



**EARLY YEARS  
(AGES 3–5)**

# Hello Country, hello friends

## EDUCATOR RESOURCE

Created in collaboration with First Nations cultural advisers

Aligned with the Early Years Learning Framework v2.0

Written by teachers for teachers



**Warning:** This resource may contain images, voices and names of deceased persons, and references to language or events that may be considered culturally sensitive, offensive or outdated.

**Language note:** It's important to consider the historical context and evolving nature of language when viewing the information in this resource. While it may not be our preferred language, Australians Together at times uses or includes terms necessary for context, due to the educational nature of our content.



## Essential question

How do Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ceremonies teach us the significance of rituals to our sense of belonging and connection to Country?



### Before teaching

#### Staff development

Before undertaking this learning with your children, deepen your team's understanding of connection to Country during a regular staff meeting or a specific staff training session. This session could be used towards meeting the National Quality Standards areas 1 and 6, as well as Early Years Learning Framework outcome 2, as a professional requirement for Early Years educators.

Watch and listen to the video [Ngurumbangga Yanhanha—Walking on Country](#) (02:55) together, encouraging staff to note words or ideas that resonate or are unfamiliar. Using the video transcript under the video, project or print the lyrics off and use them as a point of discussion. Ask the team to reflect on and discuss:

- What did you think of the song and video? What stood out to you?
- How does this song highlight respect for and connection to Country?
- How can these influence our practice as educators?
- How can we incorporate First Nations perspectives into our centre/service?
- What activities can we do to help the children connect to the Country they're on?
- How can we increase our staff, families and children's sense of belonging here?

With those questions in mind, watch and listen to the video again, taking note of what experiences the children are having in the videos. Return to the discussion and add all ideas to a brainstorm board.

Finish the session with a call to action, asking each staff member to commit to one action they can take to embed today's learning into their practice.

To delve deeper, organise and book a First Nations run and led workshop or staff development session on cultural awareness and safety for your staff.

#### Welcome Ceremony

Often when we think of the word 'welcome', we think of the common definition of greeting someone, or showing hospitality to visitors. This resource will discuss that type of welcome (lowercase), but we'll focus more on Welcome to Country ceremonies (with a capital W). It's important to understand that non-Indigenous people can't facilitate a Welcome to Country ceremony; rather, they can do an Acknowledgement of Country. For more information, we encourage you to read the Australians Together article, [Welcome to and Acknowledgement of Country](#) (391 words and 2-minute read).

Prior to the **colonisation** of this continent, it was common practice, when seeking to enter another People's Country, to wait at the boundary to be welcomed. Often a messenger was sent to see what the travellers wanted, and then when Elders gave permission to come onto Country, a ceremony would be performed. This Welcome to Country ceremony is still performed, often to signify that the visiting person or group are now connected to Country, have all the rights and responsibilities to be safe on Country, and to care for Country while visiting. Welcoming ceremonies are sometimes part of welcoming and connecting new babies to the Country, and those being married to one another (Aunty Kathleen, personal communication 2025). The form of ceremony differs in each Country; for example, some use smoking of leaves significant to the local area; in other areas water is more significant; or song and dance is the ceremony or contributes to it. Regardless of form, a Welcome to Country ceremony is a sacred ritual for First Nations Peoples, that's deeply tied to the land and waterways, lore and Dreaming. Watch ABC's video [Back to Nature: Welcome to Country](#) (05:00) to hear First Nations perspectives on Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country.

## Knowing where you live

If you don't already know the name of the Country or Countries your service is located on, prepare for the learning by finding out using the AIATSIS '[Map of Indigenous Australia](#)'. You'll use this Map with the children in some of the activities.

Where we live, work and play has a significant impact on our sense of belonging, and feeling connected to a place has a great impact on a child's development and on our social and emotional wellbeing, even as adults (Over 2016). In the Early Years Learning Framework the word 'belonging' is mentioned 105 times, 'connection' is mentioned 43 times and 'place' is mentioned 29 times (ACECQA 2022).

These concepts are central to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures – the oldest continuing living cultures in the world (AHRC n.d.). First Nations ceremonies are based on being connected (belonging) to Country (place), wisdom that's been held and handed down through the generations, and still practiced, danced and sung today.

## Using local First Nations language/s

In this resource you're encouraged to use local Indigenous language to greet children and families in your service. Be mindful that language is and should be protected as Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP), so be sure to connect with and consult local language custodians and work according to local cultural principles and protocols.

There are also some online resources that can be used. The Gambay '[First Languages Map](#)' is a good place to start, especially if you're unsure what language is spoken on local Country, and the [50 Words Project](#), which is working to record 50 words in First Nations languages across the continent, to highlight the diversity of language and as a language-learning resource for schools and the public.

## Local language sources

For localised information about languages and protocol try the following sources:

Australian Capital Territory	Reach out for advice via <a href="mailto:EDUIndigenousEd@act.gov.au">EDUIndigenousEd@act.gov.au</a> .
New South Wales	' <a href="#">AECG Aboriginal language</a> ', NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Inc. (AECG)  ' <a href="#">NSW Aboriginal Languages information</a> ', NSW Aboriginal Languages Trust  Also download the NSW Aboriginal Languages app.
Northern Territory	<a href="#">Guidelines for the Implementation of Indigenous Languages and Cultures Programs in Schools</a> , Northern Territory Government.
Queensland and Torres Strait Islands	<a href="#">Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property Protocol for the teaching of Aboriginal languages and Torres Strait Islander languages in Queensland State Schools</a> , Queensland Department of Education.
South Australia	<a href="#">Kurna Warra</a> , University of Adelaide
Tasmania	<a href="#">Policy and Protocol for Use of palawa kani Aboriginal Language, 2019</a> , Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre.

Victoria	<p><a href="#">‘Teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture’</a>, Victorian Department of Education.</p> <p><a href="#">‘Early Years Unit’</a>, Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc.</p>
Western Australia	<p><a href="#">‘Aboriginal Languages and Torres Strait Islander Languages Framework: guiding principles’</a>, School Curriculum and Standards Authority, Government of Western Australia.</p> <p><a href="#">‘Protocols’</a>, Kaartdijin Noongar – Noongar Knowledge, Sharing Noongar Culture website, South West Aboriginal Land &amp; Sea Council.</p>

## Connecting with communities/Elders

If you or your school already has a relationship with a local First Nations community member, language expert or Elder, reach out to invite the person to share their language and its significance to their cultural identity. If you don't have existing relationships with First Nations people, consider starting one by contacting a local Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander land council; or searching for First Nations groups through local or state botanical gardens, national parks and ranger groups, peak educational bodies or museums. ACECQA provide good advice in their [Engaging with Aboriginal Communities](#) guide.

There are also many valuable and innovative Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander run and led incursion and workshop opportunities. You can consider organising a local group to run a cultural immersive workshop for a rich opportunity for your children and families to experience. Search online for opportunities available in your area.

## Parents and caregivers letter – ‘Hello Country, hello friends’

Within this resource is a ‘Parent/caregiver’s letter template’ that can be sent home to support children in this learning. Parents and carers are asked to help by sharing what language/s are significant to them and what word, phrase, gestures and/or rituals they use in their homes and families. The word ‘rituals’ reflects the special, repeated practices that strengthen children’s sense of identity and belonging. These moments honour culture, connection and community while supporting learning in a positive way.

The words or phrases from home will be included on a ‘Belonging board’ in the centre. Your knowledge of the children’s home situations can inform how you approach families and carers for this learning.

## Glossary

**colonisation:** the act of one country invading and taking over another country and its population; invading forces that colonise a country are called *colonists* or *colonisers*; the invaded country is called a *colony*. The British began the colonisation of Australia in 1788.

**Country/Place:** the lands where First Nations communities have always lived and belonged to. It’s also a belief system, a relationship with all living and non-living things which includes everything within that landscape: rocks, trees, waterways, sky, animals, plants, medicines, sacred sites, all people, ancestral spirits and past, present and future community connections. Country sustains First Nations Peoples and must be respected and cared for by every generation that is and will be.

## Activity materials

You’ll need:

- a copy of the parent/caregiver letter for each child
- access to an outdoor area
- a device or notebook to record student responses
- a device/s for taking photos
- a learning area to set up nature provocation stations
- paper and coloured pencils
- a copy of the picture book *Welcome to Country* by Aunty Joy Murphy and Lisa Kennedy
- a wicker or cane basket to hold natural items

- natural objects from various environments, i.e. stones, shells, leaves, flowers, driftwood, dried seeds and fruits, fibres
- a speaker to play audio/music
- a screen to share websites/videos
- a mat, cushions, fabrics/ blankets.

## Activities

### Family engagement



#### Belonging board

Using the parent/caregiver letter provided in this resource, send a message home to all families asking what language they speak at home and what word or phrases they use to greet people in their home language, as well as rituals the families engage in. Using their responses, create a display wall with different words, phrases and rituals the family do, including photos of greeting gestures and rituals i.e. waving, bowing, clasped hands, hand over heart; or celebrating a family ritual such as birthdays, baptisms, weddings, a bar mitzvah; or making temple or alter offerings. Make sure to include the word for 'welcome' or 'hello' in the Indigenous language your site is on, as well as some images of local ceremonies, if appropriate permissions have been gained.



#### Sign-ins

Create a sign-in table for children, if your service doesn't already have one. When children come into the service, have them sign-in with the support of their parent/carer. Each day you could offer a different sign-in experience; here are some suggestions that connect to our theme of welcoming:

- Use a footprint stuck on the floor, or painted animal tracks that lead children from the door to the sign-in area, representing a journey on **Country**.
- Stamp their footprint or handprint on a piece of card using paint, then get the child to match their print with their name and put it on display to show who's here today and symbolise their journey on Country and personal belonging to the place.
- Have children copy/write their name in sand held in a small tray, then take a photo of their name and clear the sand ready for the next child to sign-in.
- Have children choose a picture of an animal or plant indigenous to Australia, write their name on it, and peg it onto a piece of string to sign-in.
- Incorporate a sign-in ritual where children sit in a circle and pass around a special object (like a small stone or feather representing Country) and say a greeting before writing or marking their name on the board.
- Have children bring in a natural object from their home environment, or a special place, and share with the group what it means to them. Each child places their object in a basket that's moved to the next child. By the end of circle time, each child has placed an object in the basket, which shows we all bring something special to our shared space. Make note of the comments children make about their special items, and display these with the basket of objects. If a child doesn't bring one, give them time to collect something from around the centre. Remind children to return these items back to the original place when finished, and talk to them about sustainable practices and caring for Country.

#### Group time

When possible, take group time outside. Sit in a circle on a mat, on the ground or around a pretend fire.



#### Good morning/greeting song

Gather the children as per your morning routine. If you don't have one consider making this a regular part of your day, as it's a great way to start the day and acknowledge everyone present in the learning environment. Here are some examples of greeting songs – feel free to use your own or find one that suits your service:

- *Hi, hello and how are you? How are you? How are you? Hi Hello and how are you? How are you today?*
- *How many friends are here today? Here to stay? Here to play? How many friends are here today? Let (insert educator or child's name here) count them! 1, 2, 3 ... (and so on, counting each child).*
- *Bee bee bumblebee we can sing your name you see, your name is? (Child responds and everyone sings it back)*

Ask children why they think singing a song like this is special or important (to mark the start of our day, to meet/greet who is with us today, to learn each other's names). Ask children to share if they know any other songs or ways to say hello in another language. You may like to write some of these words or songs down to start a display in the classroom.

## Rituals

Discuss with the children what the word 'rituals' mean, using the following dictionary definition, "something that is done regularly and always in the same way" (OUP 2025), or rewording it to suit your group.

Create a group list of rituals children do at childcare, kindy or home by writing, drawing or photographing them and adding them to a collaborative 'Belonging board' somewhere central. Use families' responses from the distributed letter and give some examples of routines and rituals the children do at your centre; for example, morning circle time, toilet and handwashing routine, mealtimes, story times, rest/nap times and wind-down routines.

Explain to children the difference between a routine and a ritual. For example, how someone washes their hands is a routine, how someone celebrates a birthday is a ritual.

Capture children doing these routines with cameras or tablets, print the images and add them to your 'Belonging board'. Visuals of routines are also highly effective for children with additional or complex needs.

## Feelings

Point out to children how you love to welcome them to the centre each day, whether that's saying good morning when they arrive, or waving to their family as they enter.

Ask them how they feel when people say hello or welcome them to their home or to their game? If children are too young or need prompting, give some examples of how you feel when children say hello to you such as:

- "I feel happy when I see you smiling and waving at me."
- "I feel safe when someone welcomes me into their home."
- "I feel important when you stop and say hello to me at the shop."

Ask children to consider how they could invite someone to play with us if that person isn't playing anything or is feeling left out. Some examples or prompts include:

- wave at them
- smile
- ask them, "Would you like to play with me?"
- gesture to them to come over to.

If educators have any 'feelings cards' they could be used in this activity by spreading them out on the floor and sitting children in a circle around them. Then, have them choose one and talk about why saying hello or good morning makes them feel that way.

## Welcome to Country by Aunty Joy Murphy and Lisa Kennedy

When reading *Welcome to Country* by Aunty Joy Murphy with preschoolers, you can begin by explaining that the book shows a special ceremony where First Nations people warmly welcome others to their land as a way of showing respect and kindness. You can invite the children to share how they say hello or welcome guests in their own families or languages. This helps them connect the story to their personal experiences. As you read slowly and expressively, point out the beautiful illustrations, describing the land, animals, and people in the ceremony, and encourage the children to imagine the sounds and feelings of the event.

During the discussion, highlight the words like "we" and "our" in the book that show everyone belongs to the land and community, emphasising sharing and caring. Ask open questions about how they welcome guests at home, kindy or childcare, to encourage thinking about kindness and respect.

You can follow up with activities like drawing footprints or pictures of animals and plants from the land, symbolising walking respectfully on Country. Using greetings from the book and the children's own languages in daily greetings helps reinforce the welcome message and deepens their understanding of the ceremony's meaning.



### Play School 'Acknowledgement of Country'

Show children key parts of the Play School '[Acknowledgement of Country](#)' episode (total of 27:00 and requires a free ABC iView account to log in and watch). In this episode, presenters Luke Carroll, Miranda Tapsell, Hunter Page-Lochard (and the toy Kiya) introduce the idea of Acknowledging Country, say hello in different Aboriginal languages, and model respectful connection to the land with simple actions (touching the ground, reaching for the sky, touching the heart).

Keep the viewing short and interactive by pausing to ask children questions like:

- What do you think it means to touch the ground to care for Country?
- Can you see Kiya and friends saying hello in different languages?

After watching, engage children in a simple conversation about what they saw and heard. Explain that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples are the first people of the land, and what it means to care for Country.



### Acknowledging Country: starting point

Introduce a new song to your morning ritual that Acknowledges the First Nations Country you're gathering and playing on, and embed this as part of your morning routine.

It's important to explain and show children the different Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nations that make up this continent we now call Australia, and discuss why it's important to acknowledge the Country they're on.

You can use your own Acknowledgement, or here are some examples. Remember to look up and check whose Country you're on using the AIATSIS '[Map of Indigenous Australia](#)':

- *Here's the land (touch the ground), here's the sky (reach up), here are my friends (gesture to the group) and here am I (point to yourself). Hands up (hands up), hands down (hands down), I'm on \_\_\_\_\_ land (tap or rub the ground).*
- *We acknowledge the land, on which we now stand, has always been \_\_\_\_\_ Country. We pay our respects to Elders past, those present and those of the future.*



### Cultivating gratitude and reflection

Finish your day or group times with a time of gratitude and reflection. Ask the children:

- What's something you liked about playing on Country today?
- What would you like to say to Country before you go?

These questions create a sense of connection and belonging for children to their learning environment and also their natural environment. Even if you operate in a city, or have limited outdoor spaces, you can bring in natural elements to the space and help nurture gratitude for the place you work and play on.



### Engage with the local community

An impactful thing educators can do, is to facilitate opportunities for young ones to hear Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives firsthand. Invite a local knowledge holder or group in to provide a language lesson or cultural immersive workshop; or ask a local Elder or Traditional Custodian to run a Welcome to Country Ceremony for an event/s at your centre; i.e. preschool graduation, a fundraiser fete or a community open day. Search online for organisations and opportunities available in your area, and ensure you have budget available to pay for any services provided.



### Quiet yarns: a wind down activity

When children need some rest or wind-down time, or if your centre has nap times, incorporate this into your routine. Dim or turn off the lights, set up a comfy space with cushions and blankets, keep the room at a comfortable temperature and encourage children to calm. Explain that today you'll be going on an adventure to a different Country – a Country that's in another part of Australia. Along the way you'll meet new people, learn new worlds and see new things. Encourage children to close their eyes and imagine what the place looks like in the story and then play the ABC *Little Yarns* (2022) episode, '[Hello in Gumbaynggirr](#)' (08:00).



## Play prompts

### Reading nook

Set up a comfortable and quiet reading area with various books, ideally the recommended picture books below as well as books from various cultures and in different languages.

These age-appropriate books about Country and ceremony are great for group time reading and/or to feature in the children's reading space. They also affirm the importance of knowing who you are, where you come from, and respecting others, which are foundational to a sense of belonging.

- [\*Welcome to Country\*](#) by Aunty Joy Murphy and Lisa Kennedy
- [\*Ceremony \(Welcome to Our Country\)\*](#) by Adam Goodes, Ellie Laing and David Hardy
- [\*Respect\*](#) by Aunty Fay Muir, Sue Lawson and Lisa Kennedy
- [\*Baby Business\*](#) by Jasmine Seymour
- [\*My Culture and Me\*](#) by Gregg Dreise
- [\*Come Together\*](#) by Isaiah Firebrace and Jaelyn Biunaiwai
- [\*Welcome, Child!\*](#) by Sally Morgan
- [\*Emus under the Bed\*](#) by Leann J Edwards



### Sensory connections

Provide natural materials (bark, feathers, leaves, weaving) and toys representing native animals and landscapes to help children physically and emotionally connect with the stories. Creating a sensory-rich environment mirrors the First Nations understanding of Country as a living entity, not just land, but family, identity and spirit. Alternatively, you can set up a story table with items relevant to the books you have available.



### Paint and play

Hang or peg a large natural fibre, cloth, canvas or butchers' paper onto a fence, or something stable that children can easily paint on. Provide children with natural dyes, pigments or earthy coloured paints that reflect the local natural environment. Encourage children to paint a collaborative piece that reflects nature around them using sticks, flowers, leaves or their fingers to tell a story of their environment. Children can explore different materials and textures in their painting, and then talk about their creations/stories.



### Natural rhythms

Music is a powerful way to connect with Country, and many First Nations People have been connecting with Country in this way for many thousands of years.

Provide a space that's comfortable and where children are free to make noise, where you can place some traditional and natural instruments on the mat and let children play and explore the different sounds they make. Some suggestions include: clapsticks, rainsticks, kulaps, hand drums, wooden shakers, castanets, guiros.

[\*Come Together Again\*](#), by Isaiah Firebrace and Jaelyn Biunaiwai, is a great book emphasising the importance of music, dance and song in First Nation cultures. Have this book in this music space for children to engage with, making connections between the instruments available and those mentioned in the book. This book could also be used during a circle time as it features several suggestions of small steps we can take to engage with First Nations music, song and dance. Here's an example of an easy set-up and ways to connect with the book.

Play some music by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists, in the background or transition times; for example, finishing cleaning up the room by the end of this song. Here are some artists who use First Nations instruments and languages in their songs:

- Gurrumul Yunupingu
- Aunty Wendy's Mob
- Christine Anu
- Electric Fields
- Lewis Burns
- Cheeky Tunes
- Jessie Llyod
- Baker Boy.

These are specific songs, great for playing in the background during nap, rest and recharge times:

- '[Marringa Lullaby](#)' (01:15) by Emily Wurramara, a gentle song about dreaming across Country
- '[Tjitji Lullaby](#)' (01:44) by Zaachariaha Fielding and Michael Ross (Electric Fields), focussed on singing baby animals to sleep and exploring nature
- '[Piki Lullaby](#)' (01:32) by Christine Anu, reflecting Torres Strait Islander culture and the natural environment
- '[Ninganah Lullaby](#)' (01:44) by Troy Cassar-Daley, which includes [Bundjalung](#) and [Gumbaynggirr](#) languages

## Family rituals

[Dear] Parents and Caregivers,

[With permission, use a local language greeting along with English meaning; i.e. Niina Marni (Kurna phrase for 'Hello, how are you?')]  
Parents and Caregivers,

Over the next few weeks, we're exploring how we greet people, as well as rituals and routines we do at home and at our service. We'll be creating a 'Belonging board' featuring the ways families greet each other in their home, including words, phrases or gestures you may use, as well as traditions or cultural customs your family engage in.

The word 'rituals' reflects the special, repeated practices that strengthen children's sense of identity and belonging. These moments honour culture, connection and community while supporting learning in a positive way.

You can help by completing the following and returning this letter in person, or via email, or add them as a comment to our online post. We'll print and display these alongside your child's name.

Words or phrases we greet one another with at home/s in your home language:

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Rituals, special routines, ceremonies or customs we engage in (for example, going to church, temple or mosque; celebrating birthdays or festivals; doing daily routines for bedtime):

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We also ask you to send along a photo of your child and/or family members greeting one another (waving, hugging, hand over heart, bowing) or doing one of the rituals or routines listed above. These photos can be posted online or sent to our email, or printed and brought into the centre. These will also be displayed on our board.

We're very keen to have all our families and cultures represented, as each child is special and belongs in our place, and we hope this activity will increase your child's and family's sense of belonging.

[With permission, use local language farewell with translation and acknowledging language group; i.e. Nhaabawunya! (Dharug farewell)],

# Hello Country, hello friends

EARLY YEARS (AGES 3–5)

## Australians Together Learning Framework™

Our resources follow a framework of 5 Key Ideas that are designed to shape a new narrative for all Australians. Each Key Idea underpins the content and activities in its section to take students on a transformational learning journey. You can download the framework from our [Curriculum Resources page](#).



### The Wound

Injustice from the impact of colonisation



### Our History

A past that shapes our story as a nation



### Why Me?

What's it got to do with me?



### Our Cultures

Everyone has culture. Know about your culture and value the cultures of others



### My Response

Steps we can take to build a brighter future

## Alignment to the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF v2.0)

### Learning Outcome 1: Children have a strong sense of identity

- 1.1 Children feel safe, secure, supported
- 1.3 Children develop knowledgeable, confident self-identities and a positive sense of self-worth
- 1.4 Children learn to interact in relation to others with care, empathy and respect

### Learning Outcome 2: Children are connected with and contribute to their world

- 2.1 Children develop a sense of connectedness to groups and communities and an understanding of their reciprocal rights and responsibilities as active and informed citizens
- 2.2 Children respond to diversity with respect

### Learning Outcome 3: Children have a strong sense of wellbeing

- 3.1 Children become strong in their social, emotional and mental wellbeing

### Learning Outcome 4: Children are confident and involved learners

- 4.1 Children develop a growth mindset and learning dispositions such as curiosity, cooperation, confidence, creativity, commitment, enthusiasm, persistence, imagination and reflexivity
- 4.4 Children resource their own learning through connecting with people, place, technologies, and natural and processed materials

### Learning Outcome 5: Children are effective communicators

- 5.1 Children interact verbally and non-verbally with others for a range of purposes
- 5.2 Children engage with a range of texts and gain meaning from these texts
- 5.3 Children express ideas and make meaning using a range of media
- 5.4 Children begin to understand how symbols and patterns work

## References

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## Image acknowledgments

- Cover image: *Toddlers holding hands*, Astrid Volzke/Austockphoto.com.au
- Young boy playing outdoors among piles of autumn leaves*, Bec Hannaford/Austockphoto.com.au
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First published in 2025 by Concilia Ltd trading as Australians Together, Adelaide, South Australia.

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