

Senior Talk Final Project

We started our year with Ken Robinson's "Changing Education Paradigms" TED Talk, with plans to end the year with your own *senior* talks — a chance to experience what Robinson describes in the following excerpt:

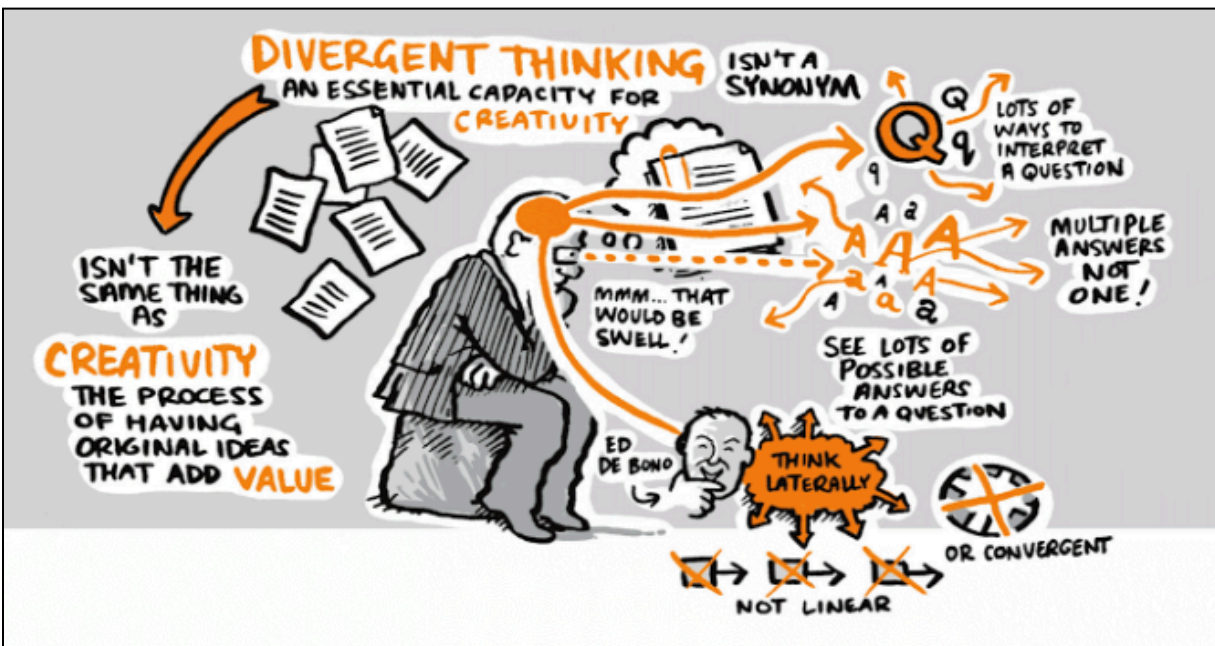
An aesthetic experience is one in which your senses are operating at their peak, when you are present in the current moment, when you are resonating with the excitement of this thing that you're experiencing, when you are fully alive. An *anesthetic* is when you shut your senses off and deaden yourself to what's happening... We are getting our children through education by anesthetizing them. And I think we should be doing the exact opposite. We shouldn't be putting them to sleep. **We should be waking them up to what they have inside of themselves.**

During this period of distance learning, the spirit of our second-semester projects remains the same: to wake up the part of you that you'll need next year, no matter the path you've chosen. The more authentic and personally meaningful the work is, the better.

In the wake of COVID-19, of course, we must make some changes. First, the formal presentation outlined in February is no longer required. It is still possible, and if you wish, you can produce and record a Senior Talk that is virtually identical to what you *would* have done.

The second change is that you can choose from a wide range of possible final projects. You will be given a week just to think divergently about what this final project *can* be.

In the same TED Talk quoted above, Robinson defines divergent thinking like this:



This is why you'll be instructed to use as much of your *other* second-semester projects as possible as part of this Final Project. You are not required to start over. In fact, you are strongly encouraged to use whatever you can from the work you've already done to help you.

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The third and final change is that you'll be given the project steps by *week*, with dates for May and June of 2020 detailed for each part of the final project. Your project should be finished and submitted between May 25 and June 5. See the new calendar posted here: sisypheanhigh.com/malachite/?p=4157.

Assessment & Grades

Please be sure you have read the following:

1. April 14 Course Update: Senior Projects Redux | sisypheanhigh.com/malachite/?p=4122
2. BCSD Grading Letter to Staff and Community | tinyurl.com/bcsd-grading-0416

The April 14 update explains where we were at the end of Q3, how to navigate leveled instruction like these posts, and where to find information about every original second-semester project. On April 16, the district posted an update about the adoption of a Pass/Incomplete option for Q4.

All assessment and feedback will continue exactly as it always has in here, with the silver lining of not having to convert grade abatement profiles into a 100-point score. The profiles, skills, and traits are universal and universally useful, so we'll stick with them:

- **Profiles:** tinyurl.com/grade-abatement-profiles
- **Skills and traits:** tinyurl.com/universal-skills-traits

Even the usual GAP protocol can be used without any changes. There will be regular Google Forms sent to students to collect evidence of their work, which will provide all the fuel for feedback we need. The daily requirements will be the same, as well:

- Check Google Classroom once a day.
- Check in and set a goal each day.
- Advocate for individual help and feedback as necessary.

Most importantly, the idea of individualizing these projects remains at the center of the process. It was that way in February, and it's that way now. We'll work together to do what is right by each of you.

Week One | 4/27-5/1

You will use this week to transition into the Final Project. You must first decide what to do with any ongoing projects. You can use your existing work as *part* of the Final Project or submit all of it as evidence for your Q4 evaluation. There are other options.

Start with the Final Project Overview: sisypheanhigh.com/malachite/?p=4199.

Continue with the calendar for the next seven weeks: sisypheanhigh.com/malachite/?p=4157.

Then bookmark the main post: sisypheanhigh.com/malachite/?p=4154.

Finally, choose one or more of the following as your focus for the first five days:

1. Submit a second project (as established [here](#)) that you can finish this week.
2. Wrap up your work on a second project, and then prepare to move onto the Final Project.
3. Identify parts of your current project-based work that could be used for a Final Project.

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4. Begin the analytical and introspective work for Week Two.

Whatever your focus is, you'll have an assignment on Google Classroom to help you transition into this final part of the year. Remember that you can individualize almost every aspect of this work, from the timeline to the final product, by advocating for yourself.

Note: The formal steps of the Final Project, which are based on the formal steps of the original Senior Talk, begin below with Week Two.



Week Two | 5/4–5/8

FINAL PROJECT: STEP #1 | **CHOOSING A TOPIC**

Review the idea of project-based learning through this PBL graphic:



① Challenging problem or question

② Sustained inquiry

③ Authenticity

④ Student voice and choice

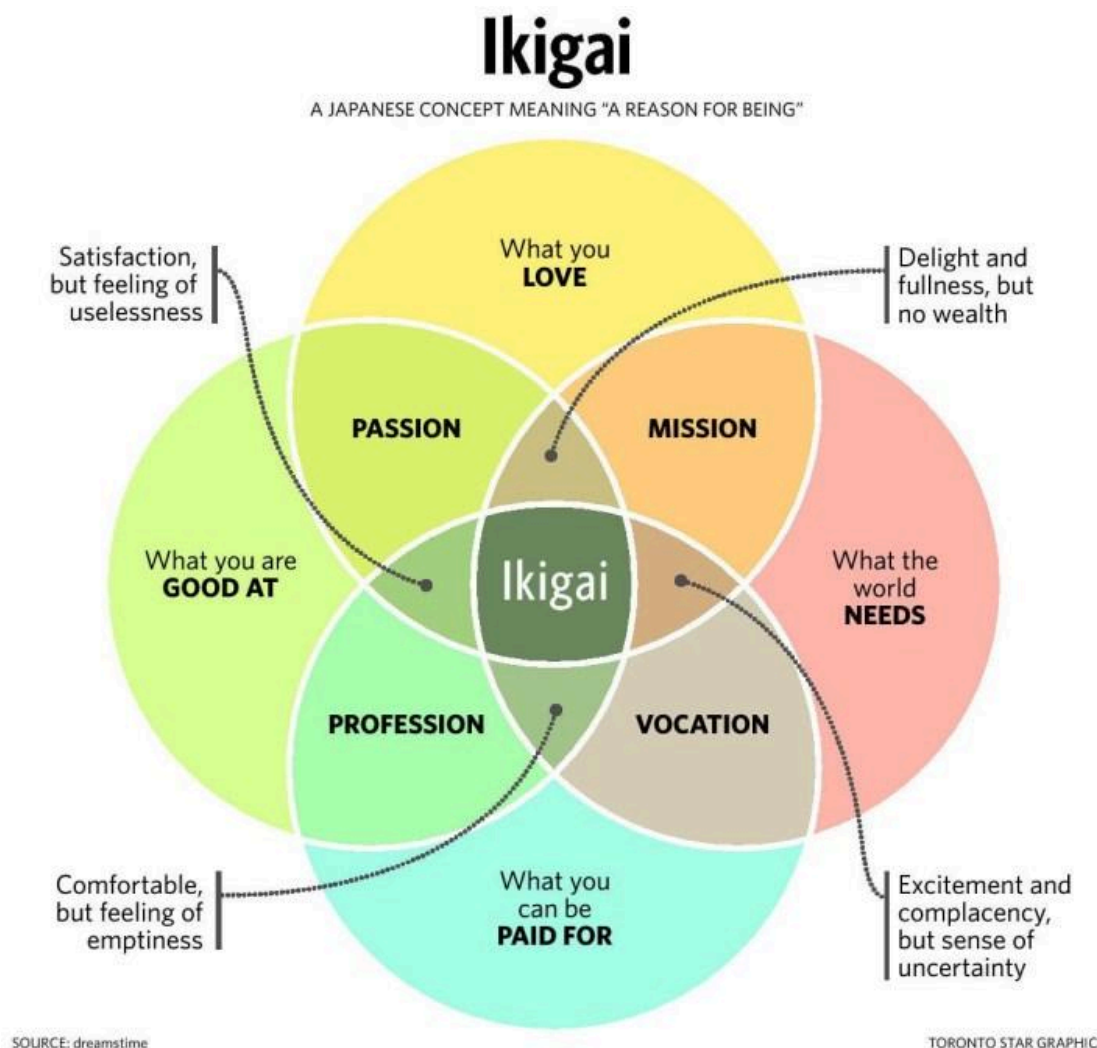
⑤ Reflection

⑥ Critique and revision

⑦ Public product

Your goal is to check off each of the seven elements there as you work your way through the seven steps of the Final Project. Whether or not you have a topic — and even if you made great strides with the Senior Talk — you should spend this week reading, thinking, and discussing what is possible. There are many ways to find a challenging problem or question, for instance.

How about the Japanese concept of *ikiga*?



This is another angle on the Pareto Project idea of finding your passion, but it's bigger than that — perfect for the final months of your senior year, in fact. Ask yourself:

1. What are you good at doing?
2. What does the world need?
3. What can you be paid for?

The third question is perhaps not as inspiring as the other two, but it's no less essential. As for the world around us: We are weathering a generational crisis, so you are witnesses to what the world needs. You could (and perhaps should) consider making this Final Project somehow related to this moment in history.

You also have the original set of options for the Senior Talk, as outlined in that February post. Here they are again, with some edits:

Option A: Pareto Projects | One intention of your Pareto Project was to generate a topic for any sort of Final Project. This applies whether you maintained the same passion project for the entire year or rebooted it. The connection to a final project may be obvious, or it may take some divergent thinking. As always, you should ask for feedback when you need it.

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Option B: Self-Prescribed Book | Your self-prescribed book project is another option for the Final Project. Could it be evolved into something more substantial? Could it be turned into a video essay or other artifact? Again, the best approach is to brainstorm in class about the connections between your book, any work you've done toward a book-driven project, and this Final Project.

Option C: Research-Driven Essay | The research-driven essay may also lead directly into a Final Project. The research portion can serve a kind of double duty, since two of the seven steps outlined here involve research. What else could you do to expand on your statement of purpose, if you got to that step? What could be done with the writing to turn it into something more substantial?

Option D: New Focus | If you like, of course, you can develop a new topic. You can talk with peers, talk to me, ask questions in the comment section below — whatever inspires you. Consider that *ikigai* concept. Revisit projects you created earlier this year, in previous years, for other classes, and so on.

Regardless of what you *think* you'll do for this project, spend as much time as possible this week simply exploring. The best way to find a topic is to read, watch, and listen to as much as you can.

To help, there are video essays chosen to help you think divergently about possible topics *and* what you do with them. Find these online: sisypheanhigh.com/malachite/?p=4203.



Week Three | 5/11–5/15

FINAL PROJECT: STEP #2 | **INITIAL RESEARCH**

FINAL PROJECT: STEP #3 | **STATEMENTS OF PURPOSE**

For these two steps, you must collect evidence of research and then write a statement of purpose. You will be given a form on May 11 and asked to fill it out by Friday, May 15. See the final calendar for context: sisypheanhigh.com/malachite/?p=4157.

These steps are combined because they happen concurrently. You must use the same methodology outlined for the research-driven essay to explore the topic you chose during Week Two, and that research should generate a **statement of purpose**, which is explained in this post:

- Statements of Purpose: sisypheanhigh.com/malachite/?p=3915

This post is from February, and you should have handouts and notes from that time. **Read this post and any notes you have carefully.** Your statement of purpose must reflect an understanding of these instructions.

Note again that the Senior Talk is now a Final Project. You can still create a traditional presentation, if you want, but you can also design a wholly different kind of project.

It may help to call the statement of purpose a **thesis**, which has Greek roots meaning “a setting down, a placing, an arranging; position, situation.” A thesis is the central staging or placement of a work.

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A better term to use is **crux**, which literally means *cross*, but which is better understood as follows:

- a puzzling or difficult problem : an unsolved question
- an essential point requiring resolution or resolving an outcome
- a main or central feature (as of an argument)

Your statement of purpose is really **the crux of the project**. That is what you are writing and rewriting during these steps. Your research helps you figure out the problem you're addressing, the question you're answering, the resolution you've reached, etc.

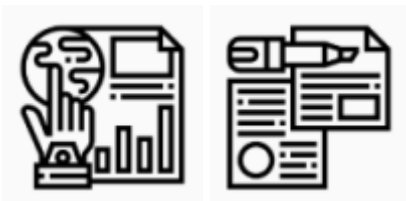
Your use of feedback is essential. We should collaborate to answer questions like these:

1. Why does your topic matter?
2. What is the bigger message intended for your audience?
3. What can others gain from this project?
4. What can *you* gain from this project?

Your statement of purpose will look like this when finished:

Student Name(s)	Title	Purpose	Location
Unknown Typesetter, 15th Century	Scrambled parts of Cicero's <i>De Finibus Bonorum et Malorum</i>	Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed do eiusmod tempor incididunt ut labore et dolore magna aliqua. Ut enim ad minim veniam, quis nostrud exercitation ullamco laboris nisi ut aliquip ex ea commodo consequat. Duis aute irure dolor in reprehenderit in voluptate velit esse cillum dolore eu fugiat nulla pariatur.	Origins of lorem ipsum

Continue to use the models you've been given in other places to guide you, too. Each of the video essays posted for Week Two, for instance, has a thesis or crux to it. You should be able to identify (and then emulate) the crux of *any* meaningful project in the Humanities.



Week Four | 5/18–5/22

FINAL PROJECT: STEP #4 | **FURTHER RESEARCH & DISCUSSION**

FINAL PROJECT: STEP #5 | **DESIGNING THE PROJECT**

As you figure out the crux of your project, you'll need to do more research, reading, and discussion. At some point, that will lead into the actual Final Project design.

You should continue to use the skills outlined for your research paper and the resources of the iLC, but you can also create *new* information in this step — through interviews, reflections, surveys, and so on.

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This is also when you would paint, record, and otherwise create the raw materials of an alternative project. If you are still doing a TED-inspired talk, you'll write a script. A script is also required for a video essay.

In other words, this step is when the most essential design decisions are made: What are you building? How do you plan that? What resources do you need?

Then you build the project itself. You'll need models, feedback from peers and teachers, help from people stuck with you in quarantine, and so on. This is the week put the project together.

This is probably the most time-intensive step, and you are especially encouraged to lean again on the "stuff of growth" — the collaborative energy and efforts of your peers. Use Zoom, Skype, etc, to talk things out. Share documents. Do whatever it takes to make this collaborative.

Note: Like every step of a process like this, you will be more successful if you fold this step into the previous week's work *and* extend the design process into the next two weeks. You don't *necessarily* stop designing the project on May 22!

The default form of this project is still a "talk" based on the format of TED Talks:

- [TED: Ideas Worth Spreading](#) | The main site for official TED Talks.
- [How to Open and Close a TED Talk](#) | Akash Karia's guide.

Your project, if it emulates a TED Talk, should be **8-10 minutes long**. If you think you might benefit from more structure, you can also do an Ignite presentation:

- [Ignite: Enlighten Us, But Make It Quick](#)

These presentations use exactly 20 slides that advance automatically every 15 seconds. If your presentation uses this format, it will be **exactly five minutes long**.

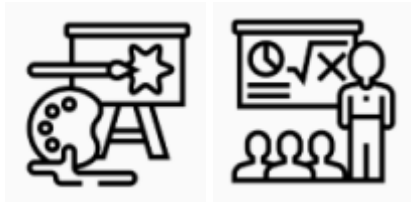
Ignite is a much more performative structure, since it eliminates any extemporaneous elements. Use their site to find examples and guides.

There are other models for presentations, of course, and you can use those. You can, as mentioned a few times already, create a video essay. There is a form and function to that kind of artifact, too, and you can look to the models from Week Two for examples.

This doesn't have to be a presentation, of course! Your project can be an essay. It can be a paper with multimedia elements embedded. It could be a website. It could be an album of original music. It could be a personal journal, or just your meta-commentary *on* a personal journal.

Really, there are very few limitations to what the *project* is. The key is that you have to research it, design it, and filter that all back through a clear purpose. It can't just be a link to your DeviantArt profile. It can't just be a copy of a research paper you've already written this semester.

Think of it like this: If you do a talk, TED-inspired or Ignite-inspired, you must get approval of a **written script** as part of these steps — that is, you must submit a typed artifact that details your presentation in full. It may be verbatim, or written word-for-word, or organized by salient points and comments. It must be precise, however, and you must follow it when you present.



Weeks Five & Six | 5/25–6/5

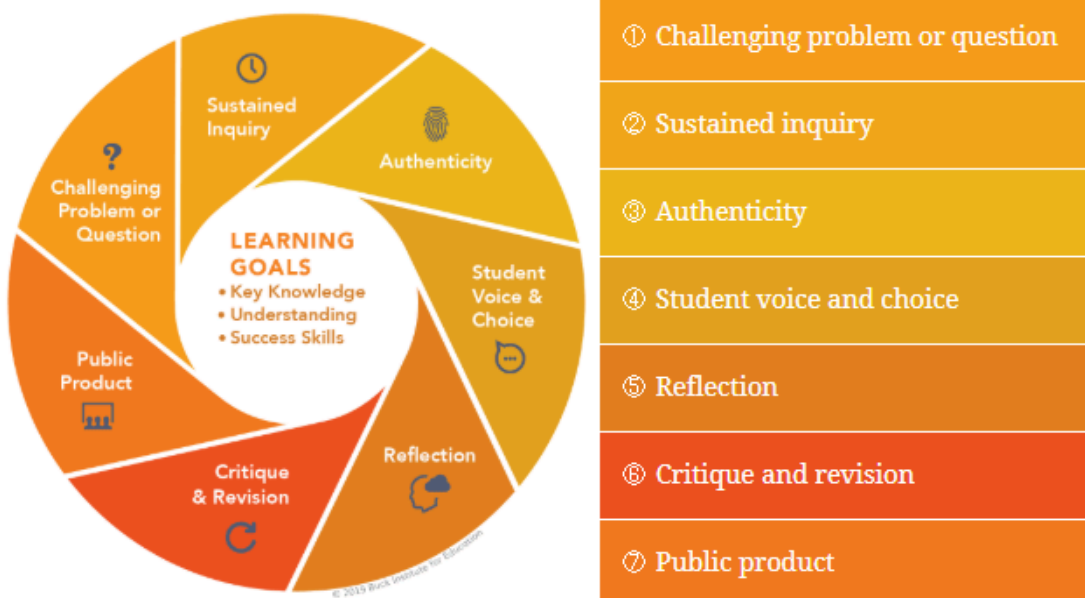
FINAL PROJECT: STEP #6 | **THE FINAL PROJECT**

In the original plan for your Senior Talk, you were asked to sign up for a specific date, time, and location for your presentation. That sign-up document still exists, but it won't work for us now — not even if we are lucky enough to return to the high school before the end of the year.

Instead, you must use these two weeks, from May 25 through June 5, to finalize your project in a way that makes sense for *you*.

One note: Because everything you do will have a digital component — video, writing, photos, etc. — you should base your work for these two weeks around the possibility of reaching out to a wider audience.

Remember the guiding ideas of project-based learning:



A **public product** makes your project authentic in a way nothing else can. You are not required to share your work, of course, but you *are* required to consider the possibility.

Anyone still doing a presentation can use these two weeks to film and submit it, and you'll follow the guidelines laid out in Week Four for length and timing. Everyone else will need to think divergently and collaboratively, asking questions like these:

- Could you publish your project to a social media account? How does that help your purpose?
- Could you showcase your project through an essay on a site like Medium?

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- Will you have a video that could be posted to YouTube? How could you share that link to broaden your audience?
- What other artifacts could you create to showcase your project?

You should use the comment section of this post to brainstorm possibilities. Look again at that rundown of project-based learning: This is an opportunity for choice and authenticity about a project you've designed and built. What *could* you do during these two weeks?

You should also consider how you can involve a public audience, however large or small, in the critique and revision of your work. **Critique and revision are part of these two weeks.** You want a final product, but that final product can be a living thing that continues to grow.

Let's say, as an example, that you are designing a digital town hall to tackle racism — a project that very much may happen — and will have an online meeting with a group of students as a final product. Could you share a video of that town hall afterward? Could you involve local newspapers? How about national journalists?

This is your chance to do something remarkable, and you don't have to wait until May 25 to start.



Week Seven | 6/8–6/12

FINAL PROJECT: STEP #7 | **SELF-ASSESSMENT & REFLECTION**

Back in February, you were given a post on final assessments for the year. The final exam, at that point, was an essay reflecting on the Senior Talk. This has changed.

Even if we return to school before the end of the year, you will not have a formal final exam. Instead, you will have this week, from June 8 through June 12, to complete the last part of your Final Project:

1. Analysis of the Final Project (Google Form)
2. Analysis of universal skills and traits (Google Form)
3. Self-assessment and reflection (short essay)

It is much simpler than it looks. You will have a two-part Google Form given to you on June 8 that asks you a series of questions about the process and product of your Final Project. Your answers will be the draft of a short essay reflecting on the Final Project.

This written response should follow the philosophy of our universal writing work — that is, it should seek out interesting and surprising insights into your learning and the artifacts you created. It should not be a summary of the steps, nor should it simply repeat the statement of purpose for the project.

This last essay is truly about what you take away from the project — an exploration of what you learned about *how* you learn. It is, once again, about the fundamental goal of authentic learning:

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We may take as our guide here John Dewey's observation that the content of a lesson is the least important thing about learning. As he wrote in *Experience and Education*: "Perhaps the greatest of all pedagogical fallacies is the notion that a person learns only what he is studying at the time. Collateral learning in the way of formation of enduring attitudes... may be and often is more important than the spelling lesson or lesson in geography or history... For these attitudes are fundamentally what count in the future." **In other words, the most important thing one learns is always something about *how* one learns.** As Dewey wrote in another place, we learn what we do. ~Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*

You want to brainstorm subjects and approaches for this final step. You can begin that work as soon as you have your project ready to go. Start with a review of the universal writing process:

- Universal Writing Guide | tinyurl.com/sisyphus-writes

Return to the metaphor of the river and the purpose of writing, as well:

- The Writing Process | sisypheanhigh.com/malachite/?p=2758