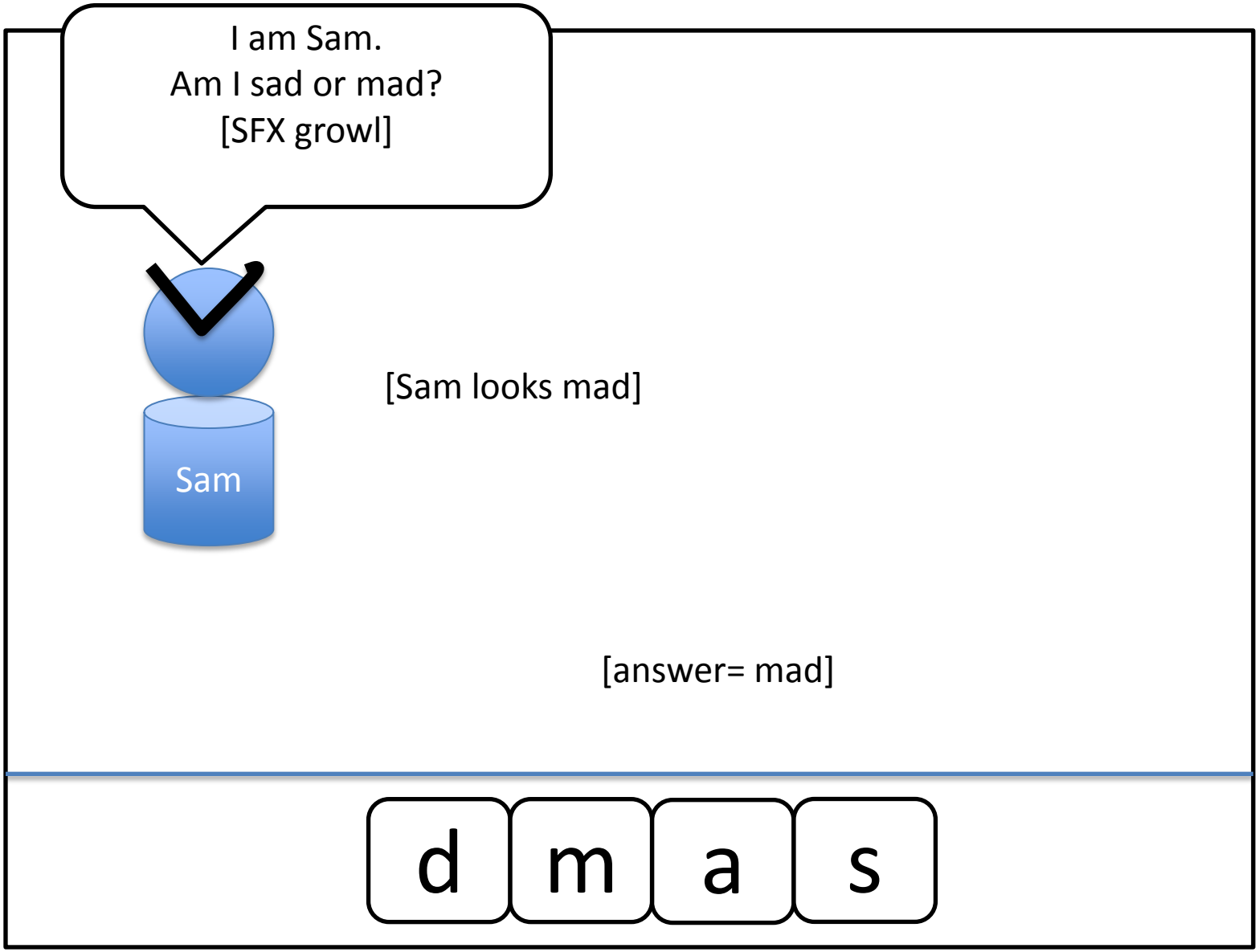

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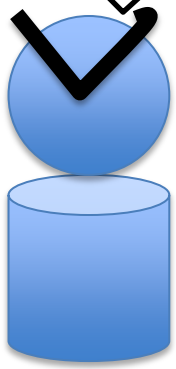
[Hint after pause]
I am not sad.
[SFX growl]



[Sam looks mad]

[answer= mad]

d m a s

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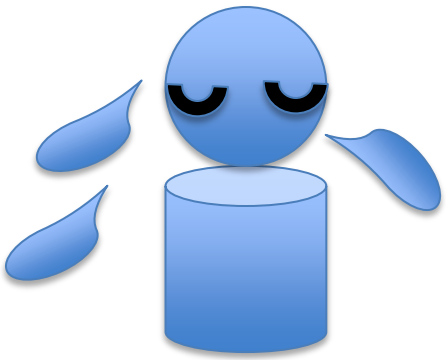
I need . . .?



[Sam looks hot,
sweaty and tired now]

[answers= nap or fan]

p a n f

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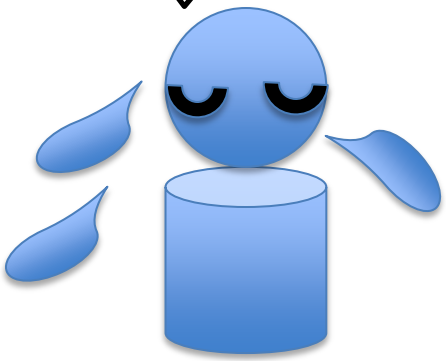
[Split screen shows branching possibilities]

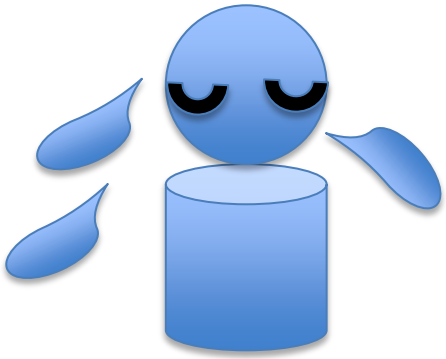
[Hint after pause]
[SFX yawn]
I need a ___.



[Sam looks hot, sweaty and tired]

[answer= nap]

[Hint after pause]
[VFX Sweat sprinkles.]
I need a ___.



[Sam looks hot, sweaty and tired]

[answer= fan]

p a n f

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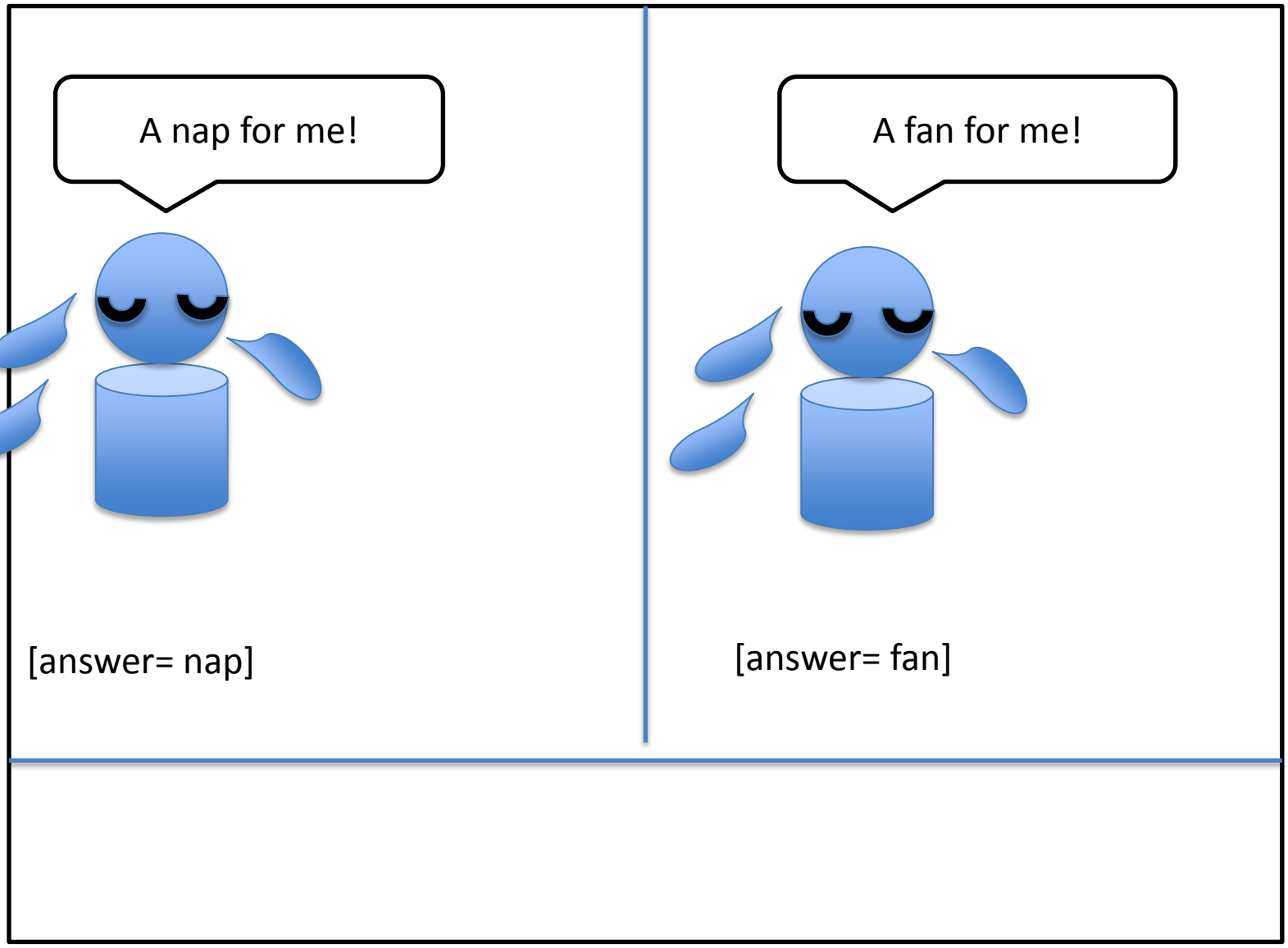
[Split screen shows branching possibilities]



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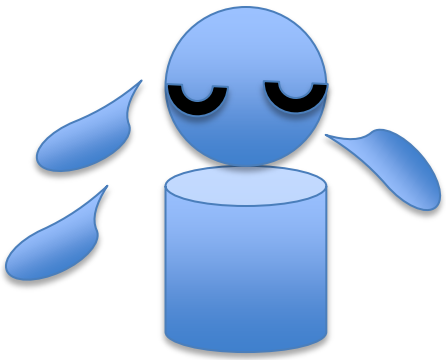
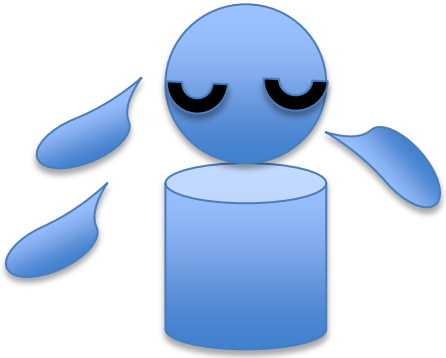
[Split screen shows branching possibilities]

[Hint after pause]
[visual of mat]



[answer= mat]

[Hint after pause]
[SFX snoring]



[answer= nap]

p t a n m

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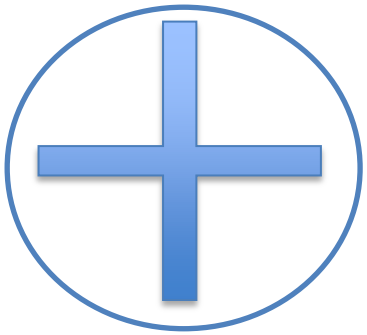
[interaction with character Sam]

?



[fan]

[answer= fan]

f n a r

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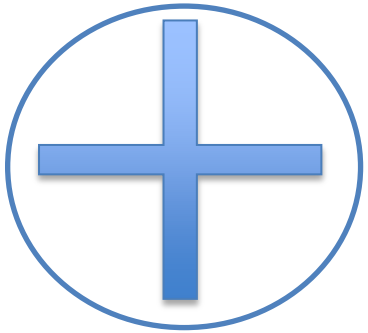
[Hint after pause]
[VFX fan blows breeze]
I am a ____.



[fan]

[answer= fan]

f n a r

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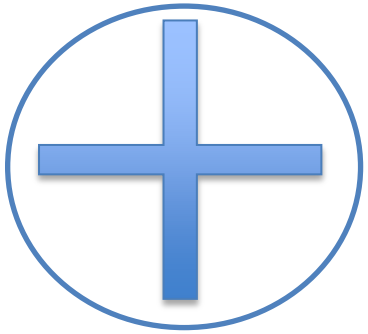
a fan for Sam



[fan]

[answer= fan]

[collection now includes a fan]

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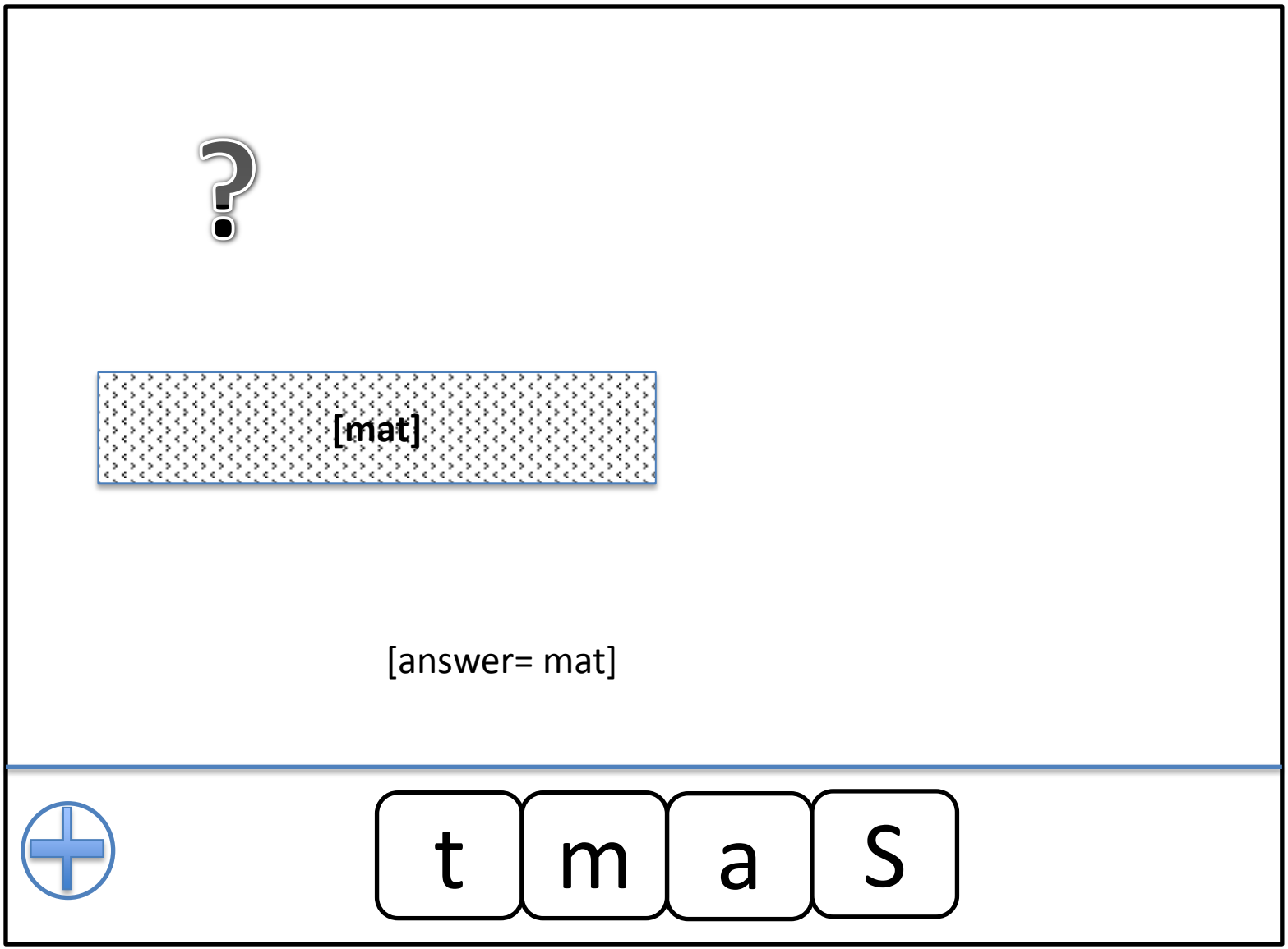
[interaction with character Sam]



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[Hint after pause]
[VFX mat rolls up and back out]
I am a ____.

[mat]

[answer= mat]

t m a S

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a mat for Sam

[collection now includes a mat]

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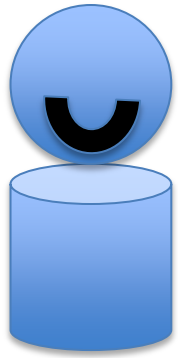
a fan, a mat, and a nap for Sam!



[Sam lays on mat with fan blowing and starts to snore.]

[user gives Sam the fan and the mat]

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What's Next?

- A LOT of things weren't covered by the core mechanic.
- Some will be covered in the next part of the sprint:
  - Theme (overarching story & game world)
  - Secondary mechanics
  - Variation on our Core Mechanic to reach higher and lower ages
  - Resources to manage
  - Short, medium, and long term goals

- Some will have to be covered later in the phase:
  - Structure the Game for Cross-age Appeal
    - 1 big unified game?
    - 1 game chapter per grade? (ex.: each Harry Potter book targets a grade)
    - 2-3 games chapters (K-1, 2-3 and 4-5)?
  - Visual style (TBD)

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