



# Finding Assistance, Delivering Outreach

Project Reference number: 2024-1-FR01-KA220-ADU-000255033



©DAH Theatre

| Module 4 |

## Technical Performance skills

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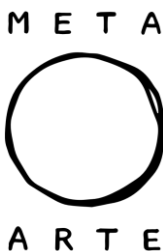
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## Description of the module

This module covers techniques of socially engaged theatre for addressing complex issues like violence, discrimination, and social injustice. It emphasizes use of different theatre techniques in creating safe environments and exploring emotions through activities such as storytelling, role-play, and group exercises to foster empathy, reflection, and community development. It also highlights the importance of expert collaboration and documentation.

## What will I learn ?

- Establish and maintain group rules that promote mutual respect, trust, and non-judgmental interaction.
- Apply metaphor, allegory, and symbolic storytelling to address sensitive issues in a safe and indirect manner.
- Empower participants to act as co-creators in the learning process rather than passive recipients.
- Connect emotional experiences to critical reflection and the identification of possible actions for change.
- Practical Theatre Skills in order to develop shared narratives.
- Exhibit increased empathy, respect, and tolerance in group interactions.

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## 1. Tackling Complex Topics through socially engaged theatre techniques

One of the great strengths of socially engaged theatre is its capacity to address complex and sensitive issues in a participatory and engaging way. Through theatrical fiction and play, topics that are often difficult to talk about openly can be explored together.

Below are key principles and methodological suggestions for using theatre to work on challenging themes (such as gender-based violence, but also racism, addictions, youth distress, bullying, etc.):

### ► **Creating a safe environment:**

First and foremost, it's essential to establish group rules based on mutual respect and trust. Participants must feel safe expressing ideas and stepping into roles without fear of judgment. Sessions often start with ice-breakers, cooperative games, and light activities to strengthen group cohesion. Only when trust is built are more serious topics gradually introduced.

This kind of preparation is crucial to ensure themes like gender violence are addressed with the right level of sensitivity (Rossi Ghiglione, 2013; Boal, 2011).

### ► **Using metaphor and storytelling:**

Theatre allows us to talk about a difficult subject indirectly, through stories or characters. For example, to discuss relationship violence, one could stage a reimagined version of Little Red Riding Hood instead of referring immediately to real-life examples. Metaphor provides that creative distance that helps people reflect without feeling personally attacked. Through post-performance dialogue, the group can connect the metaphor back to real life: "Can you think of a real-life situation that resembles what we just saw?" Allegories, fairy tales, and symbols are



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powerful allies in making tough content more accessible (Boal, 2011, p. 14).

## ► **Work with contradictions:**

Theatre has a unique capacity to sustain a contradiction and to let different aspects, voices and opinions to exist at the same time. For example it can provide a space to hear voices from both sides of the conflict.

## ► **Letting participants' voices emerge:**

Rather than introducing complex themes from the outside, socially engaged theatre seeks to make them emerge from the participants' own experiences and perceptions. For example, when exploring bullying or discrimination, the facilitator can ask participants to anonymously write down witnessed or lived experiences and use those as the basis for improvised scenes. This ensures the story on stage reflects the group's perspective and helps spark authentic discussion. Participants feel like protagonists, not passive recipients of a message. In discussions about gender-based violence, it often emerges that some young people don't recognize certain behaviours as violent; creating scenes based on those grey areas (e.g., controlling jealousy disguised as love) allows for targeted reflection (Pontremoli, 2015).

## ► **Balancing emotional involvement and rational reflection:**

Theatre stirs emotions—this is what makes it so impactful—but these emotions must then be processed. For instance, in a forum theatre session on domestic violence, a girl who steps into the oppressed character's shoes may feel frustration or anger. It's essential to provide space afterward to talk about those feelings and connect them to broader reflections. The facilitator guides this process: "How did it feel to be in her place? Why do you think the audience applauded that solution? What does that tell us about the original problem?" In short, after emotional catharsis, shared reflection helps consolidate learning and connect it to possible concrete actions (Boal, 2011).

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## ► Collaborating with topic experts:

When addressing complex themes (violence, addiction, trauma, etc.), it's good practice to involve or consult with professionals—psychologists, educators, cultural mediators—to ensure the subject is handled accurately and sensitively. In a workshop on cyberbullying, for example, having an expert in digital safety can boost the impact of the theatrical intervention. Socially engaged theatre shouldn't be an island—it works best as part of an integrated approach. The emotional and artistic component opens people up to listening and dialogue, then an expert can offer concrete information, data, and tools. In gender-based violence projects, for instance, after a forum theatre session, a representative from a local anti-violence center may present resources and services available for those who need help—transforming emotion into concrete orientation (Rossi Ghiglione, 2013).

## ► Documenting and connecting to further resources:

It's also useful to document the experience (photos, videos, debriefing notes) and provide participants with follow-up materials or links to campaigns and projects on the same topic. If a school tackles justice and legality through a theatre workshop, for example, students can be pointed toward books, films, or invited to perform again during a public event like the Day Against the Mafia. This ensures the theatre experience is not isolated, but rather embedded in a wider awareness-raising path (Pontremoli, 2015; Rossi Ghiglione, 2013; Bernardi & Innocenti Malini, 2020).

Using socially engaged theatre to tackle complex issues means engaging the head, heart, and hands: the head to analyse the problems, the heart to feel empathy and motivation, and the hands (metaphorically) to take concrete action. Whether its gender equality, human rights, cultural diversity, or any other challenge, theatre offers a living lab to imagine change—and start practising it on a small scale.

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## 2. Socially engaged theatre techniques

In this chapter some theatre exercises are listed. The beauty of community-based and socially engaged theatre is that every exercise can be adapted to the participants' age, available time, and specific goals. What matters is to establish a non-judgmental and trusting atmosphere before approaching more sensitive themes, and always end with a debriefing where participants can share how they felt and what they learned. Even simple movement games, if guided with intention, can lead to deep reflection on cooperation, leadership,



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trust, communication, and more. The role of the educator or facilitator is to link the theatrical experience to real-life contexts, helping people make connections between what happens in the game and behaviours in real life.

## 2.1. Exercises

### 2.1.1. Name Circle with Movement

**Objective:** Break the ice, encourage self-expression and mutual recognition.

**Procedure:** Participants stand in a circle. One by one, each says their name accompanied by a gesture that represents how they feel or something about them (e.g., “My name is Anna” while spreading their arms upwards). The group repeats the name and imitates the gesture. This continues until everyone has shared.

**Variation:** In a second round, each participant adds an adjective or emotion (e.g., “Happy Anna”) or a brief sentence about how they feel, still with a movement.

This exercise helps remember names, encourages non-verbal expression, and builds group trust from the start.

### 2.1.2. Trusting exercise: THE GUARDIAN ANGEL

**Objective:** Trust one another, explore the work room space.

**Procedure:** This exercise is meant to be done in pairs and there is a person standing in front and a person standing at the back. They have a point of contact (e.g. the hand of the person at the back touches the shoulder of the other person). The person standing in front leads the other person standing on the back. The eyes of the person standing on the back are closed. The leader guides the other person in the space with different speed. The leader has to understand the right pace he should walk in order to make the other person trust its guide.



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**Variation:** There is no point of contact; the person with the eyes closed explores space on its own while the other person stops him/her when there is an obstacle.

## 2.1.3. Storytelling exercise – ONCE UPON THE TIME

**Objective:** explore one’s imagination, develop narrative skills, listening and build the group.

**Procedure:** In this exercise the leader of the group collects different photos (with a common topic, for example, body shaming); it is a group exercise where the whole group of participants works together. The group sits in a circle.

The photos are covered and each participant has to choose one at random. One participant starts telling a short story based on the photo she/he chose. The following participant has to choose one photo and continue the story. The story is a collective work and finishes when all the photos have been uncovered.

**Variation:** The facilitator begins a story with “Once upon a time...” using a symbolic scenario (e.g., “...an island where people lived separated by a wall...” – theme: prejudice and division). Each participant adds a sentence, continuing the story.

**Debriefing:** After the tale ends, the group reflects on the story’s meanings and connections to real-life issues. The imaginative distance allows for safe exploration of difficult topics.

## 2.1.4. Writing exercise: COMPOSING A POEM

**Objective:** prompt creative writing, explore one’s imagination, link words to actions

**Procedure:** For this exercise the director or the leader of the group proposes a poem or written text by a SET/famous author. She/he gives the written text to



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each participant. Each participant has a pair of scissors, glue and a blank piece of paper. Each participant cuts the words she/he likes and composes a new text with these words. The text could be a simple thought, a simple poem or a statement.

**Variation:** The new text can be acted in the end adding actions to the text. The actions are not mimetic. They are created through an improvisation exercise in which participants try to recall their personal imagines stimulated by the poem she/he wrote.



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## 2.1.5. Group Images (Image Theatre)



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**Objective:** Explore a social theme through body language and stimulate dialogue.

**Procedure:** The facilitator introduces a social theme or keyword (e.g., “friendship”, “violence”, “inclusion”). In small groups of 4–5, participants create a collective frozen “statue” with their bodies to represent the topic. Each group presents their image in silence. The rest of the group reflects: What do they see? What does the image symbolize?

**Variation:** The activity can evolve into Forum Theatre. After presenting a short scene (e.g., “bullying at school”), the group reenacts it, and spectators are invited to replace a character and attempt to change the outcome, sparking discussion and problem-solving.

### 2.1.6. Composing exercise: THE CHAIR.

**Objective:** explore one’s imagination, work with a prop

**Procedure:** Each participant works with a chair, finding different positions and moods to sit or stand on it. After this improvisation, each participant chooses 5 poses and builds a score (sequence) of actions. She/he repeats the score several times experimenting at different speeds (very slow transitions, very quick transition, etc.). In the end, guided by the director, she/he is asked to memorize the score and to find a character to be played, starting from this exercise.

**Variation:** Text can be added to the sequence of actions in order to have a scene.

### 2.1.7. The JUDGE (Role-playing on Ethics and Values)

**Objective:** Tackle ethical dilemmas in a playful yet critical way.



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**Procedure:** Prepare provocative statements or brief moral cases (e.g., “Is it okay to lie to protect a friend?” or “A student cheats to help their sick sibling”). One volunteer is the “Judge”, two others act as Defense and Prosecutor. They stage debate and the Judge delivers a verdict.

**Outcome:** This format enables participants to explore multiple viewpoints and develop rhetorical and empathic skills. A group discussion follows to share authentic opinions and insights.

**Result:** This role-playing game allows participants to explore opposing viewpoints on a topic, encouraging them to step into positions they may not personally agree with. In fact, it's important to invite volunteers to argue for positions different from their own as an exercise in rhetoric and empathy. Afterwards, the group discusses the topic more seriously: how do they actually feel about it, what did they discover by listening to both sides, and whether their opinion has changed. This is a playful yet powerful way to explore civic or moral education through theatrical elements (like the dramatization of a courtroom), helping arguments emerge in a safe and structured setting.

## 2.1.8. Acting exercise – THE EMOTIONS CHAIR

**Objective:** explore emotions, work with a prop

**Procedure:** In the center of the room, three chairs are placed—one for feeling of happiness, one for feeling of anger, and one for feeling of boredom. Participants are invited to walk freely around the room. Whenever a participant feels like stopping to sit down, they choose one of the three chairs and express the corresponding emotion. Then, they get up and continue walking around the room.

## 2.1.9. Group Improvisation - MAP OF THE WORLD

**Objective:** To increase awareness that we all share the same world.

**Procedure:** The task is to draw a world map as precise as participants can remember. When the map is done, the papers are exhibited so everyone can



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see how each participant perceives the world. Participants together choose the most precise map. Participants stand in a line at the edge of the space and try to imagine the world map in the space in front of them. Working together, all the participants try to define in the space where the different cities are: (for example) New York, Paris, Moscow, Beijing, etc. (any capital in the world). The participants then go back to standing in a line on the edge of the space. The facilitator poses the first instruction: Everybody (one by one in their own terms) is to go to the country (or city) of your birth and stay in that point. The second instruction to the participants is to go to where they first moved. Everybody moves to that position. The third instruction is to go to the country (city) of their dreams and do one action they would like to do there. The fourth instruction is to go to the place of sorrow (the saddest place for them) and to do one transformative action. The fifth instruction is to go to the place of their greatest achievement or 'grand opera' or the place where they will make dreams come true and draw in the air their signature. The sixth instruction is to go to the place where they all are now. After each task when all participants are finished, they all go back to the line.

The facilitator starts another round, but NOW the participants are not going back to the line. Instead, they are to start this round from the last point they were at and to go to the next point. Now they repeat all of the above instructions and corresponding positions. They try to remember where they were going, the moves they made and to try and remember the pace and tempo, the way they walked, or how they walked, to all key points. Repeat as much as is needed to recreate the specifics of the movement (where did they go, the way they walked, how fast or slow, did they laugh or scratch their nose, anything that they can remember doing as they were moving to each position).

**Outcome:** Have access to theatre as a powerful tool for mediation and conflict resolution.

**Results:** To create feelings of mutual respect and tolerance. To realise that pain, sorrow or loss can be mutual feelings that we may all experience and that it could be transformed.



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## 2.1.10. MAY I exercise

**Objective:** To recognise participant's own zone of comfort and safety as well as to respect other people's boundaries.

**Procedure:** While still sitting in circle, divide the participants to two groups by counting 1, 2, 1, 2... Now the two groups should stand in two lines with the maximal distance in between (e.g. next to the two opposite walls of the room.) Establish eye contact with the participant standing on the opposite side. Slowly walk towards your partner and try to find the optimal closeness /distance. The question is: how to find the distance which is good enough for both persons and yet feels comfortable? Even more difficult question is: how to find the distance which is good enough for both persons?

Choose a person and ask her/him: May I take your place? If she/he answers "yes", you take her/his place, and he/she should ask another participant to take his/her place. If the answer is "no", ask another person.

**Variation:** May I touch your hand (shoulder, hair...?) May I hug you? May I say something nice to you? The main rule is simple: if the answer is no, we have to respect that, if yes, we can touch. Additionally, the students can choose certain body parts that they will ask to touch in advance, and likewise they can choose the answer to what part of the body and to whom they would say yes or no. It is important that they listen to their own wishes all the time.

Ask the group to stay with their pair and do the same as before, but they can only answer NO. They cannot say yes, even if they want to. Additionally, when they receive the "no", they will have to answer, "thank you".



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Ask the group to stay with their pair and to notice within themselves if they feel enthusiasm to be touched. If they do feel touched, then they should say “yes”. If they do not feel to be touched, they should then say no. The receiver should answer “thank you” after receiving the answer, whether it is a “yes” or a “no”.

For example: the asker says “can I touch your hand?” and the receiver may want to say “no” but perhaps they could do a counter offer and answer “no, but you can touch my left upper arm”. The asker can also be precise, for example: can I touch your left hand for 10 seconds?

Group shares the impressions after the exercise.

**Outcome:** to develop the awareness about personal broderies and individual needs and differences in the group /community

**Results:** to be aware of your own and other bodies and learn to respect it and appreciate it.

### 2.1.11. Writing and acting exercise: THE FIRST LETTER OF YOUR NAME



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**Objective:** to explore and communicate one's idea about one's own identity within a limited field of possible words. To develop expertise with metaphors, poetic language. To grow awareness about the multiple sides of identity; to know each other and develop group's identity; to link words and actions, as well as poetic language with theatre.

**Procedure:** each participant writes a list of words that she likes and that start with the same letter her own name starts. The lists of words are read aloud. Then each participant writes a short, oniric/poetic self-portrait where names, adjectives, verbs, names of places only start with the initial letter of her name. The texts are read aloud. Then each participant enacts the texts creating a short sequence of actions in space, to be played like a scene.



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**Variation:** after each participant has done the exercise and shared the outcome, the same thing can be played around the group's, non to the individual's, identity: a name for the group is created. A list of words is written that start with the same first letter of the group's name (animals, plants, places, verbs, adjectives, objects, emotions....). Then, a common text is written that portrays the group. The text can be enacted in the form of a collective action.

## 2.1.12. Improvisation and storytelling exercise: THE SPEAKING OBJECT

**Objective.** To develop observation, imagination, listening ability and the skill to build a story together finding a balance between consistency and changes in the plot. To collaborate for the creation of a multi-authoral story. To grow awareness about the different versions of the story which show different points of view. To develop the ability to "give life" to objects/props that do not look alive.

**Procedure:** an object is brought in the middle of the circle. The task is to take the object and let it speak with its own voice. One participant starts: the object introduces itself and starts telling its own story (where was he built and sold, who used it and why, as well as any accident and story that happened to or around him) then hands the object to the person sitting next and the story goes on. The object can be handed on or taken by the next person.

**Outcome:** the group has a story that each participant will remember in a different way. This story can be re-told the day after by some participants, who will probably give a different versions. The participants can choose if they want to retell the story with words, theatrical actions, dance, also having the possibility to mix these three techniques.

## 2.1.13. 6-Week Implementation Plan



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## Theatre Workshops for Survivors of Gender-Based Violence

*Format:* 6 weekly sessions, 2–3 hours each, group size 8–15 participants.

*Facilitator role:* guide, ensure safety, stimulate creativity, support emotional processing.

*Support:* collaboration with psychologists/anti-violence centers for sensitive topics.

### Week 1 – Building Trust and Group Cohesion

**Objectives:** Create a safe space, establish rules, strengthen mutual respect.

**Activities:**

- *Group Agreement:* co-create confidentiality and respect rules.
- *Name Circle with Movement* (ice-breaker, trust and recognition).
- *Guardian Angel* (trust exercise in pairs).
- *Reflection Circle:* participants share impressions and feelings.

### Week 2 – Storytelling and Collective Imagination

**Objectives:** Stimulate imagination, introduce metaphor as a safe way to address sensitive issues.

**Activities:**

- *Once Upon a Time* (collective storytelling with images).
- *Speaking Object* (object comes to life, narrates its story).
- *Debrief:* discuss how metaphors can connect to real-life experiences.

### Week 3 – Exploring Boundaries and Respect

**Objectives:** Increase awareness of personal space, consent, and relational dynamics.

**Activities:**

- *May I Exercise* (exploration of personal comfort zones, respect for boundaries).



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- *Image Theatre* (group creates body “statues” of themes like respect, violence, inclusion).
- *Group Reflection*: link bodily experiences to social issues.

## Week 4 – Identity and Self-Expression

**Objectives:** Empower participants to explore and express aspects of personal and group identity.

**Activities:**

- *First Letter of Your Name* (poetic writing and performance).
- *Composing a Poem* (cut-up words to create new texts; optional acting).
- *Group Debrief*: how identity and self-expression connect to empowerment.

## Week 5 – Scene Creation and Improvisation

**Objectives:** Transform experiences and reflections into short theatrical scenes.

**Activities:**

- *The Chair* (exploring movement, building characters).
- *Group Improvisation – Map of the World* (shared journeys, sorrows, and dreams).
- *Small Group Work*: participants develop short improvised scenes based on previous sessions.
- *Debrief*: reflect on group creativity and collaborative storytelling.

## Week 6 – Rehearsal, Sharing, and Closure

**Objectives:** Consolidate the creative process, prepare for sharing, celebrate achievements.

**Activities:**

- *Rehearsal*: polish the short collective performance (scenes, poems, images).



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- *Sharing Moment*: optional informal presentation to trusted audience (peers, support staff).
- *Closing Ritual*: group circle, certificates or symbolic gesture to celebrate the journey.
- *Resources*: facilitators provide information about support services and future opportunities.

## 2.1.14. Notes for Facilitators

1. **Adaptability**: exercises can be rearranged depending on group readiness.
2. **Timing**: each session should include warm-up (15–20 min), main activities (60–90 min), reflection & closure (20–30 min).
3. **Emotional Safety**: always debrief after emotionally intense activities.
4. **Documentation**: keep notes/photos (with consent) to value the process.

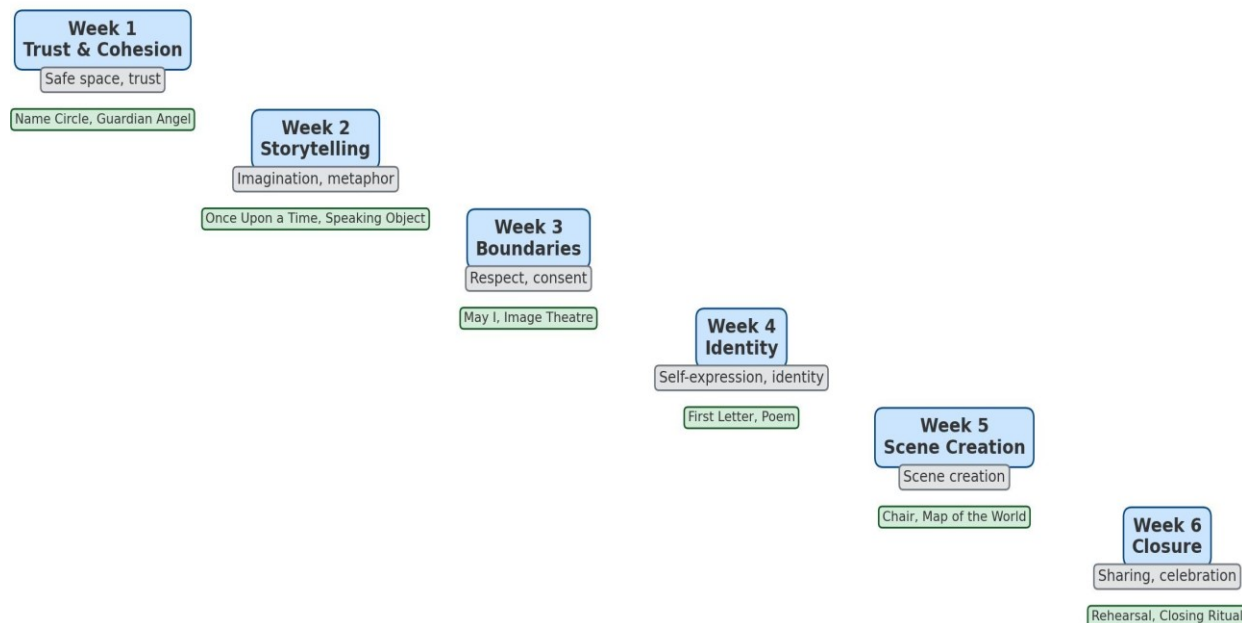


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## 6-Week Implementation Plan - Theatre Workshops



## 3. Bibliography

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## 3.2. Useful links to websites

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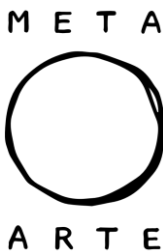
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**fourth module** of the  
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To conclude it,  
we offer you to perform a  
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