For a writer, time is the great commodity. There’s no shortcut to putting words on a page, and even for those who write for a living, securing uninterrupted work time can be difficult. To provide a group of young writers, then, with the opportunity to get stuck in to stories can only be a good thing.

Over two sessions of a couple of hours, a group ranging in age from 10 to 18 had the chance to work on their writing without the pressure of assessment, and with – for what it was worth – a little input from myself.

The Squad was a pleasure to work with. Those who chose to do so sent in some work and we’ve gathered it here. We’ve not edited it, other than to smooth a few typos. Enjoy.

Cynan Jones
December 2014
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More information on Young Writing Squads
WHAT'S THE ANSWER?

Caitlin Llewelyn, age 10

She swam across the murky lake, fish crowding her. Suddenly something started pulling her down. She was going down and down, no air to breath. She stopped struggling then she could breathe. She was in the lake but she could breathe... What was going on?

She got out of the lake still catching her breath and started walking home but her mind was juggling all the things that had just happened and she took a wrong turn. Instead of turning to her town, she was heading for the forbidden village. The village with the name that was never to be mentioned out loud.

"I know, I'm dreaming," she said to herself. "I will just go home and..." Her voice faded. "Hang on," she said again to herself, "where am I?"

Then she remembered something, (well more like she didn't). "I don't remember anything," she thought. "How did I get in that lake, I don't even remember getting up this morning." Then she stopped. All her thoughts faded away as she saw a person in a black cloak hiding behind a tree. And she got the creepy feeling someone was following her. She had one last thought before she started to run: who was that person and why were they stalking her?

She ran and ran and ran and ran until her legs could carry her no more but yet again another question fogged up her mind: was she closer or further away from home? After that final thought she fell into a deep sleep.

When she woke up her head was throbbing. Where was she? She didn't know. All she knew was that she was getting wrapped up in something she didn't want to be in...

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Carys Lear, age 11

She ran, building up speed every second. Mud pushed side to side as she started to struggle, her shoes ripping at the ground. She didn't dare look back; she could hear footsteps behind her. They seemed to be getting louder, as if they were closer, but she kept on sprinting, her bones aching as she kicked through the thick, black, tar-like mud.

Now the mud was creeping up her body. Just then she saw a light, an opening at the end of the passage. Although she knew her follower could still find her wherever she turned, she thought there could be a solution to the worst problem she would ever experience.

She thought of a time when she didn't have to run, and made a promise that if she was ever free again she would make much, much more of her life.

She felt a hand on her shoulder pulling her back just as she was about to step through the passage, into the light. She felt her heart beating in her chest and, panicking, she shouted as loud as she could, “Help!” And with that, the hand let go. She turned, and sprinted out of sight.

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Dear Diary,

Why won’t she just love me again? I caught her when I was running after her but I saw the fear in her face and just couldn’t hold on to her any longer. I’m going to find her again and tell her I love her.
Story One – THE EVIL DEAD

The house was surrounded by trees and bushes with the bench at the front of it. The stone wall behind the bench which continued around the house was older than she was. In fact the whole house was older than her.

She was going more insane every day. Talking to the cats as she sat on the bench and inviting them to tea. She was definitely going mad. I knew it. I couldn't help laughing watching from my bedroom window as she opened the door for the cats to come in, but they just walked away.

Mum told me not to laugh at her because she couldn't help it and the doctors couldn't either. Her neighbours said she kept wild beasts in her basement because there was always a racket coming from her house in the night.

I don't really believe that, but I wouldn't be surprised if she did. Some of my friends say she is a witch but others just say she's plain mad.

I didn't used to be scared of her or anything like that... until that terrible night.

It was the night after I turned thirteen. I was then allowed to stay out until 9:30pm and I was out with my two best friends Carl and Martin. It was 8:00pm when Carl thought of the idea.

He asked if we wanted to explore Mad Maria's house, see if there really were wild beasts in her basement as she had gone wandering in the woods again. Martin wanted to but I wasn't too sure. I eventually agreed though.

The door was open when we pushed and walked in. Everything was dusty in there and when we tried the lights nothing happened. So, we were left searching the house in the dark.

We didn't find anything and were about to leave but Carl wanted to check the basement. It was 10:00pm and I knew Mum would be worried sick about me. But I said yes.

That was the worst mistake I made in my life.

We walked in to find a girl in a long tattered brown jacket which hung down to her knees and a grey skirt which was ripped in some parts.

She was facing away from us and appeared to be weeping. Martin asked her why she was crying. No answer. He took a few steps forward and reached out to touch her... she turned around revealing a horrible disfigured face with the most sinister red eyes ever. She bit his wrist and gnawed at it until it completely dropped off.

During this time Carl and I had run from the basement and I glanced back to Martin who stared back at me with pleading tearful eyes. Then I slammed the door shut. Next came an ear-piercing scream from the basement which made me shudder.

Carl and I tried the door but it was locked, which was strange as I couldn't remember any of us locking it. Then we tried to smash a window but we saw Mad Maria wandering thoughtlessly back towards the house so we started up the stairs to find an upstairs window into the back garden.

Suddenly a hand shot through the wooden planks on the stairs and got an instant grip on my foot. I pulled and tugged and eventually the hand let go. I looked through the hole to see who the hand belonged to. It was the girl and
she gave me a haunting grin. Carl wasn't as lucky as I when she grabbed him. He slipped and knocked himself unconscious and she dragged him down.

So now I was left alone, with my best friends probably dead in this dark, evil house of horrors.

I carried on up the stairs and saw a window directly in front of me. I smashed the window with a candle on the shelf next to it and leaped out of it. The last thing I remembered was hitting the cold hard ground.

I wake up in a hospital with a bandage around my head. My mum and dad are next to me and I can tell my mum has been crying because of the red around her eyes. I sit up and give them both a hug and say I'm sorry and I shouldn't have listened to Carl.

They look confused when I said about Carl. They tell me Maria only found me lying on the ground and there was nobody else with me but Carl and Martin have been reported missing and are being searched for.

I want to tell them that they're dead and that there is an evil girl living in Maria's basement but they would just think I'm twice as insane as Maria so I keep quiet.

Two months after the event we moved house because mum no longer liked the place. Just before I got into the car I took a glance at the tiny basement window and saw the girl. The girl who had killed my two best friends. The evil girl in the basement.

Story 2 – GHOSTBUSTERS: THE OTHER SIDE

The phone rang. Becky pulled it up to her ear.

"Ghostbusters Incorporated, how may I help you? A ghost is eating all the food in your hotel? No, no it's not that... yes sir, I believe you. Ok, sir, they'll be there right away. Thank You."

She slammed the phone down "WE GOT ONE!" she cried.

Peter put his coffee down and looked at Ray who nodded towards him. He pulled the alarm switch and the sirens blared and the lights gleamed. Peter ran to Becky and asked, "What is it?"

"We got a Slimer eating all the food at Sedgewick Hotel again," she replied.

Then, Ray Stantz, Egon Spengler, Winston Zeddemore and Peter Venkman slid down the fire pole and got into their jumpsuits. They put their proton packs on and grabbed their proton wands and connected them to their proton packs.

They get into Ecto-1b. They had made a few adjustments after the last time they used it. They had added a super-charged nitro engine, portable containment unit and a hatch in the roof where one of them could use a proton wand to capture a ghost if they were ever being chased.

Ray takes the wheel and Peter sits next to him. Egon and Winston sit in the back.

"Where to, Pete?" Ray asks.

"Sedgewick Hotel," Peter replies.
Ray puts the siren on and they speed out of the HQ.

The new manager of the hotel is waiting at the steps for them. He looks quite anxious in case anyone notices they're coming in. When they reach him he whispers to them, "Please be as quick as possible. I don't want to make a show out of it."

"Don't worry sir, we won't be long. It will be just a simple in and out routine," Peter replies.

The manager gives Peter an unsure look and Peter returns him a reassuring look back.

"We deal with this stuff all the time," Peter says to the manager as they enter the posh hotel.

"How many ghosts have you caught before then, Mr...?"

"Venkman, Peter Venkman," Peter replies. "About one thousand five hundred, and we have caught a Slimer from this hotel before. Actually, I think the Slimer we caught here was the first ghost we ever caught."

The manager stops and looks at Peter with a horrified face, "Y...y...you mean there's been a ghost here before?"

Peter looks towards him, "Yep."

The manager faces forward and starts walking again, still pretty shocked.

They reach the huge ballroom where they originally caught a Slimer. "Customers have reported sightings of a green ghost eating all the food in here," says the manager.

"That's a Slimer alright," says Egon.

The manager turns to Egon. "So, there really is a ghost here?"

Egon faces him looking pretty impatient "Yes sir, you have a ghost in your hotel."

The Ghostbusters go into the ballroom and can see the Slimer straight away devouring food from a tray of leftovers.

"Right, let's do this guys, just like good old times," Ray says, and they all turn to him and nod.

They charge the proton wands up but, just before they shoot, around twenty other Slimers come in through the walls.

"RUN!" Winston screams, and they let go of the triggers on their proton wands and run through the doors. They can hear the manager asking what happened in the distance as they run through the entrance to the hotel and then him being cut short by the sound of Slimers wailing.

The team get into Ecto-1b and Peter screams, "Step on it Ray!" as he goes through the hatch in the roof and grabs the proton wand and aims for the what seems like thousands of Slimers. Peter shoots around ten but too many are coming too quickly.

"Egon?" Peter asks.

"Yes?" Egon replies.

"What would happen if I crossed the stream of my proton wand stream and Ecto-1b's proton wand stream?"

Egon looks at Peter. "There is a 99.98% chance that you would open up a worm hole that would suck up the whole earth destroying everything and there is a 0.02% chance that you would survive and wipe out all paranormal entities in the area."

Peter looks down at Egon, "I'll take my chances."
Peter pulls his proton wand up and crosses the stream with the one coming from Ecto-1b's and there is an immediate explosion sending a flash of white coming from where the streams crossed, catapulting Ecto-1b off the road with a blazing trail of sparks.

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Peter wakes up to find himself lying in a hospital bed with Ray also in a hospital bed to his left, and Egon and Winston in hospital beds to his right. Ray is already awake and smirks at Peter.

"What just happened, Ray?" Peter asks with a grin on his face, "What the hell just happened?"

"Well, you didn't open up a worm hole and destroy the entire planet." It was Egon, who smiles at Peter wearily.

"Hey you guys, can anybody explain what on earth just happened to us?" asks Winston who is now awake.

Ray sits up on his bed. "I will tell you what just happened. Peter Venkman just destroyed our car and will be buying us a new one."

They all looked at Peter and he smiled sheepishly. "But, he also kicked some serious Slimer butt!"

They continued to stare at Peter but then all burst out laughing.

Story 3 – SLENDER UPRISING

The young girl awakens to find herself lying in the middle of a woods in the middle of the night. She cannot remember her name, her age or her address. She can only remember that she has to find the eight pages. They will grant her memory and her way out of the woods.

She wanders the woods and after a half hour she finds a page pinned onto a tree. It says First You, Then Your Loved Ones. She stares at it for a moment, deeply haunted by the message, but then rips it off the tree, folds it and puts it in her pocket.

She finds another in what seems to be a ruined, abandoned church. It reads He will Find You and has an illustration of a tall, faceless man in a suit. She puts it in her pocket and carries on through the woods.

She finds another three pinned up on trees, one in a crashed jeep and the last one on the side of a well. They all have equally disturbing messages as the first two.

After finding the seventh page she turns around from the well and standing behind her is the man in her second page. The Slender Man. She turns away instantly, her head fuzzy for an unknown reason, and dives for cover behind a tree.

She steps out slightly from the tree, her head having calmed down, and peeks out, hoping she'll find the eighth page. Nothing. She slumps back against the oak and slides down it, feeling warm tears trickle down her cheeks.

She wipes them away and stands back up, more confident than before and turns, but standing behind her yet again is the sinister Slender Man who is facing directly towards her. Her surroundings go blurry and she can only
see the Slender Man and hear his horrible scream, like fingernails scraping down a blackboard. Then she drops to the floor... dead.

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Jack Howard, age 16

Forward towards the edge, mind over matter, brushing aside animal fear, into the isolation of the air.

People say that in peril, things slow down. They don’t. They speed up. The air current’s freezing claws grasped his spine and ascended into his skull.

Training? He couldn’t spell training let alone remember it.

His guardian angel went taut, granted him the rest of his life and took the air in his lungs as payment. The claws shattered, dissipated, and warmth began to seep in.

He drew his shining, solemn security from his jacket, that small shard of metal, ran it gently along his angel. She fell with grace to earth. He impacted, his affair with the sky over. Sand. He stumbled forward and embraced it with unreserved love.

He would not leave again. A lover’s promise. “Terra firma,” he whispered.
It was a warm afternoon. I had just finished posting a video. It was another Minecraft ‘Hermione lee33 Masters Witchery’ and I had just found another big scary creature whose name was very difficult to pronounce. As I looked at the computer screen I read the comments section underneath the video. I found so many people arguing about how to pronounce it that I was obviously not the only one.

I heard a knock at the door and caught a glimpse of the clock. I stood up and walked down the stairs to the front door. “Delivery for Miss Amy?” I heard someone shout from behind the door.

I opened the door unsure of who I would find… I saw a young girl and the mailwoman behind her. The young girl seemed to be holding something, a remote control maybe, but before I saw the whole remote the girl slipped it into her back pocket. “Here is your package…”

The woman chucked the package into my hands, luckily I caught it just in time.

“This is my daughter she wants to talk to you…”

I noted no expression in the woman’s voice or in her movement.

“Is that ok?” The woman’s question seemed aimed for me. It didn’t seem like my opinion mattered, because the girl was trying to squeeze past me and into my house.

“Mother stay outside as Miss.Lee33 and I chat inside.” The way the child said mother sounded forced and ordered, and no way to treat her mother.

I slowly shut the door and stared at the mother outside. She looked unreal, like a strange robot…

“Come, Miss Lee.”

The child seemed like a maniac. It was as if she was an Army General demanding her orders to be completed.

She stared at the cream walls as she waited for me to sit down.

“I’ve come to warn you Amy!” Out of all the introductions I’ve ever heard I think this was a first…

“I’m pretty safe kid, don’t worry.” Since I’d sat down I began to notice things, like the girl’s brown hair with pigtails and two little bows to hold the pigtails in place, her strange lilac eyes that seemed to sparkle.

“The Keepers are angry with you and your friends! You must prepare for the worst!”

“You’re starting to scare me kid…” I got up slowly watching the girl, her eyes were turning dark purple and her body rising from her chair and turning black and swirlly around the edges.

THE KEEPERS ARE ANGRY! ANGRY WITH YOU AND YOUR FRIENDS’ IGNORANCE!”

After the visit, I followed the child’s advice. I sat at home, I didn’t go to Insomnia, I was cautious about who I let come over to my house.

A month after the girl visited me, Stampylongnose came over uninvited.
“Amy what’s wrong with you? You’ve been acting strange for a month now!”
Stampy had a worried tone.
“The girl, she came, the Keepers…” I was clearly not myself and was a bit spooked.
“Amy, please! Everything’s going to be alright! Just look at this…” Stampy pointed to a comment on a picture I had posted on Instagram, the comments were mainly ‘NO HATE FOR AMY! Can’t you see she’s not herself!? I hope she gets better’ and ‘Amy, why are you so pale and not yourself lately?’
“Your fans, friends and family are worried for your welfare. I have to go now. Just try to cheer up.”
A few days later I had snapped back into action: daily videos, a happy attitude and my skin back from a ghastly white to a normal warm skin colour.

In the Heavens, the Keepers were watching Amy and her friends. They were unhappy as Amy and her friends were disrespecting the festivals which celebrated their power. A woman dressed in white said “I thought you said you would warn them, not try to frighten their leader to the point of insanity!” She had a small red hairband nestled in her blonde wavy hair.
“They deserve to be punished, Cupid!”, a tall man said, his brown hair slick and smooth. He wore a black cloak and was holding a small shining silver ball.
Suddenly there was a loud crack of thunder and an almighty cry of “CALM DOWN CUPID AND GRIM!”
A light appeared that silenced them both.
“What have you done, Grim?” The voice was so loud it was almost deafening.
“Well, um…” A faint nervous smile spread across Grim’s face…
“WHAT DID YOU DO?” The angry voice repeated.
Grim was visibly shaken and began to laugh nervously. The voice continued.
“You two will never know true POWER! Because you do not know how to use it wisely. Cupid, you sit around all day waiting for Valentine’s Day to come, and when it does the humans portray you as a BABY!”
Cupid was angered by this, but before she could answer Grim yelled “Father, you just sit there watching the puny humans living their lives, and when you do meddle they turn against each other. Need I mention World War One AND Two! So is that what wisdom looks like?” The look on Grim’s face was enough to stop anyone from smiling, especially Father.
Father listened to Grim and shouted “SILENCE YOUR NONSENSE! Tell us what you did Grim. The humans made YOU into Keepers and gave you your powers. Without those ‘puny humans’ you would be down there.”
He pointed down and a flash of thunder landed on the ground thousands of metres underneath them; they saw red dirt and lava lakes everywhere as well as thousands of demons.

I heard the phone ring BRRR-BRRRR and ran down the stairs, trying to answer in time BRRR-BRRRR.
“Hello, AmyLee33 here?” I stopped and looked at the number. SQUID?
“Amy…” Gasp… “It’s me…” Gasp… “Squid! Help!”
“IBallisticsquid? Are you ok? It’s like you’re gasping for air or something…”

I looked at the phone number, it was definitely Squid. Stampy was on
the phone now… “Amy? You still there? Sorry about Squid! He seems to be
having a panic attack or something…”
“What? Squid having a panic attack! He’s the fittest person I know, and
he most certainly does not get scared easily… Ok, maybe he screams
a lot… But that’s not the point!”
“Amy please trust us! Lee and Sqaishey are here as well, please come
over now!”

“I came as fast as I…” I stopped and noticed that no one was in the
bedroom. I started to search the house for my missing friends. Suddenly there
was a crash in the bathroom. I opened the door slowly and opened my eyes
to see Stampy, Sqaishey and Lee huddled around the bath tub.

“Hey guys! I’ve been looking for you everywhere! Where’s Squid?”
I saw Lee calling me to come look in the bath tub. When I looked inside
I saw Squid in the water, he was trying to stay underwater but pulling himself
back up to breathe.

“Amy!”… Gasp. “You’re here! I’m changing…” Gasp… “I can” …
Gasp… “I can breathe underwater!” Gasp…

Squid was not talking any more, he was also starting to become blue. It
was not the water dying his skin blue, and he was not cold for as Stampy had
said, the water temperature was normal.

I reached out trying to grab his hand and pull us both out of this living
nightmare, black smoke filled the room. It seemed to evaporate into the air. I
suddenly let go of Squid’s hand. As it dropped into the water it became a
square arm, ten of them appeared, Squid’s eyes drifted to the side of his
head. I noticed immediately he looked exactly like a Minecraft squid…

“So Grim, I ask you again: what did you do this time?” asked Father.
“Well, you see, they are gaming YouTubers…”
“Sorry to interrupt, but what are YouTubers?”

The expression on Grim’s face actually turned into a grimace. “I’ll just
tell you later, but they mainly play this game called ‘Minecraft’ and I had a
thought. What if they became the things they are in ‘Minecraft’? So I chose
AmyLee33, IBallisticsquid, Stampylongnose, L for Lee, and Sqaishey Quack
as my test dummies.”

For a moment Father looked proud of Grim and saw the irony of it until
he asked, “What will happen to them?”
A silence filled the air waiting for Grim to answer or Father to get angry.
“Well, They… They will turn into animals. IBallisticsquid will turn into a squid,
Stampylongnose will turn into a cat, L for Lee will turn into a bear, Sqaishey
Quack will turn into a duck and AmyLee33 will turn into a mermaid!”
“I’m sorry Grim but when is a mermaid an animal?”
“Sssshhh! I was too lost in the moment. I forgot! But what’s super cool is that they turn into MINECRAFT animals! So Minecraft cats, squids, and mods with ducks, bears and mermaids!”

Father seemed enraged by Grim’s cruelty and said, “Turning humans into animals is not ‘cool’. How would you like it? And while you’re explaining that, can you explain the YouTubers thing?”

“SQUID!!!! WHY ARE YOU A SQUID?!” Lee was screaming now, Stampy was sitting on the toilet seat staring at the bath, Sqaishey was playing with soap. Squid was still wriggling about in the water. Stampy walked towards me.

“Um, Amy… Why is your hair pink and mermaid like?”

I looked down and saw Stampy was right. Stampy looked mildly strange himself, his skin had turned a yellowish colour and he had grown whiskers.

“Stampy, Lee, come here a second.”

Stampy and Lee walked over to me with a blubbering Squid in the background.

“Lee, why have you gone brown and why are your ears on the top of your head? Stampy, why have you got whiskers and why are you yellow? And WHY is Squid a SQUID?!”

The next thing, I woke up by noticing everything was back to normal. I thought back to when I went to bed, but I couldn’t remember actually going. I then thought about the strange dream I had that had seemed so real.

I decided to phone my friends and tell them about my dream. I soon found out that they had all had the same dream! Did it all happen? Who was the girl at the door? Was she real? Or part of the dream? I guess we’ll never know…

“Do you think they will learn their lesson Father?” Grim looked up at him.

“No Grim. After all, they did start World War Two!”
Joe’s Joke Shop has been open since I was born. It opened on the day I was born to be precise. Joe was a friend of my family, and to celebrate my birth, he opened a joke shop! Some kids at my school spent their pocket money on sweets or toys, but I always spent mine at Joe’s. To know there was an actual joke shop that was opened for me, that was just cool.

Joe’s Joke Shop was almost seven years old, and so was I, but Joe wasn’t. He was almost sixty-seven! He didn’t open his shop every day anymore, only on occasional weekends. I also didn’t see him walking in the park every Thursday anymore. Joe’s Joke Shop wasn’t itself without Joe.

One day, when I came home from school, Mum and Dad said they had something important to tell me. Joe wasn’t going to be working at his joke shop, we wouldn’t see him again, ever. Recently he had been unwell, and he didn’t get better. I didn’t know what it meant at the time, but I was still upset, very upset. I kept asking myself, ‘If Joe wasn’t coming back, who would run Joe’s Joke Shop?’

It didn’t open for a long time, but it wasn’t replaced by something boring, like a newsagents or a DIY shop, which I didn’t understand. The Government were always cutting down trees to make more space for stuff like that, surely they would jump at the chance to turn an empty building into something more ‘useful’.

One day, I saw a huge sign on the dirty wall of Joe’s Joke Shop, saying ‘GRAND RE-OPENING TODAY!’ Bursting with excitement, I ran home in what seemed like just seconds. “Mum... Dad! Joe’s... Opening!” I panted before running straight out the door again.

When I got back to the shop, a tall man with grey hair stood outside it. He bent down and smiled. “You must be William,” he said, “I’m Wilf. I’m going to be working here from now on. If that’s alright, is it?”

I nodded, and shook his hand. “Ow!” I shrieked. He waved his hand, and I saw Joe’s favourite practical joke. The electric hand shake. I laughed. Joe would’ve been proud.
More information on Young People’s Writing Squads

For more information on the Swansea Young Writing Squad, please contact Jo Furber at the Dylan Thomas Centre - jo.furber@swansea.gov.uk

The Young People’s Writing Squads have been developed over the past decade by Literature Wales in association with the local authorities in Wales. The Squads aim to locate gifted young writers – in both English and Welsh – in each authority region and introduce them to some of Wales’ leading writers, and teachers of writing. Young People’s Writing Squads welcome selected children whose creative writing shows particular ability and promise. Usually this selection has been made by the age of 9 or 10, with head teachers in each authority identifying keen and gifted young writers. Advisors conduct the final selections and each Squad of children meets on average three or four times a year (usually on Saturdays) for special training sessions with outstanding writers who have the necessary communication skills to work with the young writers. The aim is to keep each Squad together until the end of their schooldays.

Literature Wales offers funding to local authorities to set up new Young People’s Writing Squads. Teachers, librarians or education advisers wishing to establish new squads in their authority are particularly encouraged to get in touch with Literature Wales for advice and assistance.

For more information on how the squads operate and what they do, please contact Leusa Llewelyn - leusa@literaturewales.org (Children and Young People’s Officer)

http://www.writingsquads.org/what-is-a-squad/

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