



# Let's Talk About It: Before, During and After Reading

## KINDERGARTEN, GRADE ONE, GRADE TWO, GRADE THREE:

At the appropriate place in the story, challenge the students to answer the following questions about details in the text.

### BEFORE READING:

- *Take a close look at the full spread cover of the book as well as the end papers at both the front and back of the book.*
  - Have the students make a prediction about why the illustrator chose colorful mice to be the end paper artwork.
  - What importance do they think the mice will play in the story?
- *Text-to-Self Connection/Setting A Purpose for Reading:* Discuss the title of the story. Discuss whether students have ever had a time when they got blamed or in trouble for something that really wasn't their fault. How did they feel? Do they think the character in the story will be feeling the same way?

### DURING READING:

The story contains many figurative language idioms that can be discussed as they are read throughout the story. What do the words/phrases REALLY mean? Discuss figurative vs. literal meaning. Why do they think the author chose to use the phrases instead of simply stating the same idea in a literal way? Some examples include:

- “We don't *hold a candle* to canaries.”
- “Miss Violet's friend Mitzi *dropped in*.”
- “. . . *gave me a dirty look*.”
- “how did you get *stuck with him*?”
- “Miss Violet *laughed herself silly*.”

### AFTER READING:

- *Revisit the discussion about the colorful mice end papers.*
  - What importance DID they play in the story?
  - Were their initial predictions correct?
  - What would have happened to the story if Scalawag didn't have his catnip mice? Would it have been the same?
  - How might the story have turned out without the mice?
- *Discuss the story elements:*
  - Who are the main characters in this story? Secondary characters?
  - What is the problem?
  - How is the problem solved? Who solved the problem?
  - Sequence the events of the story: Is the order in which they happened important? Why or why not?
  - Do the students think this story had a surprising conclusion? Why or why not?
- *Discuss what the name “Scalawag” means:*
  - Miss Violet says that if she wanted a boring cat, she would have named him Fred. What would students name a mischievous cat? A boring cat?
  - What is a synonym for the word “Scalawag”? An antonym?

## Outstanding vs. Mischievous: You Decide

### KINDERGARTEN, GRADE ONE, GRADE TWO:

Scalawag is trying to convince Santa that he has been an **OUTSTANDING** cat all year, however, events that happen throughout the book tell another story. This activity can be done as an independent handout activity (using the **Outstanding or Mischievous?** handout on the following page) or as a whole group anchor chart activity for non- or emerging readers. If using as an anchor chart activity (perhaps for kindergarten and/or first grade emerging readers), write the events from the handout onto a sentence strip. On a large anchor chart paper, write the two categories on top and divide the paper in half. Students decide together whether each event is evidence that Scalawag was either outstanding or mischievous. Some of the events may elicit rich discussion as students have to consider point of view and perception. For example, was drinking the milk in the pitcher helpful? Through whose eyes?

## A Hunting We Will Go: Finding Verbs Throughout the Text

### GRADE ONE, GRADE TWO, GRADE THREE:



*Dear Santa, I Know It Looks Bad But It Wasn't My Fault!* is rich with verbs that precisely show the action happening in the story. Make a list of all of the verbs students can find. Record their answers on a dry erase board or anchor chart. Next, ask the students to categorize the verbs recorded: how many ways did the author use different verbs to portray people or animals talking? Making movement? Use verbs to show emotion? This is a great spring board to discussing how writers carefully choose “just right” words to *show* rather than *tell* what is happening in the story. For younger students, have them act out the “actions” that they find in the story. *Some examples include:*

- Talking/Sound Verbs: hollered, screeching, squawked, yelled, shattered, told
- Movement Verbs: grabbed, flew/flying, scooted, slipped, batted, rolled, chewed, wobbled, scorching
- Emotion/Feeling Verbs: laughing, smirked, smiled, purred, warms



# OUTSTANDING OR MISCHIEVOUS?

Directions: Decide whether Scalawag was showing that he was an outstanding cat or a mischievous cat in each of the story events listed on the 2nd page. Cut out each event and glue into the proper column on the first page.

 <b>OUTSTANDING</b>	<b>MISCHIEVOUS</b> 

Scalawag eats all his dinner.	Scalawag wishes for new ornaments for Miss Violet.
Scalawag climbs the Christmas tree.	Scalawag cleaned out the pitcher with milk in it.
Scalawag plays too rough with Caruso.	Scalawag makes Miss Violet laugh and have fun.
Scalwag tries all new food.	Scalawag ate Miss Violet's cake.
Scalawag keeps Miss Violet company.	Scalawag warms Miss Violet's feet.
Scalawag bumped into the table and started a fire.	Scalawag used the sandbox as a litter box.
Scalawag played with his catnip mouse to make Miss Violet happy.	Scalawag calls Caruso a "bird brain."
Scalawag is not a picky eater.	Scalawag wants a video game instead of the gift Miss Violet gives him.





# Who Is That Character?: Using Character Traits and Evidence

## GRADE ONE, GRADE TWO, GRADE THREE:

Each character in *Dear Santa* is unique. Using the **Who Is That Character?** handout on the following page, students will identify which character matches the listed character trait and provide evidence from the story to support their answer. Both main and secondary characters can be considered. This activity can also be done as a whole group anchor chart activity for non- or emerging readers. Simply transfer the information on the handout to an anchor chart paper. Answers may vary depending on the evidence, critical thinking, and the perspective students use in their answers.

## Who Caused the Effect?

## GRADE ONE, GRADE TWO, GRADE THREE:

Scalawag creates many opportunities to discuss cause and effect and the importance of those relationships for comprehension in understanding how and why one event led to the next, and the next and so on. Review with the students what cause and effect is, the prompting questions to identify cause and effect and the “clue words” they can look for to recognize a cause and effect relationship. Then have them work either independently, with partners, or in small groups to complete the **Cause and Effect** handout in the following pages. Again, this activity can be done as an interactive anchor chart activity. Simply transfer the information on the handout to large chart paper or sentence strips. A word bank of effect answers has been provided to differentiate this activity. Provide this word bank to students who may need additional support.



# Who Is That Character?

Character traits are adjectives that describe what a character is like on the inside. We find evidence for these traits in what the character says, thinks and does.

Think about a character in the story that matches the character trait listed. Then provide evidence of something the character says, thinks or does that supports your answer. The first one has been done for you.



**curious**

**Character**  
**Scalawag**

**Evidence from the Story**  
**He investigated the sandbox and thought it was a litter box.**

**forgiving**



**playful**

**mischievous**



**nurturing**

**brave**



**patient**

**helpful**



**rude**



# CAUSE AND EFFECT

A **cause** is why something happened. Ask yourself “Why did that happen?”

An **effect** is what happened. Ask yourself “What happened?”

**Clue words:** because, so, due to, since, as a result of, if . . . then

<b>CAUSE: Why did that happen?</b>	<b>EFFECT: What happened?</b>
<b>Caruso flew into Scalawag’s tail.</b>	
<b>Mitzi left the front door open.</b>	
<b>Miss Violet left out a pitcher of milk.</b>	
<b>Scalawag played with his catnip mouse.</b>	
<b>Miss Violet has laughed, had fun, had warm feet and good company.</b>	
<b>Scalawag realized how much he loves Miss Violet and how much she loves him.</b>	
<b>Scalawag thought he had too many catnip mice.</b>	



# WORD BANK OF EFFECTS

Scalawag moved in with Miss Violet	Scalawag had to go to the vet and get a shot and a bath.
Scalawag asked Santa to bring Miss Violet new ornaments, especially ones shaped like Nutcrackers.	The Christmas tree fell down, Miss Violet was unconscious, the house caught on fire, and the smoke detector went off.
Scalawag grabbed Caruso and got accused of eating him.	Scalawag got in trouble for using the sandbox as a litter box.
Scalawag asked Santa to bring him a "Catman and Robin" video game.	



# Through My Eyes: Point of View Writing

## GRADE TWO, GRADE THREE:

Scalawag is convinced that he has been an outstanding cat all year. He writes repeatedly to Santa to make sure that Santa understands exactly what happened throughout the story and most importantly, according to Scalawag, the events that occur, are never his fault. What would happen if this story were told from the point of view of another character? Have students write letters to Santa from the view point of Miss Violet, or Mitzzi, or even the vet, neighbor, or first responders. Would Scalawag continue to have been seen as the victim? Can they persuade the reader to believe that Scalawag is mischievous?

## It Wasn't Me!! Persuasive Writing

## GRADE TWO, GRADE THREE:

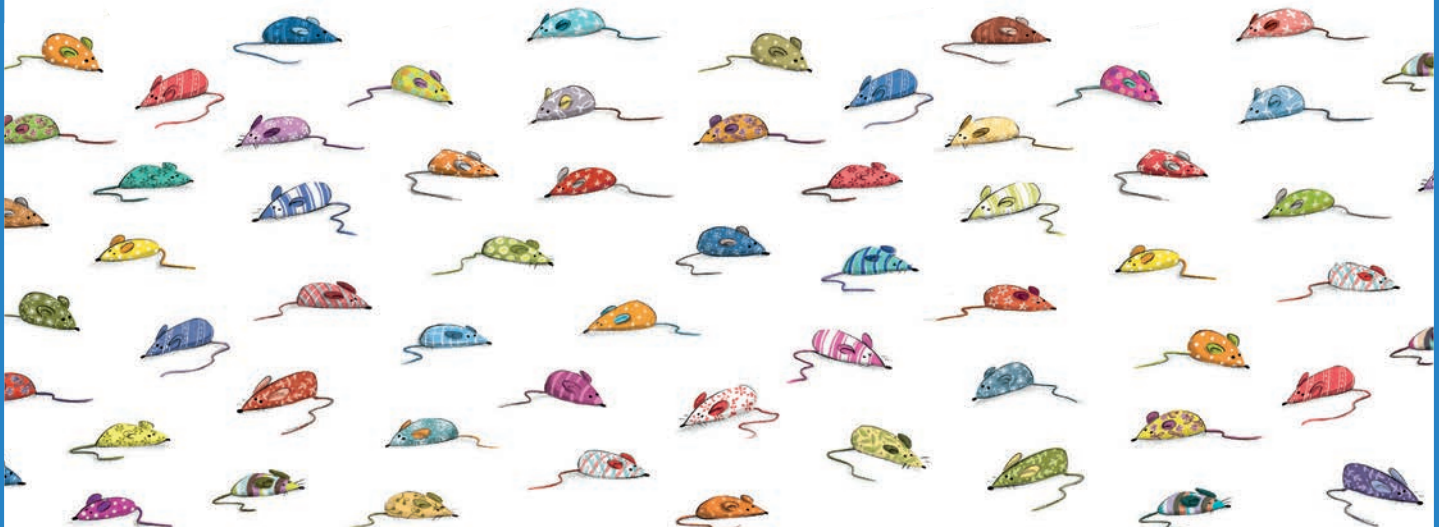
Have students write a letter to someone explaining about a time that they tried to do the right thing but something went wrong and changed the desired outcome. (Text-to-Self Connection.) This is a good opportunity to talk about the parts of a friendly letter. If desired, instead of a letter, students could write an email to someone using the same prompt. Discuss whether this book would be different if it were written in a series of emails to Santa.

## Art Extension Activities

## GIFTS FOR EVERYONE . . . EVEN SCALAWAG

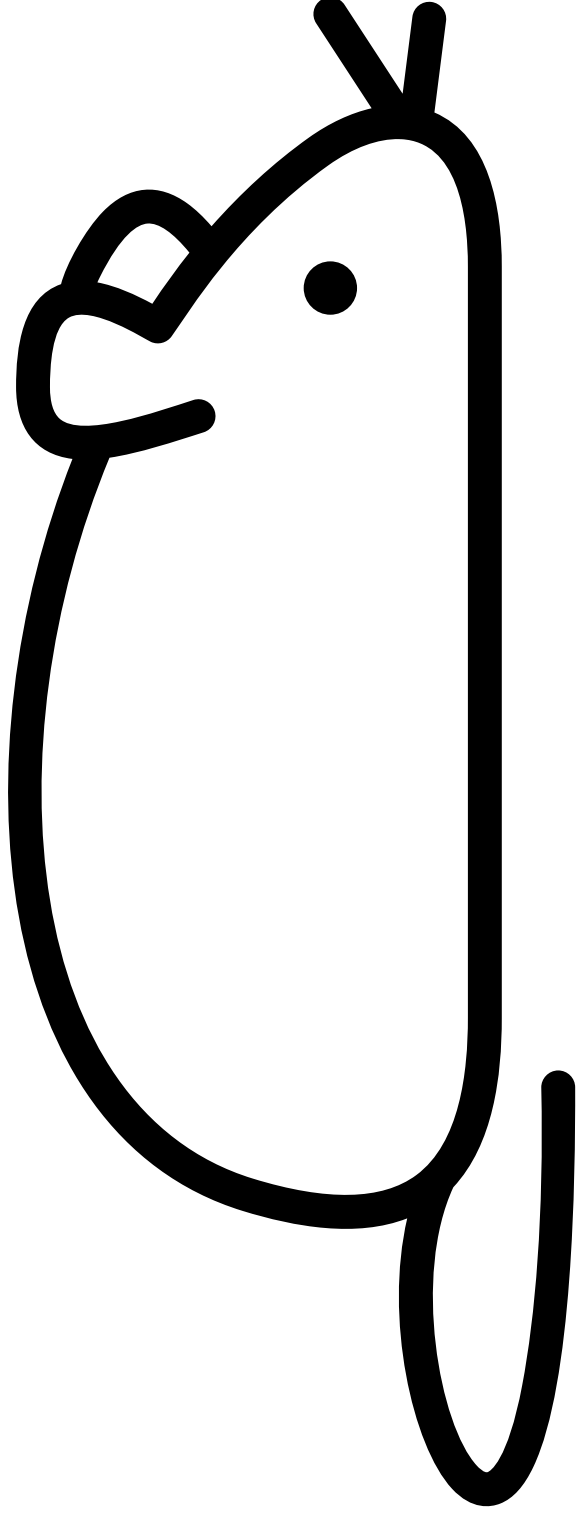
*Another Catnip Mouse:* Since Scalawag decided to forego his request for a video game and asked Santa instead for ornaments for Miss Violet, have the students decorate a new catnip mouse for Scalawag, using the **Another Catnip Mouse** handout on the following page. Ask them to give it bright colors and patterns and think about what design Scalawag might like on his new toy.

*A Gift for Miss Violet:* Scalawag feels badly about breaking all of Miss Violet's ornaments. Have the students decorate some new ornaments for her by decorating the Nutcracker and other ornaments provided in the **A Gift for Miss Violet** handout in the following pages.



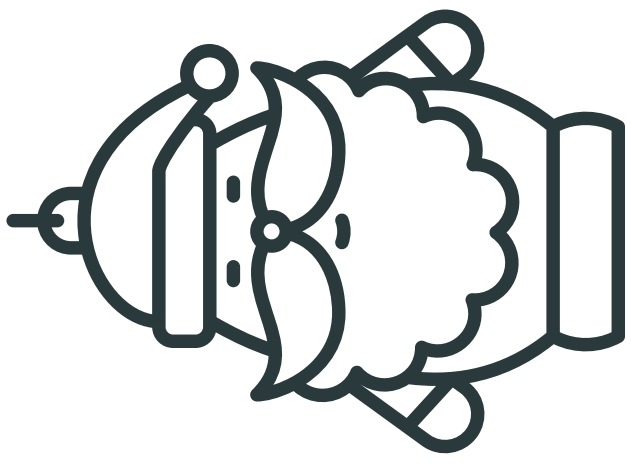
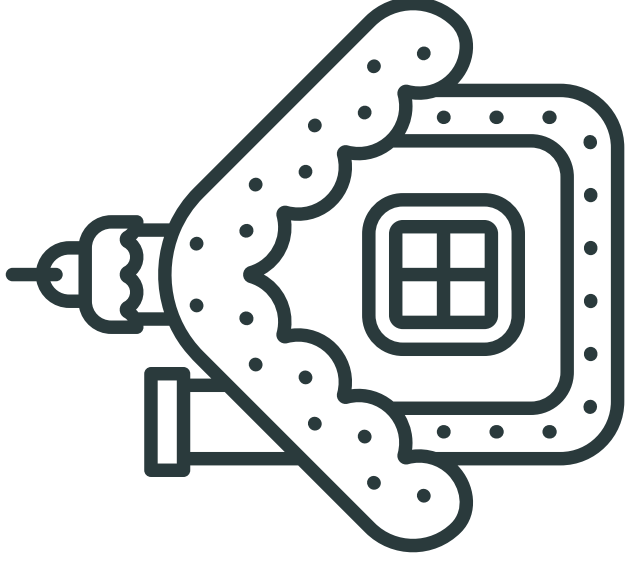
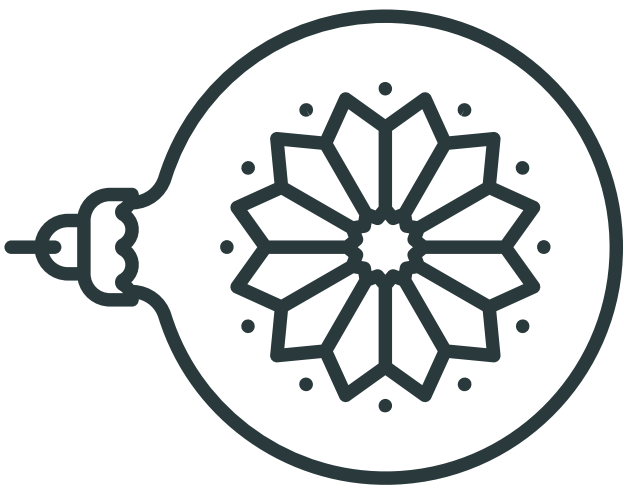
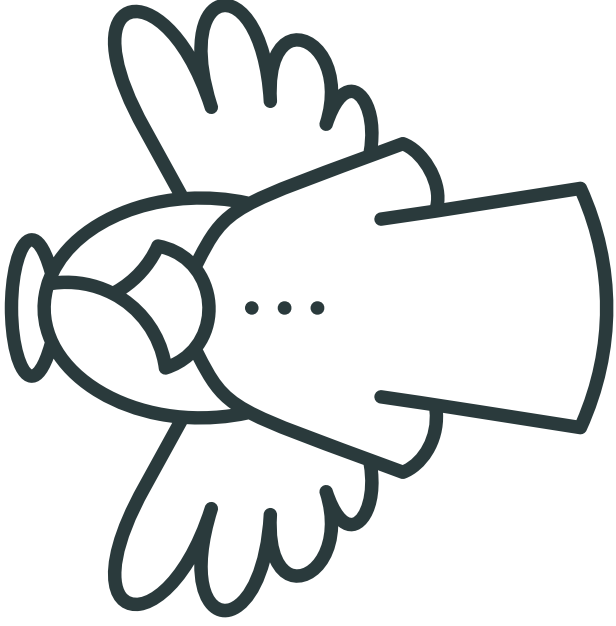
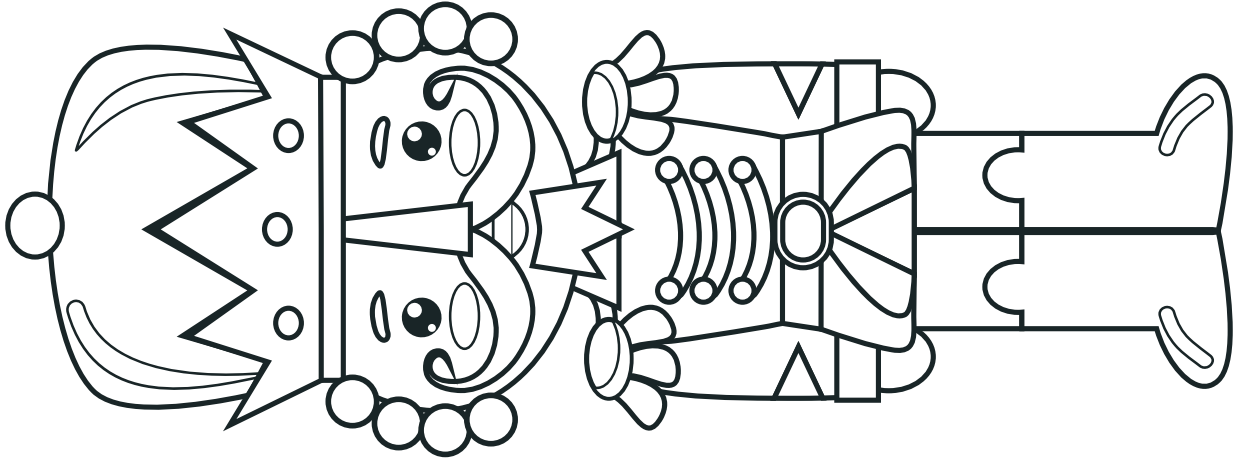
# ANOTHER CATNIP MOUSE

Decorate a catnip mouse for Scalawag!



# A GIFT FOR MISS VIOLET

Decorate some new ornaments for Miss Violet!



# Common Core Standards Met in this Guide

## READING LITERATURE STANDARD 1

**RL K.1** With prompting and support, ask and answer questions about key details in text.

**RL 1.1** Ask and answer questions about key details in a text.

**RL 2.1** Ask and answer such questions as *who*, *what*, *where*, *when*, *why* and *how* to demonstrate understanding of key details in a text.

**RL 3.1** Ask and answer questions to demonstrate understanding of a text, referring explicitly to the text as a basis for the answers.

## READING LITERATURE STANDARD 3

**RL 1.3** Describe characters, setting and major events in a story, using key details.

**RL 3.3** Describe characters in a story (e.g., their traits, motivations, or feelings) and explain how their actions contribute to the sequence of events.

## READING LITERATURE STANDARD 4

**RL 1.4** Identify words and phrases in stories or poems that suggest feelings or appeal to the senses.

**RL 2.4** Describe how words and phrases (e.g., regular beats, alliteration, rhymes, repeated lines) supply rhythm and meaning in a story, poem or song.

**RL 3.4** Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, distinguishing literal from nonliteral language.

## READING LITERATURE STANDARD 6

**RL 1.6** Identify who is telling the story at various points in the text.

**RL 2.6** Acknowledge differences in the points of view of characters, including by speaking in a different voice for each character when reading dialogue aloud.

**RL 3.6** Distinguish their own point of view from that of the narrator or those of the characters.

## READING LITERATURE STANDARD 7

**RL 1.7** Use illustrations and details in a story to describe its characters, setting or events.

**RL 2.7** Use information gained from illustrations and words in a print or digital text to demonstrate understanding of its characters, setting or plot.

**RL 3.7** Explain how specific aspects of a text's illustrations contribute to what is conveyed by the words in a story (e.g., create mood, emphasize aspects of a character or setting).





# Next Generation Science Standards Met in this Guide

## **SPEAKING AND LISTENING STANDARD 1**

**SL 1.1** Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about *grade 1 topics and texts* with peers and adults in small and larger groups.

**SL 2.1** Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about *grade 2 topics and texts* with peers and adults in small and larger groups.

**SL 3.1** Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on *grade 3 topics and texts* building on other's ideas and expressing their own clearly.

## **SPEAKING AND LISTENING STANDARD 2**

**SL K.2** Confirm understanding of a text read aloud or information presented orally or through other media by asking and answering questions about key details and requesting clarification if something is not understood.

**SL 1.2** Ask and answer questions about key details in a text read aloud or information presented orally or through other media.

**SL 2.2** Recount or describe key ideas or details from a text read aloud or information presented orally or through other media.

## **WRITING STANDARD 1**

**W 1.1** Write opinion pieces in which they introduce the topic or name of the book they are writing about, state and opinion, supply a reason for the opinion and provide some sense of closure.

**W 2.1** Write opinion pieces in which they introduce the topic or book they are writing about, supply reasons that support the opinion, use linking words (e.g., *because*, *and*, *also*) to connect opinion and reasons, and provide a concluding statement or section.

**W 3.1** Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR & ILLUSTRATOR



**NORMA LEWIS** lives in Grand Haven, Michigan with a cat coincidentally named Scalawag. He did NOT inspire the cat-astrophic shenanigans described in this or any other book, but she knows he could and lives in fear that he will. This is Norma's fifth book for children.



**OLIVIA BECKMAN** worked for years in graphic design and magazine layout until one day her little inner bird whispered to her that it was time to focus on the type of illustration that inspired her to study the Fine Arts in the first place—children's art! She worked for years decorating children's hospitals around the world in collaboration with a non-profit foundation. She feels very lucky to illustrate children's books—and especially loves drawing people doing everyday activities, animals with fluffy fur, and mischievous cats.