

# Best Seller

**Q1. Based on your reading of the story, answer the following questions by choosing the correct option.**

**(a) The narrator says that John was " \_\_\_\_\_ of the suff that heroes are not often lucky enough to be made of." His tone is sarcastic because \_\_\_\_\_**

- (i) he hated John.
- (ii) he felt that John was a threat to him.
- (iii) John was not particularly good-looking.
- (iv) nobody liked John.

**(b) Pescud felt that best-sellers were not realistic as**

- (i) American farmers had nothing in common with European princesses.
- (ii) men generally married girls from a similar background.
- (iii) American men married girls who studied in America.
- (iv) American men did not know fencing and were beaten by the Swiss guards.

**(c) "Bully", said Pescud brightening at once. He means to say that \_\_\_\_\_**

- (i) he is a bully.
- (ii) his manager was a bully.
- (iii) he was being bullied by his co-workers.
- (iv) he was doing very well at his job.

**(d) The narrator says that life has no geographical bounds implying that \_\_\_\_\_**

- (i) human beings are essentially the same everywhere.
- (ii) boundaries exist only on maps.
- (iii) one should work towards the good of mankind.
- (iv) he was happy to travel to other countries.

**Ans:** (a) (iii) John was not particularly good-looking.

(b) (i) American farmers had nothing in common with European princesses.

(c) (iv) he was doing very well at his job.

(d) (i) human beings are essentially the same everywhere.

**Q2. Answer the following questions briefly.**

**(a) One day last summer the author was travelling to Pittsburg by chair car. What does he say about his co-passengers?**

**(b) Who was the passenger of chair No. 9? What did he suddenly do?**

**(c) What was John A. Pescud's opinion about best sellers? Why?**

**(d) What does John say about himself since his last meeting with the author?**

**(e) How did John's first meeting with Jessie's father go? What did the author tell him?**

**(f) Why did John get off at Coketown?**

**(g) John is a hypocrite. Do you agree with this statement? Substantiate your answer.**

**(h) Describe John A. Pescud with reference to the following points:**

- Physical appearance \_\_\_\_\_
- His philosophy on behaviour \_\_\_\_\_
- His profession \_\_\_\_\_
- His first impression of his wife \_\_\_\_\_
- His success \_\_\_\_\_

**Ans:** (a) One day last summer, the author was travelling to Pittsburgh by chair car on business. Most of the passengers were ladies. They were in brown-silk dresses cut with square yokes, laces and dotted veils. There were men who looked as if "they might be in almost any business." However, his attention was drawn by the black, bald-spotted head just visible above the back of seat No. 9.

**(b)** John A. Pescud was the passenger of chair No. 9. Suddenly he hurled a book on to the floor between his chair and the window. The book was named "The Rose Lady and Trevelyan". It was one of the best-selling novels of the present day.

**(c)** John A. Pescud didn't hold a very high opinion about best sellers. The fiction writers are not consistent with their scenes and characters. They are far removed from reality. Their account is highly unreal, exaggerated and romantic. Sometimes the American hero falls in love with a royal princess from Europe. He follows her to her father's kingdom. But in real life people choose life-partners belonging to their own status.

**(d)** The author asked John how he was getting along with the company. John replied that he was getting on pretty well. He had his salary raised twice since they met last time. He got a commission too. He had bought a "neat slice of real estate". The firm was going to sell him some shares of stock. He was "in on the line of General Prosperity". He also broke the news that he got married eighteen months ago.

**(e)** John met Jessie's father at his ancestral house. At eleven sharp, he rang the bell. An old man about eighty showed up and asked what he wanted. John showed him his business card. He told the old man how he followed his daughter from Cincinnati, his business, salary and prospects. Then the old man related anecdotes and humorous occurrences. The Colonel expressed that he had never been so fortunate as he felt after meeting him.

**(f)** John got ready to get off at Coketown. The author was surprised as the place didn't hold much prospect for selling plate-glass. However, John told that while coming back from Philadelphia, his wife Jessie saw some petunias in a pot in one of the windows there. She used to raise such flowers in her old Virginia home. So he thought of getting off there to dig up some of the cuttings or blossoms for her.

**(g)** John is a hypocrite. What he says, he does the opposite. He expresses his uncharitable views regarding the best-sellers as they are far removed from reality. They are too romantic. But in real life people marry somebody in their own status. But John is another Trevelyan. He is just a commercial traveller but runs after Jessie whose father is a lineal descendant of belted earls. He is searching petunias for his 'princess'.

**(h)** • Physical appearance. A small man with a wide smile and an eye fixed on the end of the nose. A bald-spotted head.

- His philosophy on behaviour. When a man is in his home town, he ought to be decent and law-abiding.
- His profession. Travelling salesman for a plate-glass company.

- His first impression of his wife. '... the finest looking girl. Nothing spectacular but just the sort you want for keeps'.
- His success. Salary raised twice in a couple of years. Got a commission. Bought real estate. The firm going to sell some shares of stock. On the line of 'General Prosperity'.

**Q3.** Complete the flow chart in the correct sequence as it happens in the story.

Hint: It begins from the time the author first saw Jessie till the time they marry.

1. **Jessie takes a sleeper to Louisville.**
2. **Pescud sees a girl (Jessie) reading a book in the train.**
3. **Pescud speaks to the girl (Jessie) for the first time.**
4. **Pescud follows her but finds it difficult to keep up.**
5. **Pescud goes to the village to find out about the mansion.**
6. **Jessie arrives at Virginia.**
7. **Pescud meets Jessie's father.**
8. **They get married a year later.**
9. **Pescud instantly gets attracted to the girl (Jessie).**
10. **Jessie informs Pescud that her father would not approve of them meeting.**

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9. **Pescud instantly gets attracted to the girl (Jessie).**
10. **Jessie informs Pescud that her father would not approve of them meeting.**

**Q4.** Irony refers to the use of words to convey a meaning that is the opposite of their literal meaning. Working in pairs, bring out the irony in the following:

- (a) The title of the story, "The Best Seller".
- (b) Pescud's claim, "When people in real life marry, they generally hunt up somebody in their own station. A fellow usually picks out a girl who went to the same high school and belonged to the same singing-society that he did."
- (c) The name Trevelyan.

**Ans:** (a) Ram : The title of the story, "The Best Seller" is ironical.

**Sita :** That it is. Irony refers to the use of words to convey a meaning that is opposite to their literal meaning.

**Ram:** John A. Pescud doesn't like 'best-sellers' like "The Rose Lady and Trevelyan."

**Sita :** He thinks that they present a highly unreal, exaggerated and romantic version of life.

**Ram:** But he himself is the "Best Seller".

**Sita :** After all, he is a travelling salesman. He knows all the tricks and arts of selling.

**Ram:** And he sells such an incredible story.

**Sita :** He criticises Trevelyan but imitates his real life.

**Ram:** He is another Trevelyan hunting for petunias for his princess Jessie Allyn.

**(b) Ram :** Don't you feel John A. Pescud is a hypocrite.

**Sita :** Without any doubt, he is.

**Ram:** Pescud claims "When people in real life marry, they generally hunt up somebody in their own station."

**Sita :** He thinks that "A fellow usually picks out a girl who went to the same high school and belonged to the same singing society that he did."

**Ram:** What John A. Pescud claims, he does just the opposite.

**Sita :** This is what irony is. He criticises best-sellers. They present a highly unreal, exaggerated and romantic version of life.

**Ram:** But John doesn't marry a sales girl. He falls in love with the "finest looking girl, a descendant of belted earls. She was the owner of a grand mansion as big as the Capitol at Washington. ^

**(c) Ram :** In the end, the narrator wishes good luck to John, calling him Trevelyan.

**Sita :** The address is ironical.

**Ram:** Trevelyan falls in love with a royal Princess from Europe. He follows her to her father's kingdom or principality.

**Sita :** And John A. Pescud does exactly the same.

**Ram:** John criticises the hero of "The Rose and Trevelyan" but imitates him.

**Sita :** He doesn't run after a sales girl but after the finest girl, a descendant of belted earls.

**Ram:** And this modern Trevelyan hunts petunias for her princess Jessie Allyn in Coketown.

**Q 7, A newspaper reporter hears of the marriage of Pescud and Jessie. He interviews them and writes an article for the paper entitled: A Modern Romance.**

**Working in groups of four, write the article.**

**Ans:** A Modern Romance

It happens. It may defy logic or reason but it happens. This is what they call a "modern romance". It happens not only in the best sellers like "The Rose Lady and Trevelyan" but even elsewhere. Our hero is John A. Pescud. He is a travelling salesman of a plate-glass company. He is doing rather fine in his professional life. He had had a raise in salary twice in two years and bought some real estate. Our hero strongly believes in traditional middle class values. He hates running after princesses and thinks that a person should choose a girl of his background and status. He hates Trevelyan, the American hero from Chicago falling in love with a royal European princess and following her to her father's kingdom.

So far so good. But our hero, John A. Pescud is clean-bowled when he sees "the finest looking girl" in the train while going to Cincinnati. He falls in love at the first sight. He follows her right up to Elmcroft, a place deep in Virginia. He finds that she is the daughter of Colonel Allyn who is a lineal descendant of belted earls. The Allyn's live in a huge mansion as big as the Capitol at Washington. The girl pretends to be a princess who doesn't want to talk to a commoner. She even threatens him not to meet her father who can feed him to his fox hounds if he does so. Pescud meets the Colonel. He hides nothing and tells him that he wants to win the love of his daughter. The Colonel makes him comfortable and relates anecdotes and humorous occurrences. John and Jessie meet again. And lo! They are married after a year. Do you know what is our hero doing now? Our Trevelyan is hunting for petunias in Coketown for his princess. Good luck, Trevelyan! I mean, John A. Pescud.

#### **I. SHORT ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS (30-40 WORDS)**

**Q1. Describe the people in the chair car by which the narrator was going to Pittsburgh on business.**

**Ans:** One day last summer, the narrator was travelling to Pittsburgh on business. The chair car was well-filled with people. They were typical people one usually finds on chair cars. Most of them were ladies. They were in brown-silk dresses cut with square yokes, laces and dotted veils. They refused to have the windows raised. There were men with business like attitudes and behaviour.

**Q2. Who was the passenger of chair No. 9 and how did he attract the attention of the narrator?**

**Ans:** The narrator leaned back idly in chair No. 7 and looked at the small, bald-spotted head with curiosity. He was just visible above the back of No. 9. Suddenly the man in No. 9 hurled "The Rose Lady and Trevelyan," one of the best-selling novels of the present day to the floor.

The man was John A. Pescud of Pittsburgh. He was a travelling salesman for a plate-glass company. He was an old acquaintance of the narrator whom he had not seen in two years.

**Q3. What does John A. Pescud tell about himself or his career? Give two examples to prove that he was doing well in life.**

**Ans.** John A. Pescud was a travelling salesman of a plate-glass company. He was doing quite well in life. He had his salary raised twice since he met the narrator last time. He got a commission too. He had bought some piece of good real estate. The firm was going to sell him some shares of stock. In brief, he was in "on the line of General Prosperity."

**Q4. Why is John A. Pescud so critical of best-sellers of the present day?**

**Ans:** John A. Pescud tries to give an impression that he believes in middle class values and pragmatism. He is quite critical of the modern best-sellers because they are far removed from reality and real life. They present a highly idealistic, exaggerated and romantic version of life. They describe an American hero falling in love with a royal princess from Europe. In real life, when people marry they choose their life-partners who belong to the same background or status.

**Q5. Describe one of the best-sellers of present time "The Rose Lady and Trevelyan" in your own words. Why doesn't John A. Pescud show much appreciation for it?**

**Ans:** "The Rose Lady and Trevelyan" was one of the best-selling novels of its times. Here, the hero Trevelyan falls in love with a royal princess from Europe who is travelling under an alias. The hero follows the princess to her father's kingdom or principality. Trevelyan calls Princess Alwyna, "dearest and sweetest of earth's fairest flowers." He calls himself an "uncrowned sovereign". The very idea of a Chicago man picking up a sword is ridiculous. The novel presents a highly exaggerated, unreal, idealistic and romantic version of life. Hence, he doesn't show much appreciation for the novel.

**Q6. How did John A. Pescud meet his future wife Jessie for the first time?**

**Ans:** John A. Pescud saw his future wife Jessie Allyn for the first time in a train. He was going to Cincinnati on business about 18 months ago. There he saw "the finest looking girl" he had ever laid his eyes on. "Nothing spectacular" but the kind of girl one would like to have as a life-partner. She changed cars at Cincinnati and took a sleeper to Louisville. John followed her all along but never losing track of her. He followed her to her grand mansion.

**Q7. Describe the huge white house of the Allyns on top of the hill as John A. Pescud saw it.**

**Ans:** The huge white house of the Allyns was at a thousand feet highest. The yard was full of rose-bushes, box-bushes and lilacs.

The mansion was as big as the Capitol at Washington. Colonel Allyn and his daughter Jessie lived there in their ancestral house. It had fifty rooms and the ceilings were twenty-eight feet high.

**Q8. Describe the first meeting of John A. Pescud with Jessie Allyn in the front yard of her ancestral mansion.**

**Ans:** On the third day of his arrival, John A. Pescud caught the young lady walking in the front yard. John was as respectful and earnest as he could. He told her why he followed her there. He wanted to get acquainted with her and hoped her to like him. The young lady replied that she was aware of all his activities throughout the journey. She replied that her father was a descendant of belted earls. He wouldn't allow his meeting with her. She affected as if she had no interest in him.

**Q9. Describe John A. Pescud's meeting with Colonel Allyn. What was its outcome?**

**Ans:** The next morning at eleven John A. Pescud rang the doorbell of the Colonel's mansion. For a few seconds John was nervous in the presence of the Colonel but soon got his nerve back. He told the old man everything, the purpose of his visit, his job and prospects and his little conduct of life. He clearly told that he wanted "to make a hit" with the young lady. The Colonel made him comfortable and they talked for two hours. The old man narrated anecdotes, humorous occurrences and a fox hunting story. John Pescud appeared to be satisfied with his meeting with the Colonel.

**Q10. Describe the second meeting of John A. Pescud with Jessie Allyn at Elmcroft. How was it different from the first?**

**Ans:** After meeting the Colonel, John A. Pescud got a chance after two days to speak to Miss Jessie Allyn alone on the porch. In this meeting, Jessie didn't appear to be affecting her ancestral greatness and grandeur. She rather ridiculed her father for telling stories about the old African and the green water melons. Suddenly, John's foot slipped and he was nearly tumbled off. She appeared to have been prepared for the inevitable. She skipped into the house through one of the big windows. John married her a year after.

**Q11. What made John A. Pescud get off at Coketown?**

**Ans:** John was getting off at Coketown. The narrator asked why he was getting off there. He could hardly do any business there. John told the narrator that he had a little trip to Philadelphia. While coming back, his wife Jessie saw some petunias in a pot in one of those windows in Coketown. So John thought he would drop off there for the night. He would see if he could dig up some of the cuttings or blossoms for his dear wife.

**Q12. "Good luck to you, Trevelyan," I said. "And may you get the petunias for your princess!" Give the importance of these last words of the narrator. Why was John A. Pescud called Trevelyan?**

**Ans:** Trevelyan is the hero of the best-selling novel of its times "The Rose Lady and Trevelyan." He falls in love with a royal European princess and follows her to her father's kingdom or principality. Though John A. Pescud criticises Trevelyan but in reality, he imitates him. He follows the daughter of Colonel Allyn, a descendant of belted earls, Jessie to her grand mansion. Like Trevelyan, John would hunt for petunias for his princess Jessie; The narrator sarcastically and ironically, wishes him good-luck.

**Q13. Describe the ironical ending of the story, Best Seller.**

**Ans:** Irony refers to the use of words to convey a meaning that is the opposite of their literal meaning. "Good-luck to Trevelyan  
And may you get the petunias for your princess!" These words of the narrator say everything about John A. Pescud. John doesn't like Trevelyan's running after a royal European princess. The love story sounds unreal, exaggerated and highly romantic. A man in real life must choose a girl of his background and status. But ironically, he (John) imitates Trevelyan and follows Jessie, the descendant of belted earls to her huge mansion as big as the Capitol at Washington.

**Q14. Justify the title 'Best Seller'. Was John A. Pescud the 'best-seller'?**

**Ans:** The title "Best Seller" is apt, appropriate and logical. John A. Pescud is a travelling salesman for a plate-glass company. He knows all the arts and tricks of selling. No doubt, he does not show his approval for the best-selling novels of his day like "The Rose Lady and Trevelyan". He thinks that they present a highly unreal, exaggerated and romantic view and version of life. In real life people choose their life-partners who belong to the same background and status. However, he sells his love story. He falls in love with the "finest looking girl", a descendant of belted earls living in a grand mansion as big as the Capitol at Washington.

**Q1. Describe the meeting of the narrator and John A. Pescud in the chair car. How was this meeting different and ironical from the previous ones? •**

**Ans:** One day last summer, the narrator was pleasantly surprised. He saw an old acquaintance John A. Pescud in a chair car after two years. They shook hands and finished with such topics as rain, health, residence and destination. Pescud was a small man with a wide smile. He was a travelling salesman for a plate-glass company.

During their earlier meetings they discussed the local topics and departed. However, this time John initiated a discussion on best-sellers. He particularly discussed "The Rose Lady and Trevelyan". The hero of "The Rose Lady and Trevelyan" was an American. He fell in love with a royal princess from Europe. He followed her to her father's kingdom. John A. Pescud didn't like such exaggerated and far-fetched versions of life. He believed that people in real life generally marry somebody belonging to their background and status. John replied that he was married 18 months ago to the "finest looking girl."

Pescud told that he met Jessie in a chair car. The meeting was not less romantic than the meeting of Trevelyan with the Princess Alwyn. She was the daughter of Colonel Allyn, who was a descendant of belted earls. He met the Colonel and told him why he was there.

Ultimately, they got married after a year.

The narrator asked why he was getting off at Coketown. John's reply was quite ironical. He replied that his wife Jessie saw some petunias in a pot in one of those windows in Coketown. He wanted to see if he could dig up some of the cuttings or blossoms for her. The narrator only wished good luck to him in getting petunias for his "princess".

**Q2. Is John A. Pescud a hypocrite? He pretends to have moral standards or opinions that he never practises in life. Justify your answer by giving examples from the text.**

**Ans:** Who is a hypocrite? A person who pretends to have moral standards or opinions that he actually doesn't have. Judging by this yardstick John A. Pescud is a hypocrite. He pretends to cherish middle class values. He strongly believes that people in real life marry "somebody in their own station. John A. Pescud is very critical of the modern best-sellers: The world they create is a false world of romance and fantasy. The world of best sellers is far removed from the harsh realities of life. In "The Rose Lady and Trevelyan", the hero Trevelyan is an American. He falls in love with a royal princess from Europe. He follows her to her father's kingdom or principality.

John A. Pescud seems to be doing exactly what he so strongly opposes and criticises in real life. Like Trevelyan he has a chance of meeting with the "finest looking girl".

Like Trevelyan he follows her to the grand mansion of her father. It is as big as the Capitol at Washington. Colonel Allyn is a lineal descendant of belted earls. He appears to be as proud as Julius Caesar. His meeting with Jessie Allyn is nothing less romantic than the meeting of Trevelyan with Princess Alwyn. So is their marriage. When asked why he is getting off at Coketown, Pescud replies that he hopes to dig up some of the cuttings of petunia flowers for Jessie. The last words of the narrator expose the hypocrisy of this incurable "Trevelyan".

"Good-luck to you, Trevelyan ..... And may you get the petunias for your princess! "

**Q3. John only knows too well how to sell himself and his ideas to others. Draw a pen-portrait of John A. Pescud in your own words highlighting all the important features of his character.**

**Ans:** John A. Pescud is the main character of O. Henry's story 'Best Seller'. He is a resident of Pittsburgh and a travelling salesman. He works for a plate-glass company. He is a small man with black, bald-spotted head and a broad smile. He seems to be going on well in life. He did have his salary raised in two years, got a commission and bought a piece of land. In his own words, he is in on the line of 'General Prosperity'. He has his "little code of living". When a man is in his home town, "he ought to be decent and law abiding".

John A. Pescud professes to entertain middle-class values in life. He believes that in real life



people marry the partners in their own background. He is highly critical of best-sellers like 'The Rose Lady and Trevelyan'. Here, the American hero falls in love with a royal princess from Europe.

He follows her to her father's kingdom or principality. The modern best sellers present a highly unrealistic and romantic version of life. However, John A. Pescud seems to be imitating Trevelyan in his own life. He falls in love with Jessie Allyn at the first sight. He follows her to her grand mansion as big as the Capitol at Washington. Her father Colonel Allyn is a lineal descendant of belted earls and looks as proud as Julius Caesar.

John Pescud is really the 'Best seller'. He sells 'himself and his ideas so well to the narrator, to Jessie and the Colonel. He is soft spoken and highly persuasive. Even after marriage this modern Trevelyan wanders in search of petunias for his princess.

**Q4. John and Jessie were made for each other. How did John A. Pescud's meeting with Jessie Allyn get converted into their marriage? Describe the role of Colonel Allyn in this episode.**

**Ans:** John A. Pescud's meeting with Jessie Allyn has all the ingredients of a great romance. It seems as if they were made for each other. Their meeting is in no way less romantic than the meeting of Trevelyan with Princess Alwyna in "The Rose Lady and Trevelyan". John was going to Cincinnati eighteen months ago. In the chair car he saw "the finest looking girl". She was nothing "spectacular" but the sort of girl one would like to have as his life-partner. A tall old man, looking as proud as Julius Caesar, was there to receive her at Virginia. He found out that the girl was the daughter of Colonel Allyn, a descendant of belted earls. Their mansion at the top of the hill was as big as the Capitol at Washington. The girl told him that she was keeping an eye on all his activities during the journey. She told that her father would feed him "to his fox-hounds" if he tried to meet her. She couldn't talk to him as they were not properly introduced. John felt quite at home in Colonel's company. He frankly told the purpose of his visit. He wanted to "make a hit with the little lady". He told him about his career, his prospects and his little code of conduct. The Colonel made him comfortable by narrating anecdotes and humorous occurrences. Two evenings later, John and Jessie met again on the porch. And finally they got married a year after.

**Q5. Give a character-sketch of Jessie Allyn in your own words highlighting her wonderful understanding of man and matters.**

**Ans:** Jessie Allyn of the story 'Best Seller' is an imitation of Princess Alwyna of "The Rose Lady and Trevelyan". She certainly shows some similarities and resemblances. John A. Pescud met her when he was going to Cincinnati eighteen months ago. John finds her "the finest looking girl" he has ever laid his eyes on. She was the kind of girl one would like to have as his life-partner.

Jessie Allyn shows a wonderful understanding of man's nature and behaviour. She is aware of what John is doing and how he is following her from Cincinnati to Virginia. She keeps her eye on all his activities without letting him know anything. She maintains an affected style and behaviour. She shows herself and her family beyond the reach of commoners like John A. Pescud. She calls her family a "lineal descendant of belted earls". Jessie threatens John not to meet her father otherwise he would feed him to his fox hounds. She even pretends not to talk to him as they were not properly introduced. But suddenly, things come to such a pass that she agrees to marry a commoner. She marries a travelling salesman for a plate-glass company.

**Q6. Justify the title 'Best Seller'. Describe the dramatic irony inherent in the title and the story.**

**Ans:** Irony refers to the use of words to convey a meaning that is opposite of their literal meaning. The title 'Best Seller' is quite ironical. O'Henry is best known for his ironic plot and surprise endings. Here, in the story we have the main character John A. Pescud. He doesn't show any liking or appreciation for the best-sellers of the modern times. The world they create is far removed from reality and real life. He particularly criticises the hero of "The Rose Lady

and Trevelyan". Here we find an American falling in love with a royal princess from Europe. He follows her to her father's kingdom. John A. Pescud argues that this doesn't happen in real life. In real life, people marry girls of the same social background and status. Ironically, John A. Pescud himself turns out to be the 'Best Seller'. He sells a highly romantic and exaggerated version of his life-story to the narrator. He is not at all different from Trevelyan of "The Rose Lady and Trevelyan". The girl Jessie Allyn is nothing less than Princess Alwyna. Her father is a descendant of 'belted earls'. Things move at a fast pace. John meets the Colonel and tells why he is there and what he wants. The Colonel makes him comfortable by narrating anecdotes and amusing occurrences. Finally, John marries Jessie after a year. And John, another version of Trevelyan goes out in search of petunias for his 'princess'. The title is apt, logical but ironical. Therefore, the irony is that John himself is the 'Best Seller' while he criticises the best-sellers of his times. John talks something but does the opposite. The situation contains an element of dramatic-irony as well

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