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Holiday Toy Recommendations from VIPS Staff

Age recommendations for toys are typically listed by each manufacturer but should be taken as suggestions. Depending on your child’s level of development and physical and cognitive skills, a toy recommended for a three-year-old might be appropriate for a much younger child and a toy recommended for a three-month-old might be appropriate for an older child.

VIPS is not endorsing any seller – we have used Amazon links for convenience. When you decide to purchase from Amazon, please consider going through Amazon Smile, which is exactly the same as ordering directly through Amazon, but offers a percentage of your purchase cost to a charity of your choice. And, of course, we would love for you to select Visually Impaired Preschool Services, Inc. as your charity. The **blue print** in a toy name is the link to purchase options.

Bath Toys – a Big Hit This Season

Several of our teachers/interventionists have recommended light-up bath toys. They have many similar characteristics, which are listed below as a group, followed by the specific toys VIPS teachers have recommended. They offer great opportunities for fun and learning during a typical daily routine.

Characteristics of most bath toys recommended by VIPS teachers/interventionists include:

- Automatically activate when placed in water;
- Automatically stop working when removed from water;
- Spray a column of water into the air;
- Play music when activated;
- Use bright colors to draw visual attention;
- Include flashing lights or at least a flashing option (possibly a concern for some children with seizures);
- Are made of BPA-free materials with rounded edges, for safer handling;
- Feature small size to fit children’s small hands;
- Are battery operated (batteries not always included);
- Are relatively inexpensive;
- Provide stimulating colors for children with Cortical Visual Impairment (CVI);
- Encourage several developmental skills including (but not limited to) visual tracking, visual attention, and focused attention;

Parents, Your Input is Needed!

Please click here <https://www.accessengagement.com/> to complete a survey on the accessibility of services for your child during the pandemic. It will take approximately 30-40 minutes of your time. It is important for those in the field to understand the successes, challenges, and concerns during the 2020-2021 school year. If your child or student who is blind or visually impaired is experiencing accessibility issues, does not have access to necessary technology, and/or is not progressing in their education, we need to advocate for additional services and solutions! **This survey must be completed by November 22, 2020!!**



Mission Statement

VIPS empowers families by providing educational excellence to young children with visual impairments in order to build a strong foundation for reaching their highest potential.

- Make bath time less of a challenge for some children; and
- Can be used in a pool or other water setting; several also can be activated on “dry land.”

Teacher Recommended Bath Toys

Brittany Williamson, Teacher of the Visually Impaired, Kids Town Preschool

Aolige Baby Light Up Bath Squirt Toys for Toddlers, Pack of 2

- When activated on base out of water, becomes a space UFO
- Suitable for children up to 3 years of age
- Available from Amazon for \$16.99



HLXY Baby Bath Toy, Water Spraying Whale LED Light Up Bath Toy

- Requires 3 AAA batteries, not included
- Comes in both red and yellow -- may help your child visually locate it in the water, especially useful for children with Cortical Visual Impairment (CVI)
- Available from Amazon and other vendors for \$12.99



Boon Marco Light-Up Bath Toy for Kids, Blue

- Floats with head above water
- Requires 3 AAA batteries (not included)
- Available for around \$14 from Amazon, Walmart, Buybuybaby



MAPIXO 6 Pack Light-Up Floating Dinosaur Bath Toys Set

- Battery included; normally lasts more than 3 months depending on usage.
- Appropriate for children over 6 months old
- Available from Amazon and other vendors for \$16 and up



Tracy Webb, Developmental Interventionist, VIPS Louisville

Bath Toys for Toddlers Baby 8 Pack Light Up Toys

- Safe for children 3 months and up
- Great designs for a child with CVI phase 1, early phase 2, or a child with low vision
- Provides visual stimulation, encourages visual fixation, tracking, and reach/grasp
- Increases understanding of cause and effect
- Available from Amazon for around \$15



Paige Maynard, Teacher of the Visually Impaired, Developmental Interventionist, VIPS Louisville

Submersible Battery Operated Waterproof LED Lights (4 Pack)*

- LED submersible lights can be paired with toys your child may already have, making them glow and become easier to visually locate
- Lights can be set to any color using the included remote control
- *Child should use only with adult supervision
- Available from Amazon for \$10.99



Other Teacher Recommended Toys

Paige Maynard, Teacher of the Visually Impaired, Developmental Interventionist, VIPS Louisville

First Years Stack Up Cups

- Eight brightly colored cups stack together
- Solid vibrant color may make them easier to see for child with limited vision
- Unique holes in the bottom for water play
- Can be stacked up or turned over to hide things underneath
- Large numbers on the bottom encourage counting and number recognition
- Open ended toy that encourages exploring, looking, reaching, grasping, scooping, pouring, and many more skills



- Made without BPA, lead or phthalates
- Available from Amazon for \$3.99

Melisa Matthews, Blind/Low Vision Specialist, VIPS Indiana

Smart Games Bunny Peek-A-Boo

- Encourages learning positioning concepts
- Child looks at a card and matches the positioning of the three dimensional wooden bunny and the blocks
- Great for beginning pattern building and comparing two images
- Comes in bright colors and visually supports the various ways to hide the bunny.
- Available online from Amazon, Fat Brain Toys and other vendors for less than \$30



Carla Vied, Developmental Interventionist, VIPS Louisville

Whirly Squigz, a set of three colorful silicone spinners

- Made of 100% high quality, food-grade silicone, BPA-Free and fully safety tested
- Each spinner has a suction cup on one side, with a textured dome in the center, and “petals” radiating from the central dome on the other side
- Spinners stick to any smooth, flat, non-porous surface (think side of bathtub, window, tabletop or wheelchair tray)
- With a slight touch, spins smoothly and very quickly, creating a great visual target
- Especially appropriate for children with Cortical Visual Impairment (CVI)



- Encourages fine motor skills (the slight spin to start the spinner), sensory exploration (pleasing to touch or suck on), and cause-effect learning (spin causes spinner to move)
- Available online for \$22 at Amazon, Fat Brain Toys and other vendors

Oribel VertiPlay Wall Toys

- Brightly colored peel and stick toys
- Sticks to the wall keeping the floor free of toys, yet can be easily removed

- Several interactive designs ranging from a train track xylophone to a woodpecker pecking a tree or Jack and his beanstalk
- Flat plastic part sticks easily to the wall while the wooden parts add texture and interest; makes interesting noises
- Encourage children to reach and manipulate, turning and flipping parts
- Great for kneeling and standing practice as well as encouraging visual searching and fine motor skills
- While the age recommendation is 3+, can be used by younger children
- Priced from \$10 to almost \$200 (for a combination of toys) available online from Oribel, Amazon, Target and other vendors



Juanita Miles, Preschool Teacher, VIPS Louisville



Wowwee Pink Fong Baby Shark Tablet

- Plays one of children's most favorite songs
- Educational toy teaches letters and numbers
- Contains volume control
- Recommended for ages 2+
- Available for around \$16.99 at both Kohl's and Amazon

Play-Doh Pink Fong Baby Shark set with 12 cans of Play-Doh:

- Fun Play-Doh set lets child build her own shark family while also strengthening muscles in her fingers
- Includes 21 tools and 12 cans of Play-Doh
- Recommended age for this item is 3+
- Available from Amazon and other vendors for around \$12



Lesley Lusher, Developmental Interventionist, VIPS Central KY

Spinny Pins

- Feature a weighted bowl that wobbles with five wobbly pins to be inserted into the bowl, either right side up or upside down

- The softly chiming pins are easy to grasp, and each has a unique texture
- Encourages sensory exploration and fine motor skills
- BPA-free, high quality, durable materials and construction
- Available from Fat Brain Toys for \$29.95 plus shipping



Spoolz

- Set of 7 color-saturated spools that are easy to stack, but also roll



- A fun way to practice fine motor skills, visual motor skills, visual attention and concepts like large, small, up, and down
- Available from Fat Brain Toys for \$24.95

Bright Starts Light & Learn Drum with Melodies

- Musical toy has a shiny surface to encourage use of vision
- Child controls the light show by tapping the drum, encouraging cause and effect learning
- Three modes with numbers, colors, and drumming to mix things up
- Ages 3 Months +
- Available from Amazon and other vendors for \$14.97



Tracy Webb, Developmental Interventionist, VIPS Louisville

Kidoozie Lights 'n Sounds Shape Sorter:

- Six different shapes and color blocks that fit into the base
- Blocks contain motivating textures, mirrors, and rattles
- Visually and auditorily stimulating blocks light up and music plays when a shape is placed in the correct spot
- Encourages visual attention, eye-hand coordination, matching and motor skills
- Game mode can be activated for more challenging learning
- Requires three AA batteries (included)
- Recommended for children 9 to 24 months
- Available from Amazon, Walmart and other vendors for \$24-\$30



Christina Allen, Teacher of the Visually Impaired, Preschool Teacher, VIPS Louisville

Baby Einstein Glow Discover Light

- Easy to activate interactive toy bar w/music
- Brightly colored sections light up with touching or spinning of rattle drum
- 3 modes: animals, colors, xylophone
- Language switch changes content to English, Spanish or French
- Collapses for easy storage or tummy time play
- Easy to clean
- Recommended for 3 months +
- Encourages pushing or tapping, learning colors,
- Great for students who see best with lights such as students with CVI, and students who need table top toys
- Plays music
- Available from Amazon, Target and other vendors for \$14.99



BunMo Poppin' Pipes

- Fun, functional, sensory toys that pop, stretch, and connect
- Stretchy toys provide tactile stimulation, fine motor skills and auditory feedback
- Each pop tube kit of four comes in a variety of colors -- green, pink, purple, and blue
- Excellent for students with sensory and fidget needs
- Available for \$7 for four tube kit from Amazon, Walmart and other vendors



Magna Tiles

- Safe, durable 3D magnetic building sets
- Translucent, colorful ABS plastic shapes including squares (4 large, 50 small) and triangles (20 equilateral, 11 right, 15 isosceles)
- Build fine motor, spatial and tactile skills; color, shape recognition and encourage creativity
- Especially useful for children who need color/light to draw their attention such as with Cortical Visual Impairment (CVI) and/or who have low vision
- Can be placed on a light table or against a window or played with on the floor or table
- Ages 3 years and up
- Available from Amazon, Target, and other vendors starting at \$30 for 15 pieces; larger sets priced at over \$100



My Talking Spoon

- Infant/toddler feeding utensil that plays nine familiar animal sounds (green spoon) or transportation sounds (purple spoon)
- Encourages listening and repeating sounds
- Baby selects desired sound by pressing one of three differently colored soft buttons.
- Encourages basic development of speech, motor and cognitive skills.
- Motivates children to eat by making eating fun
- Lifetime battery included
- Ages 6 months+
- Available from Amazon, Baby Smart for \$19.95



Crayola Palm Crayons

Our students are just learning to use writing/drawing tools. It is often considered inappropriate to teach young children to use a pencil grip because their hand muscles are still developing.

- Great introduction to coloring
- Egg shaped crayons for toddlers (1 egg-shaped crayon equals 14 regular crayons)
- Designed for small hands to use palmar grasp
- Washable and nontoxic coloring
- Available from Amazon, Target, Walmart for \$5.99 for three crayons in primary colors: red, blue, yellow



Amy Nichols, Teacher of Blind/Low Vision, VIPS Indiana

Kid Made Modern Paint Sticks

- Nine chunky paint sticks that make vibrant, wide marks on paper with little effort
- One of my favorite early literacy “writing tools” for children with low vision
- Easy to use and make bright, wide marks that children with low vision can easily see
- Lids are small and could pose a choking hazard, so supervision is needed when child is using them
- Available from Target for \$8.99



Fat Brain Toys Dimpl Duo

- Recommended for ages 1-4 years
- Small tablet type toy that is great for on the go learning
- Multi-sensory toy with six tactile, colored buttons with shapes and Braille
- Great for all children, and especially good for children with low vision and those that may be future Braille readers
- Bright colors and textures are inviting for all
- Encourages sensory exploration, tactile learning, color recognition, shape recognition, and early literacy
- Available at Fat Brain Toys for \$24.95



Quack Stick

- An early percussion instrument with a bright red silicone end that makes a quack sound with a shake
- Red end provides great tactile and auditory information
- White handle is small and easy for little ones to hold independently
- Bright red color draws a child's visual attention, especially children with CVI.
- Easy to hold, motivating little ones to use a visually guided reach.
- Available from West Music for \$4.95



Dixie Marz, Teacher of the Visually Impaired, Developmental Interventionist, Little Learners Teacher, VIPS CK

Baby Einstein Magic Touch Toys - Piano, Drum, Ukulele, Xylophone, Tam-bourine

- Toys light up and play music
- Encourage child to begin to focus on different rhythmic patterns and sounds
- Encourage cause and effect
- Very easy to activate
- Higher end, quality speakers with volume control buttons
- AA or AAA batteries included, some toys do not require batteries



- Child safe and durable materials
- Made of wood with magic-touch technology
- Easy to wipe down and clean
- Although there is no texture to let children with low/no vision know where to touch, toys could easily be adapted with some velcro, glue, or other textured materials
- Available from Target, Walmart, and Amazon with prices beginning at \$11.99

As a teacher and a parent, I love children's books. I always push for my students to show interest in books and to start learning to identify pictures in books or in real life photos (this is so important for early literacy). Reading and looking at books with your child is a great way to spend quality time bonding, snuggling and learning.

At home, both of my children have shelves and baskets full of books; but I just can't help adding to their collections. So this year for Christmas, I want to do something special for my sweet six-month-old daughter, Charlee.

One of my families introduced me to **customized board books** for babies. The nice thing about creating your own personalized books, is that you can control colors, contrast, background clutter, size and colors of the words. There are several sites that can create customized board books. I have found pinholepress.com to be very user-friendly. The cost for the board books is a little pricey but you can sometimes find coupons. The books range from \$13 - \$40.

So for Christmas this year, Charlee is getting custom made books that have her cousins and sister teaching her about opposites.

David Sterne, Lead Blind/Low Vision Specialist, VIPS Indiana

Battat Hooty-Hoo Shape Sorter

- Features shapes that make wacky sounds when placed in the corresponding shape opening
- Bright, high-contrast colors
- Colorful beads to move one by one
- Provides a reward of a fun sound for fitting shapes in the sorter
- Includes tactile beads, which allow for practice of directional concepts of up and down and counting/number concepts
- Available from Amazon for \$11.50



LOFTEK LED Light Cube

- Four-inch Cool Cosmic Cube Lights
- Features 16 colors
- Changes colors easily with included remote control
- Can be charged quickly through a USB connection
- Waterproof, eco-friendly and sturdy
- Great for active play and calmer activities (such as breastfeeding and resting) alike
- Provides light source for visual focus and visual tracking
- Encourages use of both hands when a child picks it up
- Encourages work on opposite and directional concepts when child places something on the cube or removes it, or when it is placed in a larger container and/or removed
- Available from Amazon for \$21.99



Color-by-Texture Circus Coloring Pages

- Set of raised-line pages to color
- Provide great visual contrast (black line illustrations on white paper)
- Provide tactile input
- Encourage coloring and pre-writing skills
- Encourage work on sensory and tactile discrimination skills
- Encourage literacy skills (each picture is labeled in print and in braille)
- Available from the American Printing House for the Blind for \$27 (not comparable to a coloring book in price, but make a very nice gift for children with visual challenges)



Books & Toys for Children with CVI

Staci Maynard, Teacher of the Visually Impaired, Kids Town Preschool Teacher

Many of the toys suggested so far offer features that are suitable for children with Cortical Visual Impairment (CVI) -- the most common cause of visual impairment in young children. Rather than being an issue with the eye itself, CVI involves a difficulty in the way that the brain processes information from the eyes. This condition may improve over time, especially given the correct environment and strategies.

Children with CVI may not show much sustained interest in common popular toys such as dolls and blocks, though they will often attend to toys that incorporate movement, sound or lights. Gift ideas for children with CVI are certainly not one-size-fits-all, so be sure to think about your child's individual preferences before making decisions.

Specific considerations about your child include:

- How much does your child need color in order to focus visually?
- Does he or she respond best to a specific color or two?
- Does your child need light and/or movement to attend to an object?

Once you have answers to these questions, you are ready to choose toys and items to play with that are going to be most enjoyable and effective for your child. You may also wish to consult with your child's VIPS TVI/DI for assistance with these questions.

Reading to your child daily (or as much as possible) is so important to child development. To encourage a child with CVI to engage with a book, pick a book with the colors, the contrast, and a complexity of pictures suitable to your child's needs and preferences.

Some of my favorites are:

So Big! by Anna Jane Hays

- Elmo helps your child work on repetition and imitation.
- \$7.06 on Amazon



The TouchThinkLearn series of books

- Most between \$10 and \$20 on Amazon)
- Visually simple
- Offer concept development on varied topics such as numbers, letters, colors, shapes, vehicles, homes, and different kinds of animals.



Child's Play Perfect Paperbacks also has enjoyable tactile books that are visually simple:

Off to the Beach!

\$11.98 on Amazon

Getting Ready!

\$15.60 on Amazon

Off to the Park!

\$11.89 on Amazon



You can also make your own adapted versions of classic children's books. The **Paths to Literacy** website has ideas if you would like to try producing personalized books for your child.

Commercial toys that are suggested for children with CVI include:

The SmartNoggin Noggin Stick Developmental Light up Rattle

- Light-up rattle for infants that changes colors
- Encourages visual tracking and other fun activities
- Includes guide with ideas of how to use the rattle
- \$22.99 on Amazon



The Infantino Turtle Cover Band 8-Piece set

- Cute and colorful
- Visually simple set of instruments
- \$19.99 on Amazon



The Baby Einstein Pop and Glow Piano

- Not as visually simple as some of the other choices
- Features movement and light-up features when the piano keys are pressed
- \$19.99 on Amazon



Busy Farm

- Contains single colored farm animals and related card activities
- Encourages discussing the distinguishing feature of the animals, sorting, matching, counting, and pretend play
- \$25 at Discovery Toys



Lightboxes are typically an entertaining and useful tool for children with CVI. Available from American Printing House for the Blind (APH) for \$499 (includes materials to use) or Mini-Light Box for \$259 -- <https://www.aph.org/product/light-box/>

You can make your own light box using a large, clear plastic tote with clear lid and some rope lights (see <http://westandlula.com>).

blogspot.com/2011/09/how-to-make-light-box-for-around-20.html for directions).

Look for items around your house or at the dollar store that are transparent or translucent to play with on the lightbox. Dollar



stores are also often good sources to look for items like slinkies, mylar, shiny bows, and cheap, sparkly holiday decorations that may be of interest to your child.

Home-made light box with translucent cups & lids.

Talk to your child's teacher if you would like more ideas about what items might be most engaging for your child on the lightbox or for other individualized gift ideas. Though these gifts were chosen with CVI in mind, they could also be useful for many children with low vision.

A Multisensory Christmas

By Pauletta Feldman, Special Projects, VIPs Louisville

Christmas has always been my favorite holiday. But when I became the parent of a child with no vision, the holidays were not the same. I'd feel crushed, watching my baby missing the things that my sighted children were so excited about and enjoying so much. It was all so visual and he seemed so left out.

When I learned how to make the holidays a multisensory feast for my child, my own enjoyment returned. We focused on bringing the spirit, sounds, smells, tastes and touch of the season to life and forged a whole set of holiday traditions for our child and family that have lasted a lifetime.

If you, like me, have a child with little or no vision, you might find that focusing on the multisensory features of the season will make holidays merrier for your whole family. For your little one who is visually impaired, they will provide so many fun and learning opportunities, and for the adult your child will become, they will provide wonderful memories and a pattern of loving interactions to carry into his or her own family some day.

Even though the following suggestions are geared to Christmas, most are applicable for those celebrating the wonderful holidays of other faiths and traditions, as well.

Fill your home with the tastes and smells of the season (see recipes below). Bake cookies and make candies. Prepare special dishes and meals that your child will learn to associate with the holidays and look forward to year after year. Burn scented candles. If your child is not allergic, use a seasonal, scented soap for bath time. Involve your child in the baking and cooking process. Help him scoop flour and sugar, smell spices, taste individual ingredients, grind nuts and spices, roll dough into logs or balls, grease cookie sheets and baking pans with butter, and help clean up and wash dishes after. Let her taste dough or batter not made with eggs, and compare the textures and flavors of foods when unbaked and baked. Do the same with uncooked and cooked vegetables and fruits. Make scented ornaments for the tree!

Take your child Christmas tree shopping. Even if you use an artificial tree, or your faith tradition does not include celebrating Christmas, going to a tree lot offers great multisensory learning opportunities. There is the feel of excitement among the shoppers; the crisp, cold air; music playing; and the wonderful aroma of the trees. There are many types of trees, with different names, needles of different lengths and thickness, and varying branch structures. Some trees are fat, some are short, some are soft, and some are prickly. (Be sure to follow COVID safety precautions when outside the home.)

When decorating the tree, let your child help. Let her tactually explore ornaments. Tell stories about ones that are special – e.g. baby's first Christmas, ones that have been gifts from loved ones and friends, ones that have been purchased while on vacation or for special occasions. Decorate her room with lights and maybe even her own tree. Have a tactual Christmas countdown calendar – we used to have one that was a big Santa face painted on a piece of wood, with nails, numbered 1-25, placed throughout Santa's beard, from which Life Savers candies dangled. On the first day of December, my son got to hang the Life Savers on Santa's beard (a great fine motor activity); then he got to remove and eat one each day of the countdown!

Fill your home with happy sounds of the season. Musical decorations or toys that only come out during the holidays will always be cherished and awaited with anticipation. [Musical Christmas lights](#) are available from Target, Walmart and Amazon. There are musical ornaments, as well. Sing songs of the season. Use props (jingle bells, carrot nose, etc.) as you sing. With Covid 19 making in-person gatherings unwise, you can visit loved ones and friends and sing at their doors, or walk your neighborhood Christmas caroling for your neighbors. You can carry a bag of props with you, so your child(ren) can put on a little show as they sing – red nose, top hat, jingle bells, baby doll, robe for Mary or Joseph or a Wise Man, wings for an angel.

Label your child's stocking with braille or a special tactile symbol. Wrap his presents in different textured fabrics and label them with a tactile symbol, a jingle bell, or a scented ornament



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to add to the fun. And, if possible, put his name in braille on them (your VIPS teacher can help with this). Use a noisemaker under the tree near his presents so that he can find them himself, or select a spot under or near the tree that will always be where his presents are placed. And don't forget to help your child learn the joy of giving as well as receiving. Wrapping presents offers opportunities to work on a variety of fine motor skills –cutting with scissors, folding, taping, tying -- and concepts of putting the gift **in** the box or bag, putting a bow **on top**, placing presents **under or beneath** the tree,

As the mother of a 36-year-old former VIPS child, I can say that one of the best gifts I've been given in this life, is the necessity of learning to see the world in a new way through my child. From my family to yours, wishing you wonderful holidays filled with the goodness of things to see, hear, smell, touch and taste!!

Recipes

Easy Mint Candies*

- 1 lb. confectioner's sugar
- ¾ stick (6 T.) butter
- 2 T. milk or half-and-half
- 1 t. peppermint extract

Blend first three ingredients together and add peppermint extract. Divide into four parts. Roll into little logs and slice. You can texture the mints by pressing them with a fork or shape them into smooth, flat coins. Your child can help make these candies, even if in a high chair or wheelchair – spread candy mixture on the tray and let her roll and shape them (and of course, taste!).

**Recipe from Mary Ann Reynolds, Visually Impaired Program Specialist, Jefferson County Public Schools, and mother of former VIPS child Ashley, now 33 years old.*

Non-Discrimination Policy

VIPS does not discriminate in any of its policies or practices with children and/or families on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, veteran status, or any other characteristic protected by law.

Spicy Applesauce Ornaments*

- ¾ c. ground cinnamon
- 1 c. applesauce
- 1 T. ground nutmeg
- 1 T. ground allspice
- 1 T. ground cloves

Let your child help make dough by mixing ingredients. Roll out the dough to a 1/4-inch thickness (dust table top and rolling pin with cinnamon to prevent sticking). Let your child use cookie cutters to cut Christmas shapes out of the dough. Place shapes on waxed paper and poke a hole in the top of each shape. Allow ornaments to air-dry for several days (or bake them on a cookie sheet for several hours at 250 degrees). Turn the shapes over to prevent curling. To complete the spicy ornaments, tie on loops of ribbon or yarn for hangers, decorate with gilt paint or glitter, or glue on silver balls and/or red dots.

**Recipe from Joy Stelly, mother of former VIPS child Christopher, who is now 27 years old.*

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