

Balanced Trees

Part One

Balanced Trees

- Balanced search trees are among the most useful and versatile data structures.
- Many programming languages ship with a balanced tree library.
 - C++: `std::map` / `std::set`
 - Java: `TreeMap` / `TreeSet`
- Many advanced data structures are layered on top of balanced trees.
 - We'll see several later in the quarter!

Where We're Going

- ***B-Trees (Today)***
 - A simple type of balanced tree developed for block storage.
- ***Red/Black Trees (Today/Thursday)***
 - The canonical balanced binary search tree.
- ***Augmented Search Trees (Thursday)***
 - Adding extra information to balanced trees to supercharge the data structure.

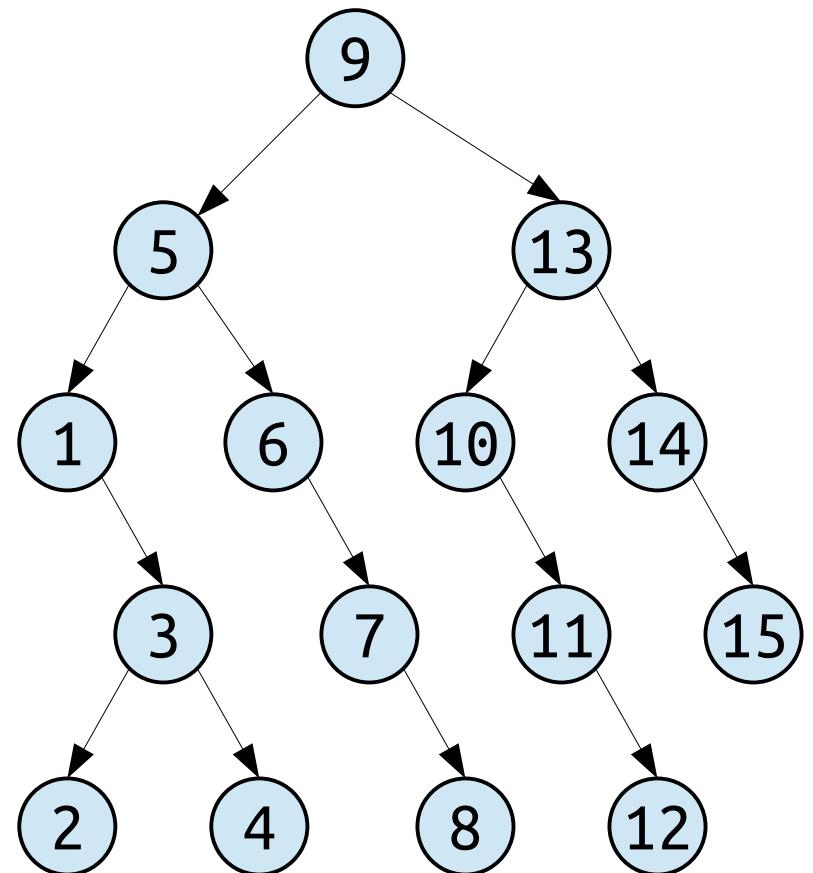
Outline for Today

- ***BST Review***
 - Refresher on basic BST concepts and runtimes.
- ***Overview of Red/Black Trees***
 - What we're building toward.
- ***B-Trees and 2-3-4 Trees***
 - Simple balanced trees, in depth.
- ***Intuiting Red/Black Trees***
 - A much better feel for red/black trees.

A Quick BST Review

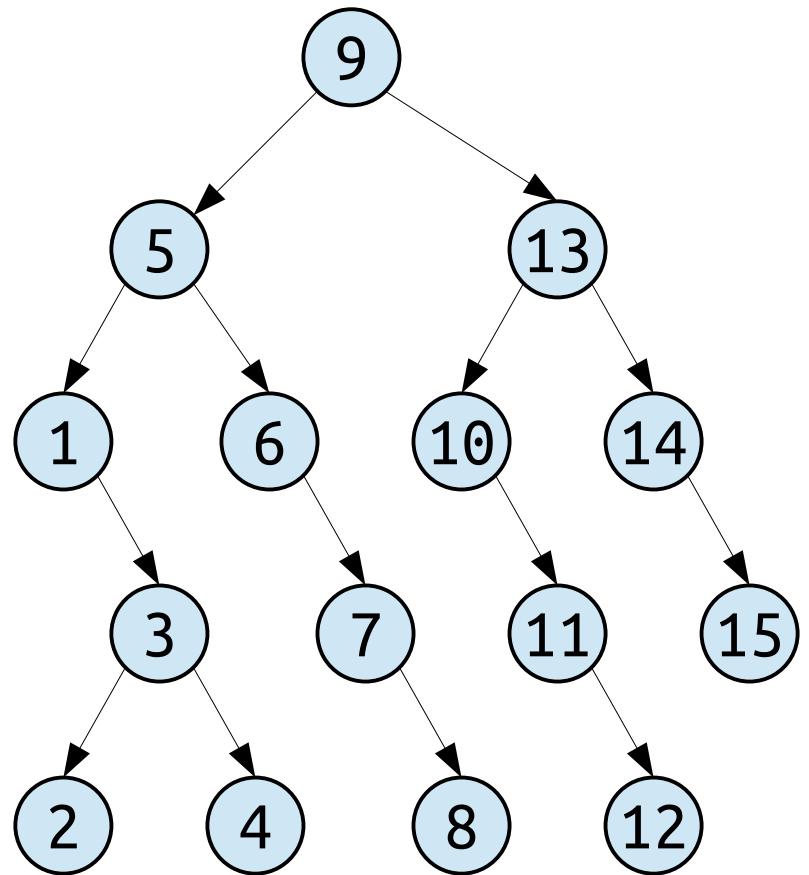
Binary Search Trees

- A ***binary search tree*** is a binary tree with the following properties:
 - Each node in the BST stores a ***key***, and optionally, some auxiliary information.
 - The key of every node in a BST is strictly greater than all keys to its left and strictly smaller than all keys to its right.
- ***Note:*** Keys and *nodes* are related but are not synonymous. You'll see why later.

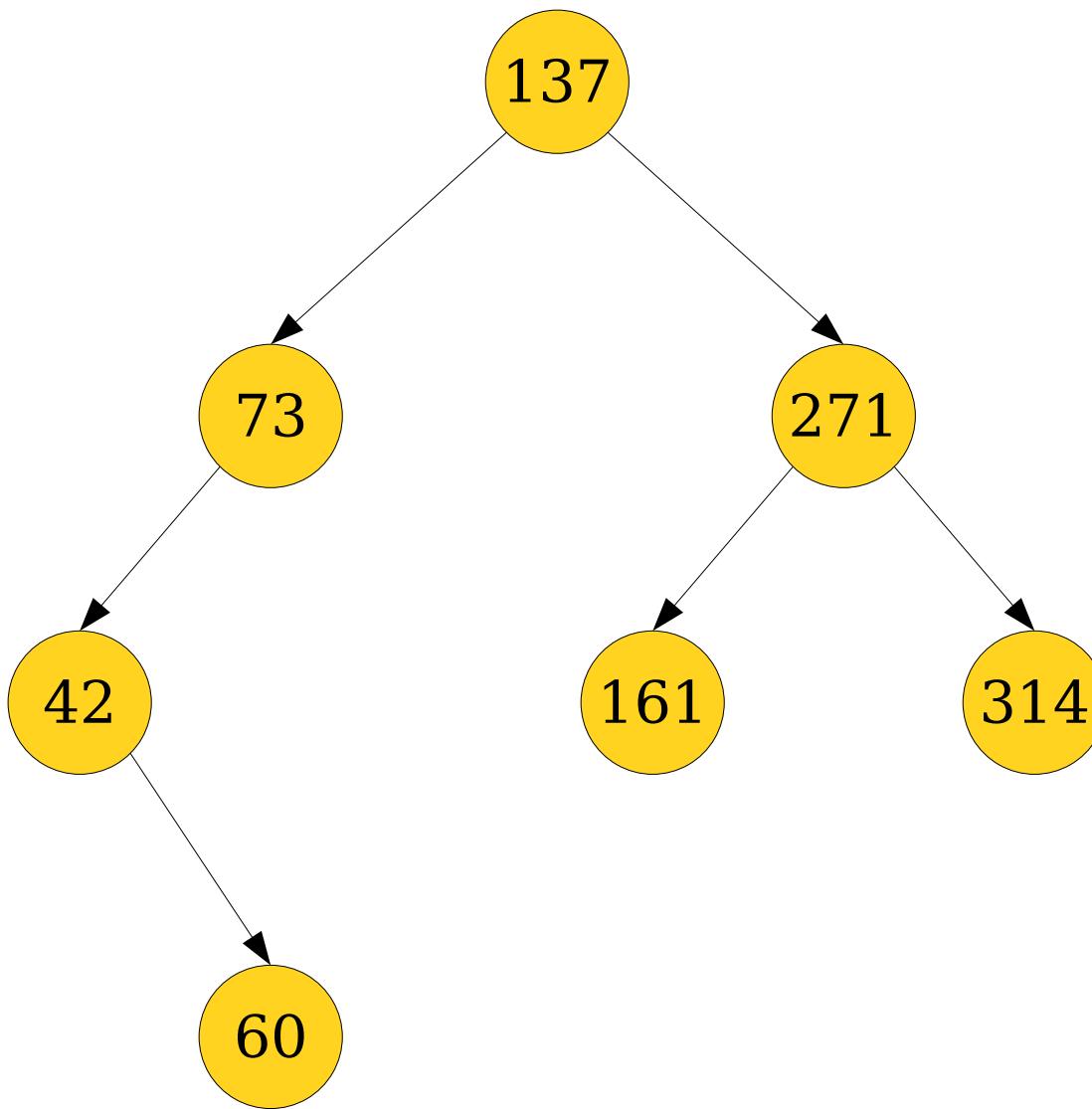


Binary Search Trees

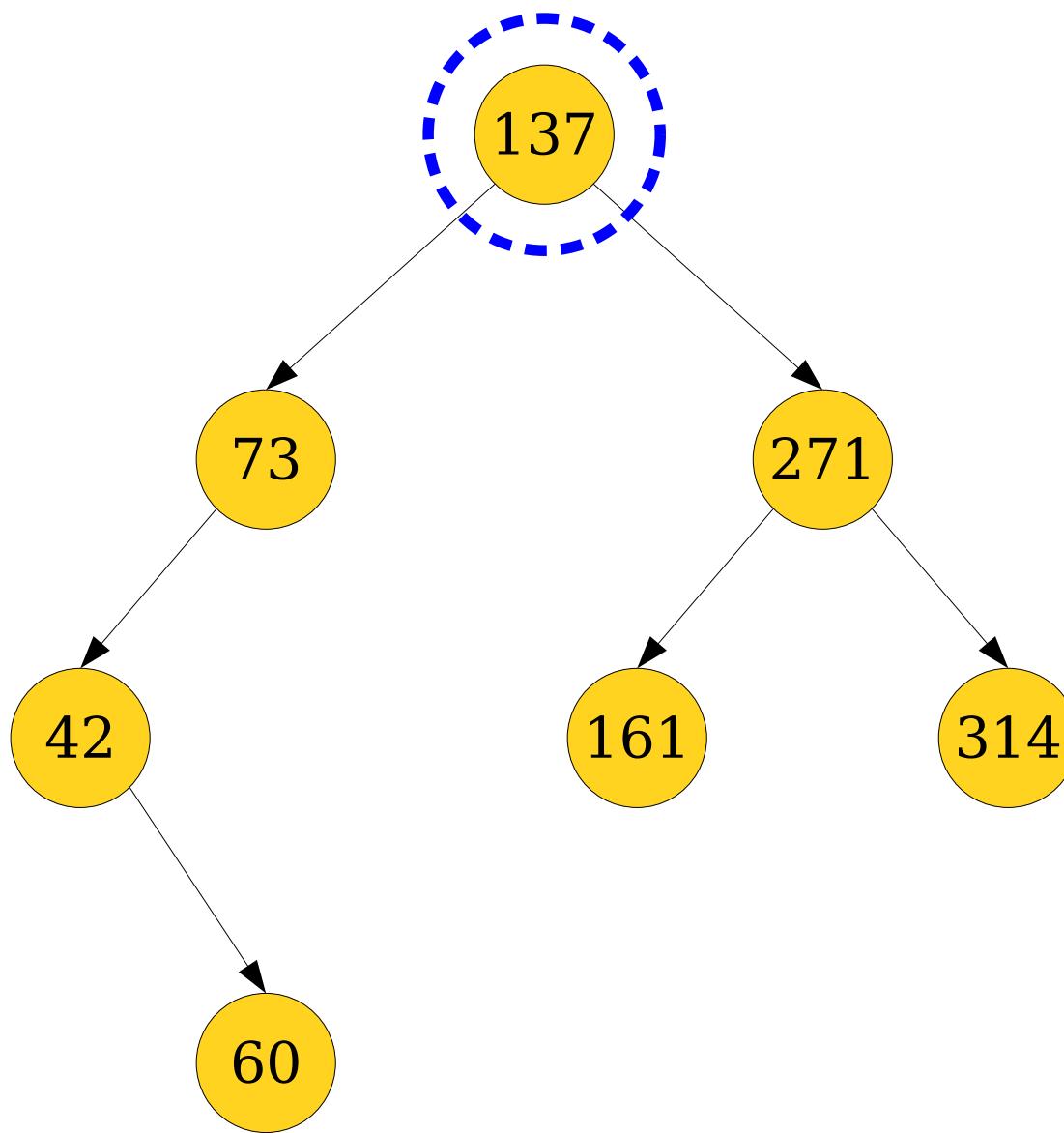
- The **height** of a binary search tree is the length of the longest path from the root to a leaf, measured in the number of *edges*.
 - A tree with one node has height 0.
 - A tree with no nodes has height -1, by convention.
- The height of a BST bounds the costs of most basic operations (search, insert, lookup, successor, max, etc.)



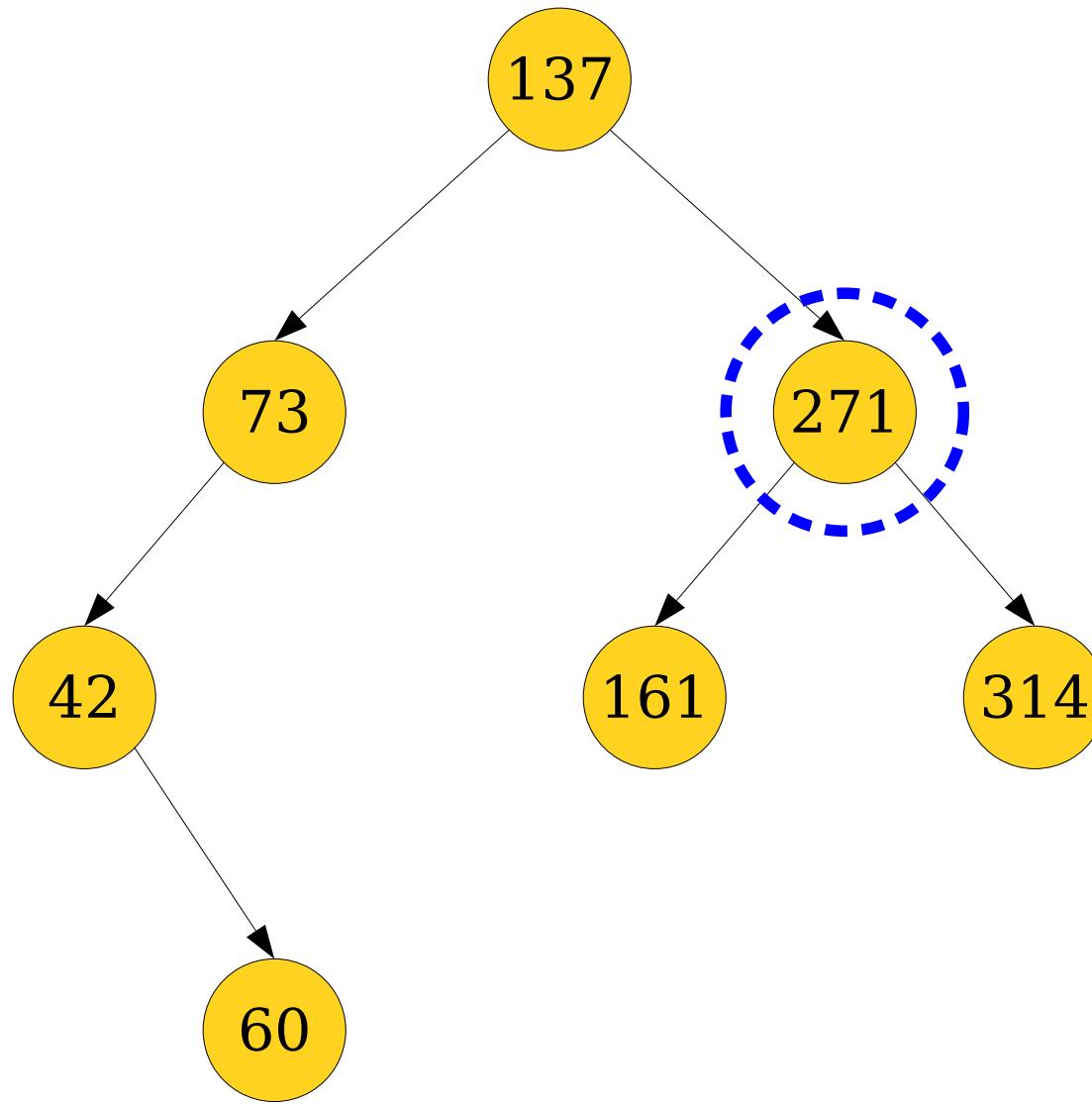
Searching a BST



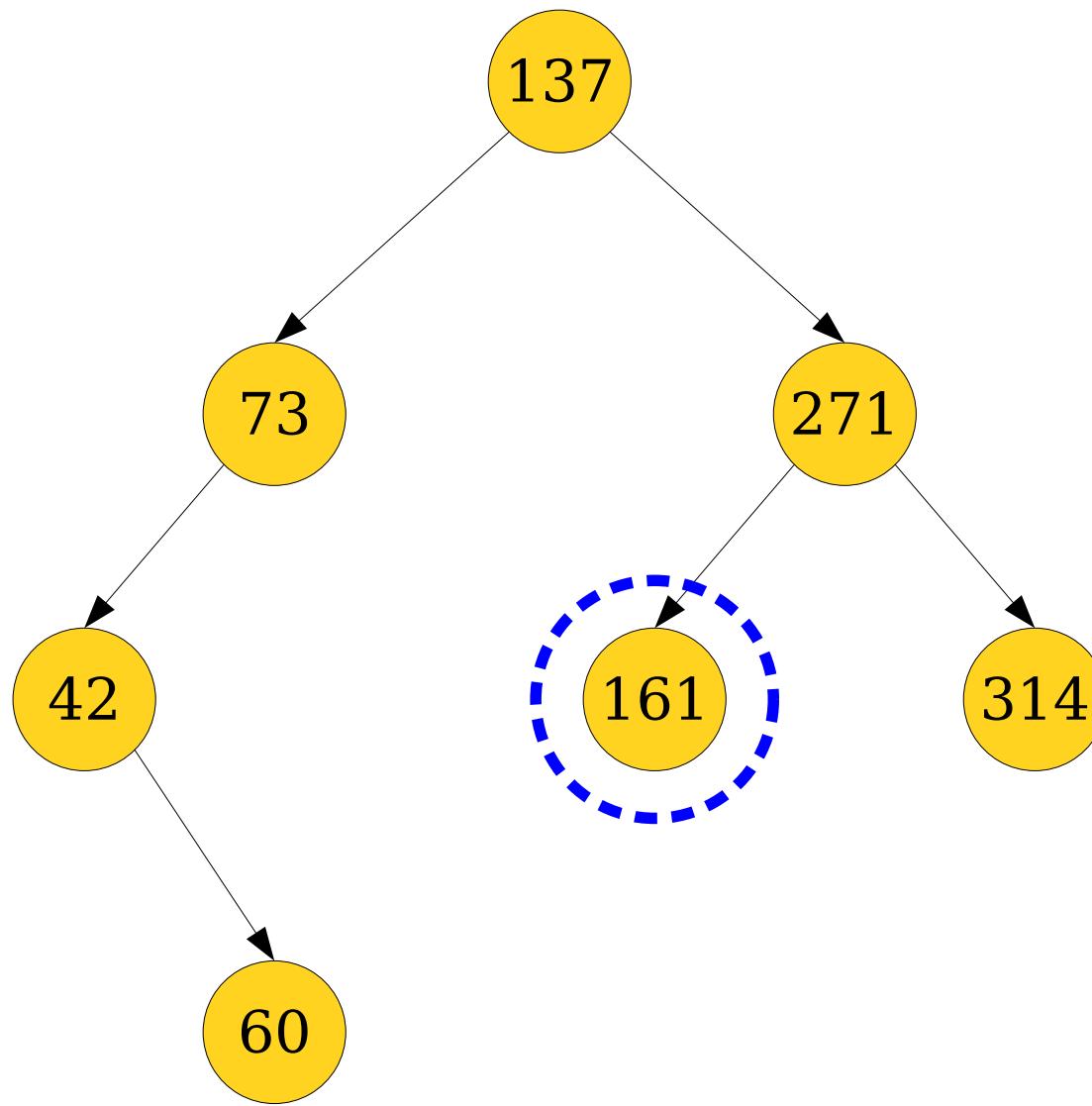
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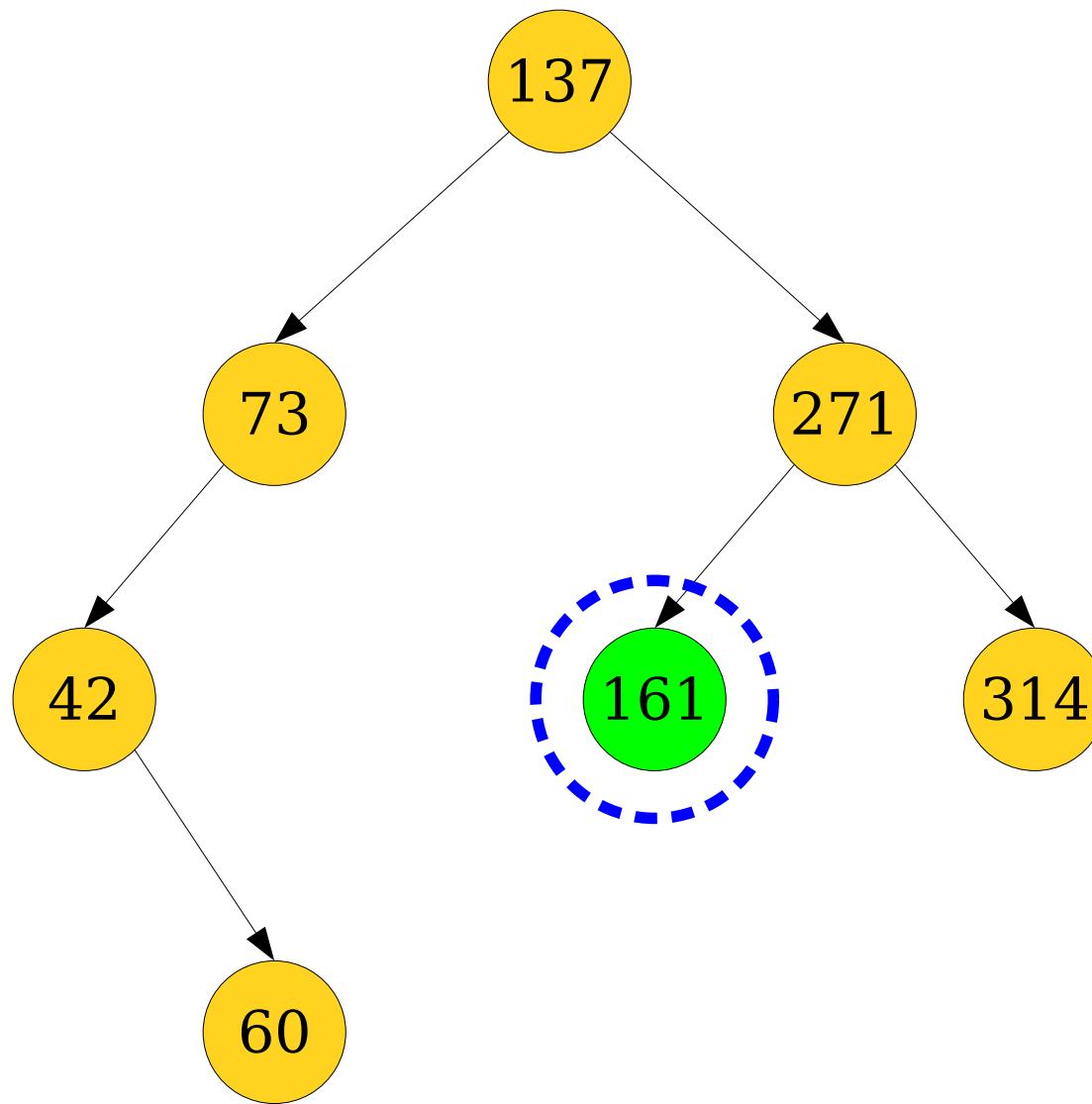
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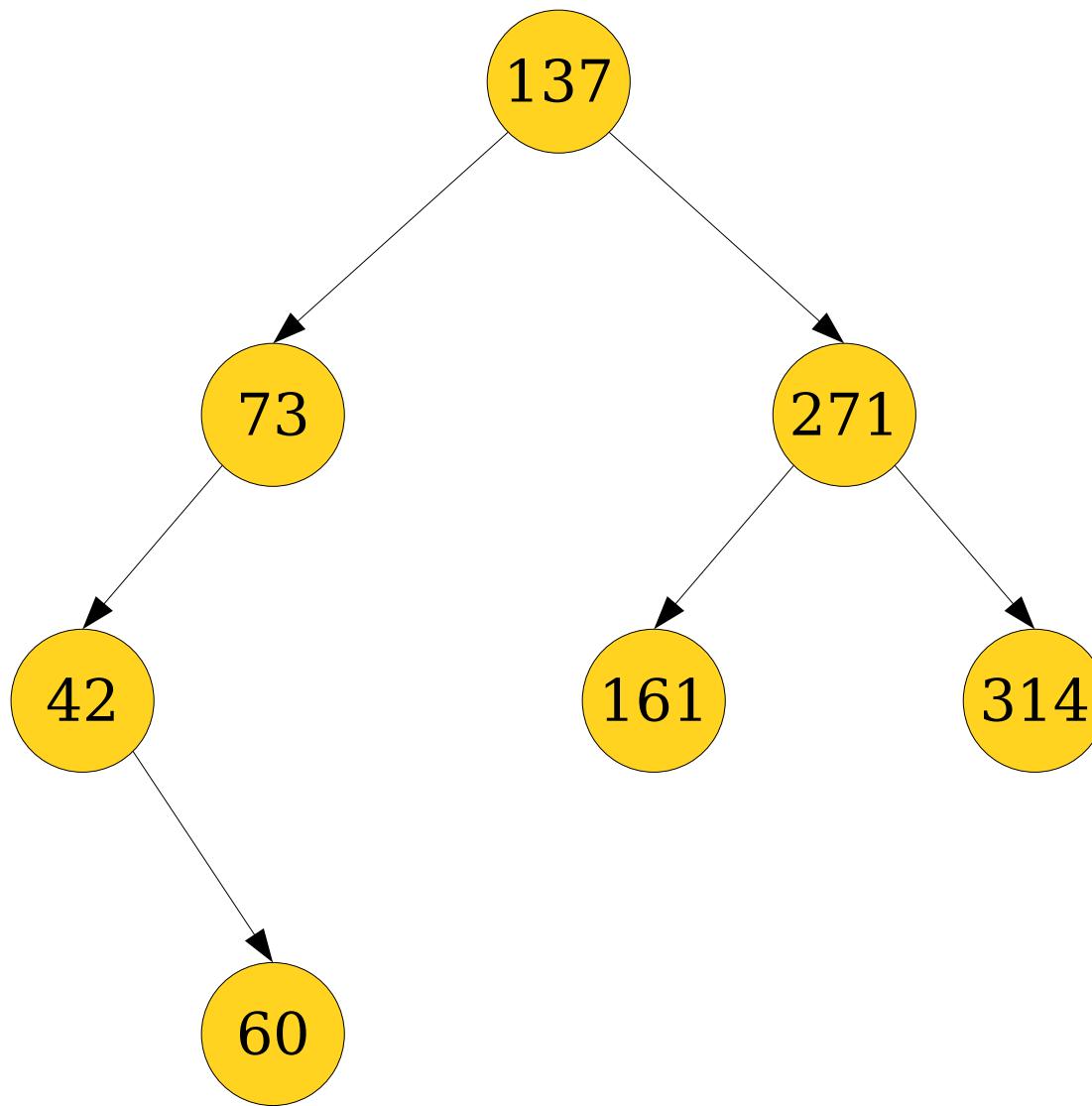
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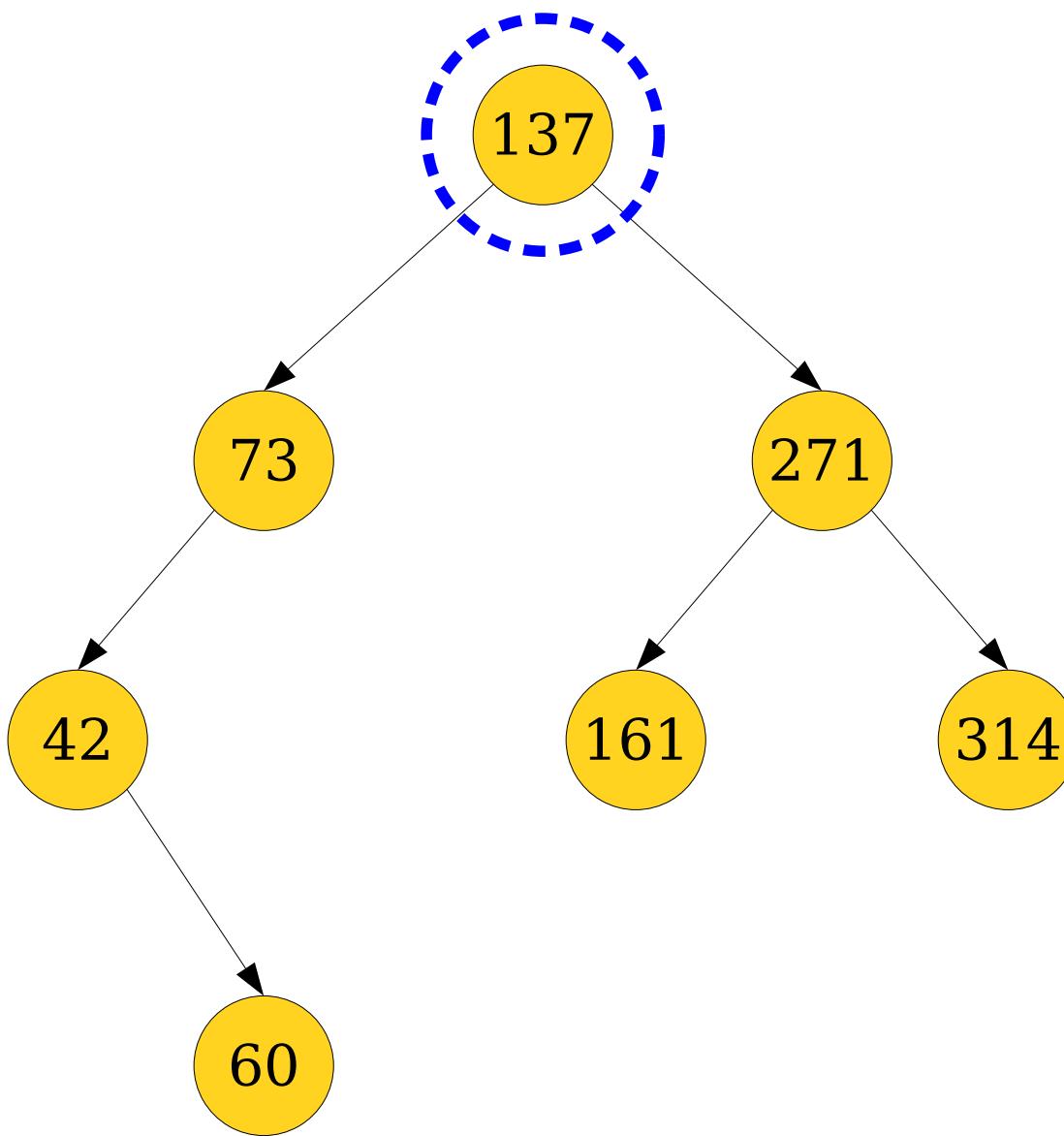
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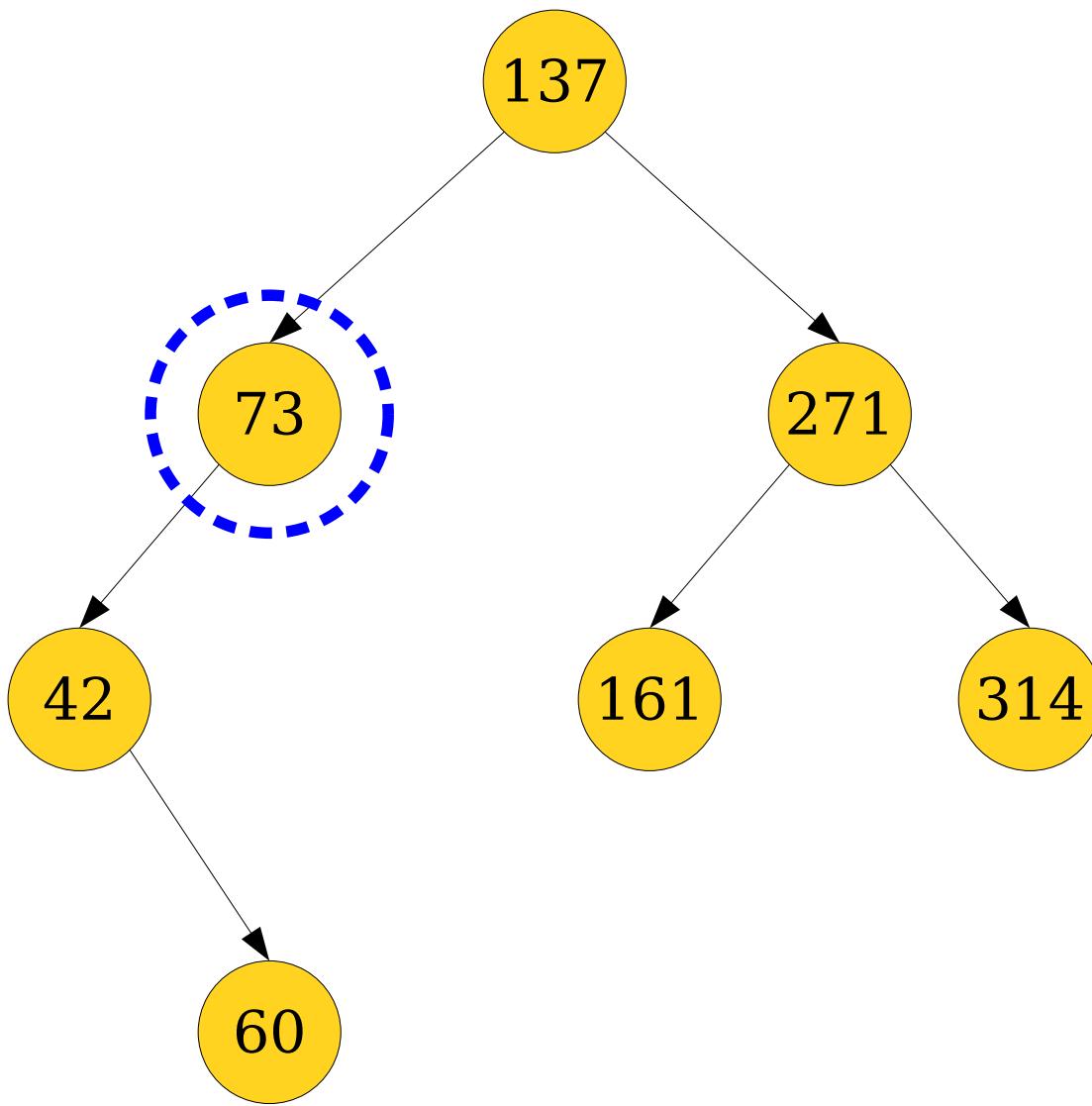
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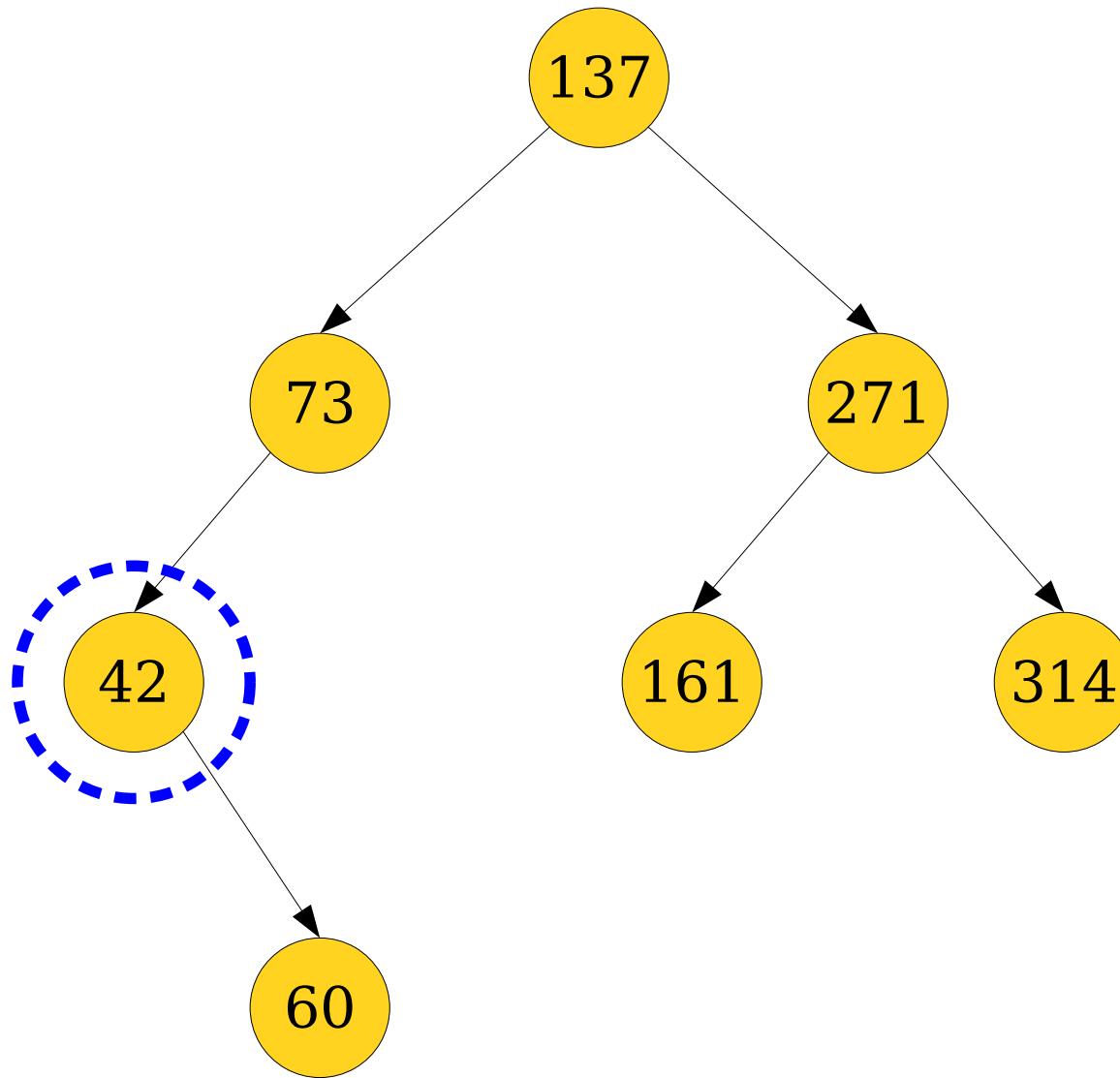
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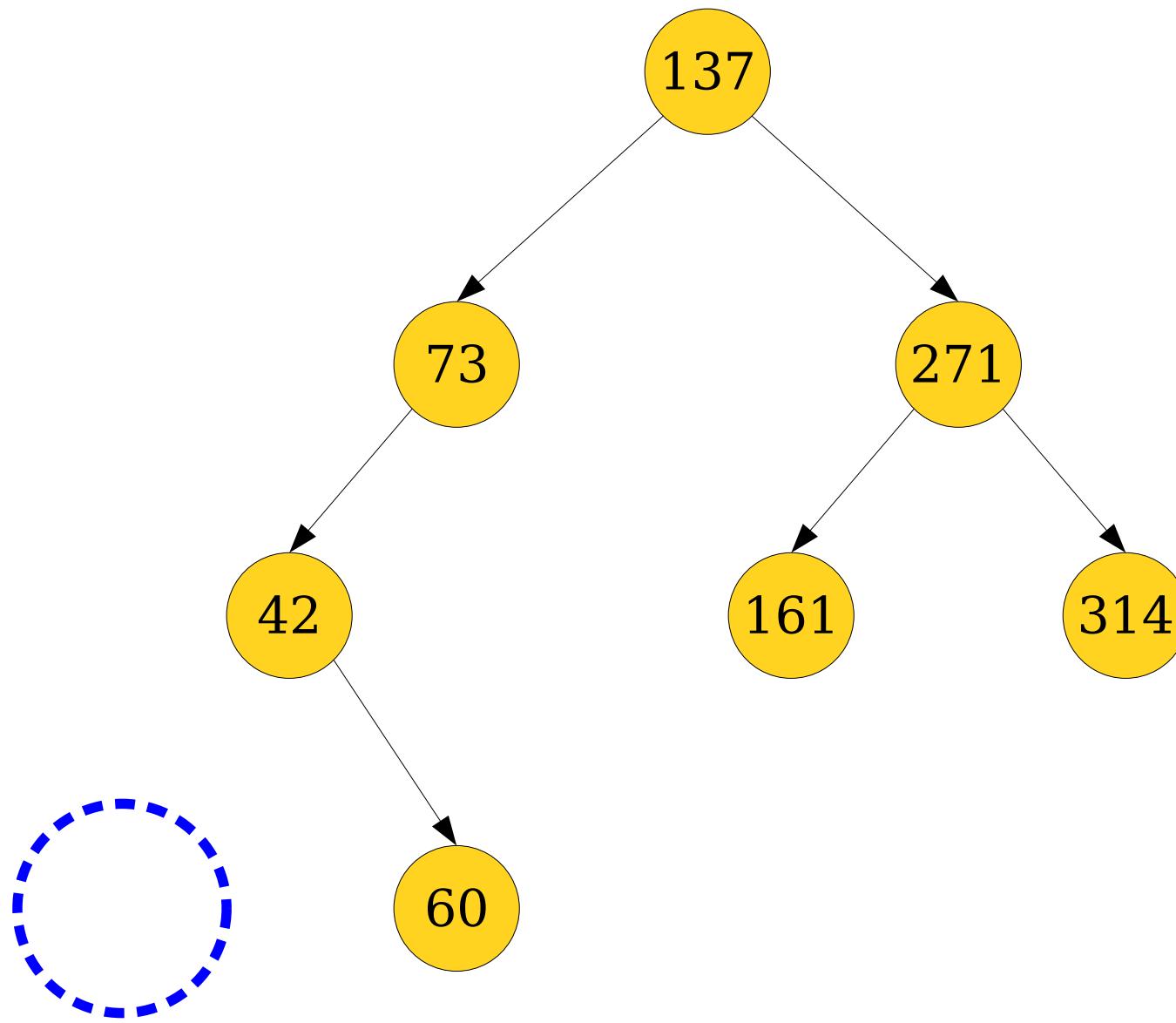
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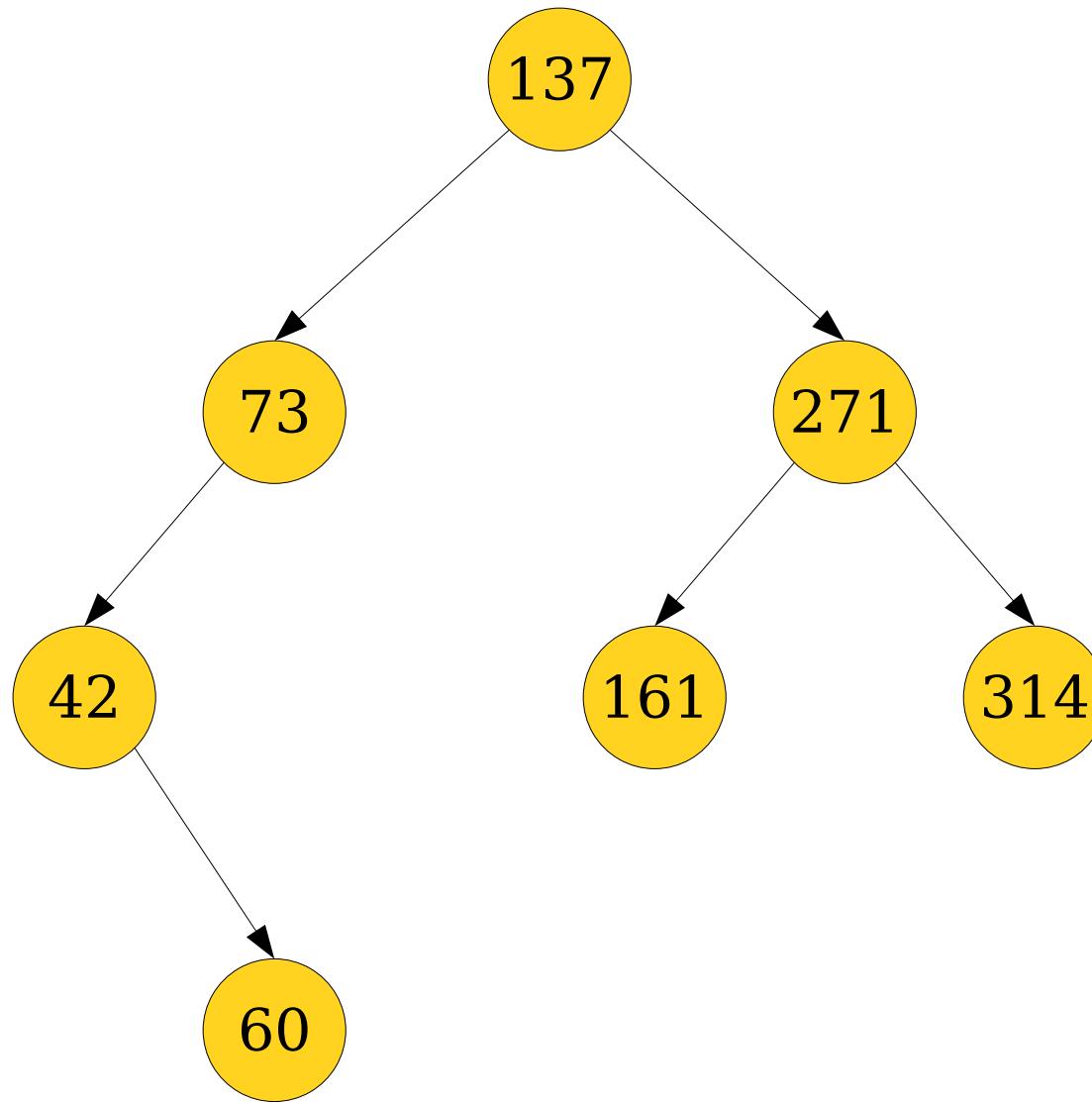


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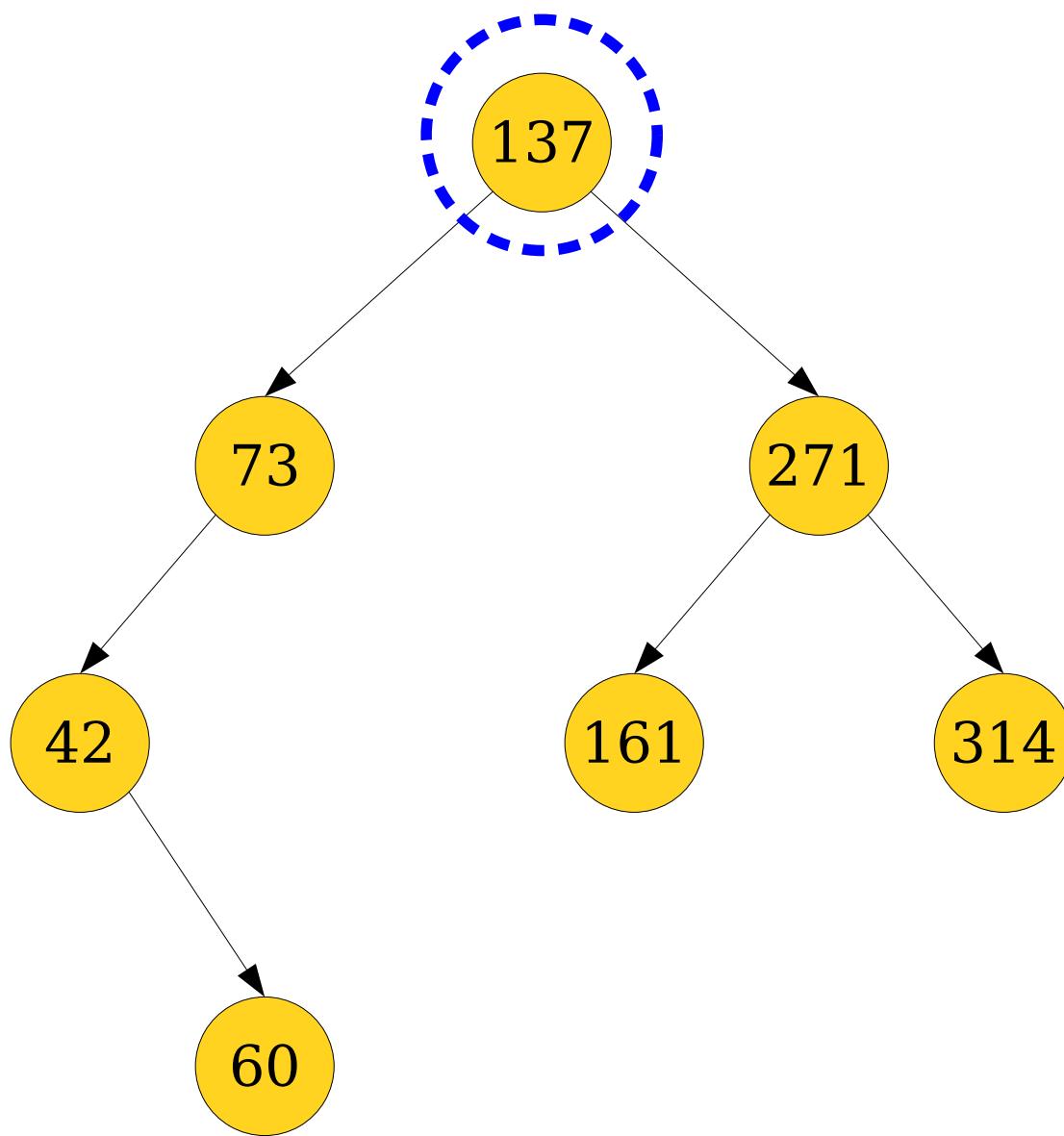


Inserting into a BST

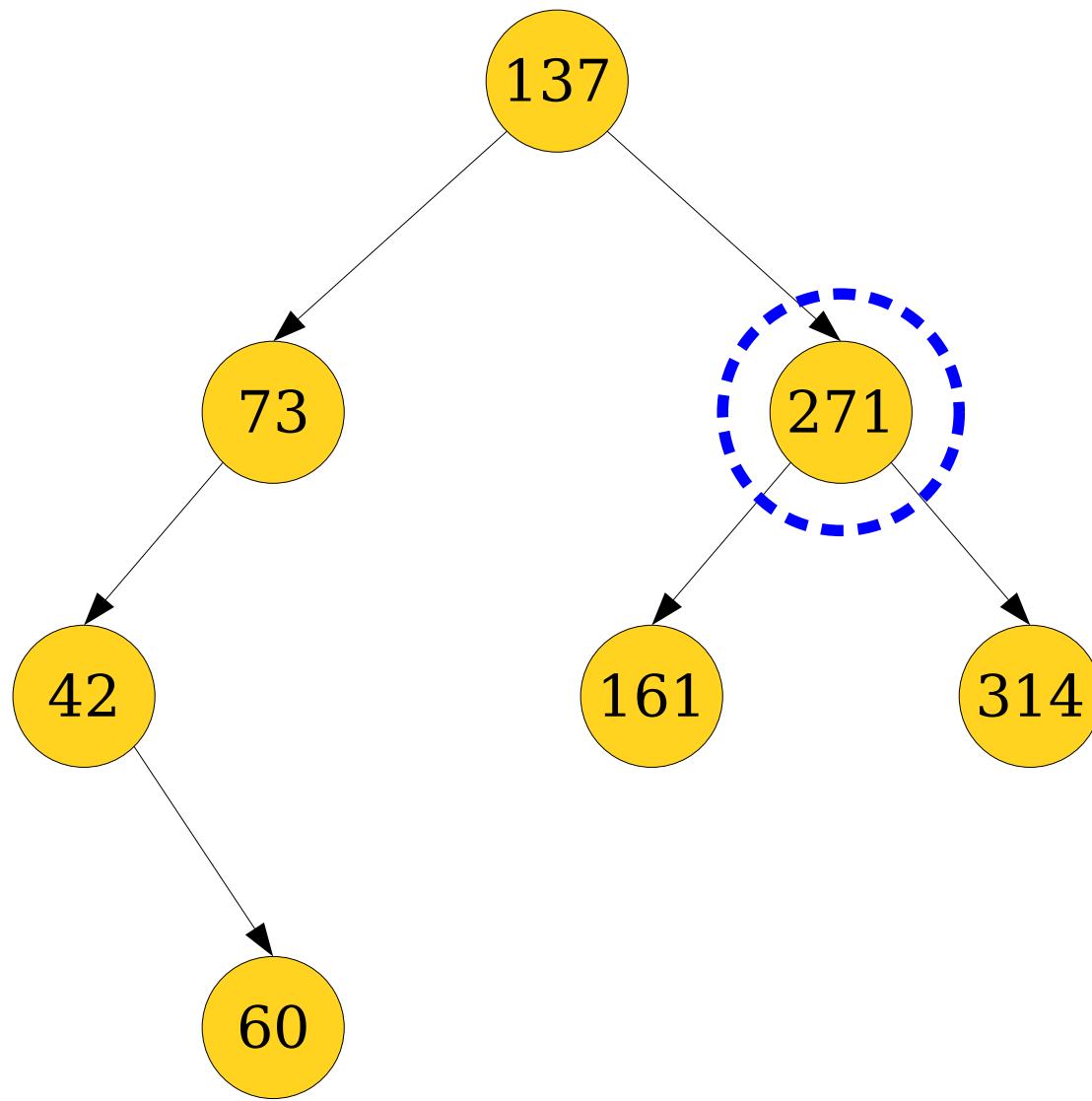
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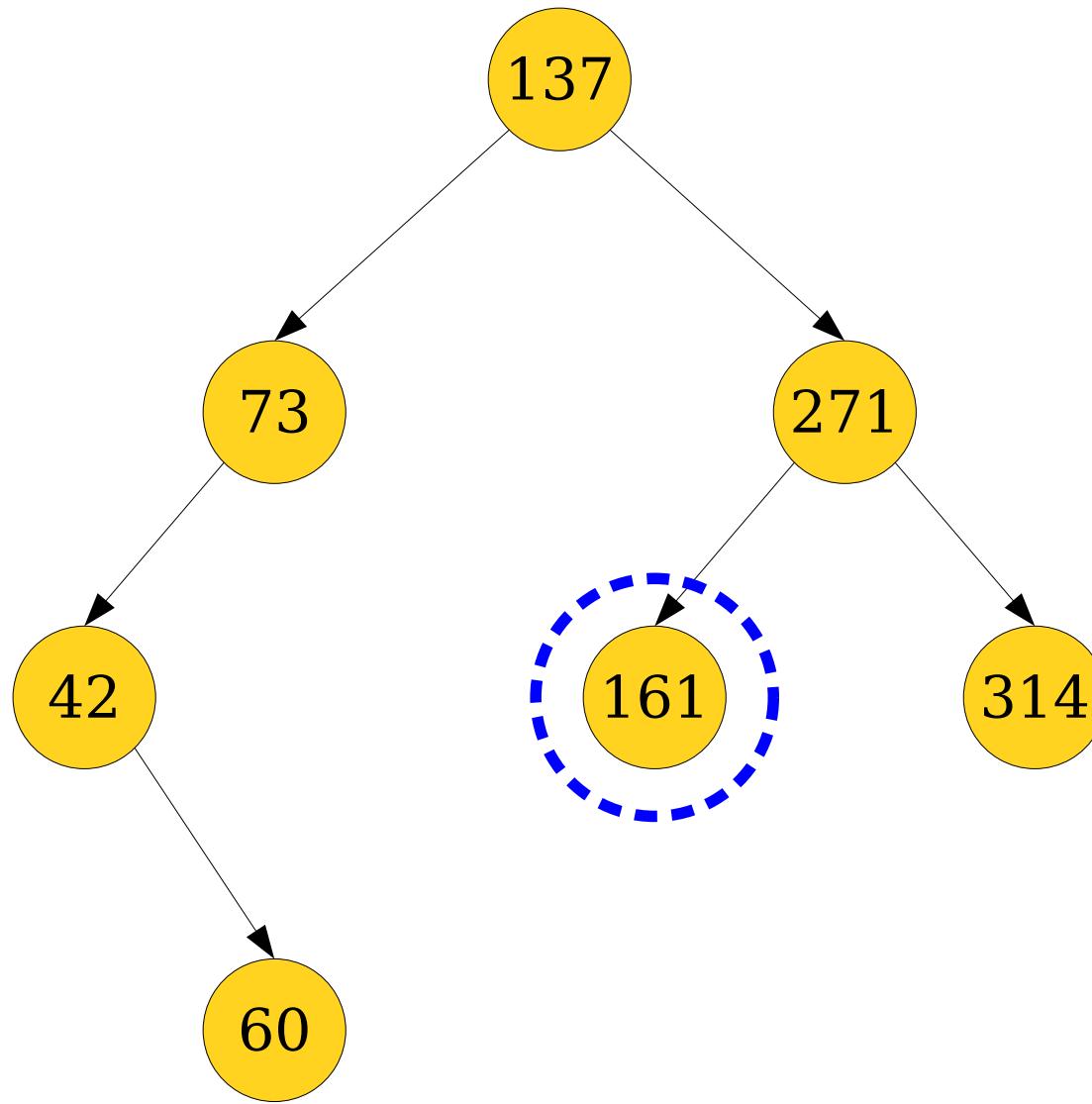
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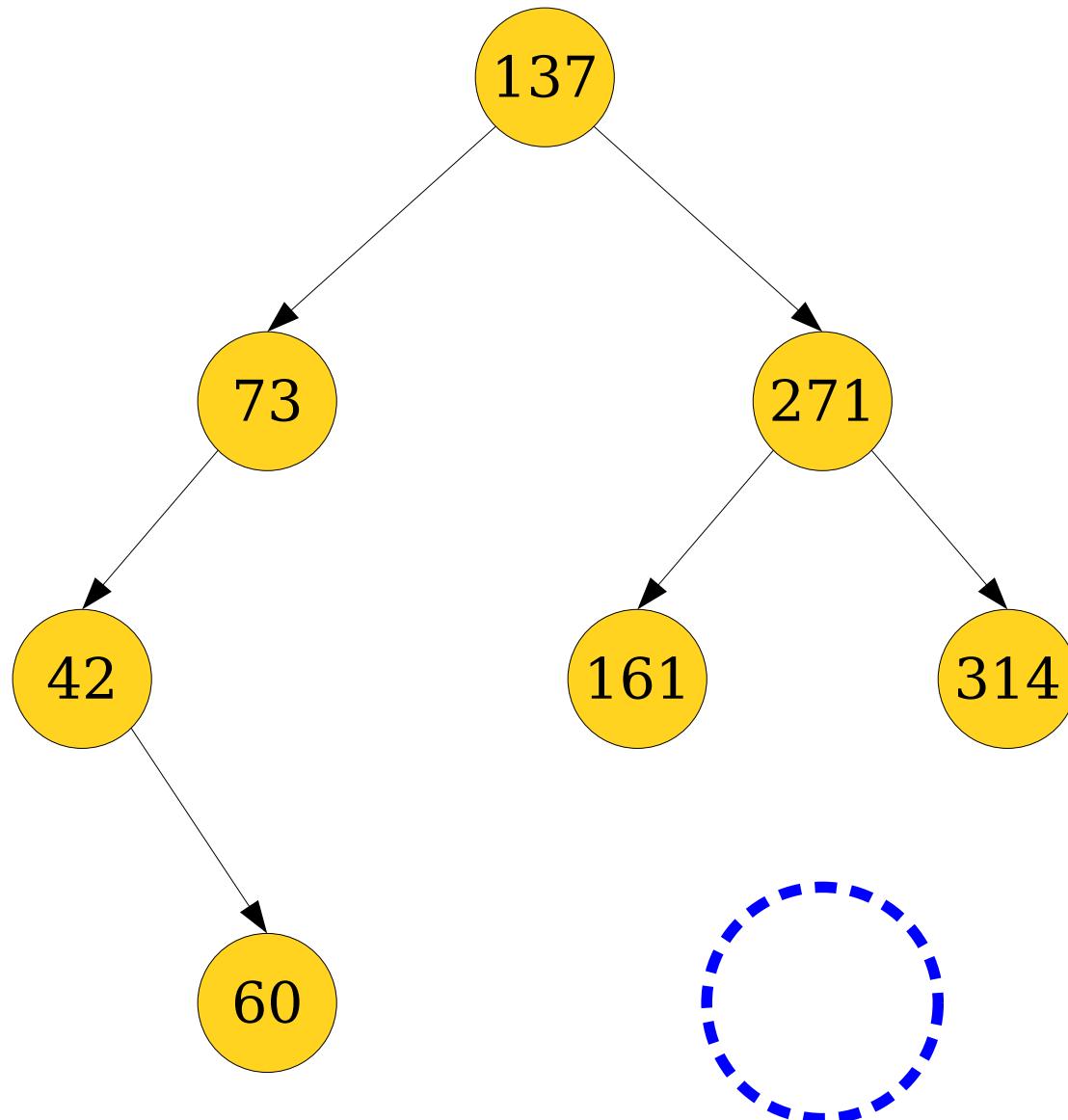
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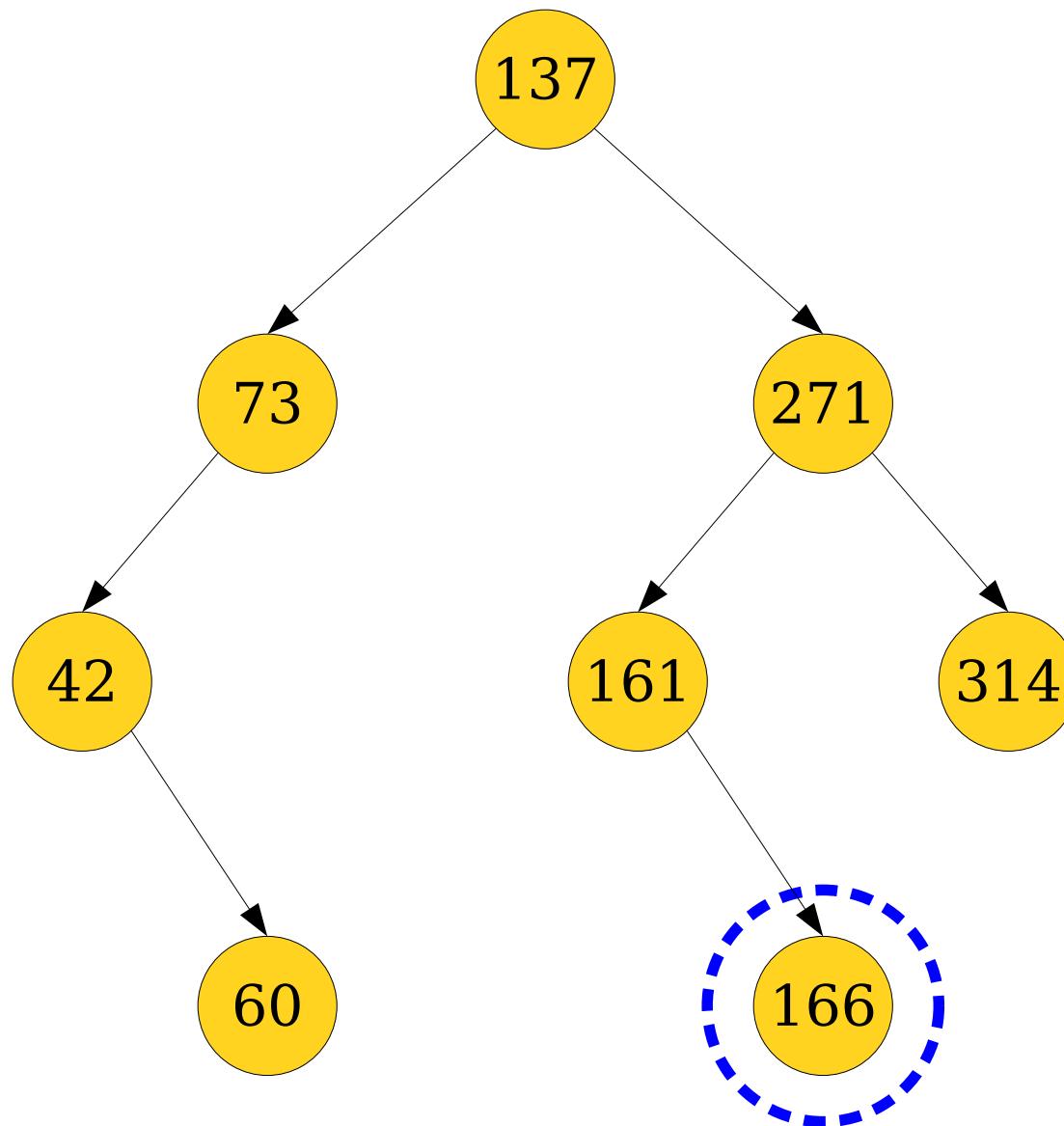
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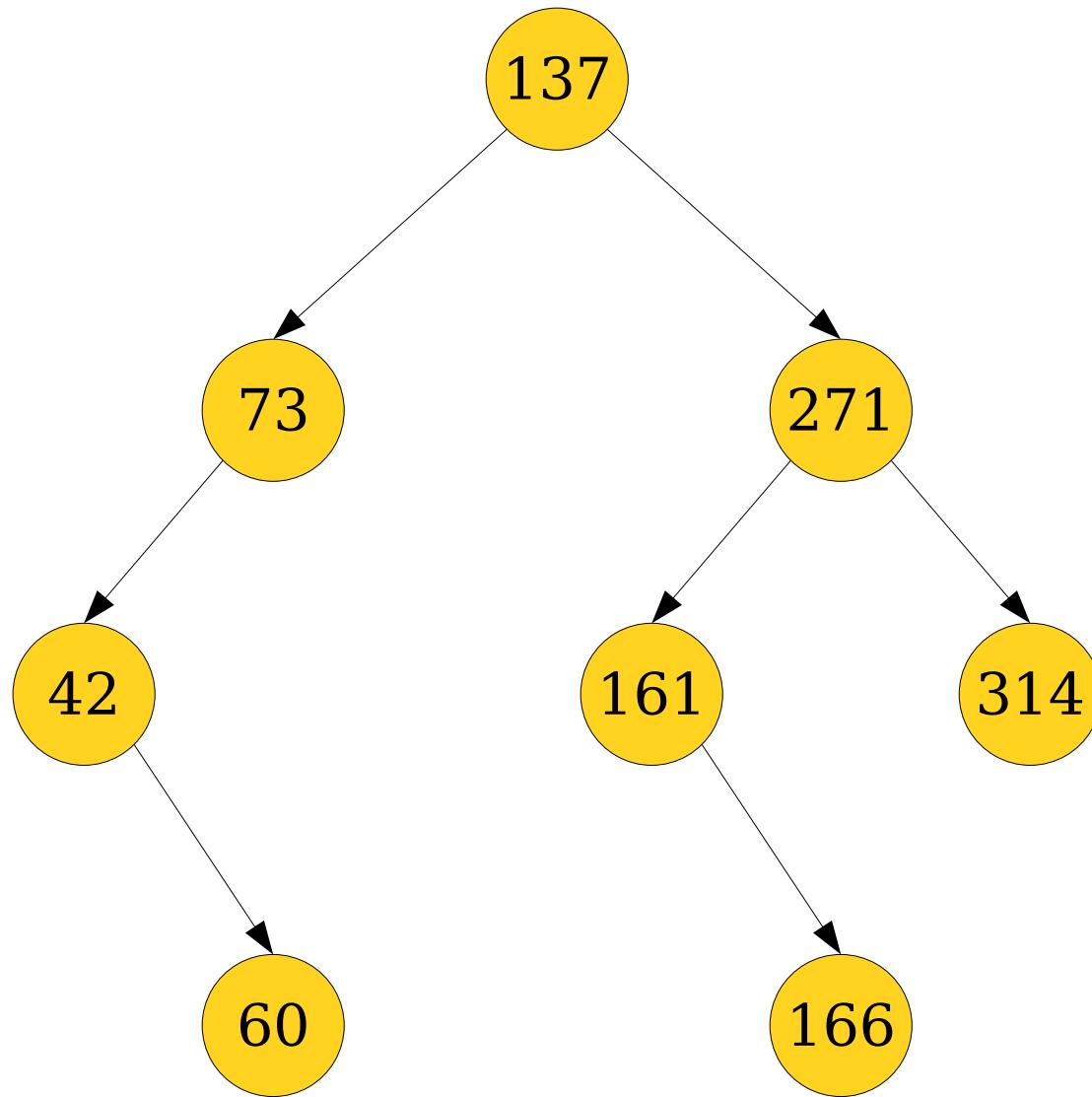
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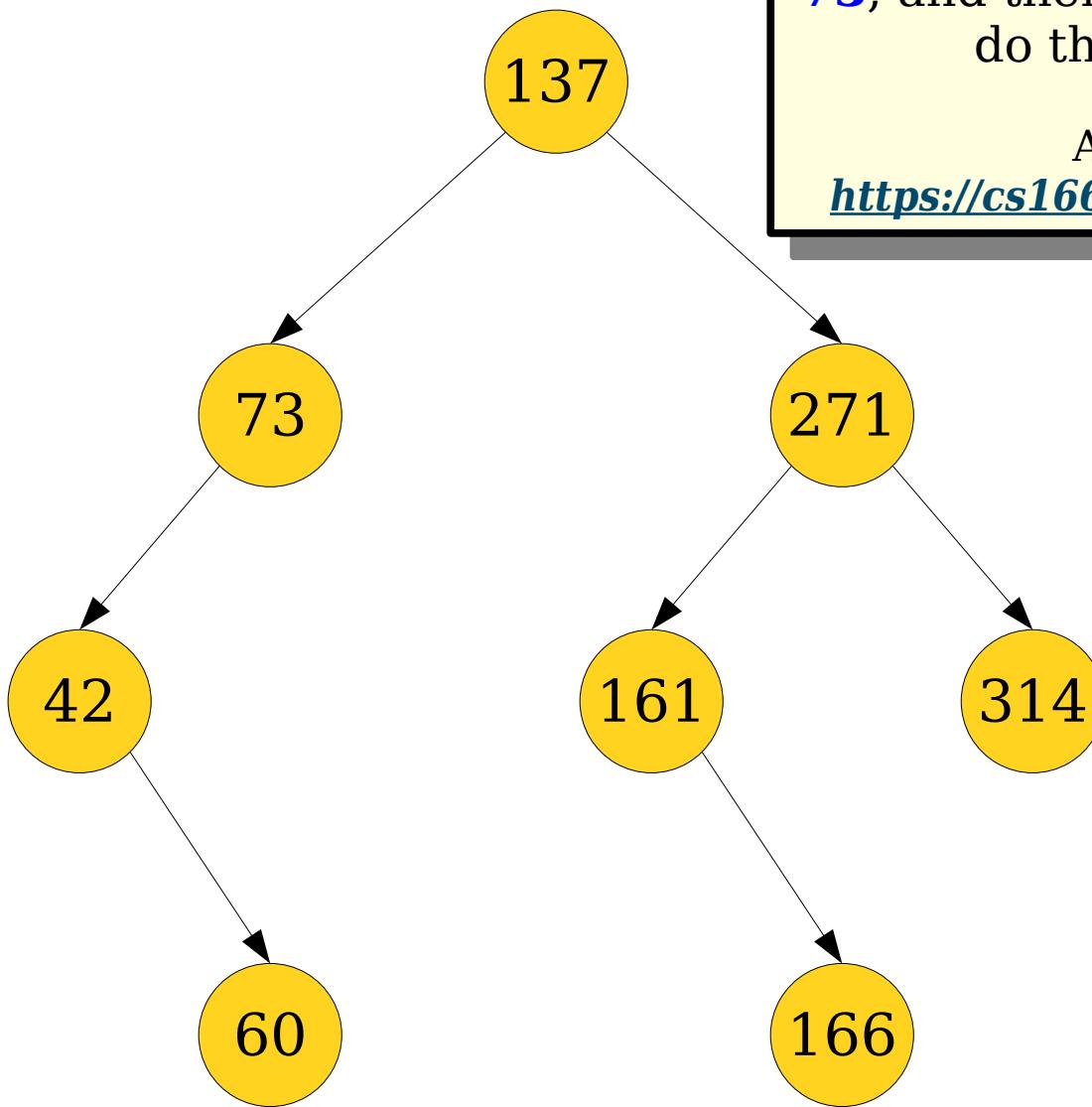


Inserting into a BST



Deleting from a BST

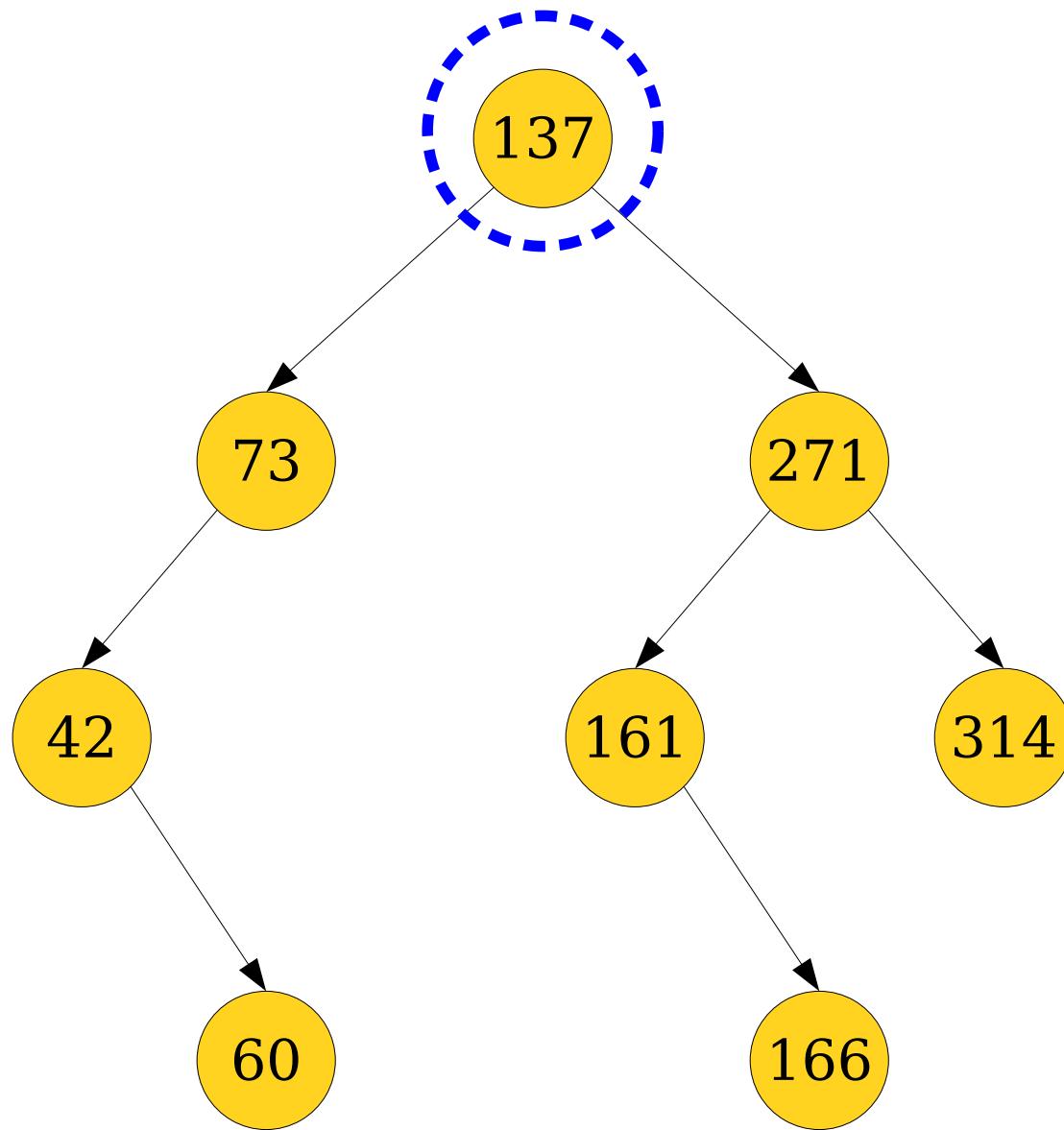
Deleting from a BST



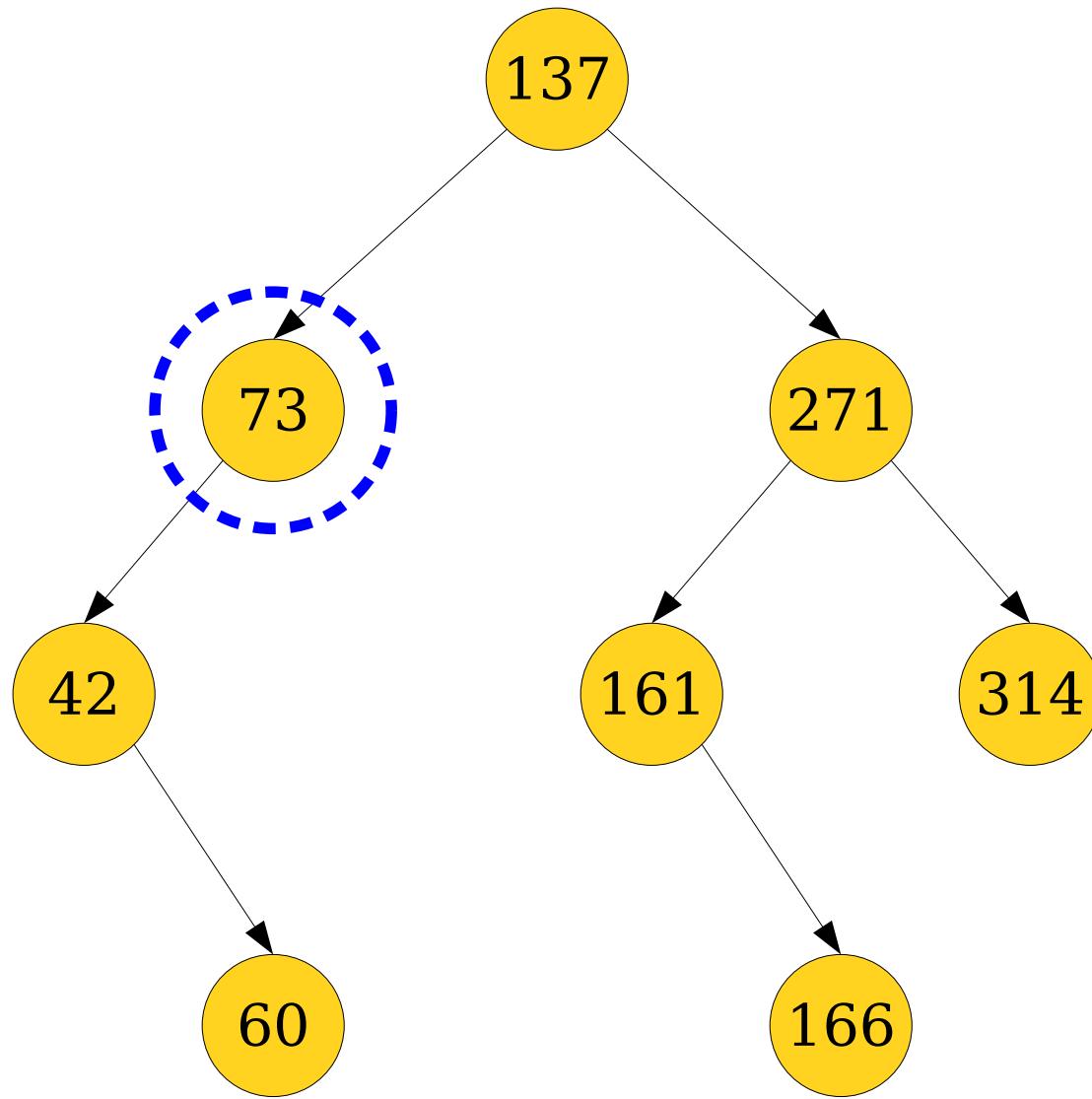
Delete **60** from this tree, then **73**, and then **137**. How did you do the deletions?

Answer at
<https://cs166.stanford.edu/pollev>

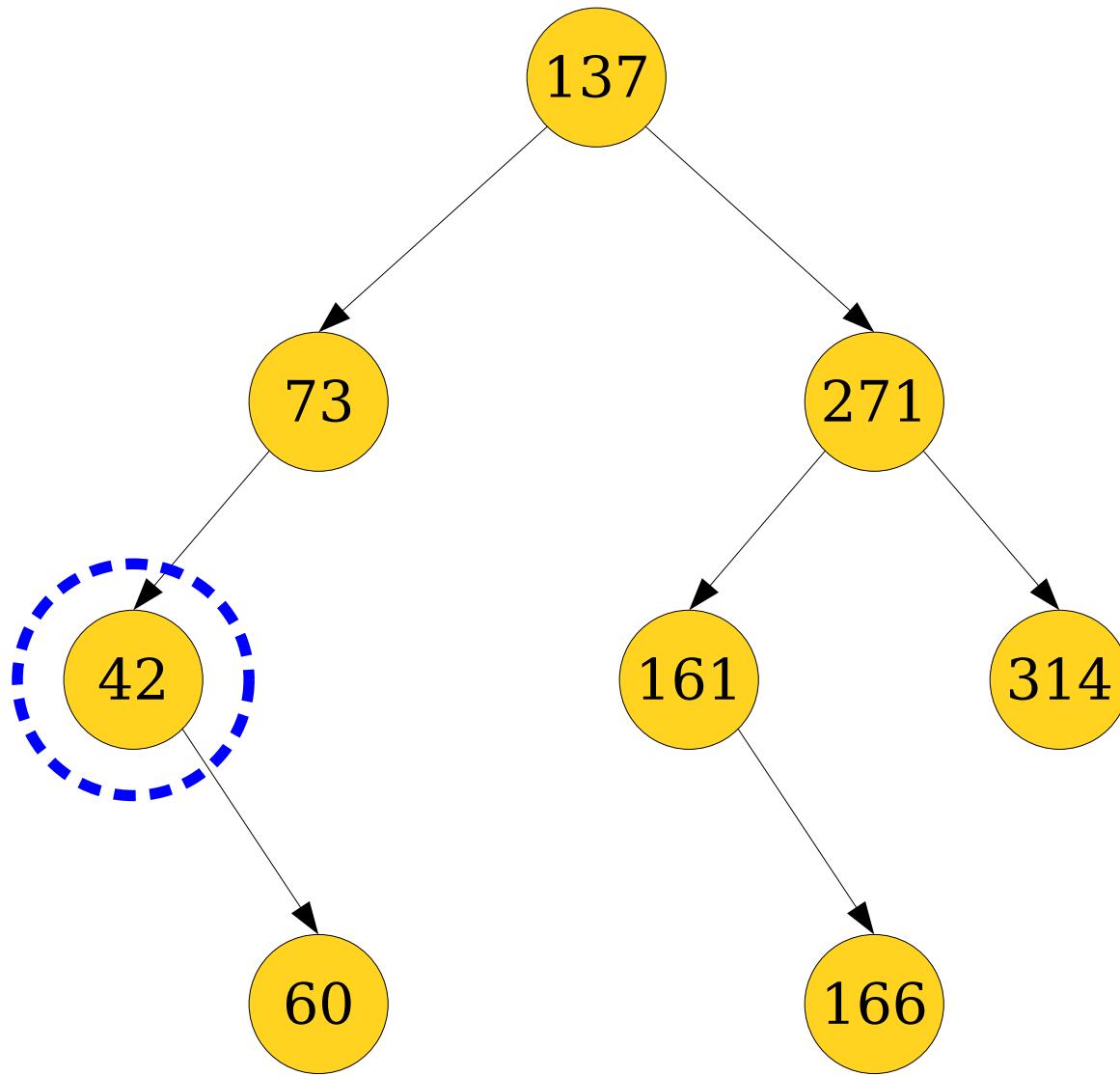
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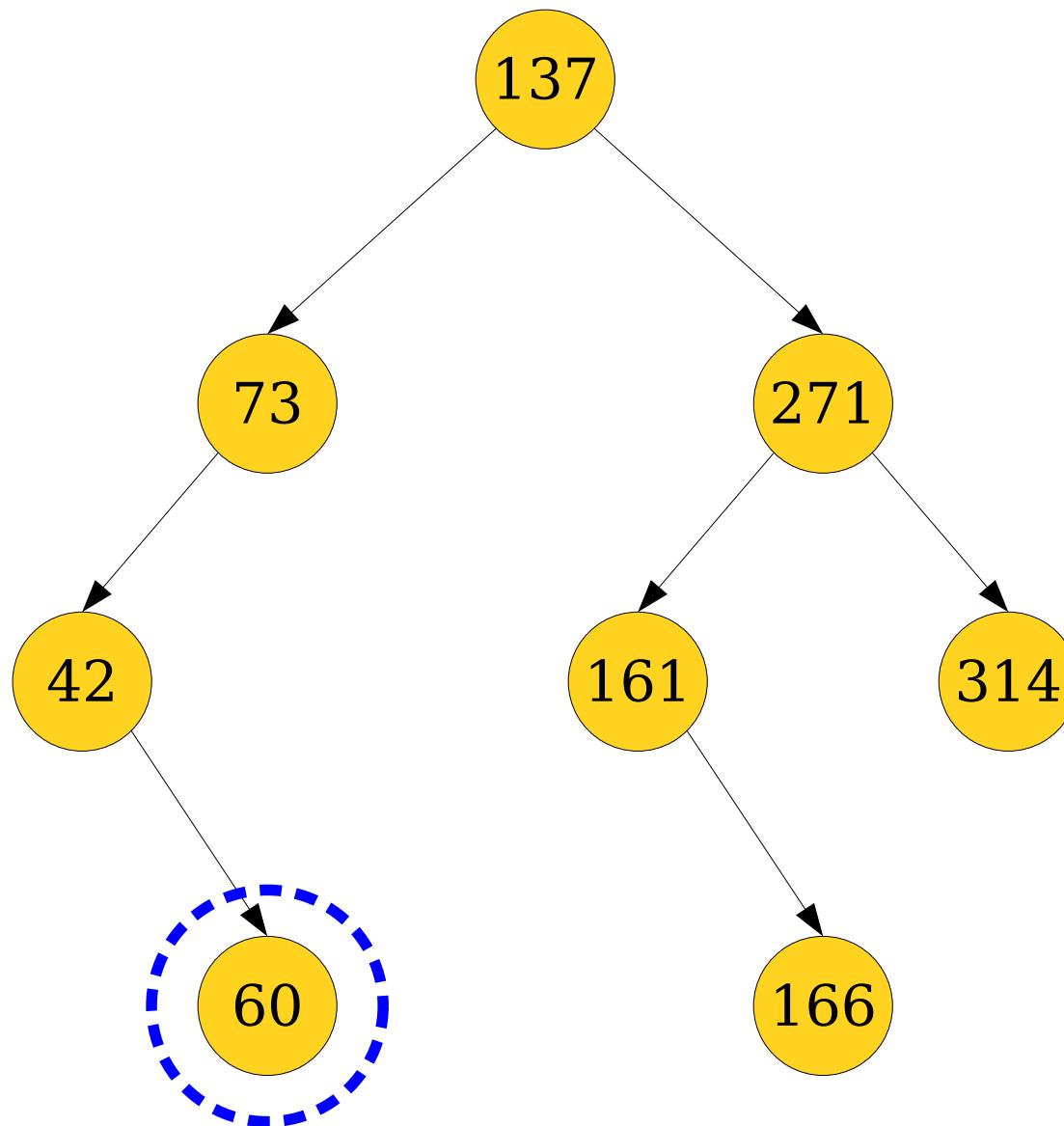
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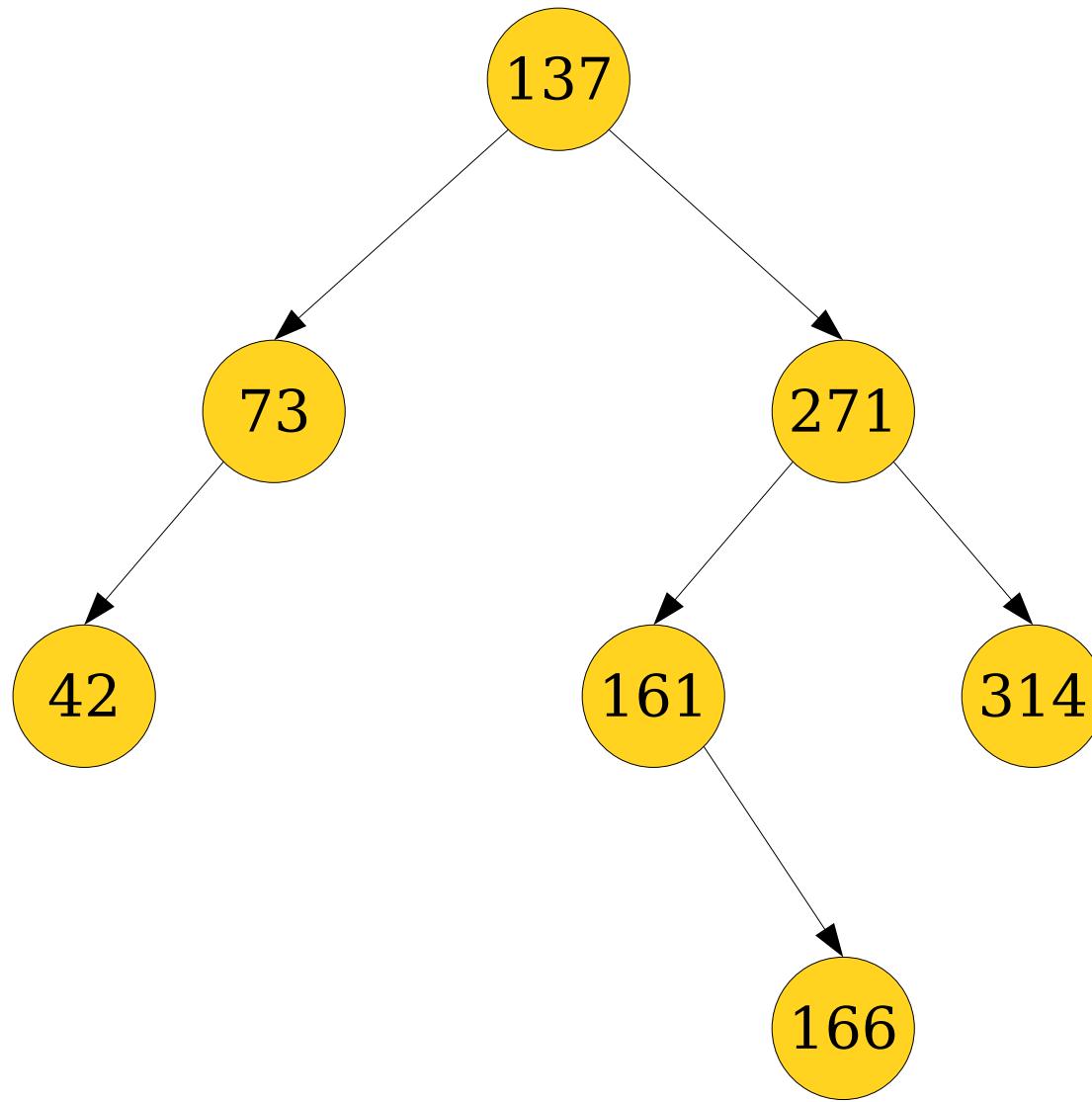
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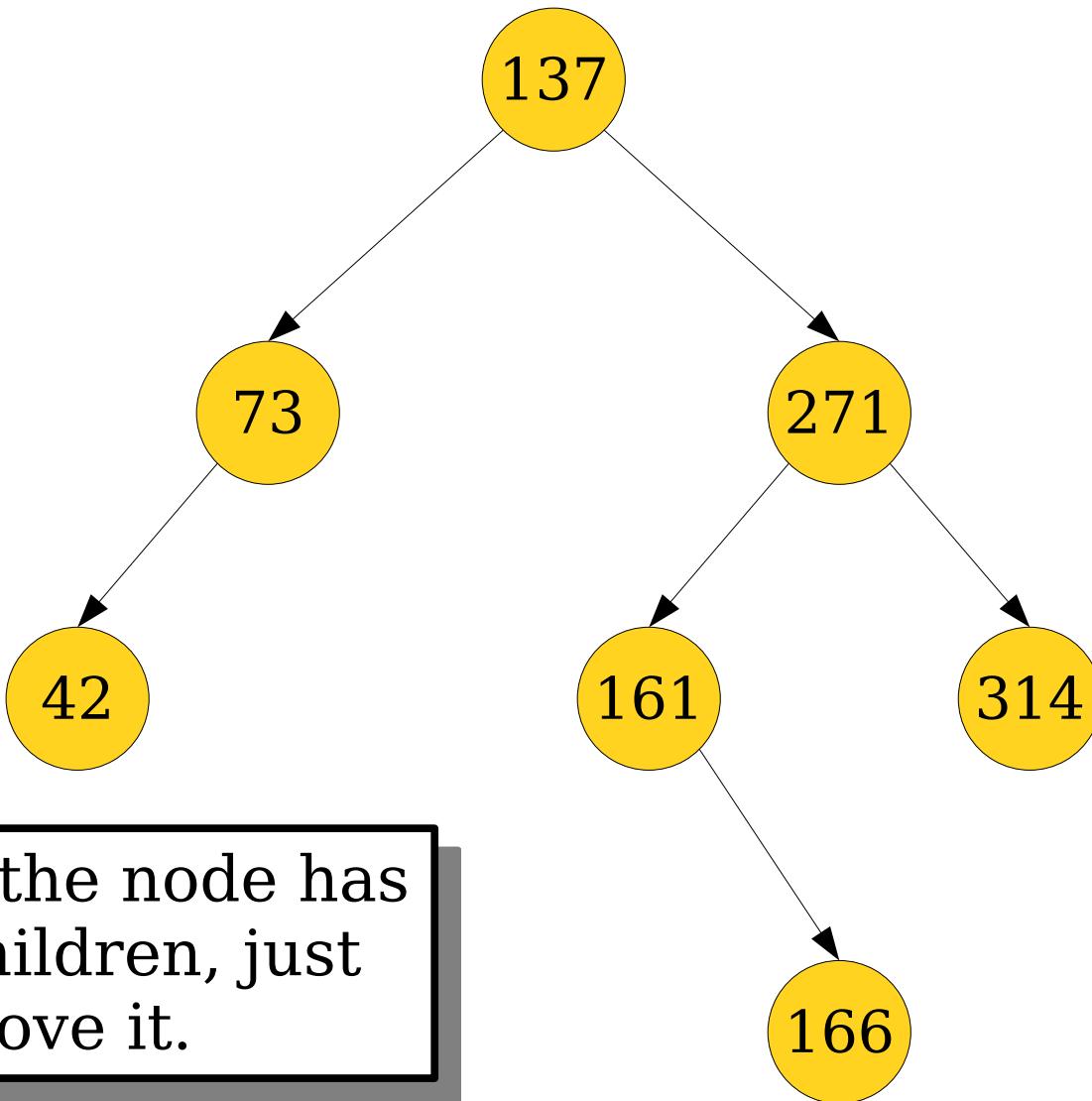
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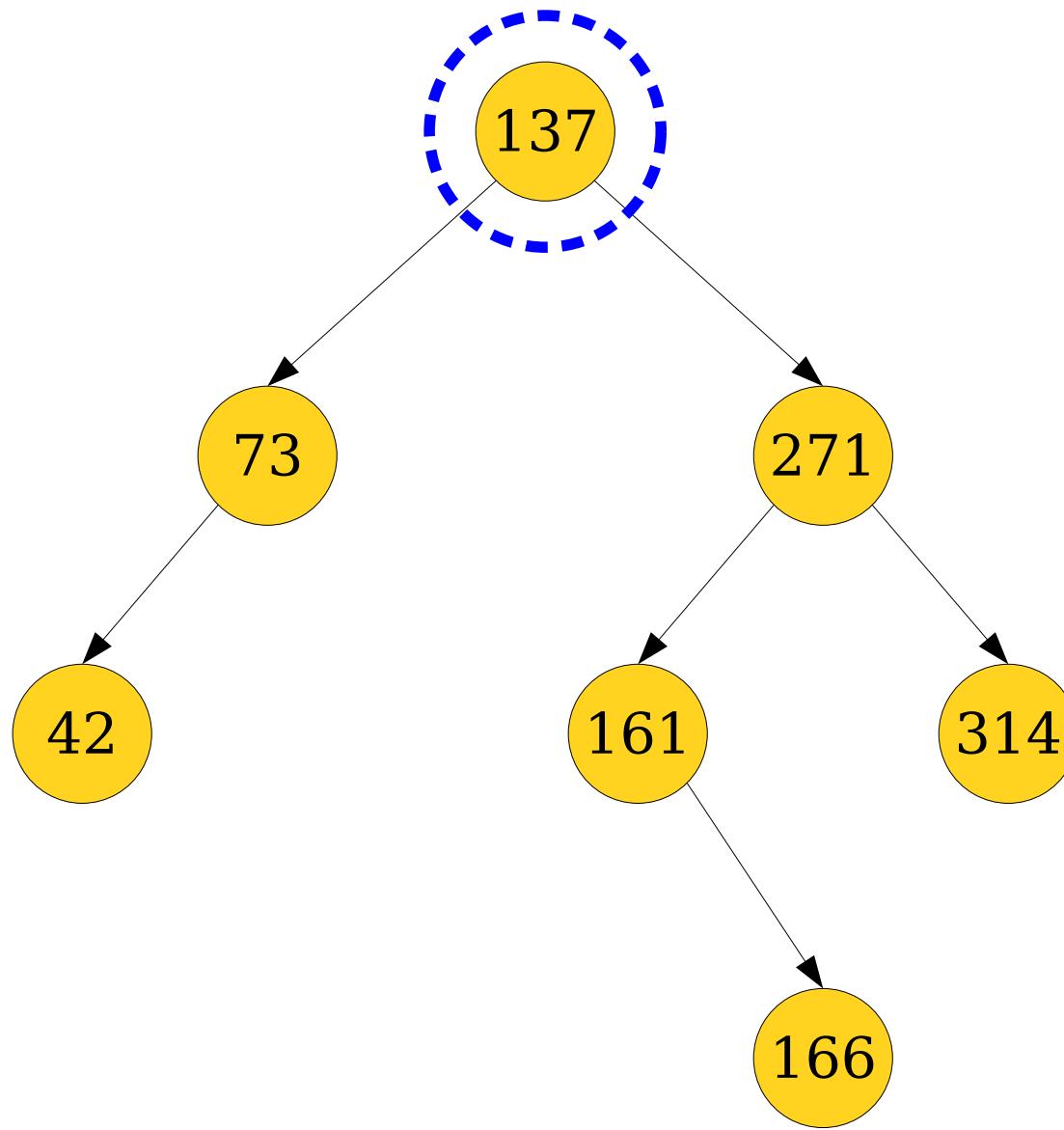


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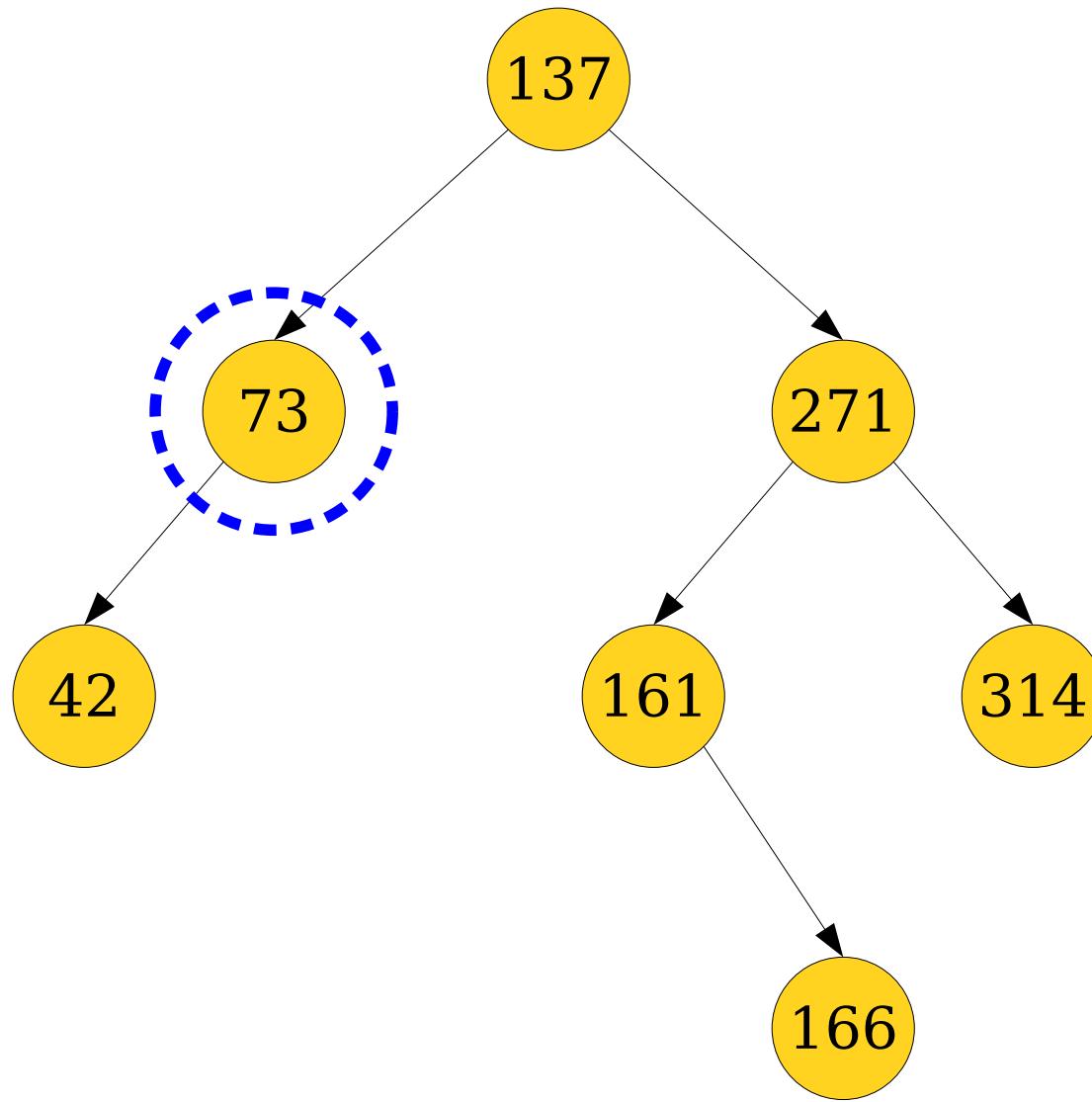


Case 0: If the node has just no children, just remove it.

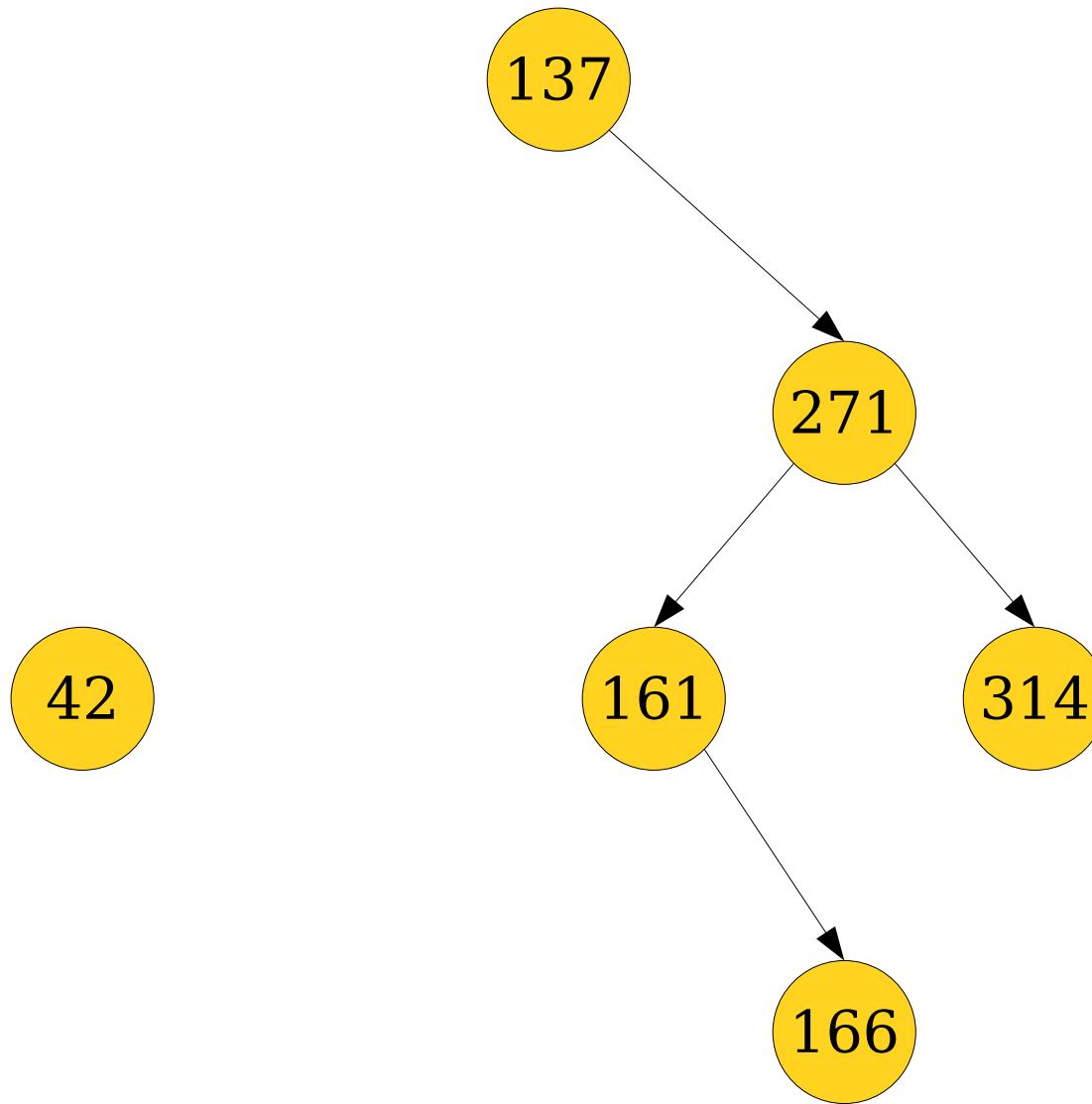
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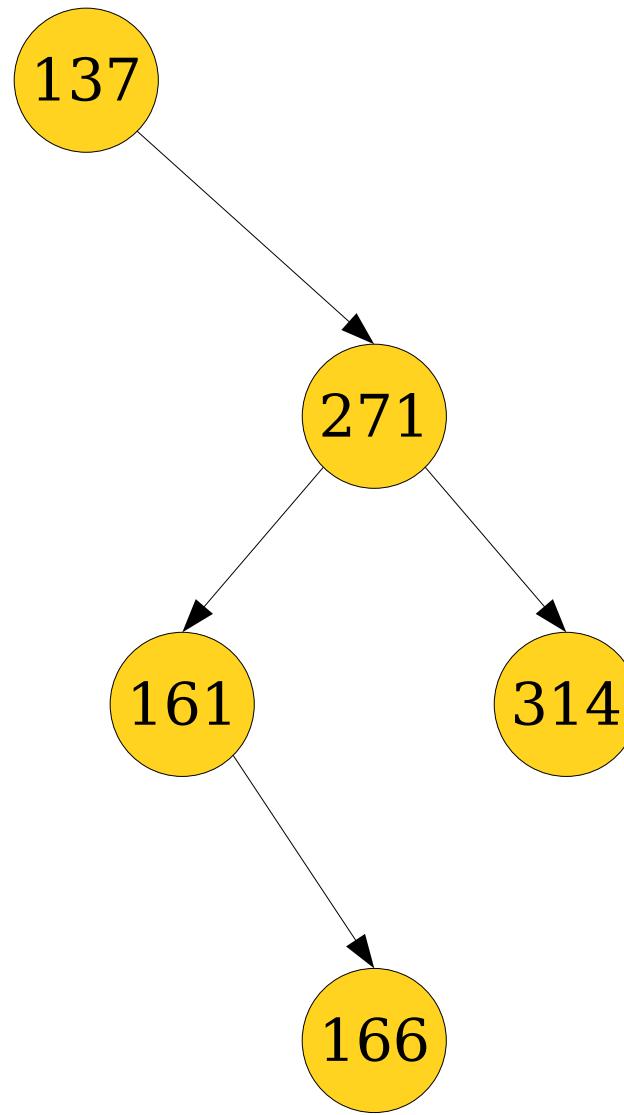
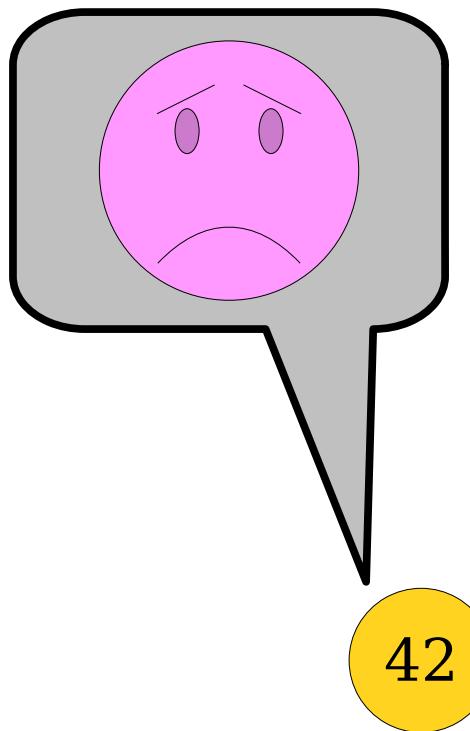
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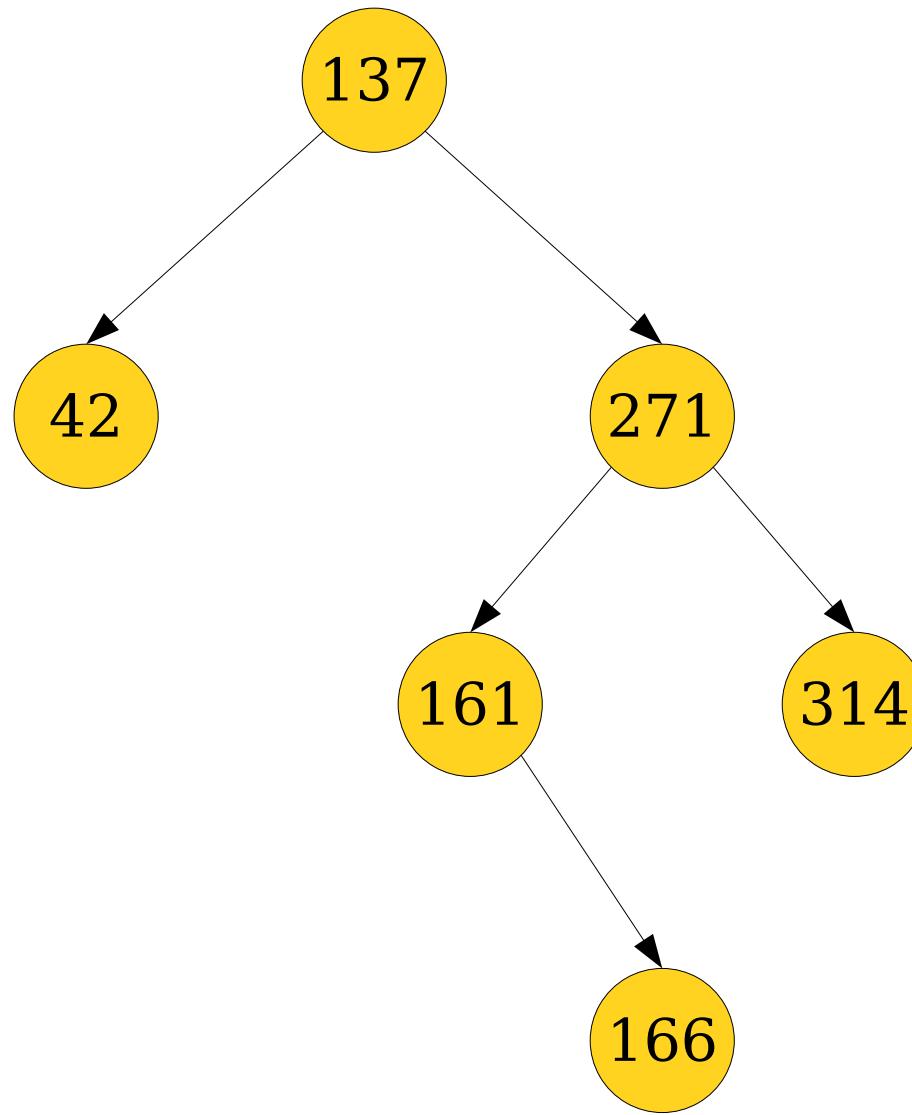
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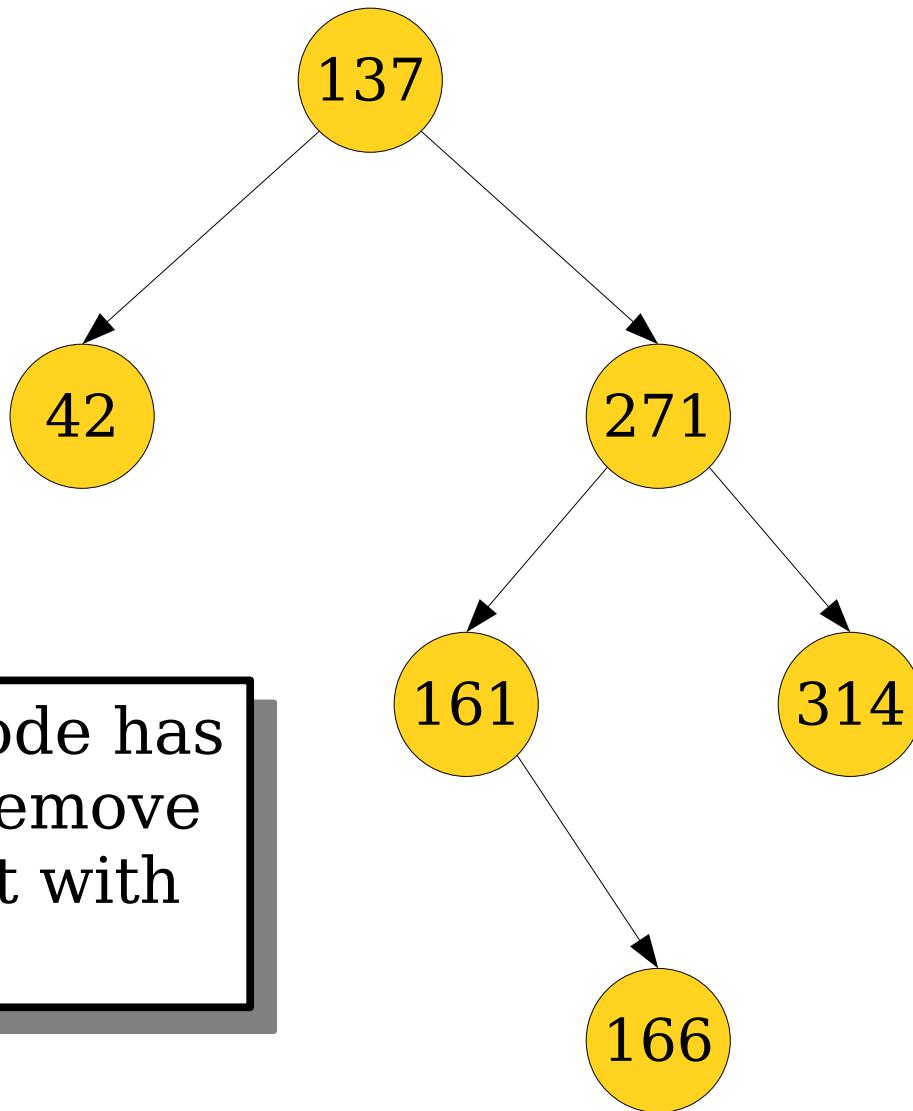
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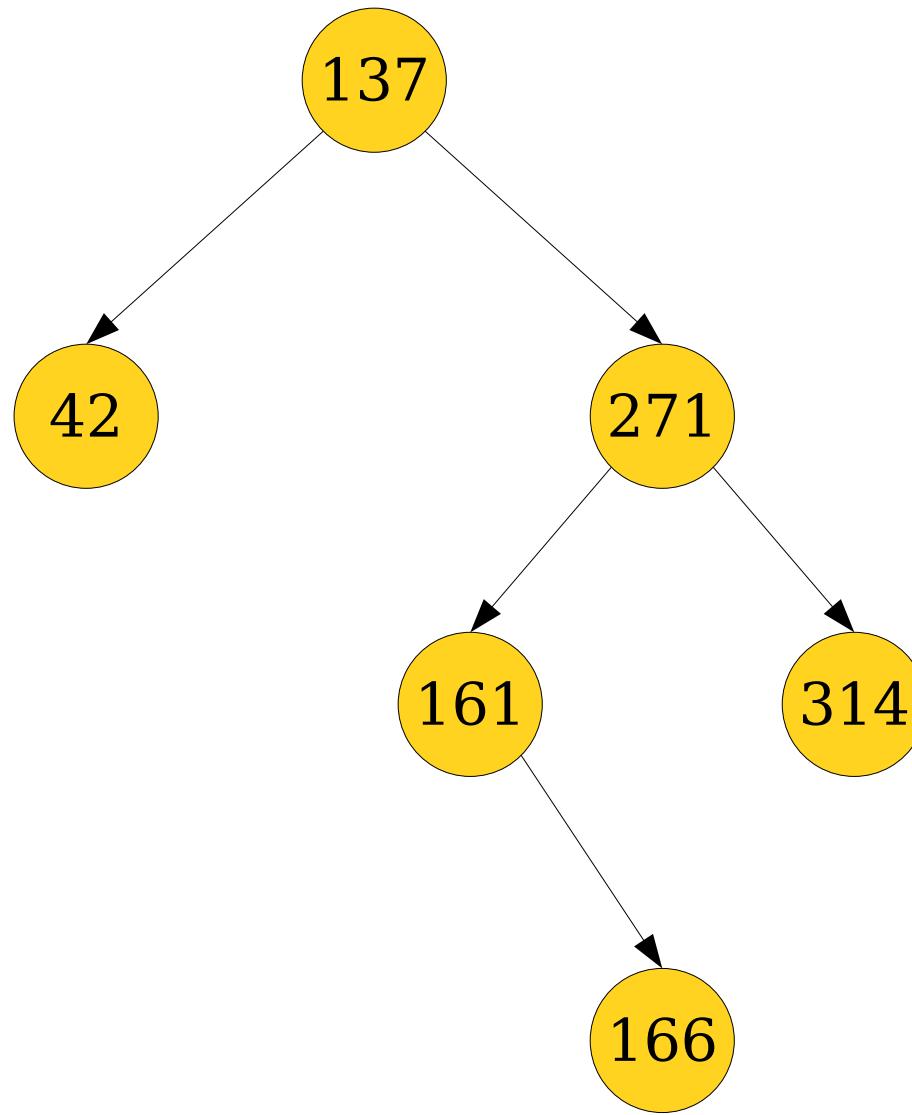


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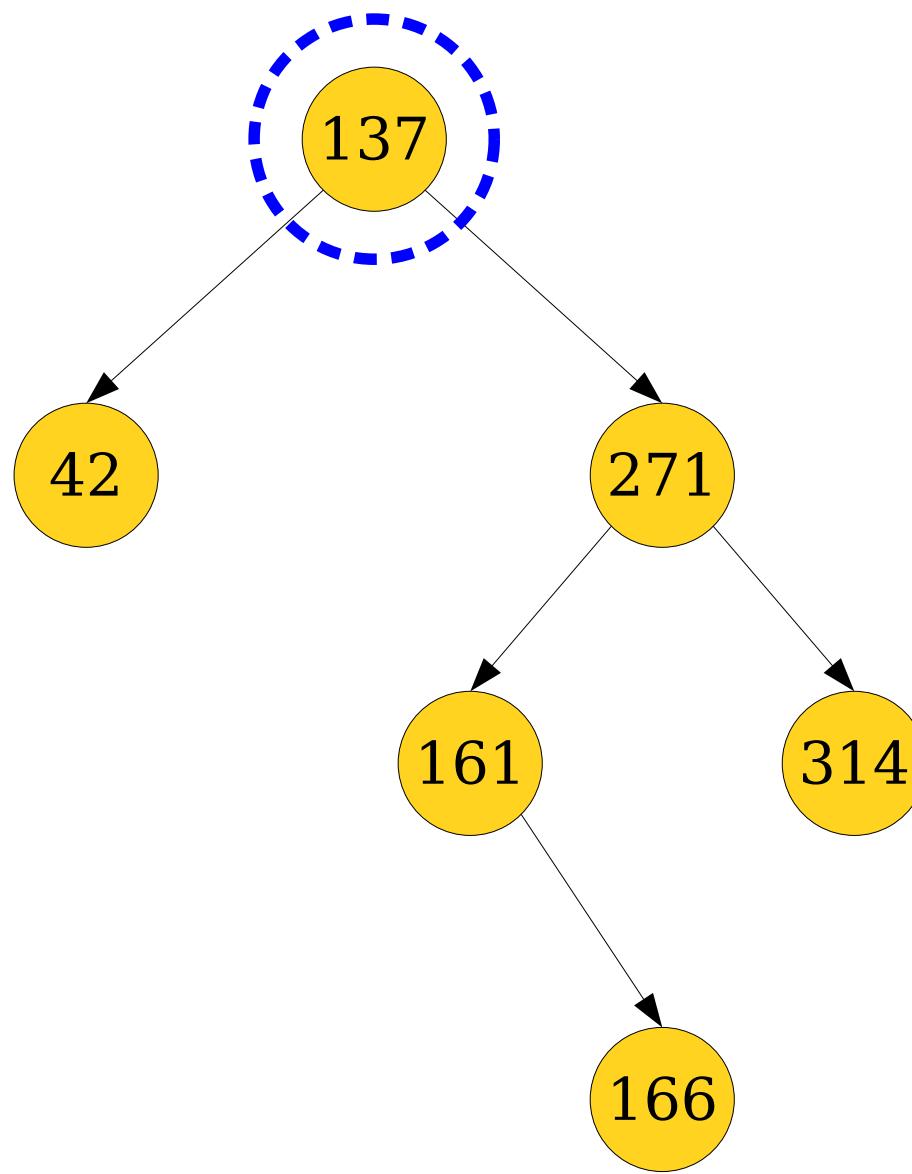


Case 1: If the node has just one child, remove it and replace it with its child.

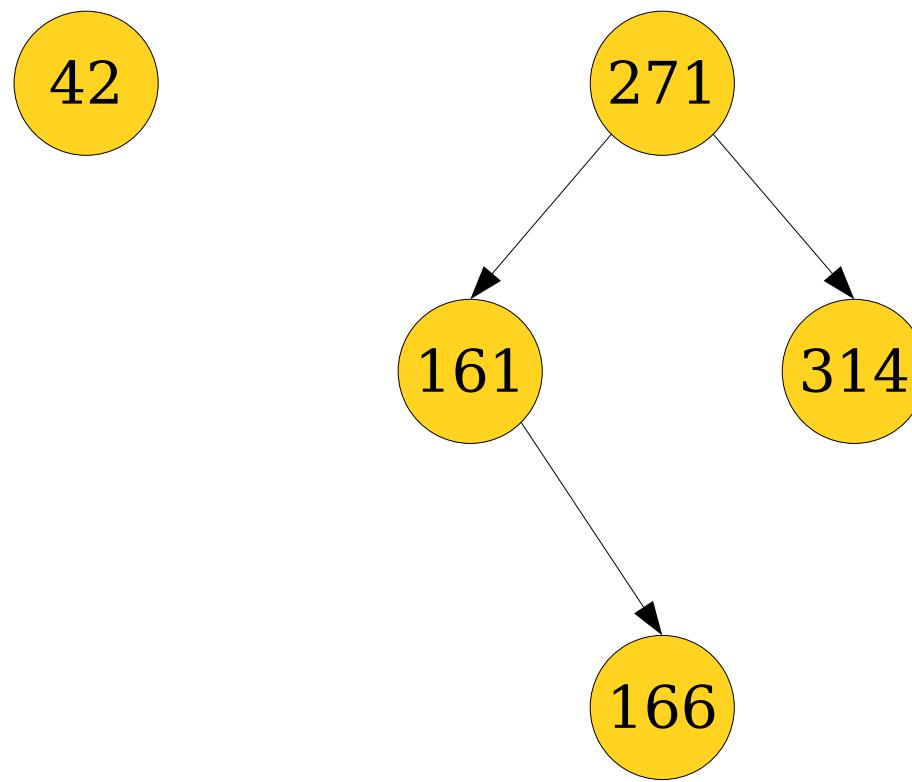
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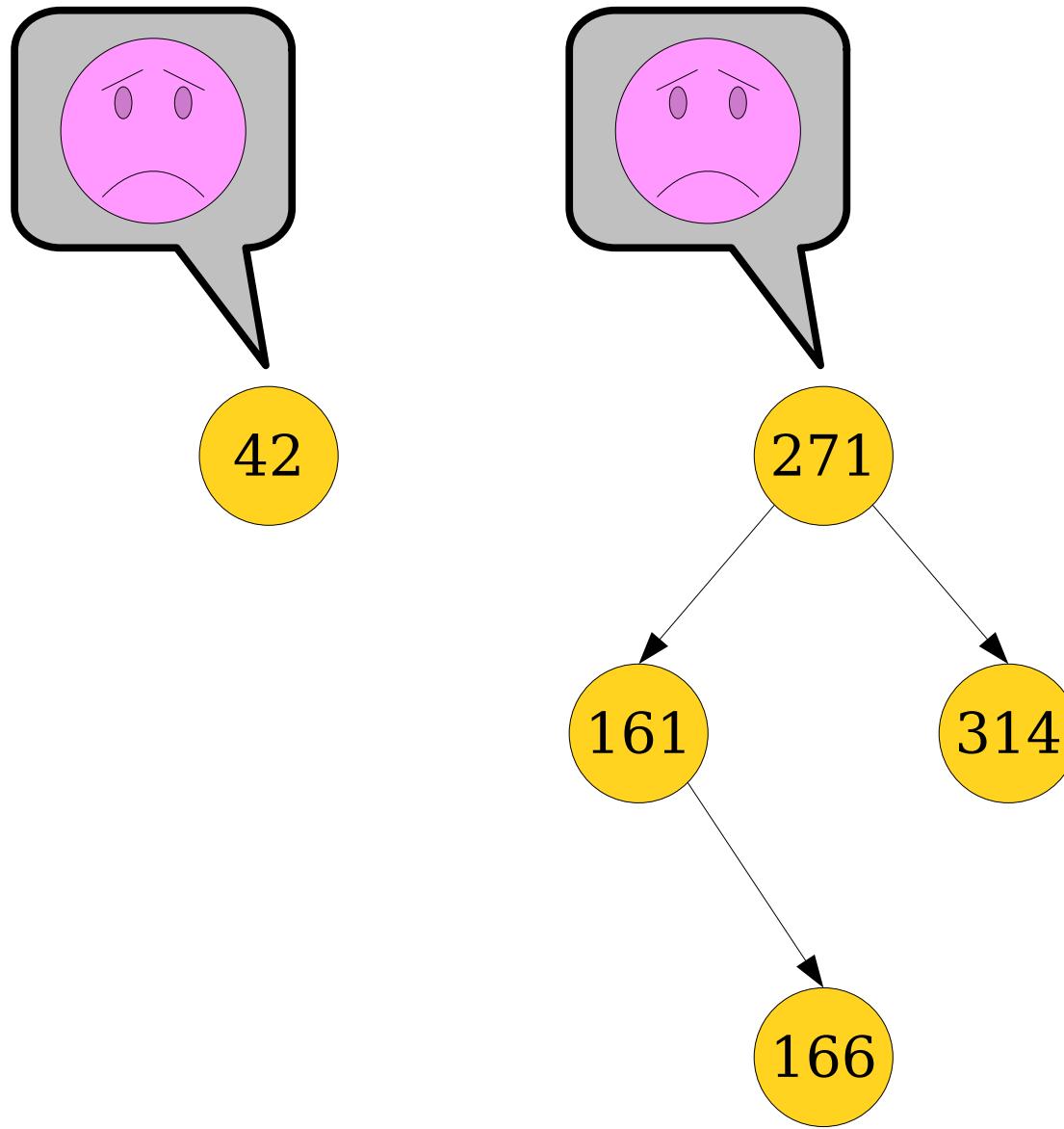
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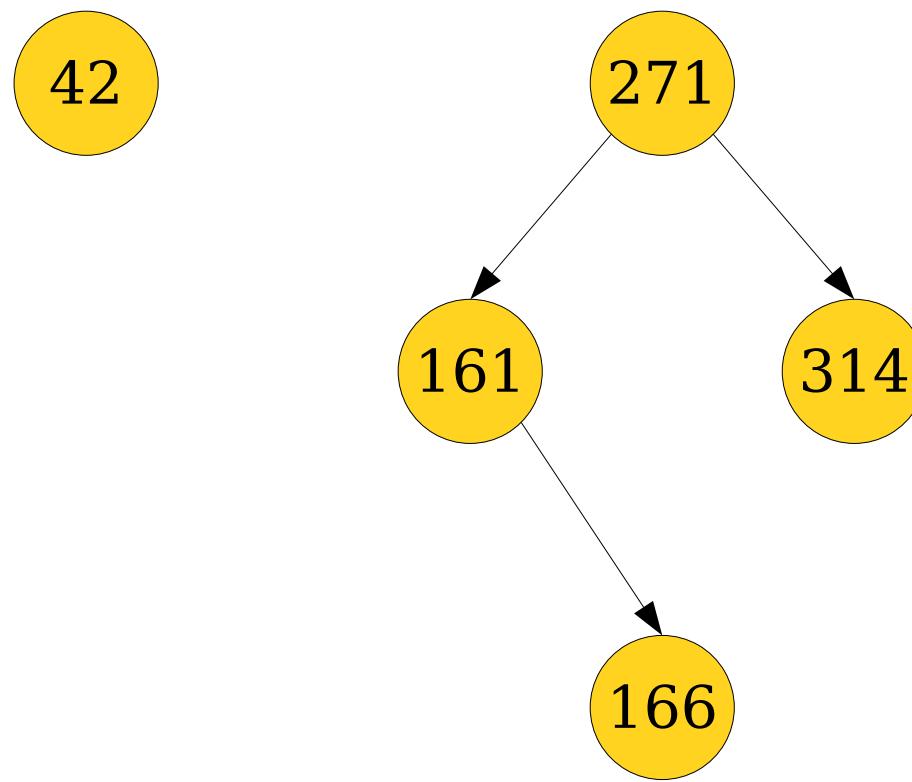
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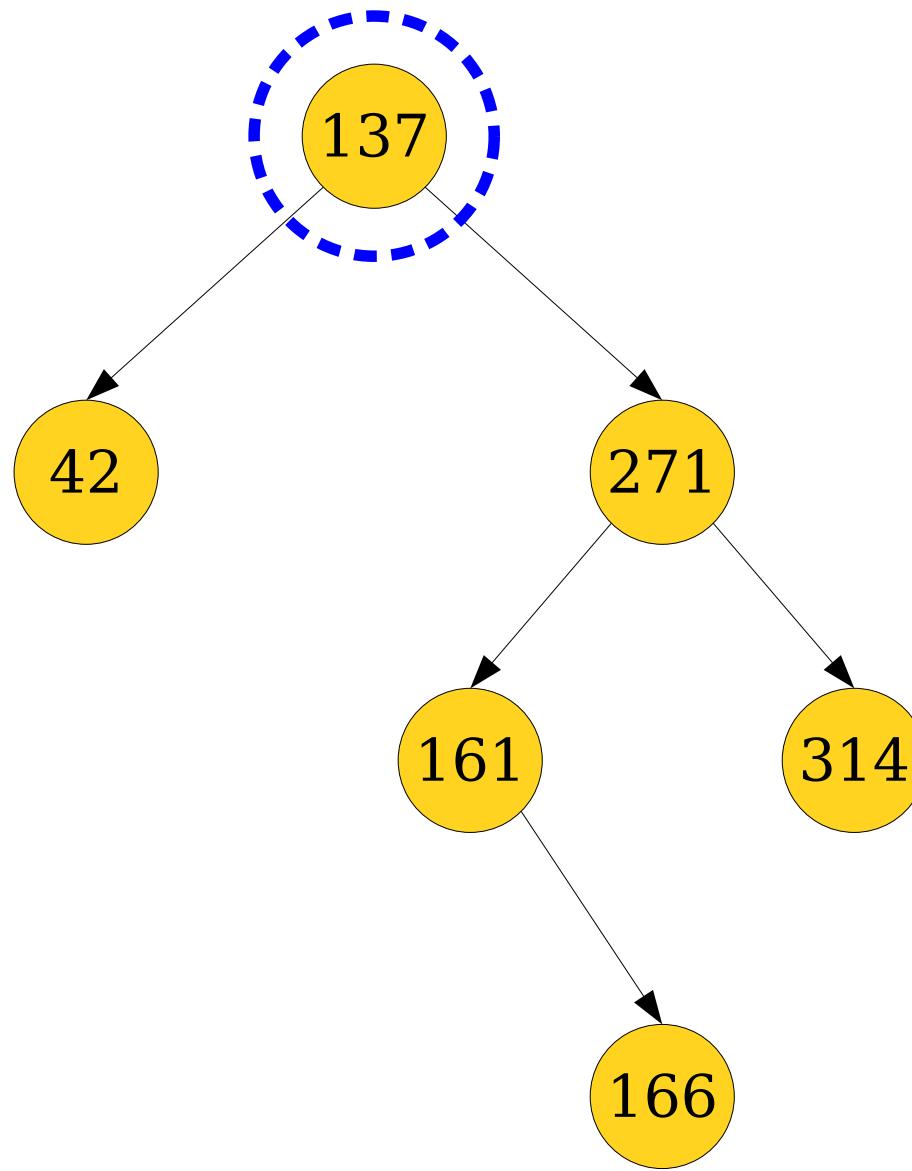
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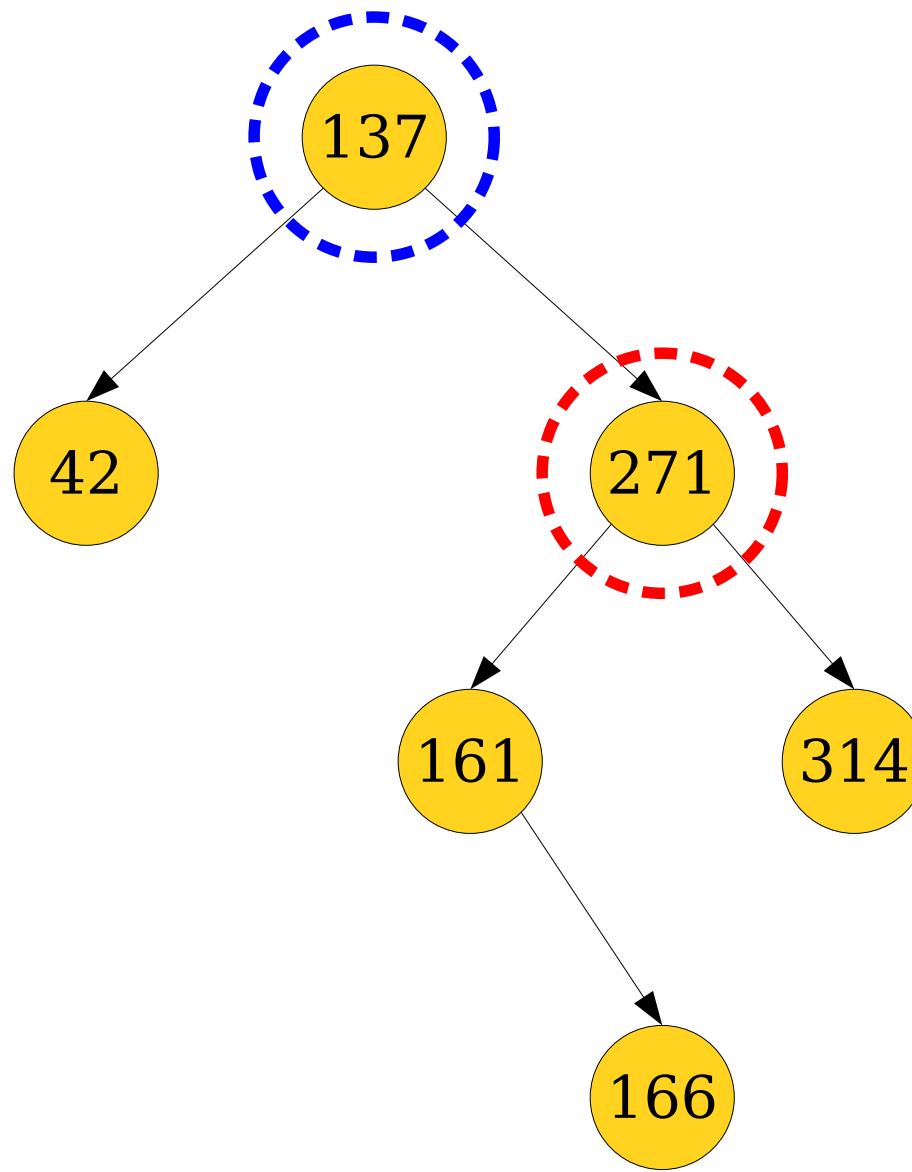
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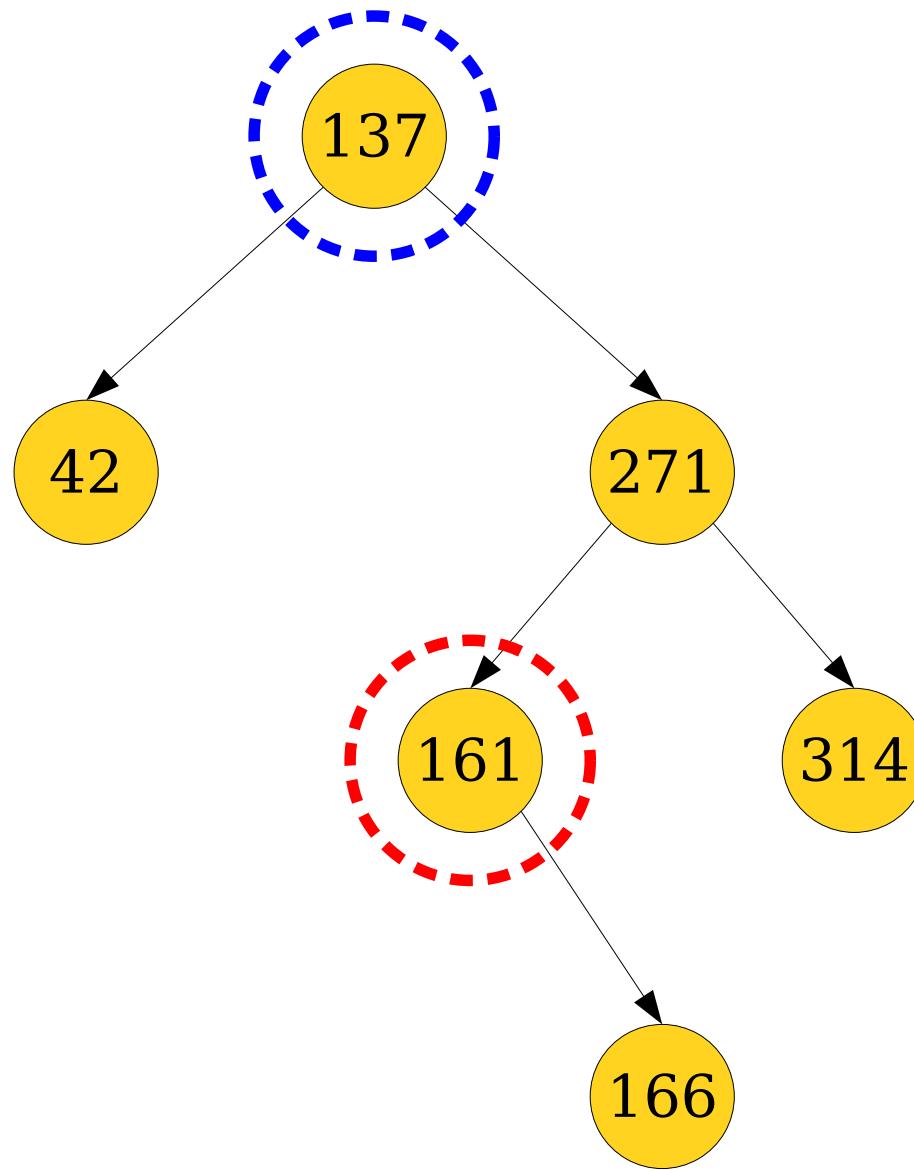
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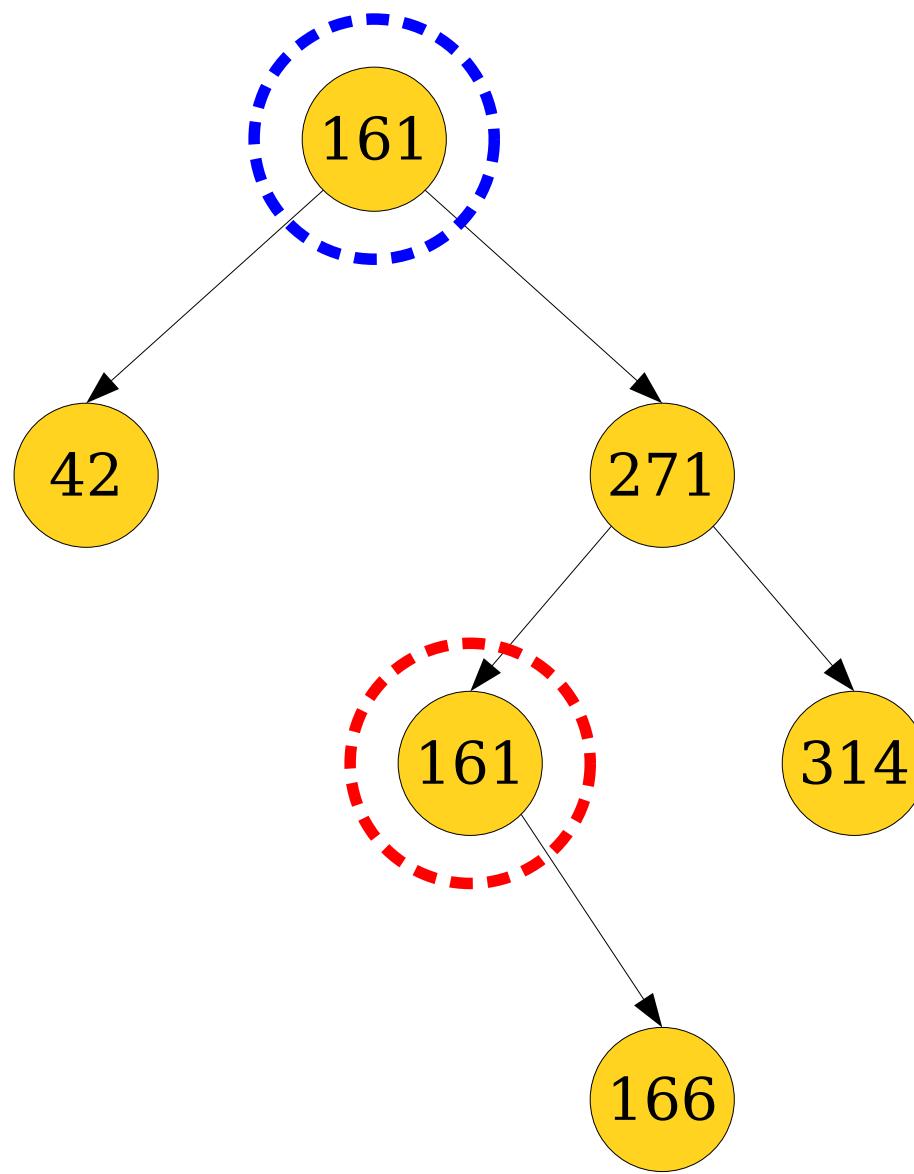
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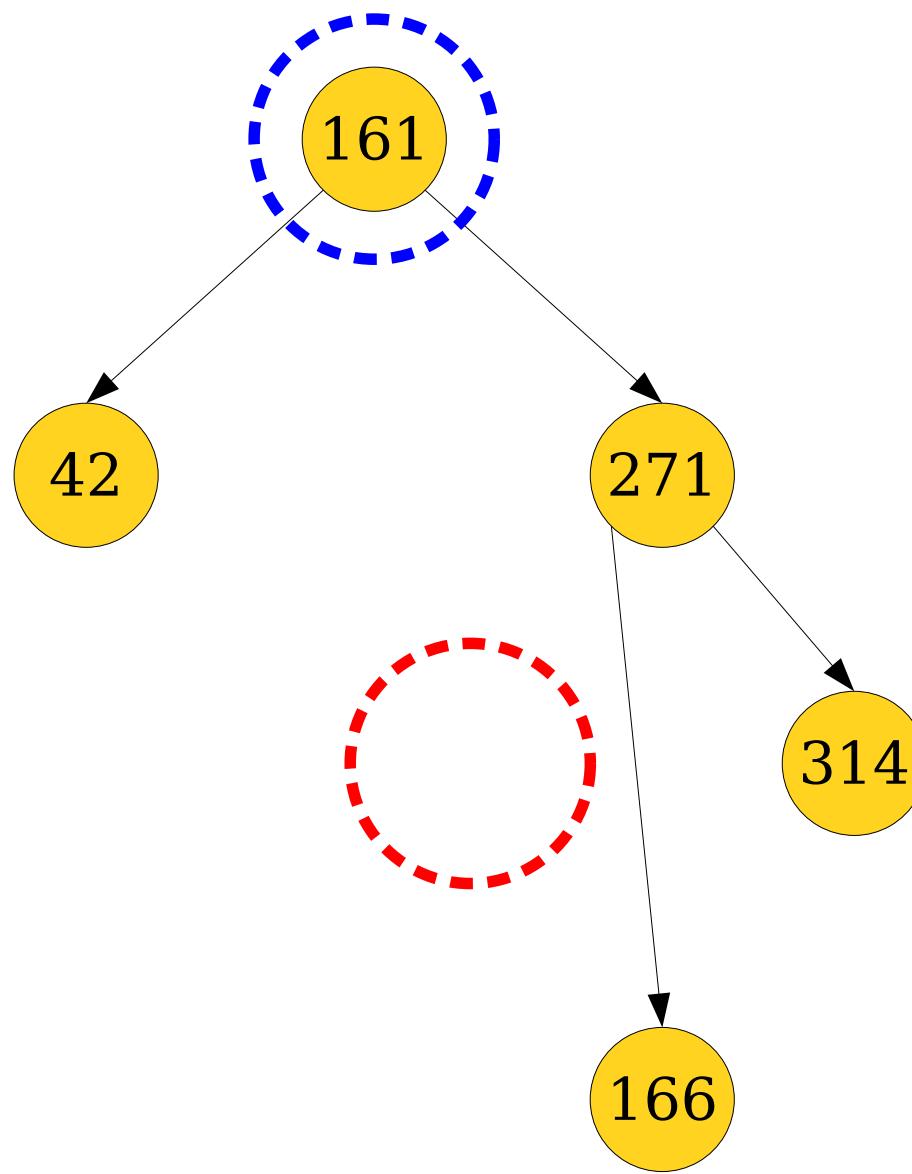
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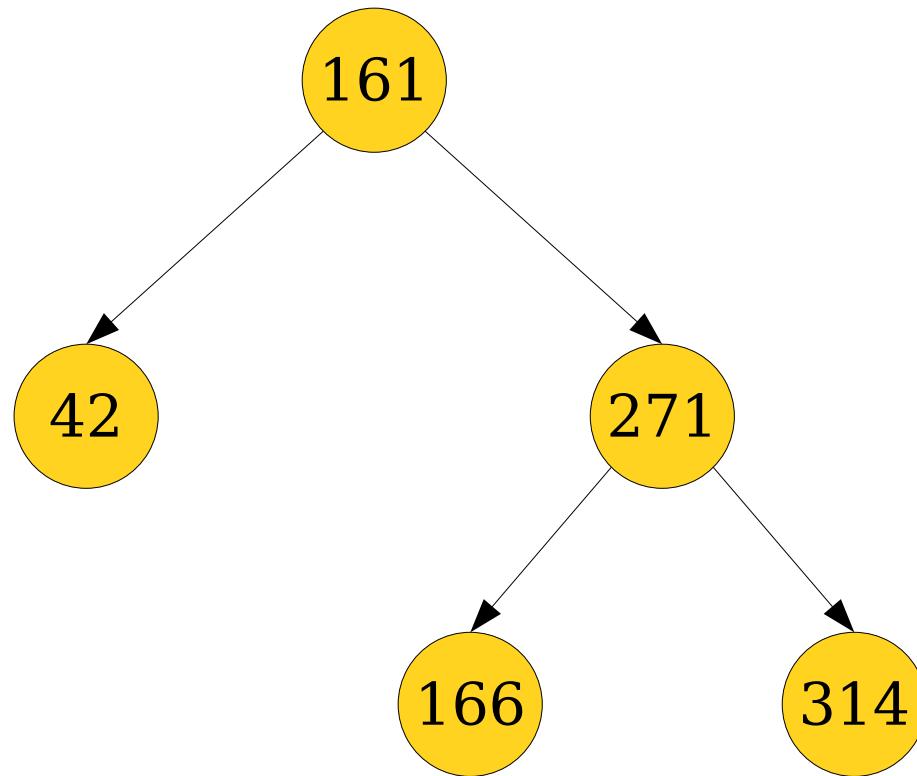
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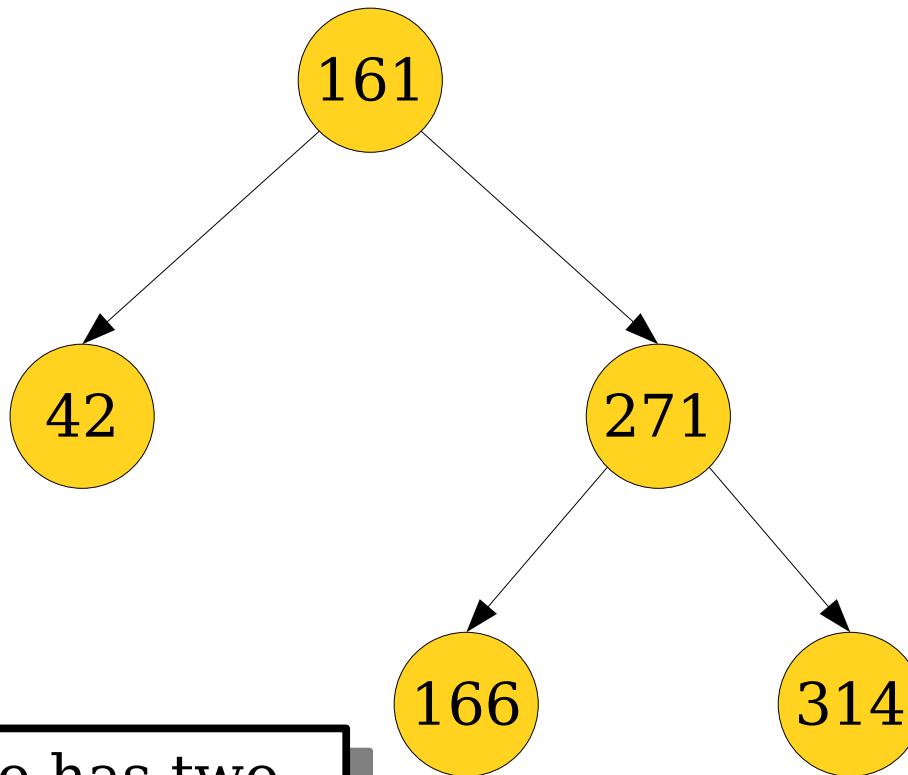
Deleting from a BST



Deleting from a BST



Deleting from a BST



Case 2: If the node has two children, find its inorder successor (which has zero or one child), replace the node's key with its successor's key, then delete its successor.

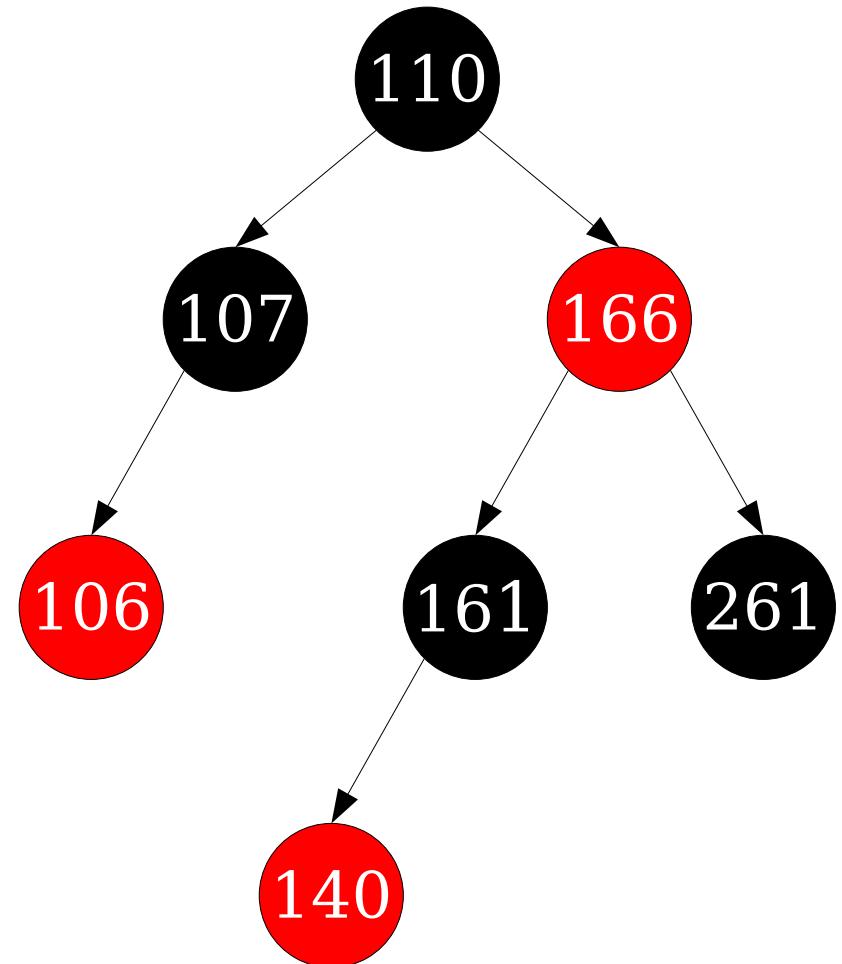
Runtime Analysis

- The time complexity of all these operations is $O(h)$, where h is the height of the tree.
 - That's the longest path we can take.
- In the best case, $h = O(\log n)$ and all operations take time $O(\log n)$.
- In the worst case, $h = \Theta(n)$ and some operations will take time $\Theta(n)$.
- **Challenge:** How do you efficiently keep the height of a tree low?

A Glimpse of Red/Black Trees

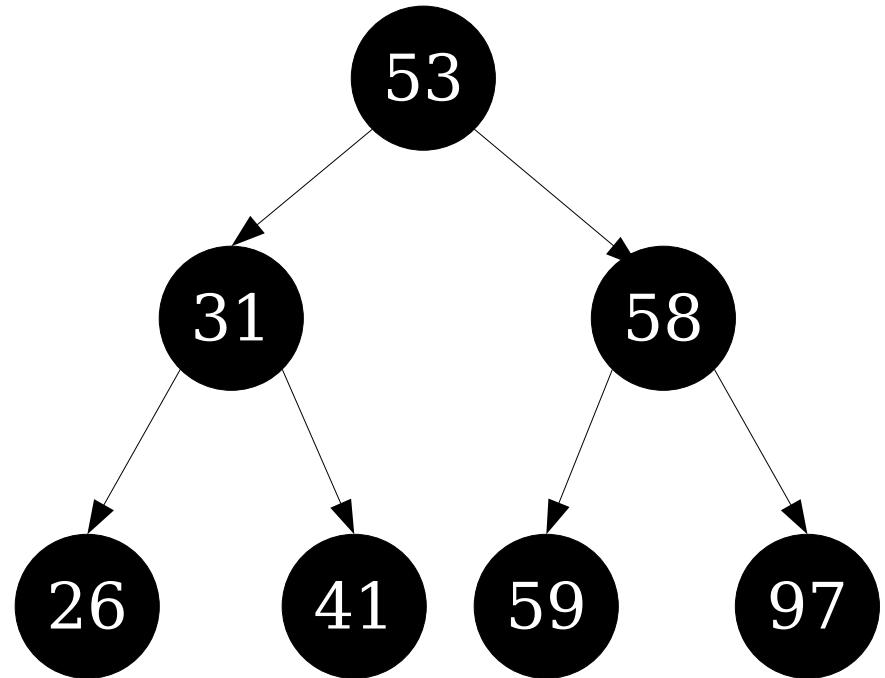
Red/Black Trees

- A ***red/black tree*** is a BST with the following properties:
 - Every node is either red or black.
 - The root is black.
 - No red node has a red child.
 - Every root-null path in the tree passes through the same number of black nodes.



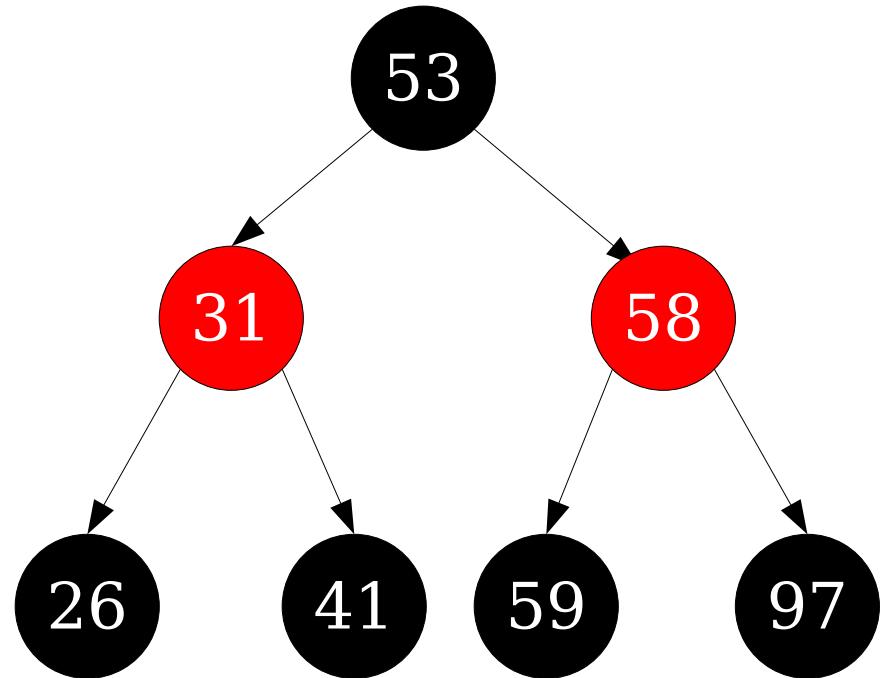
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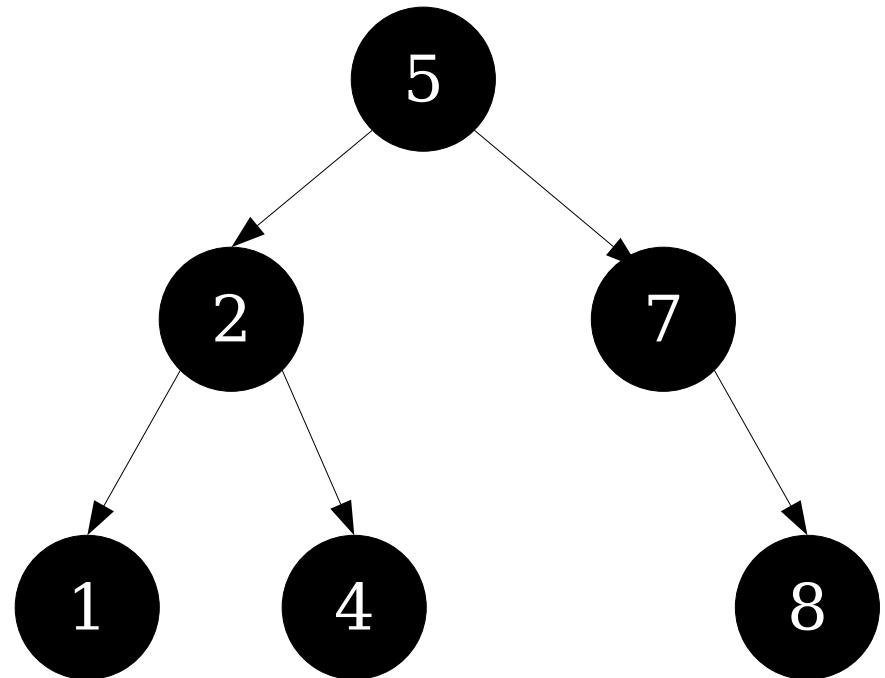
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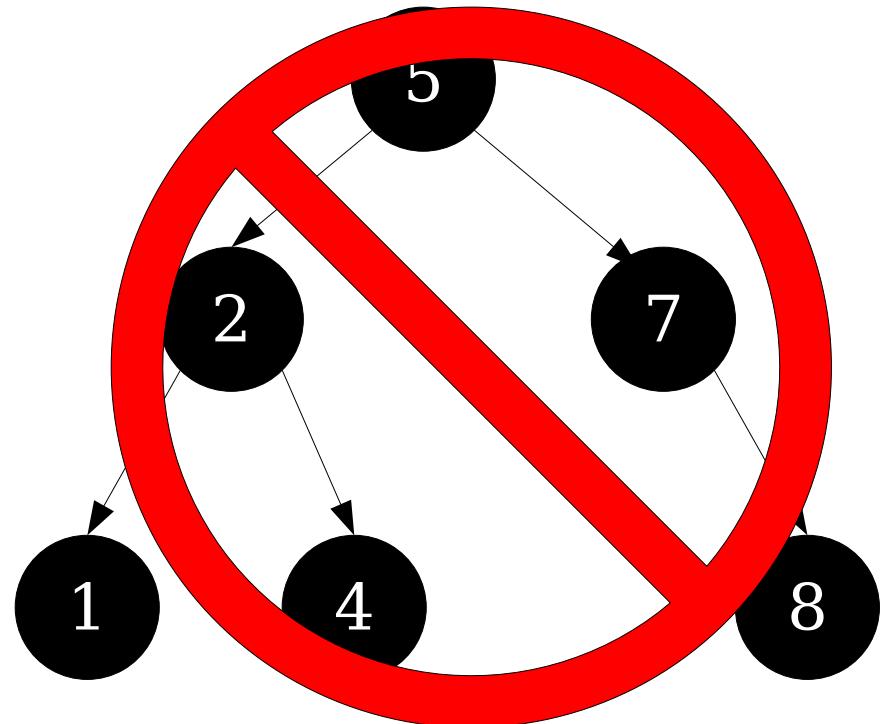
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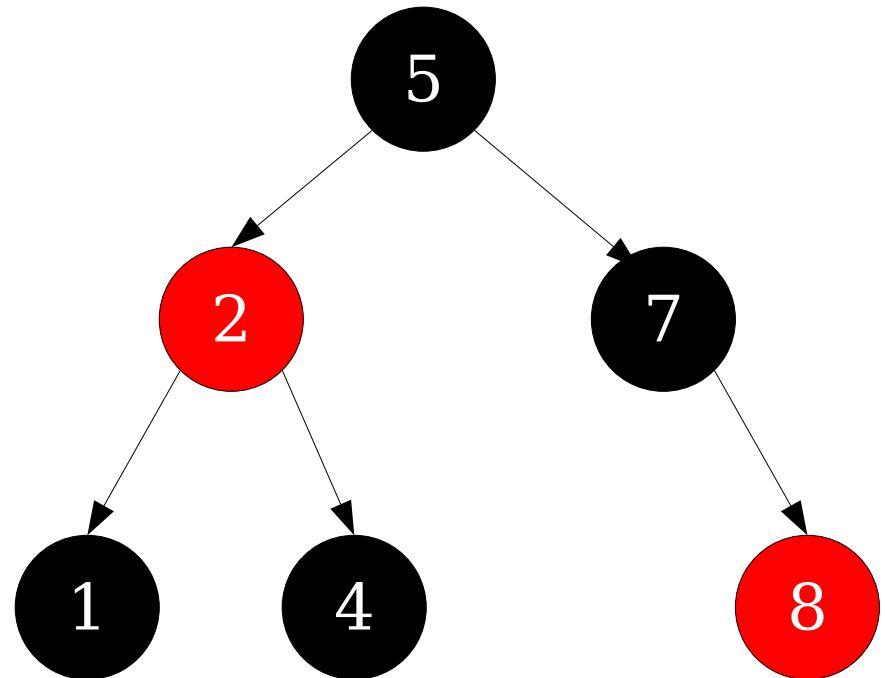
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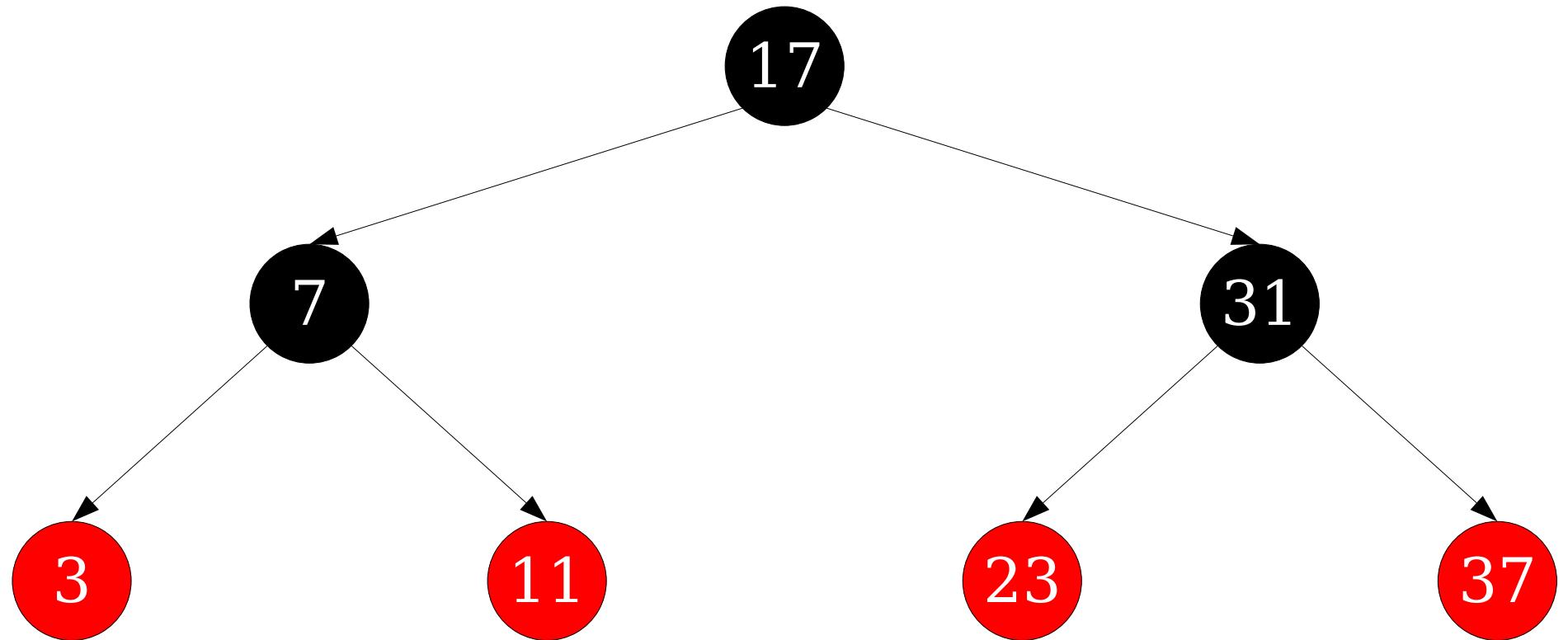
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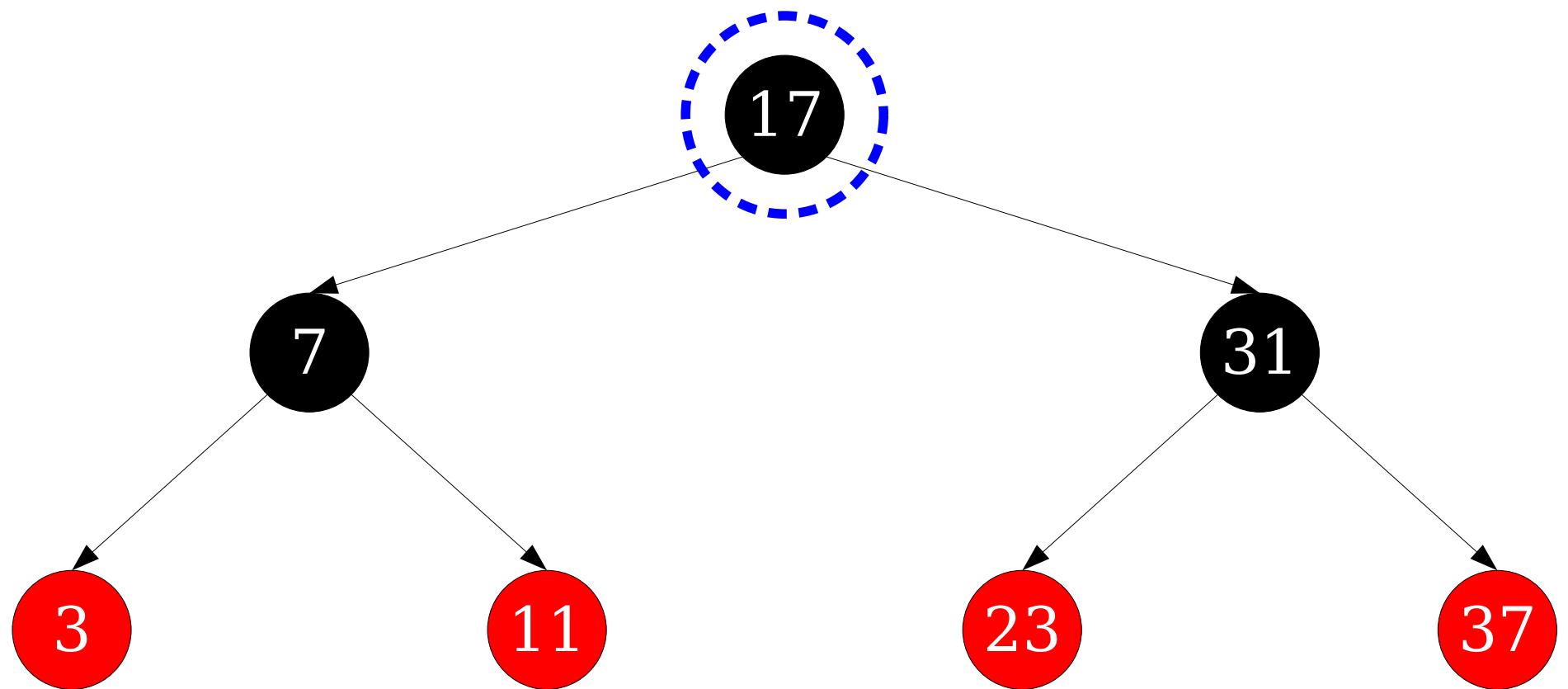
Red/Black Trees

- **Theorem:** Any red/black tree with n nodes has height $O(\log n)$.
 - We could prove this now, but there's a *much* simpler proof of this we'll see later on.
- Given a fixed red/black tree, lookups can be done in time $O(\log n)$.

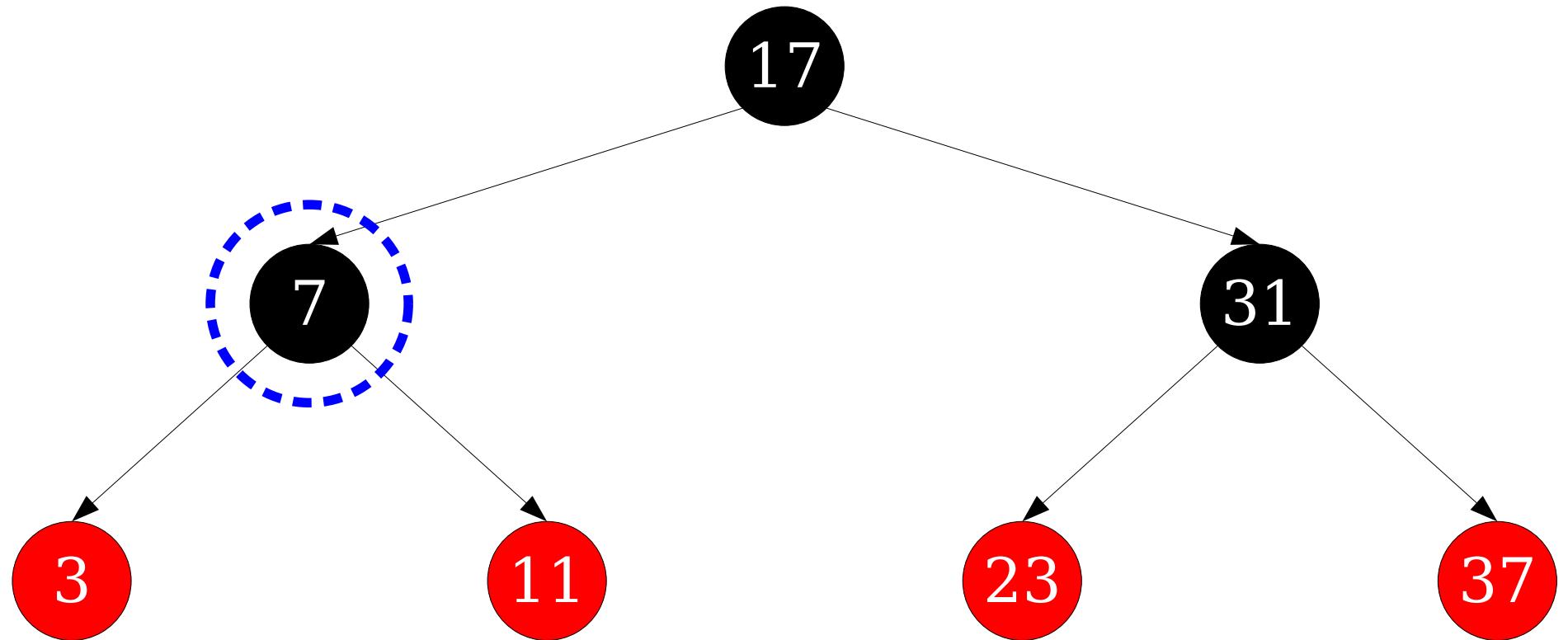
Mutating Red/Black Trees



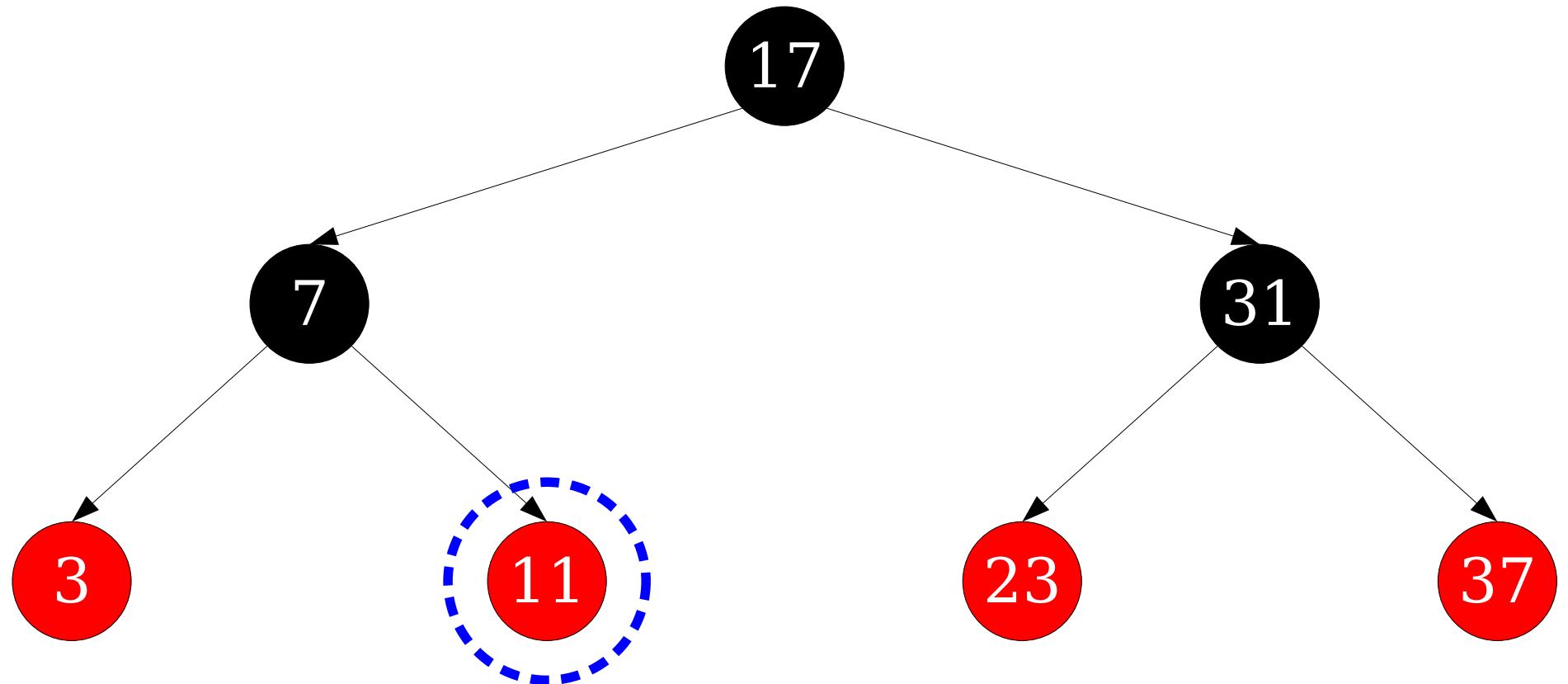
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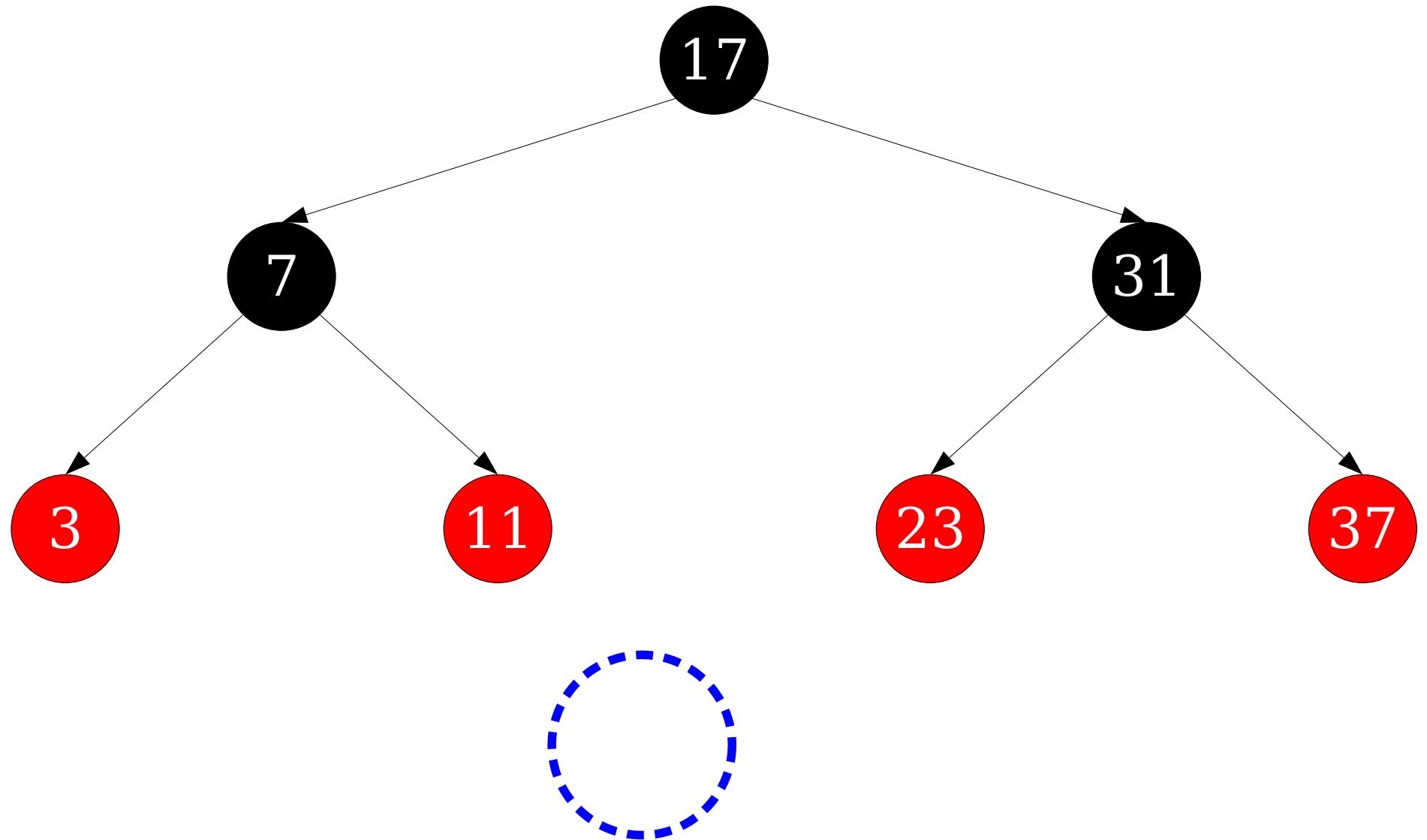
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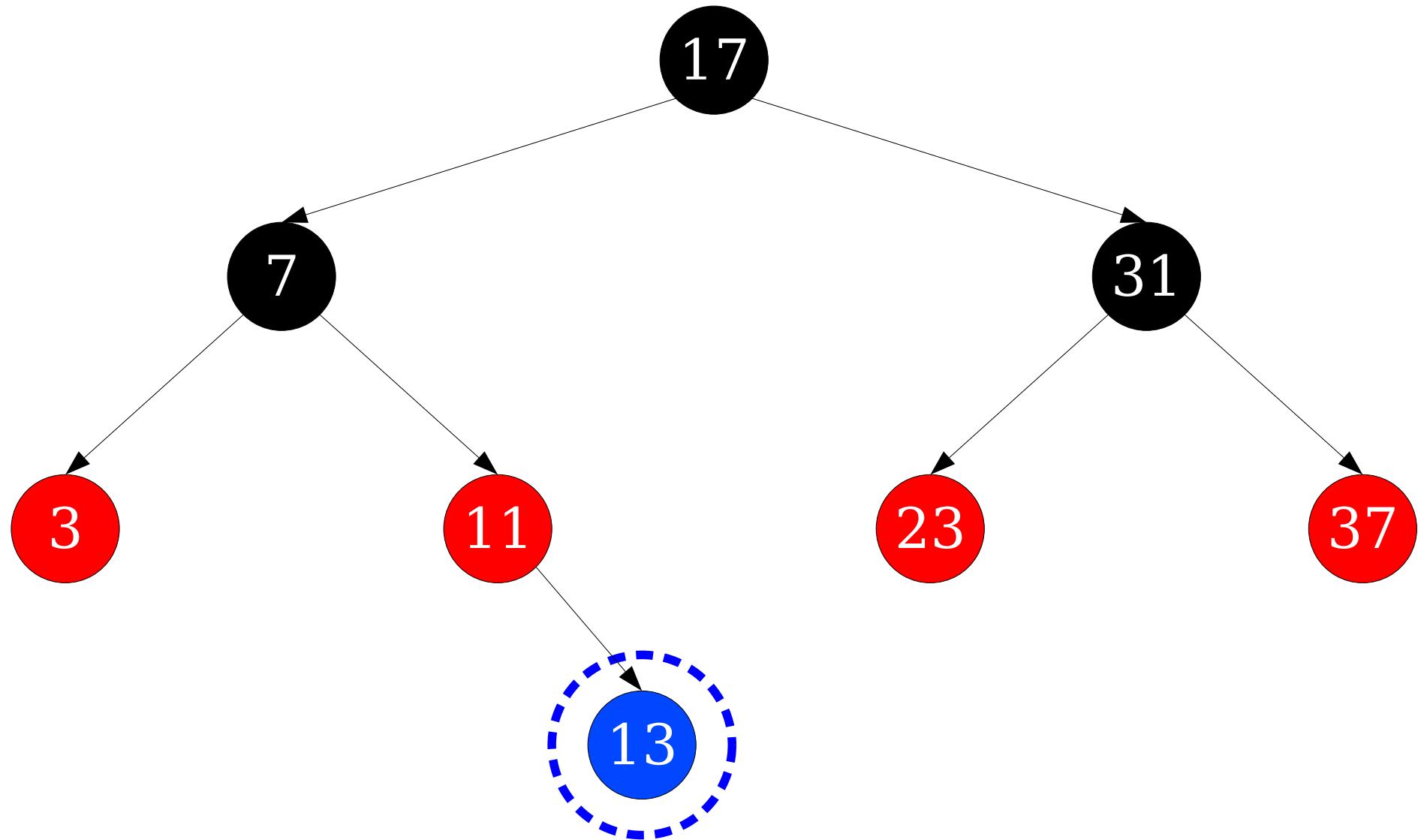
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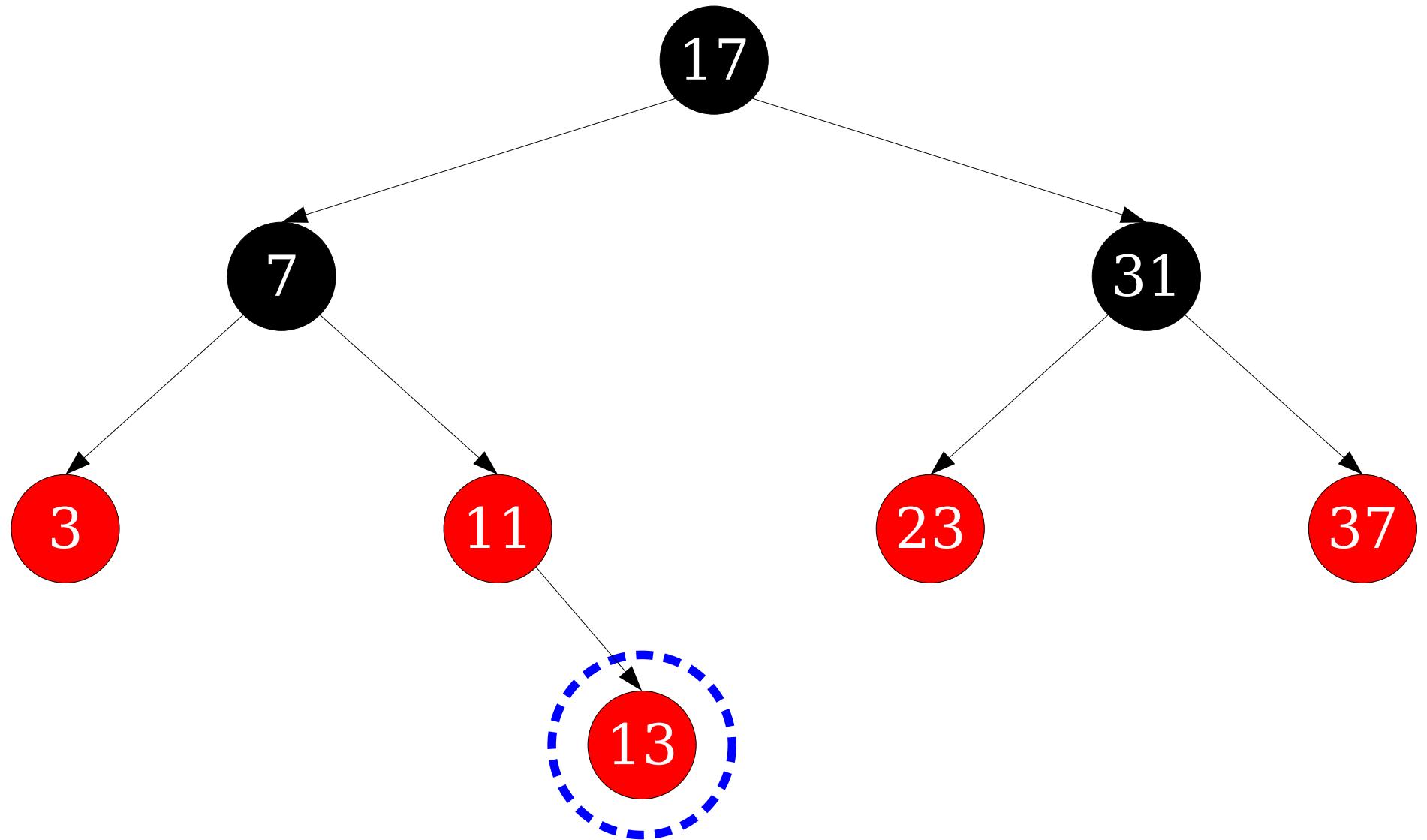
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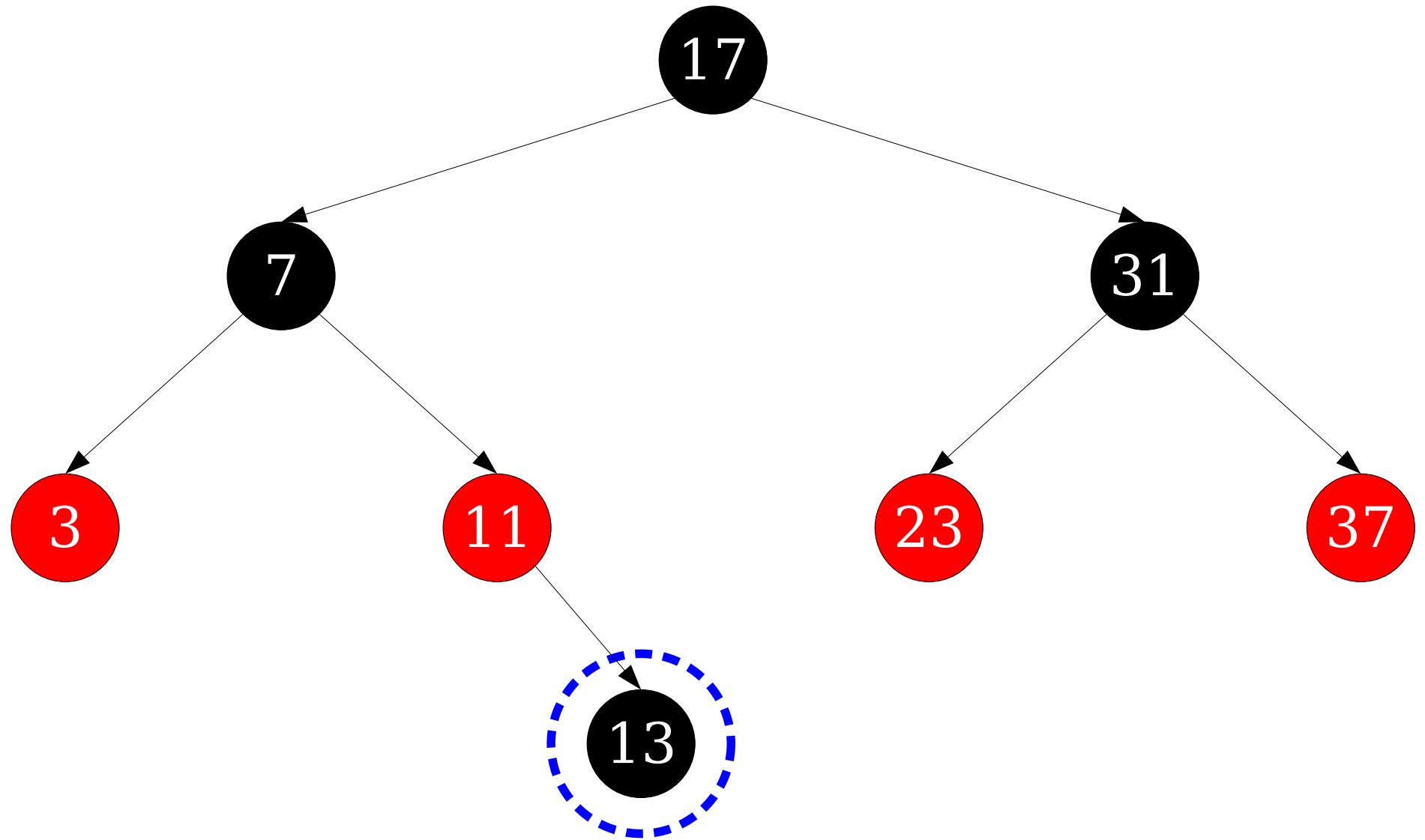
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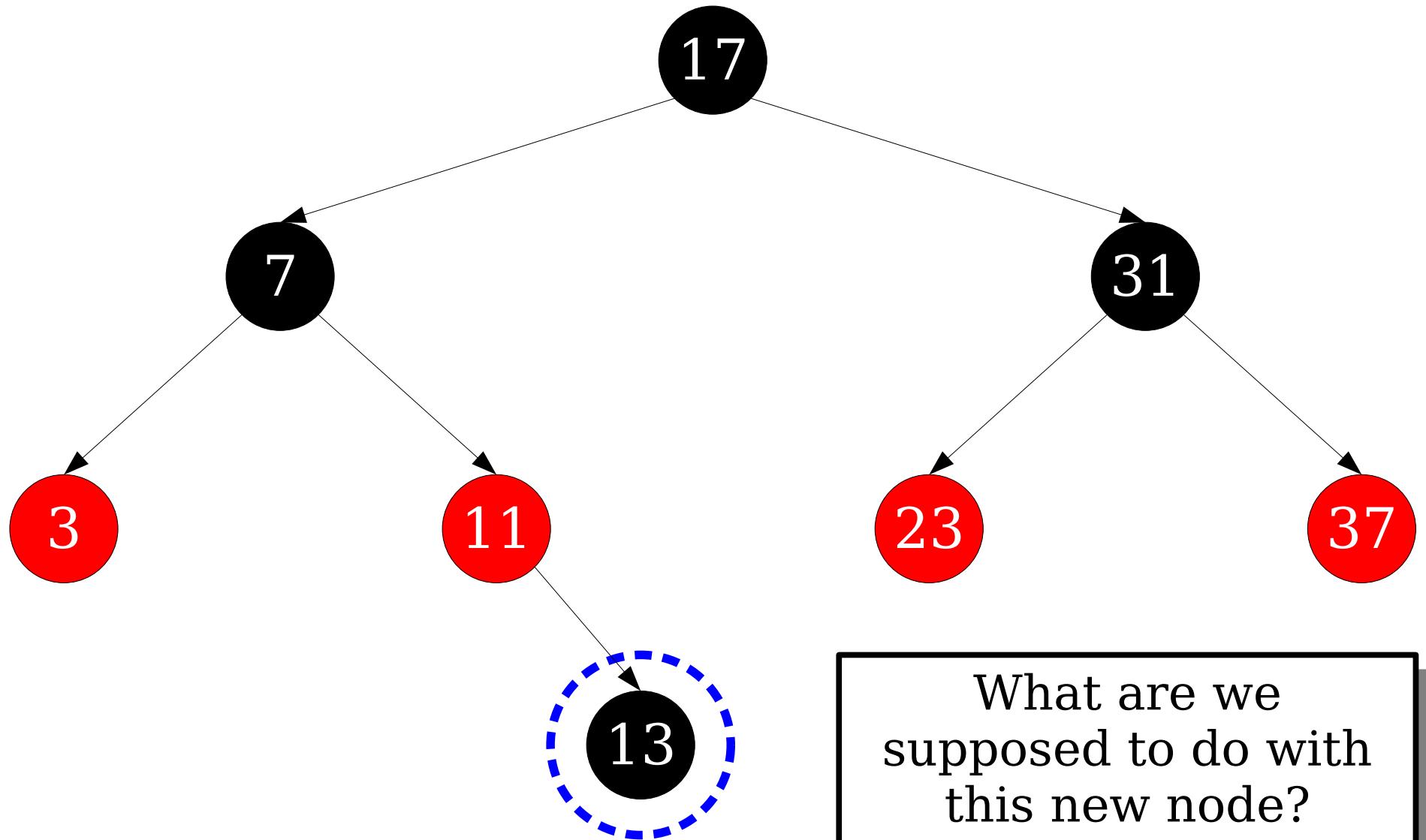
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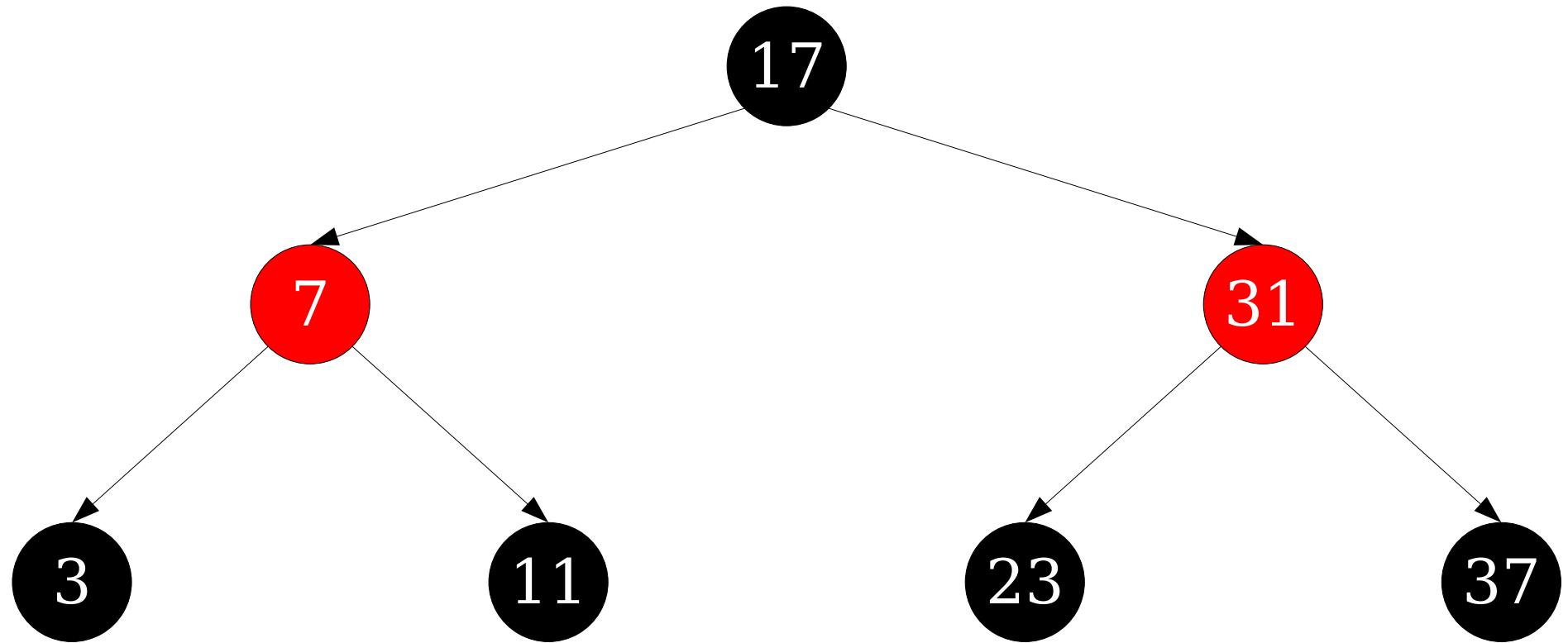
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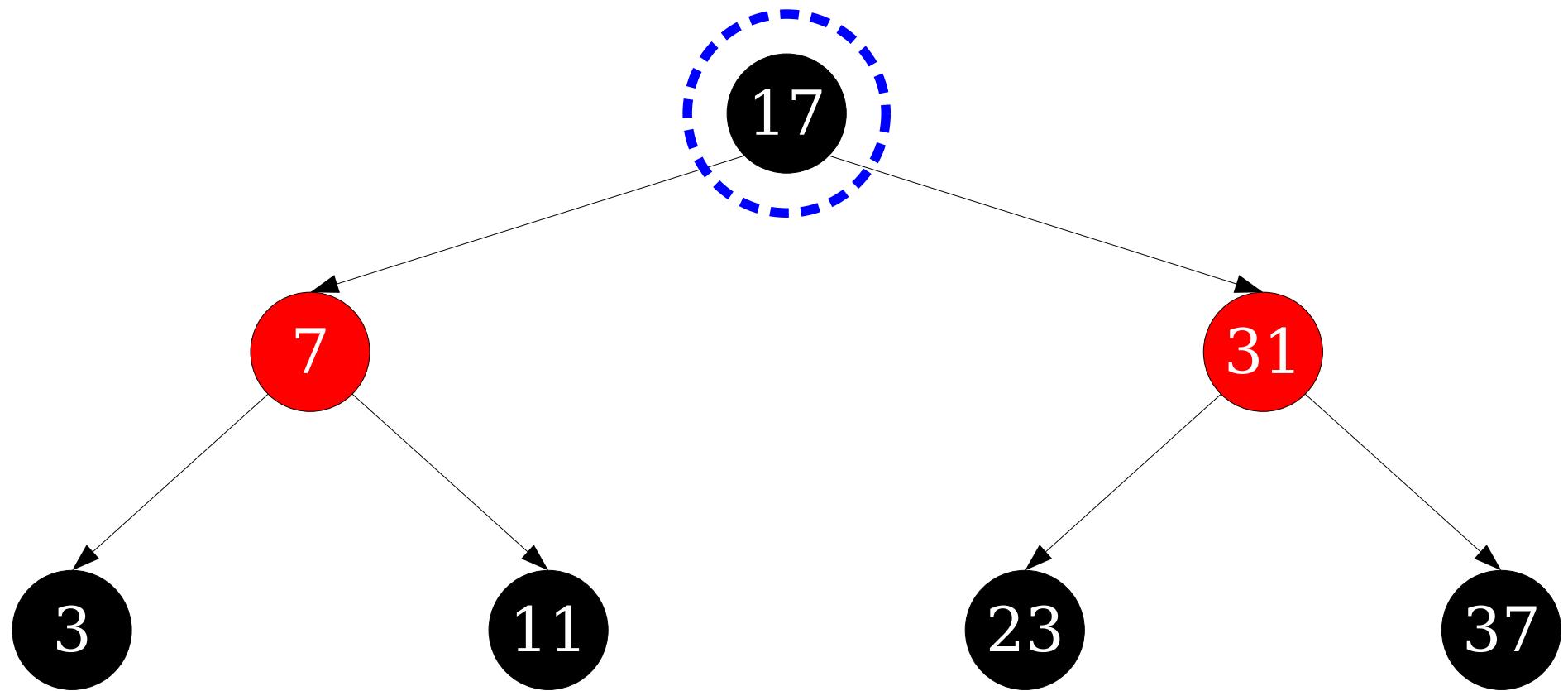
What are we
supposed to do with
this new node?

Mutating Red/Black Trees

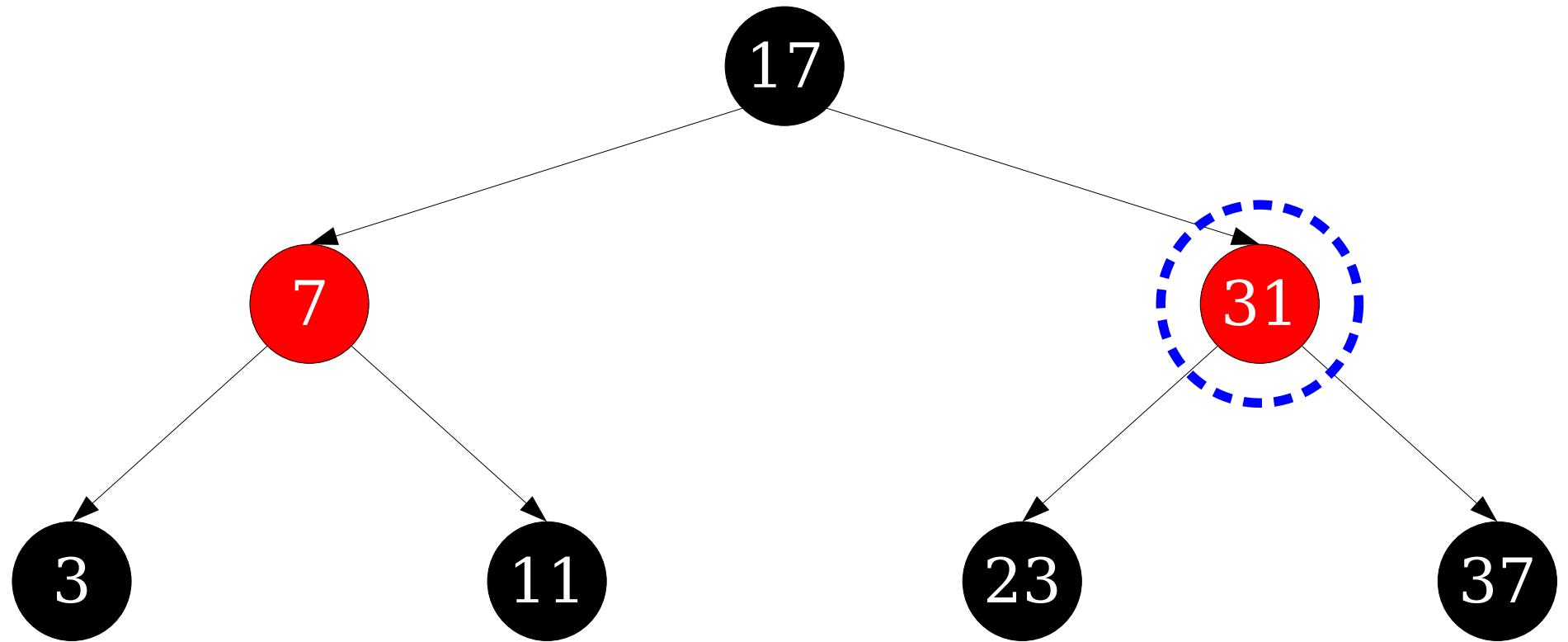
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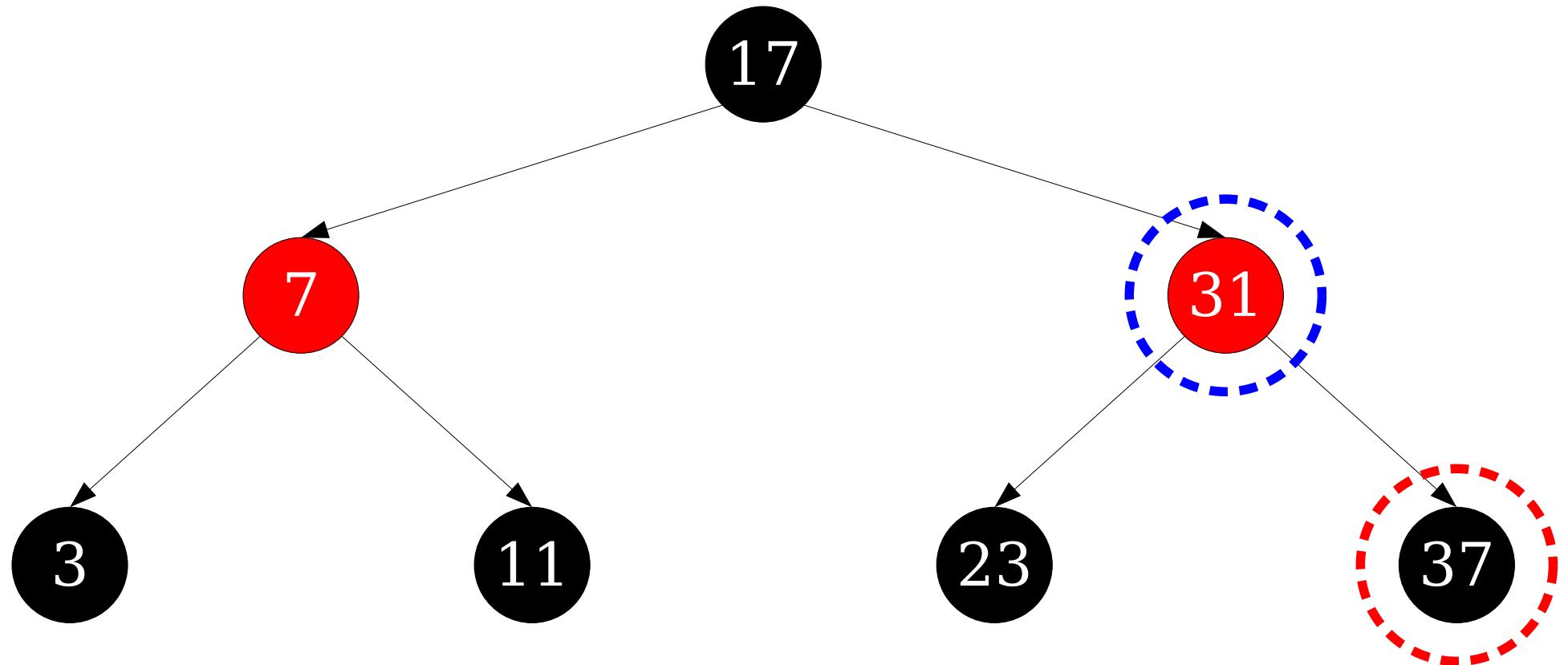
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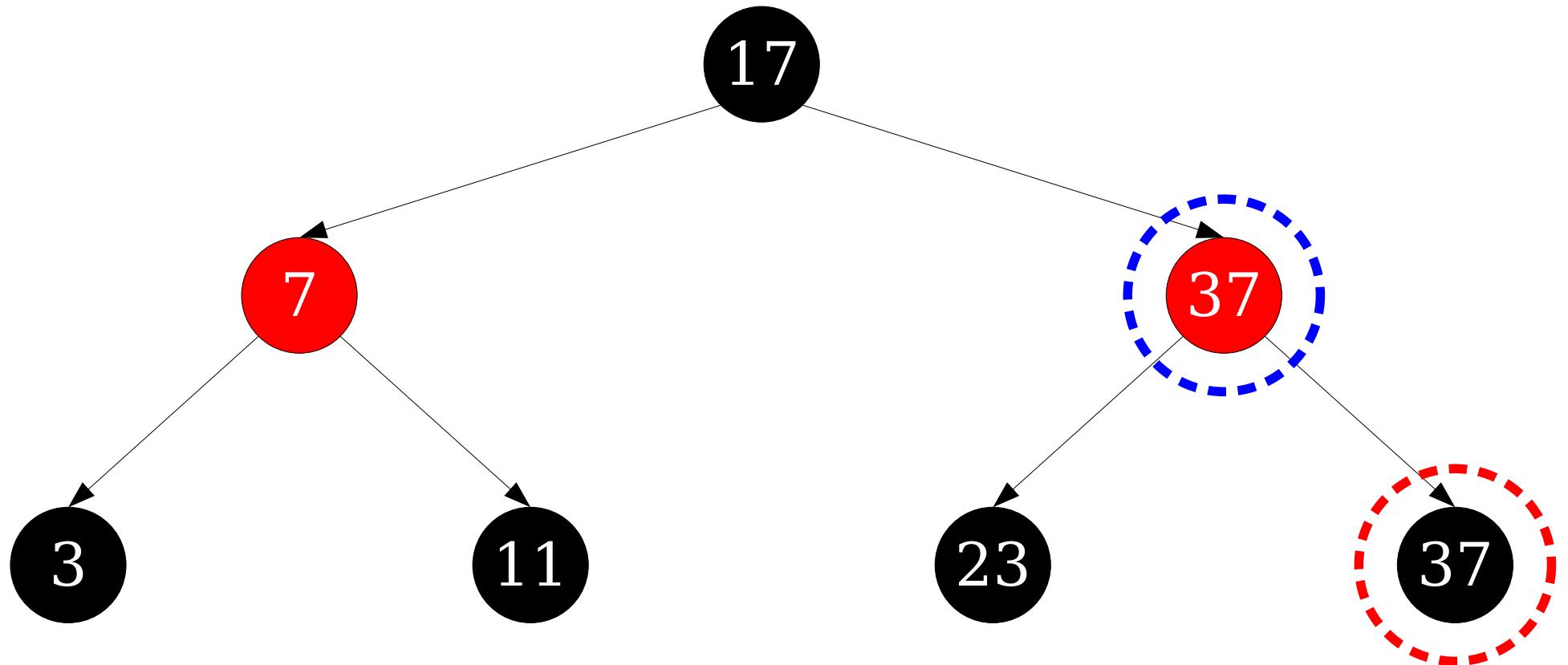
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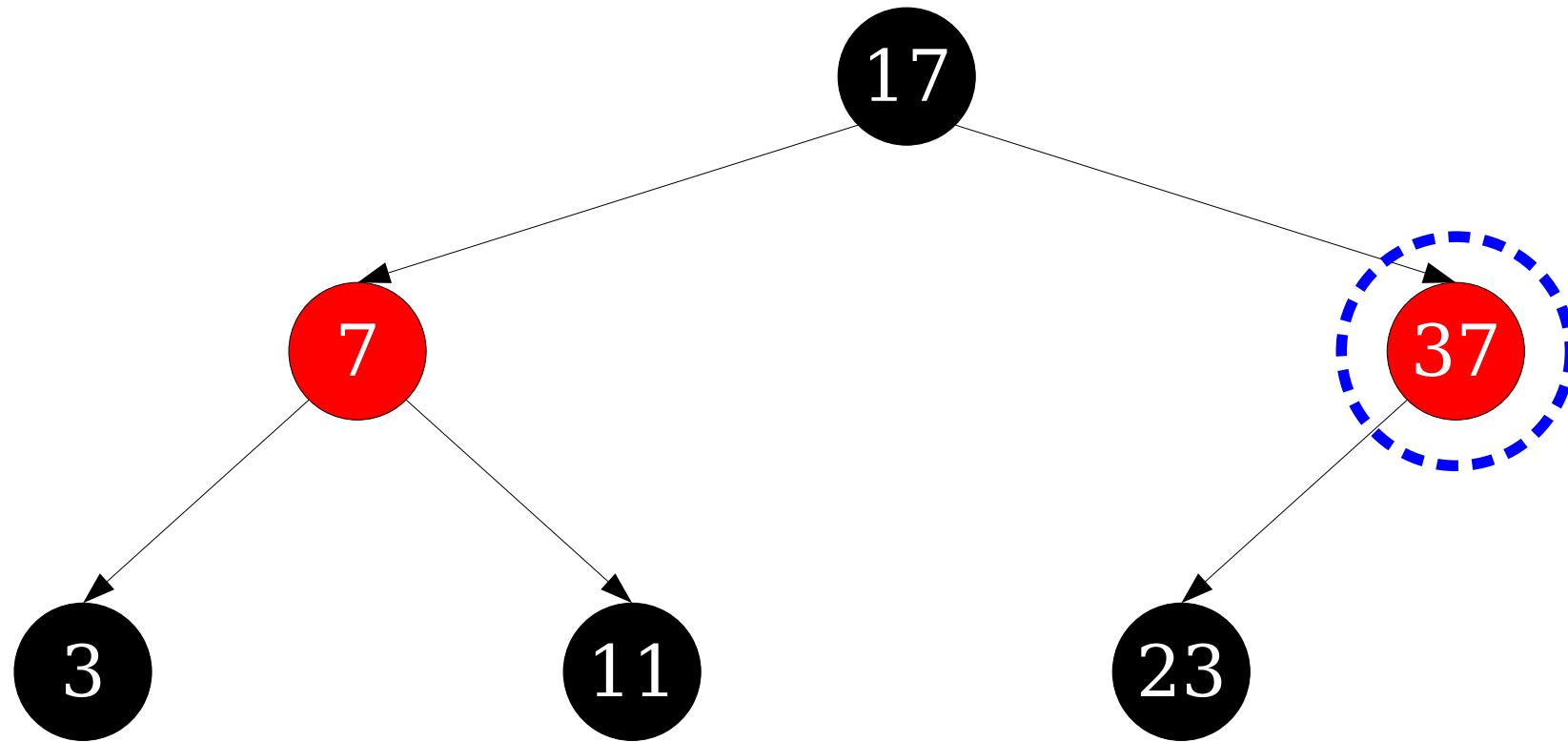
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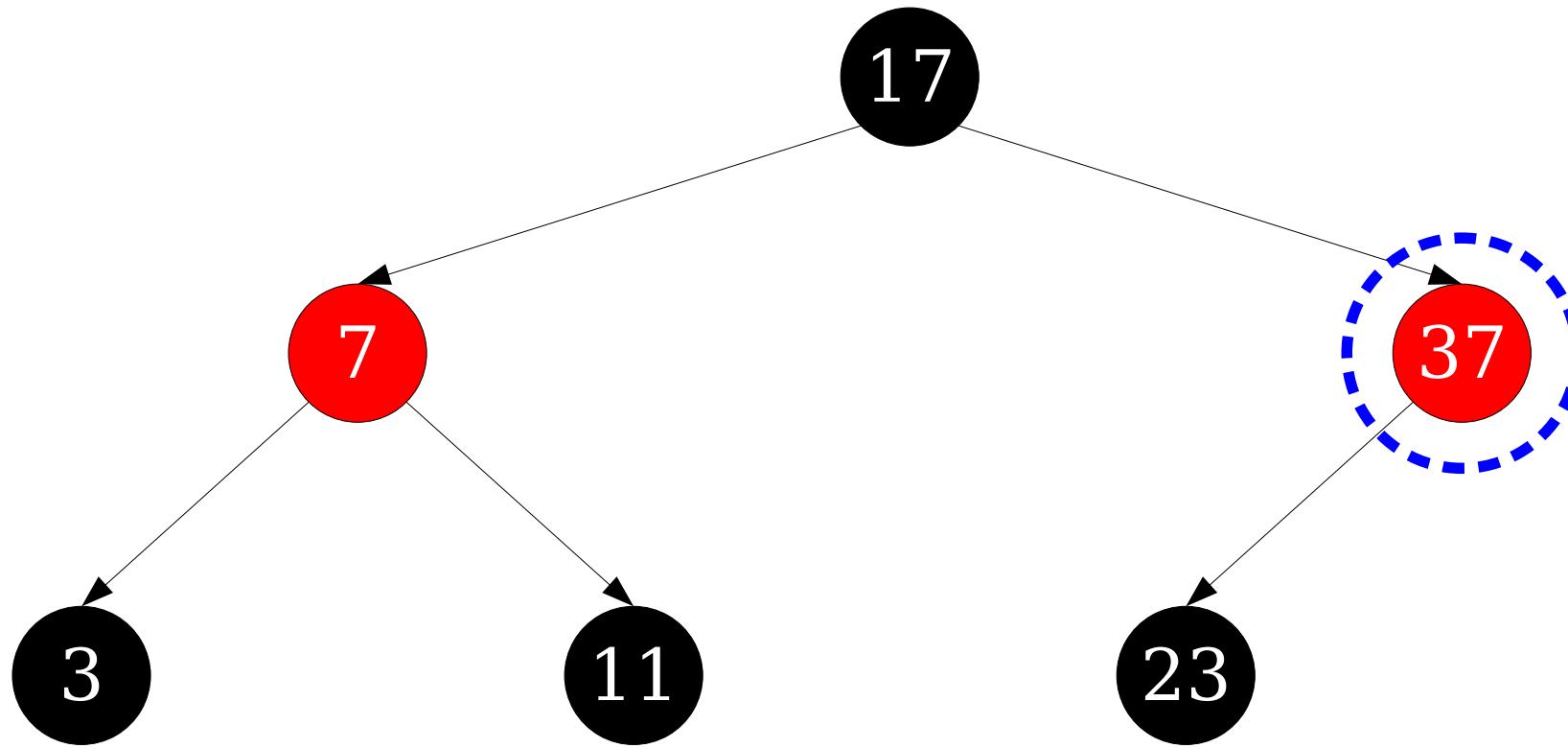
Mutating Red/Black Trees



Mutating Red/Black Trees



Mutating Red/Black Trees



How do we fix up the
black-height property?

Fixing Up Red/Black Trees

- ***The Good News:*** After doing an insertion or deletion, we can locally modify a red/black tree in time $O(\log n)$ to fix up the red/black properties.
- ***The Bad News:*** There are a *lot* of cases to consider and they're not trivial.
- Some questions:
 - How do you memorize / remember all the rules for fixing up the tree?
 - How on earth did anyone come up with red/black trees in the first place?

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Time-Out for Announcements!

Lecture Participation Opt-Out

- By default, lecture participation (PollEV) accounts for 5% of your course grade.
- If you'd like to opt out of lecture participation and add that extra 5% to your final exam, you can opt out by this Friday at 11:59PM.
- Check Ed for the link you can use to do this.

Problem Set 2

- Problem Set 1 is graded and solutions are now up on Gradescope.
- Problem Set 2 is due Thursday at 1:00PM.
 - Friendly reminder for the coding component: don't try doing this all in one go. Break it down into smaller, more easily testable pieces.
 - Kai has some **excellent advice** about coding up advanced data structures; check it out!
 - Remember to write beautiful code: decompose complex functions into multiple helpers, comment aggressively, etc.
- Stop by OH or ask on Ed if you have any questions!

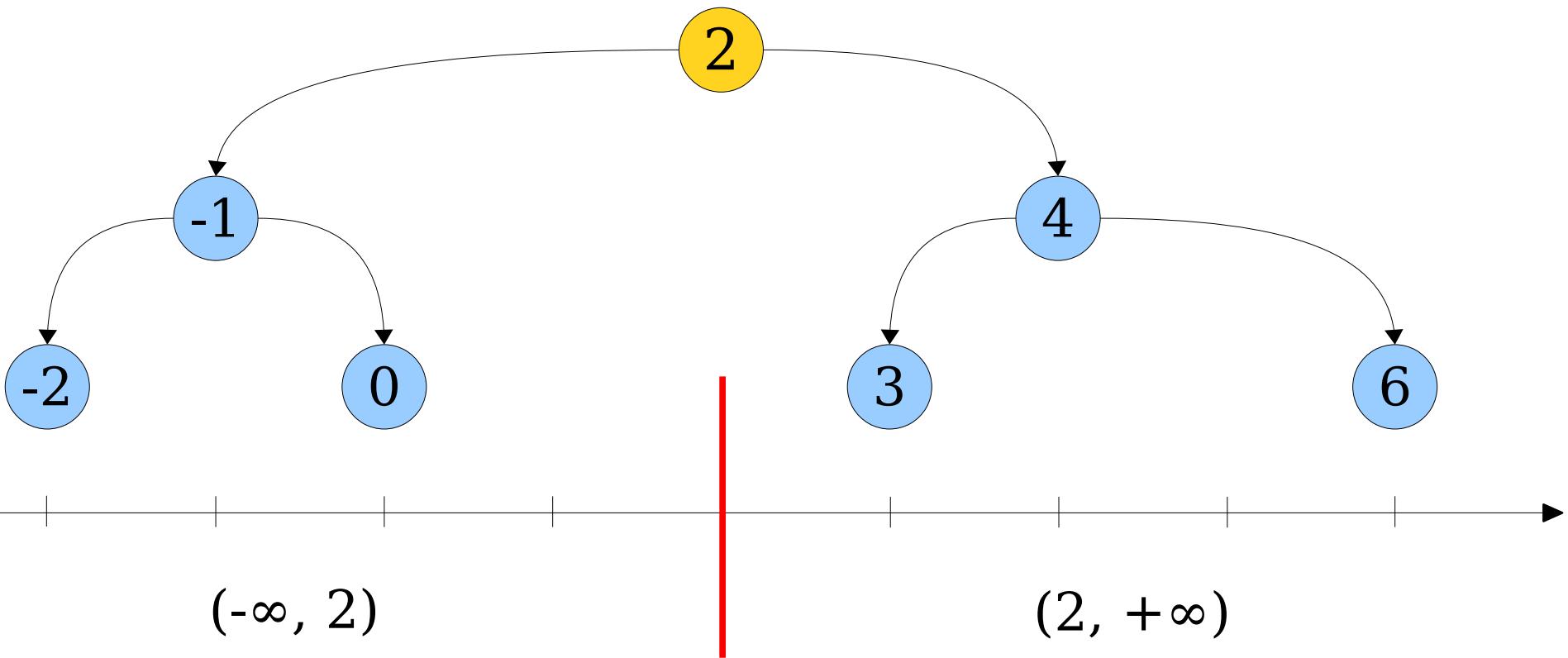
Back to CS166!

How did anyone come up with
red/black trees in the first place?

Multiway Search Trees

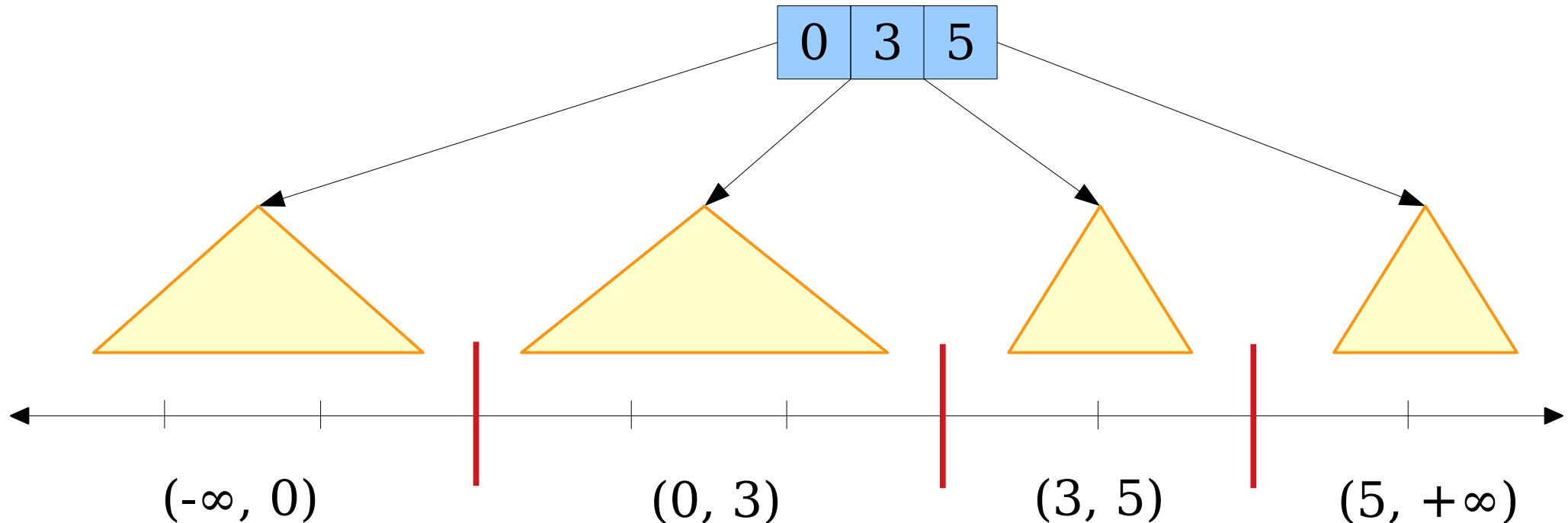
Generalizing BSTs

- In a binary search tree, each node stores a single key.
- That key splits the “key space” into two pieces, and each subtree stores the keys in those halves.



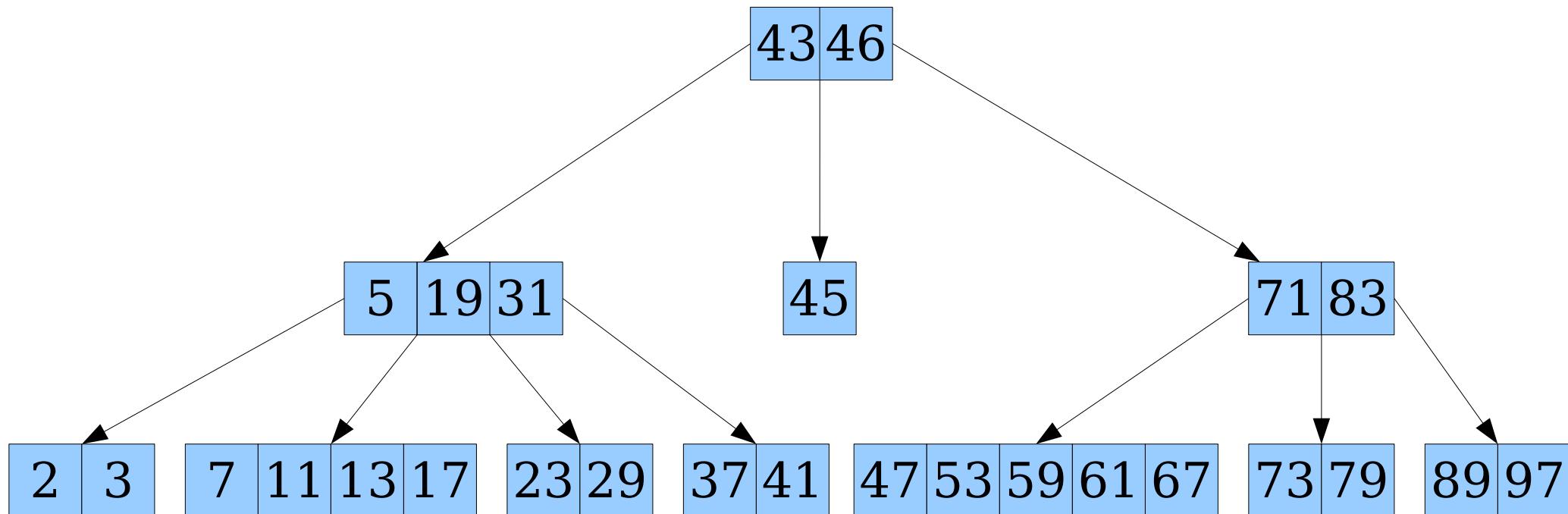
Generalizing BSTs

- In a ***multiway search tree***, each node stores an arbitrary number of keys in sorted order.
- A node with k keys splits the key space into $k+1$ regions, with subtrees for keys in each region.



Generalizing BSTs

- In a ***multiway search tree***, each node stores an arbitrary number of keys in sorted order.



- Surprisingly, it's a bit easier to build a balanced multiway tree than it is to build a balanced BST. Let's see how.

Balanced Multiway Trees

- In some sense, building a balanced multiway tree isn't all that hard.
- We can always just cram more keys into a single node!

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26	31	41	53	58	59	97
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26	31	41	53	58	59	93	97
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23	26	31	41	53	58	59	93	97
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- At a certain point, this stops being a good idea – it's basically just a sorted array. What does “balance” even mean here?

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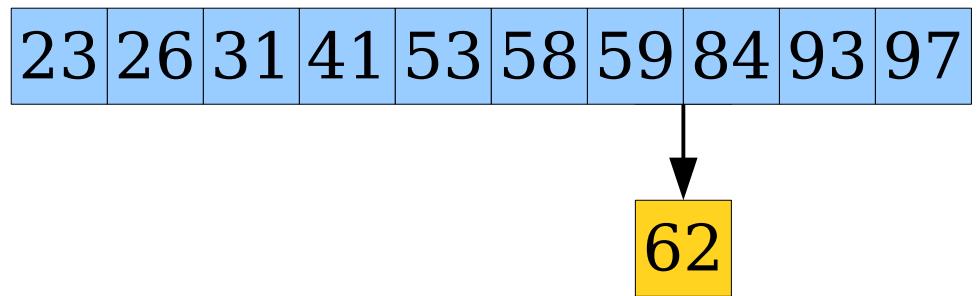
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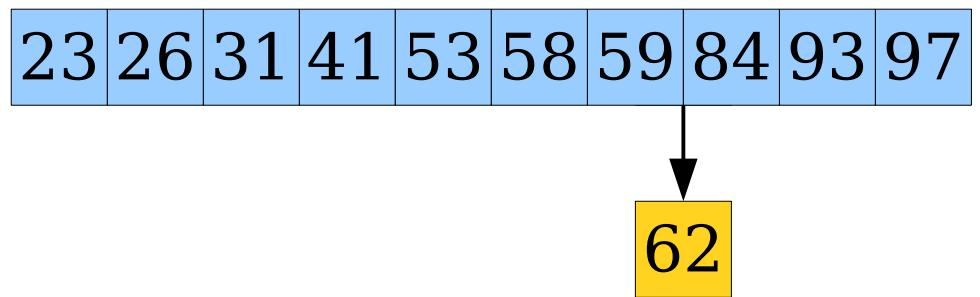
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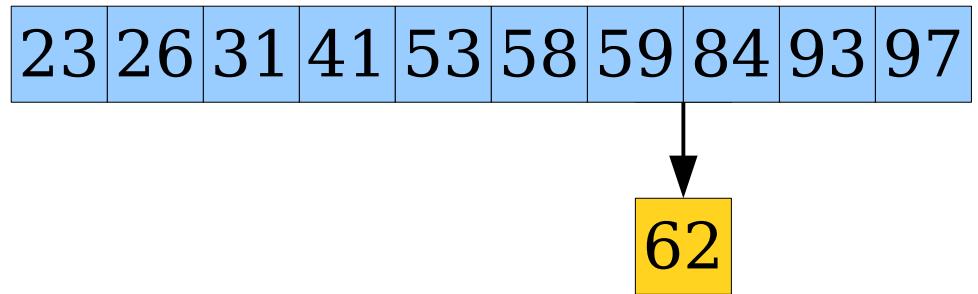
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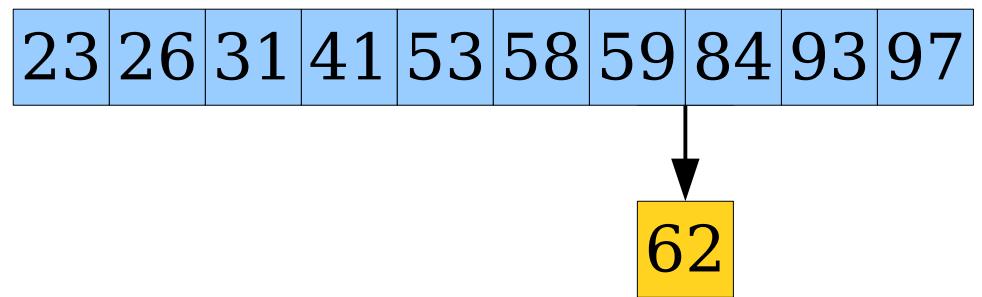
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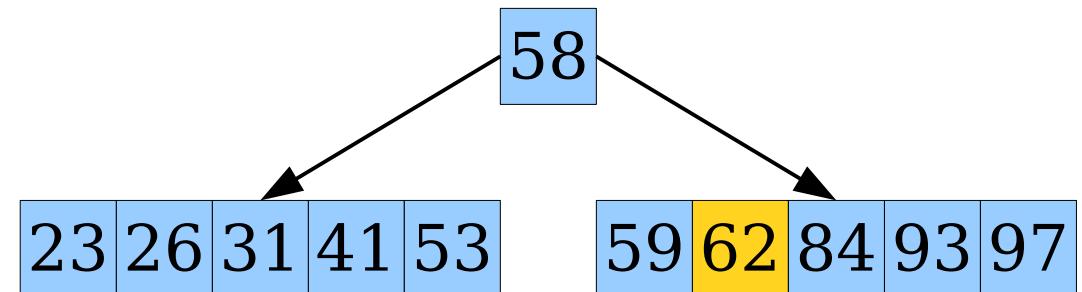
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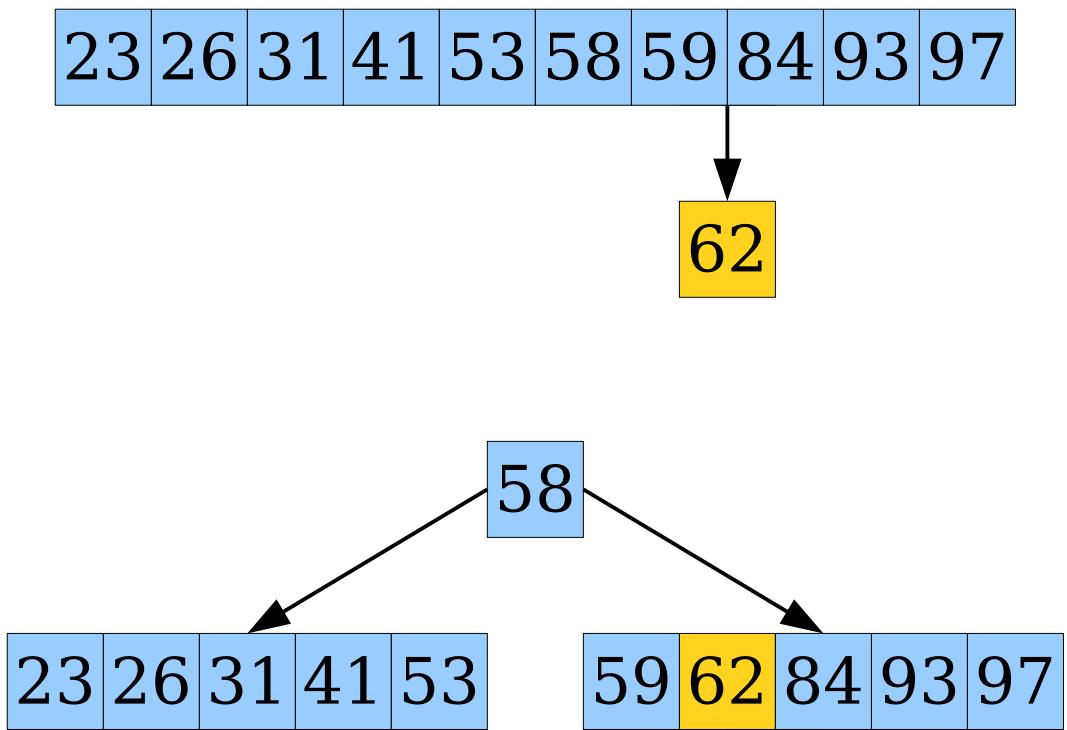
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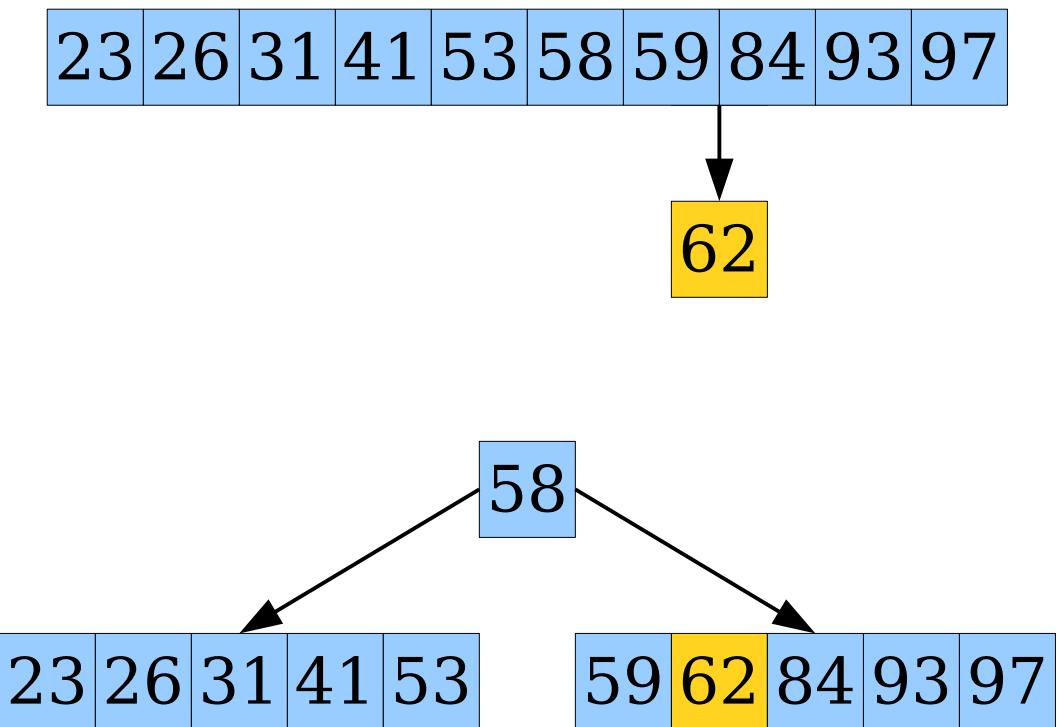
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How do these options compare? Answer at
<https://cs166.stanford.edu/pollev>

Balanced Multiway Trees

- ***Option 1:*** Push keys down into new nodes.
 - Simple to implement.
 - Can lead to tree imbalances.

10	99	50	20	40	30	31	39	35	32	33	34
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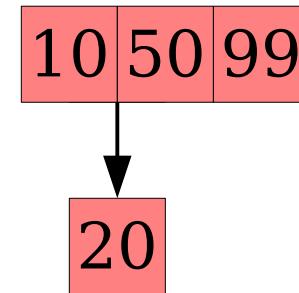
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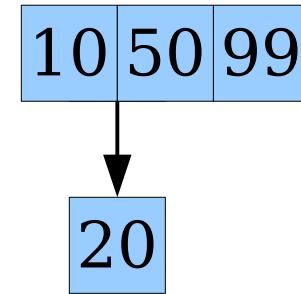
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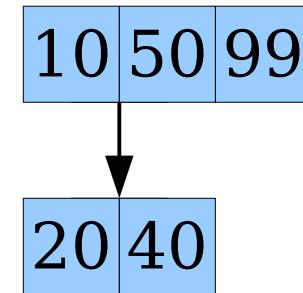
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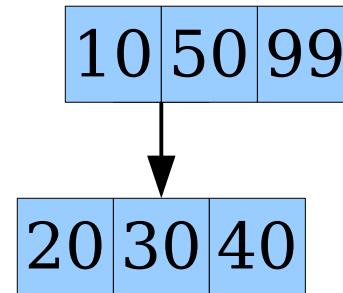
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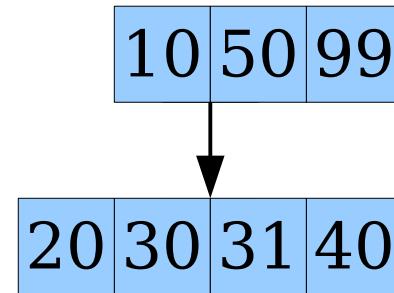
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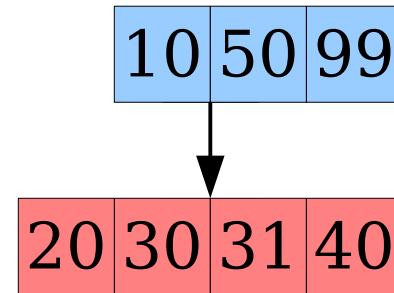
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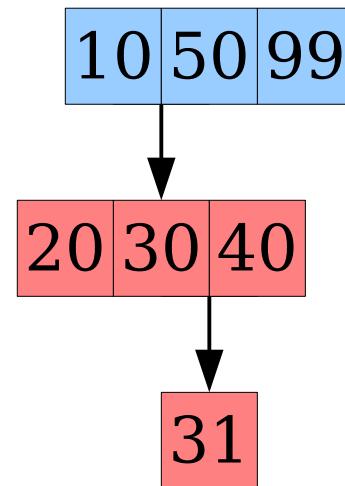
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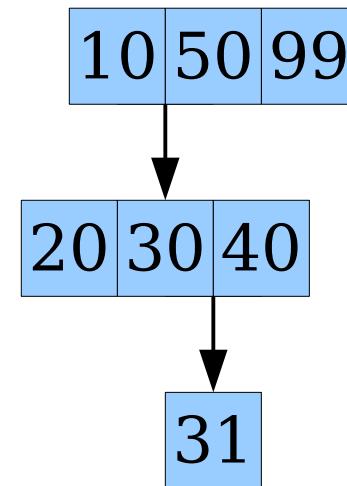
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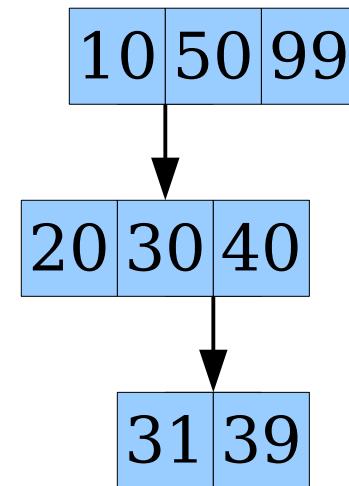
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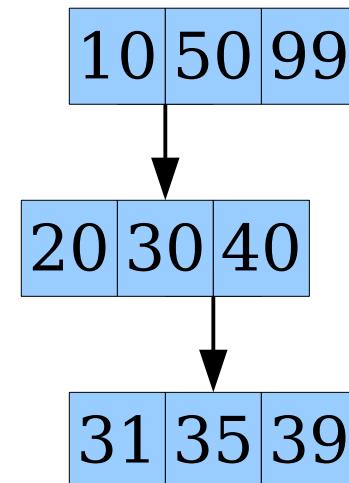
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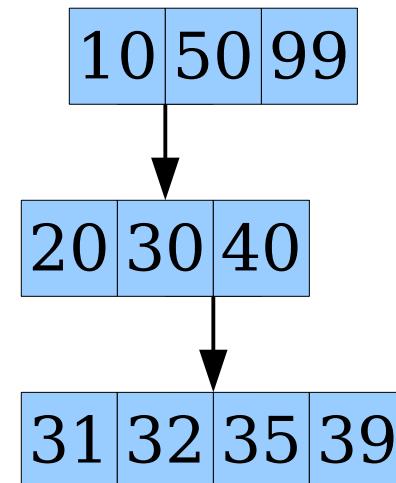
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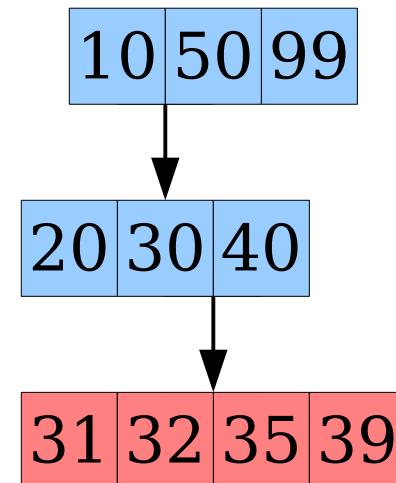
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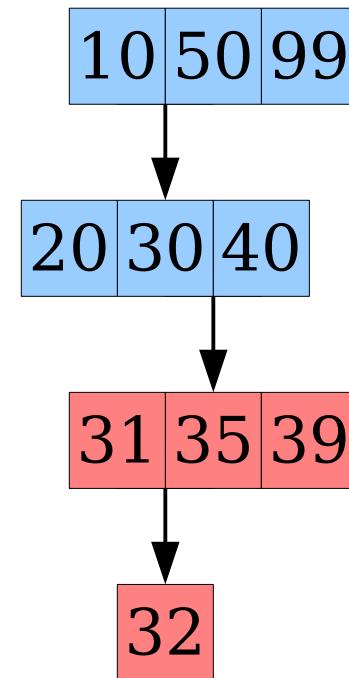
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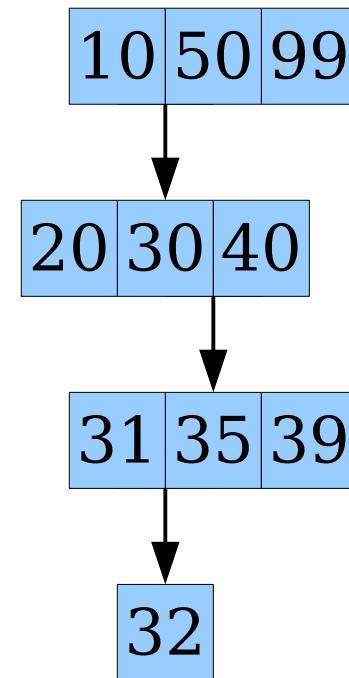
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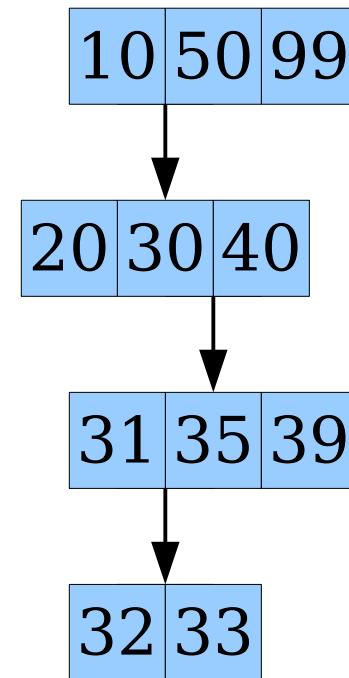
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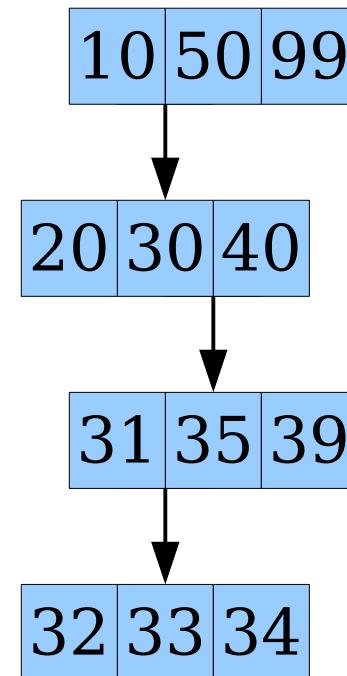
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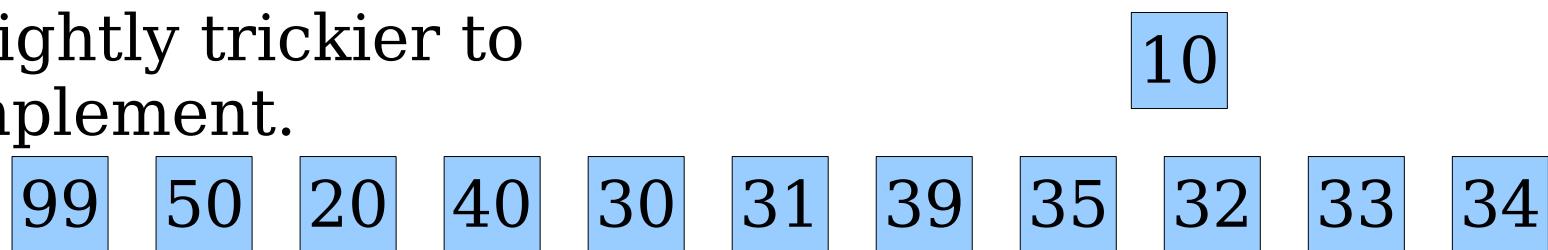
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- **Option 1:** Push keys down into new nodes.
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 - Can lead to tree imbalances.
- **Option 2:** Split big nodes, kicking keys higher up.
 - Keeps the tree balanced.
 - Slightly trickier to implement.

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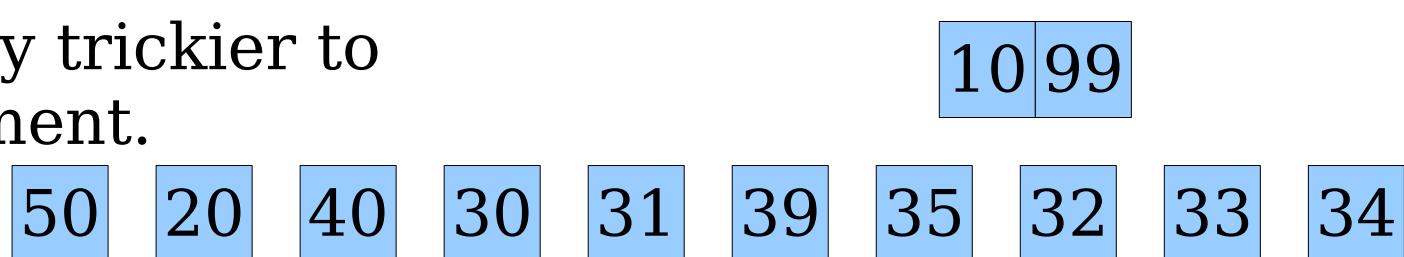
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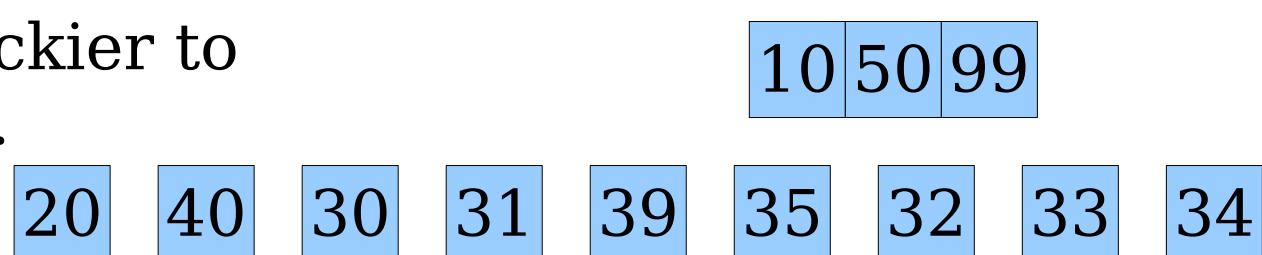
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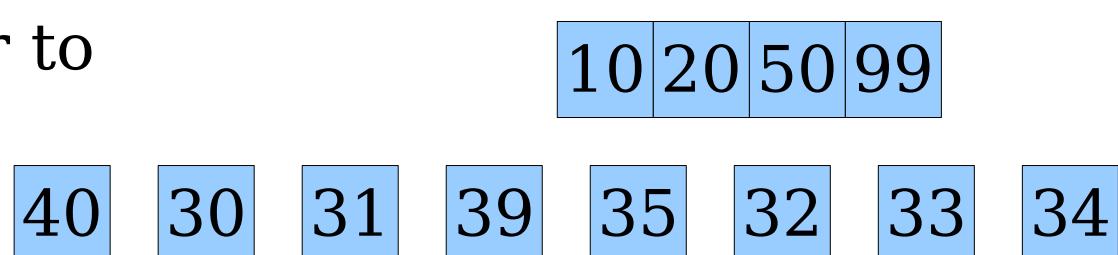
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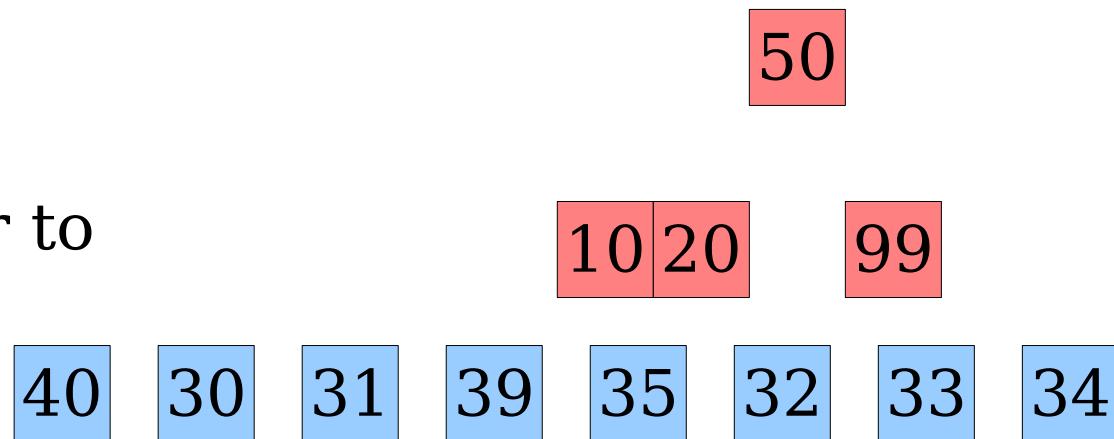
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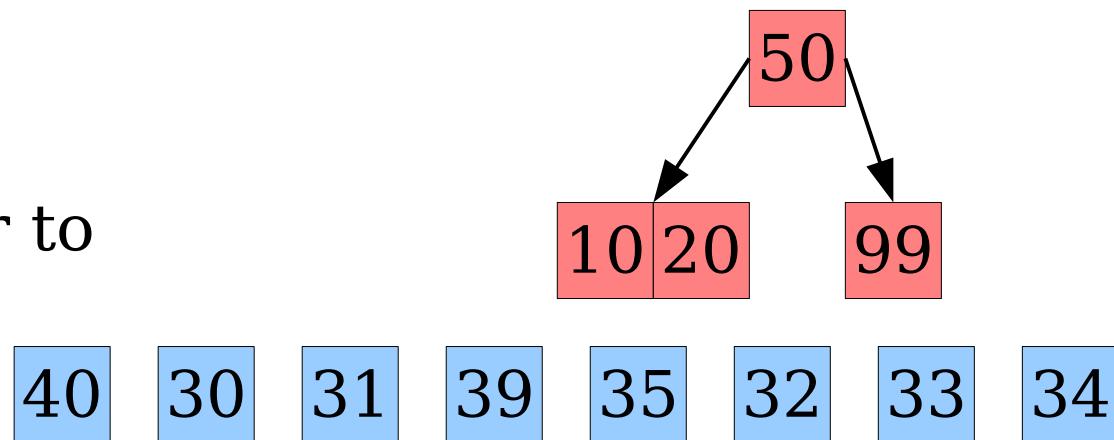
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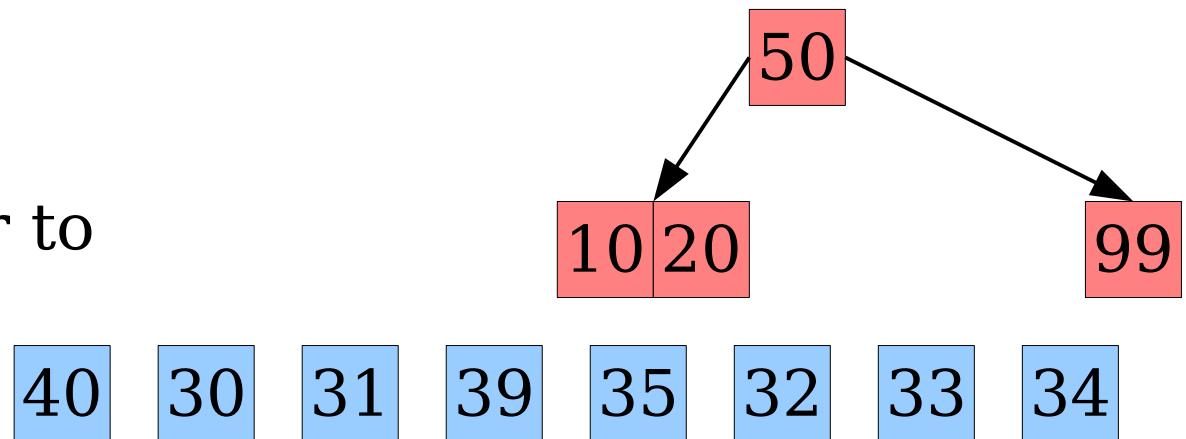
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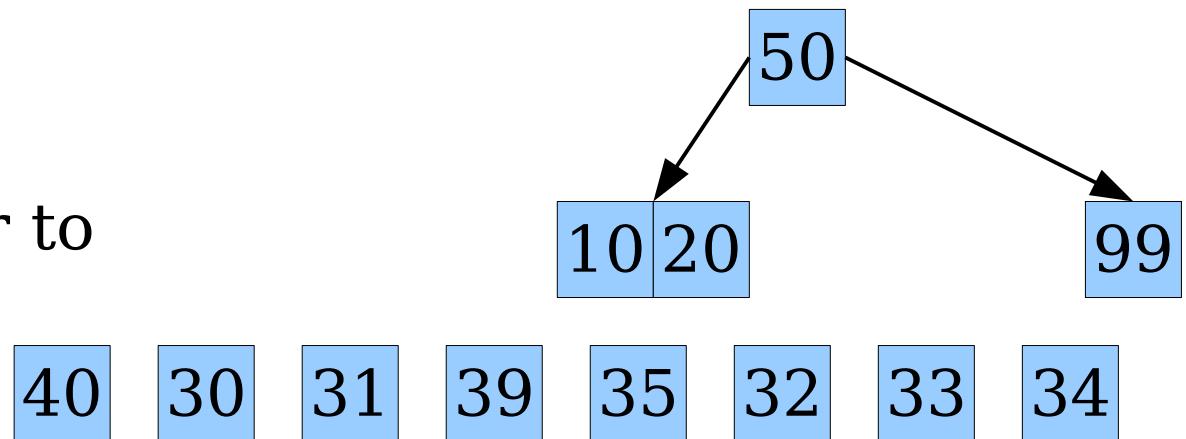
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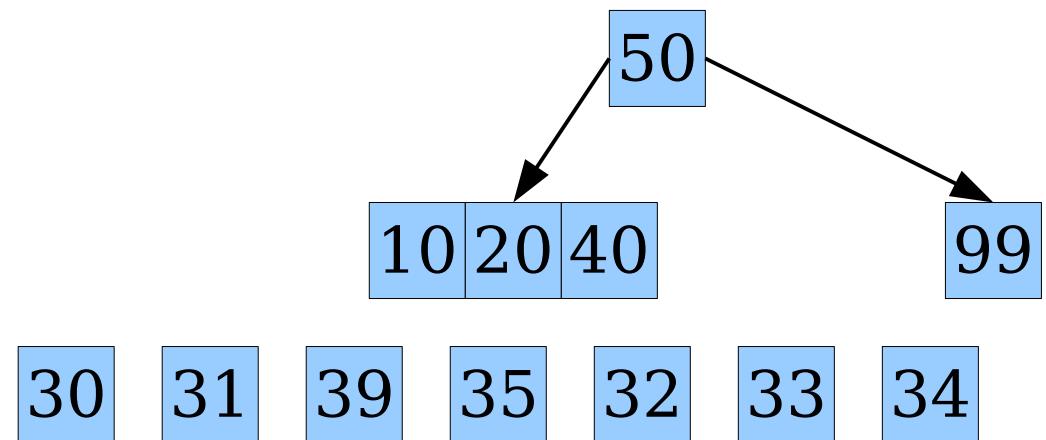
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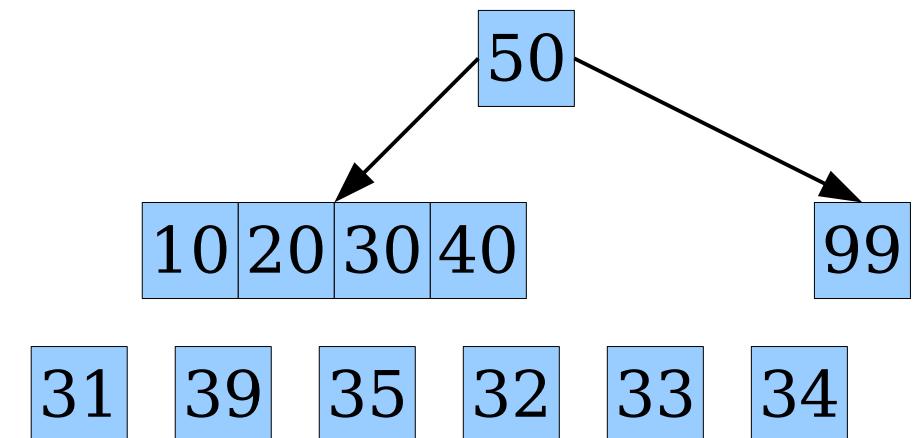
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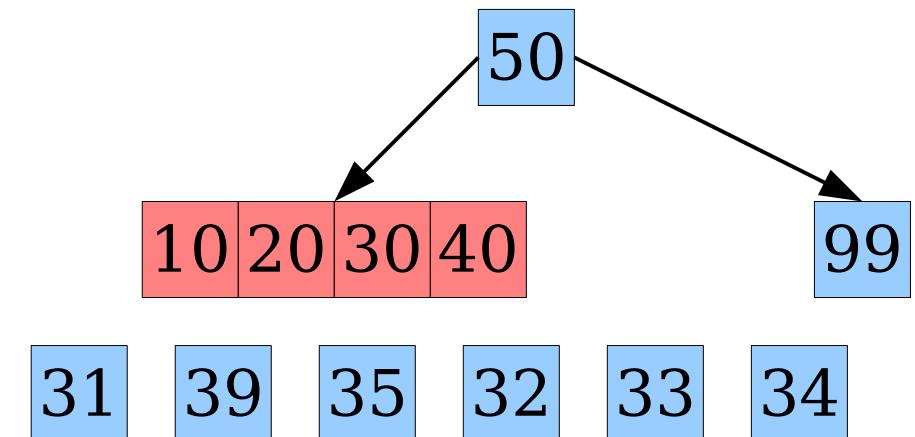
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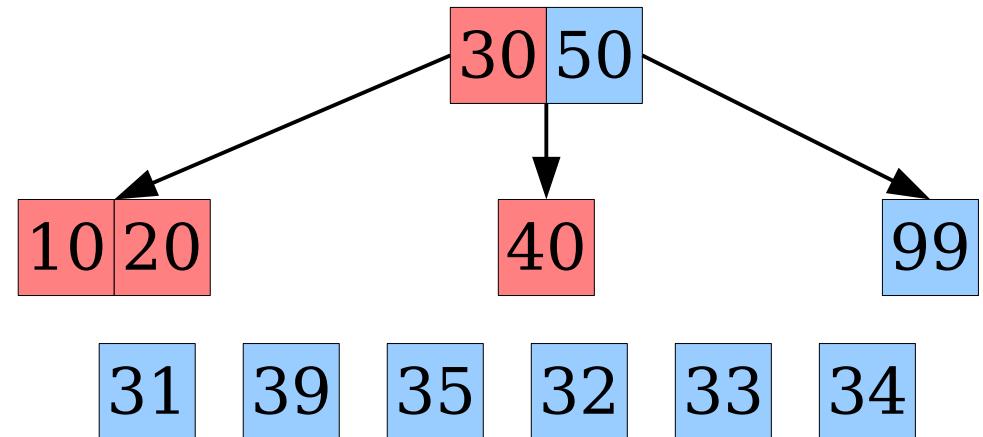
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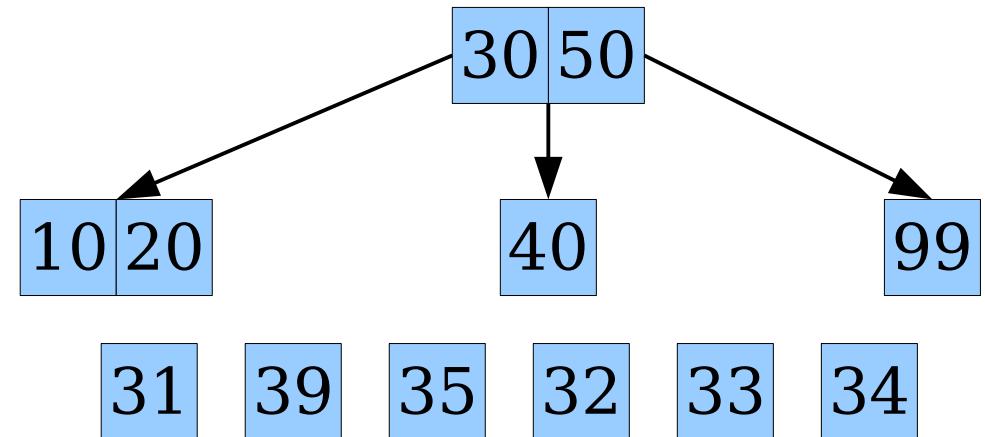
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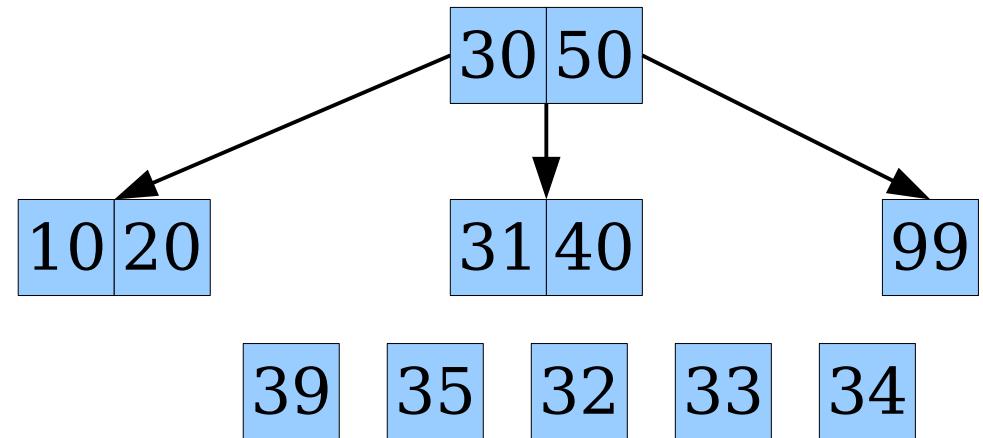
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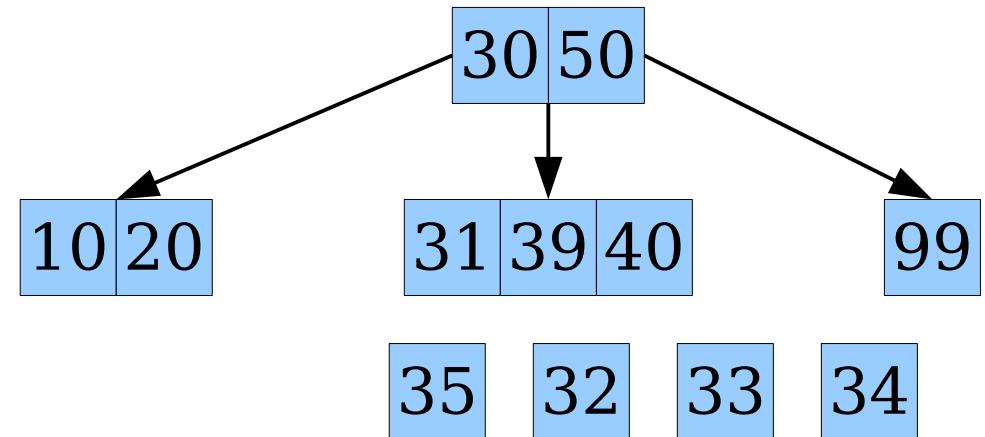
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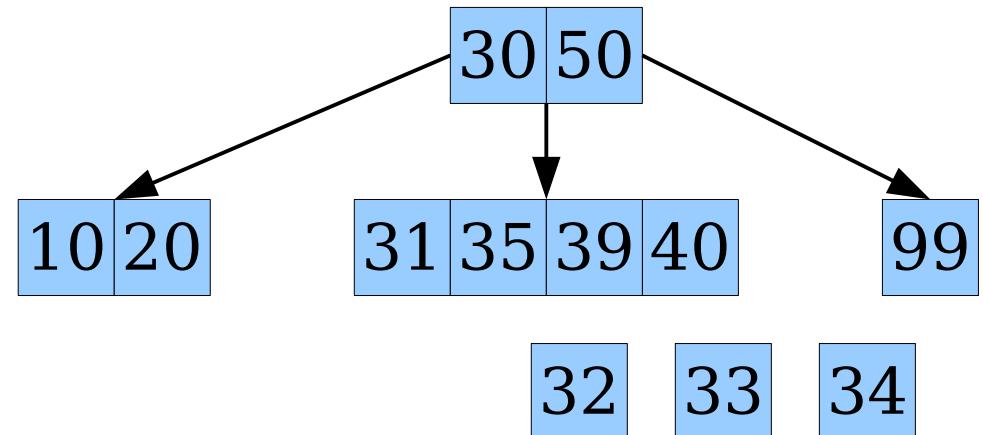
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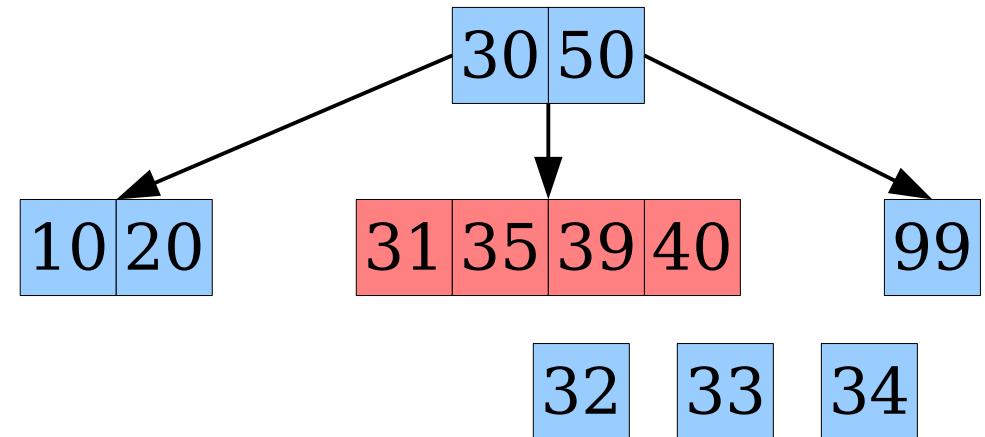
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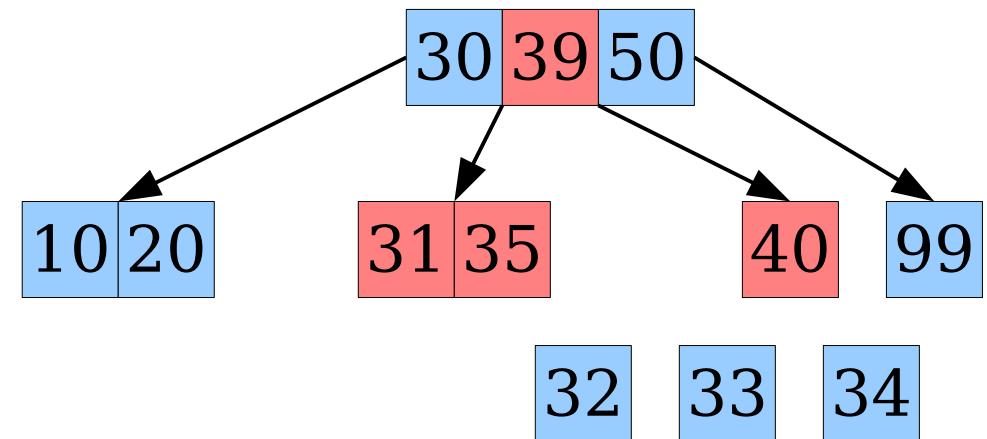
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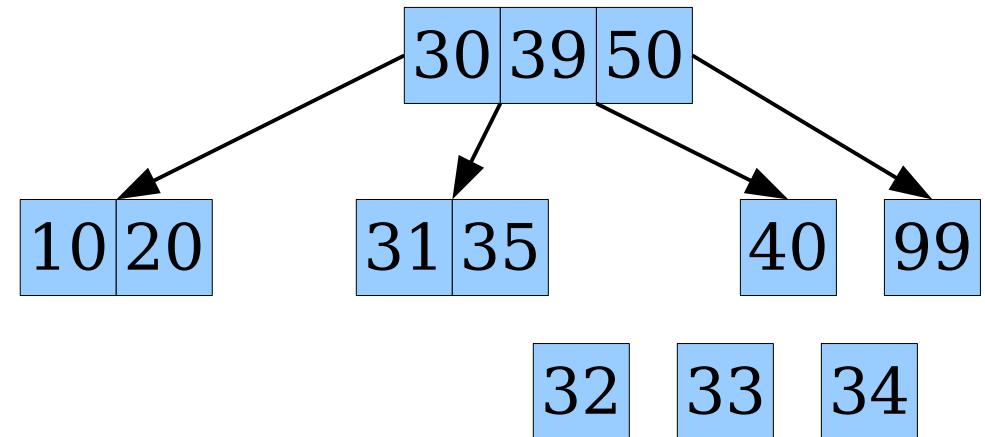
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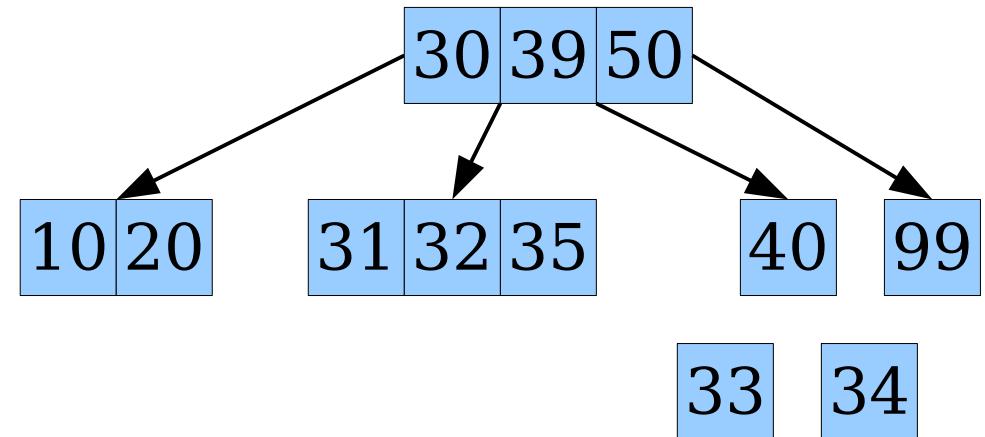
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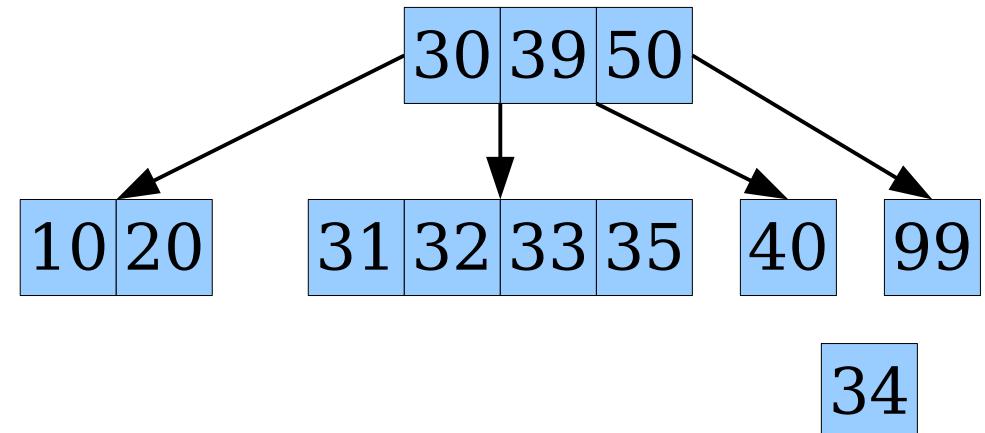
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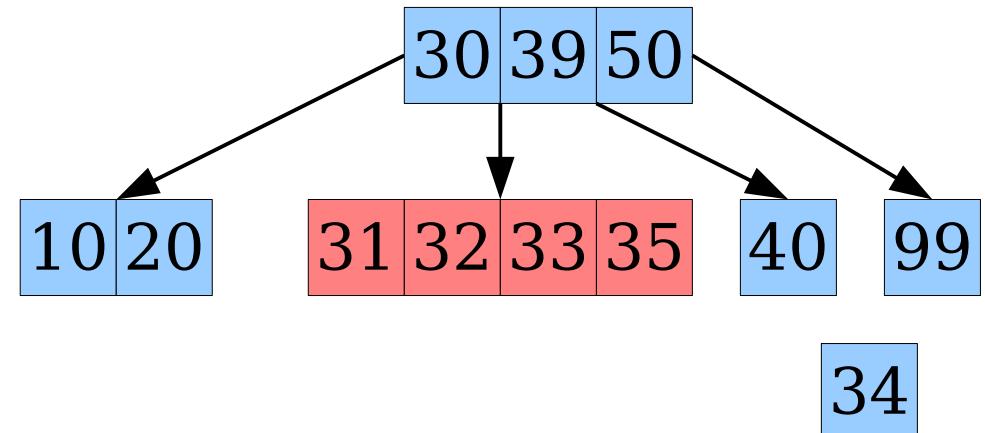
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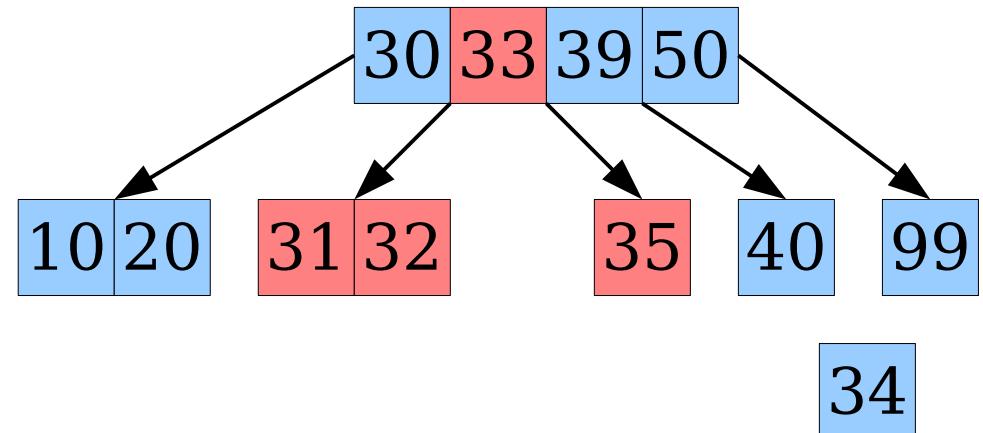
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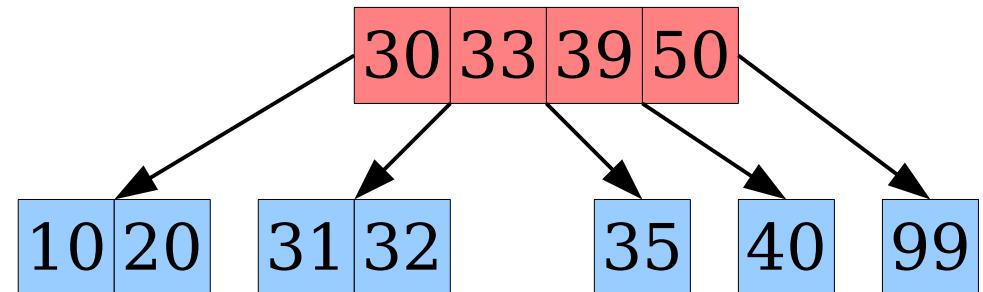
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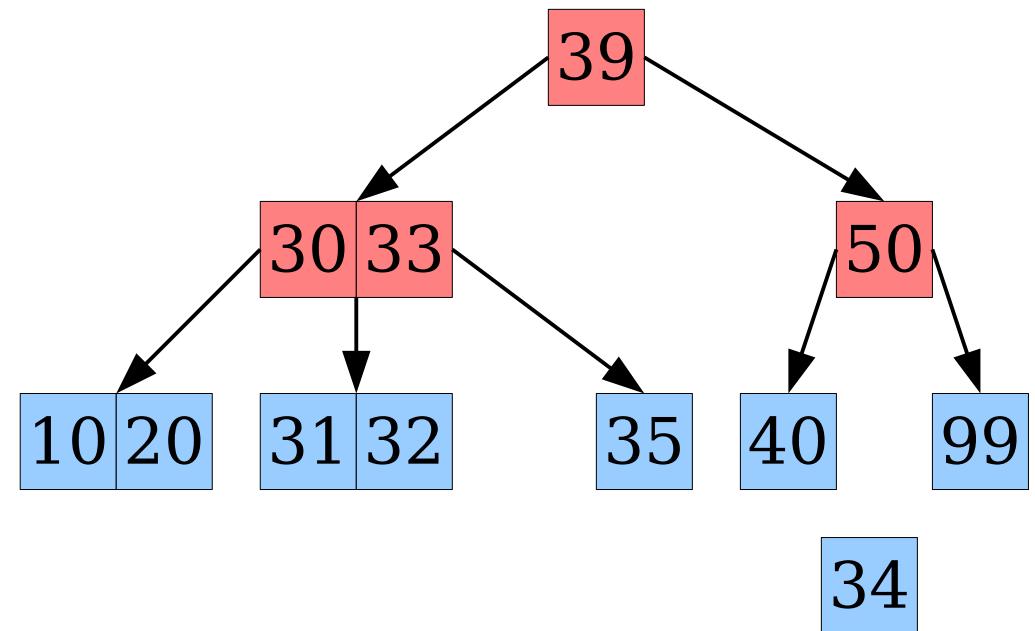
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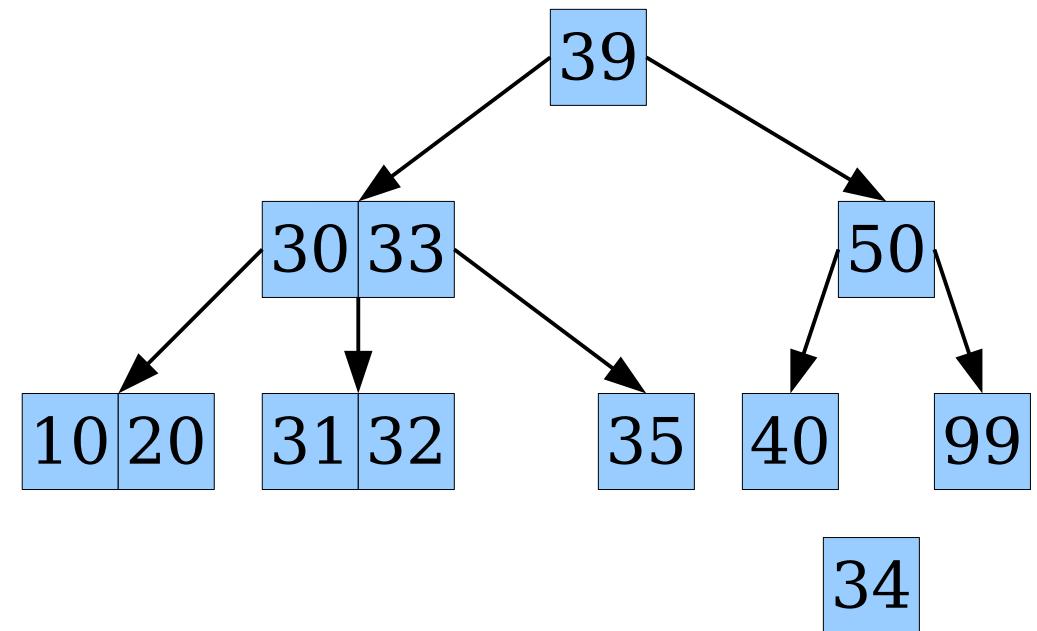
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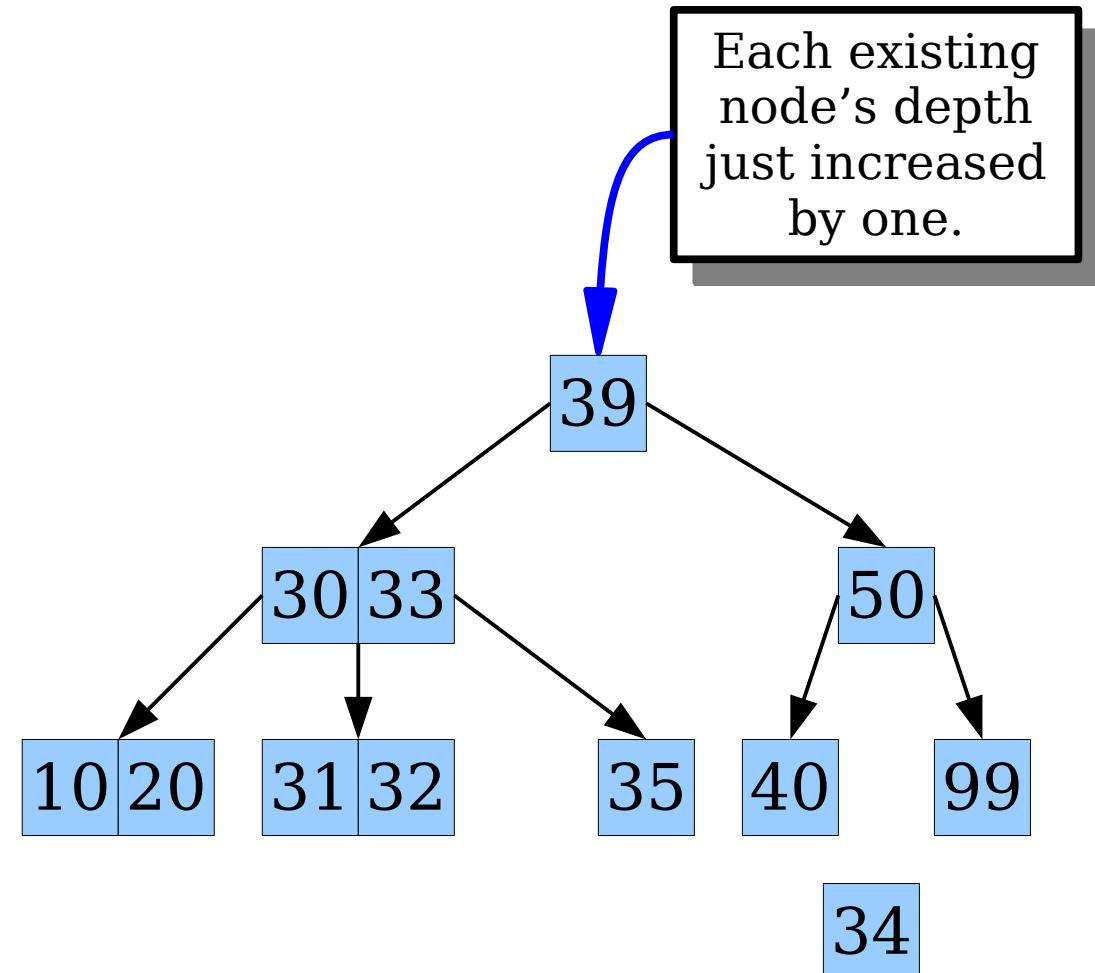
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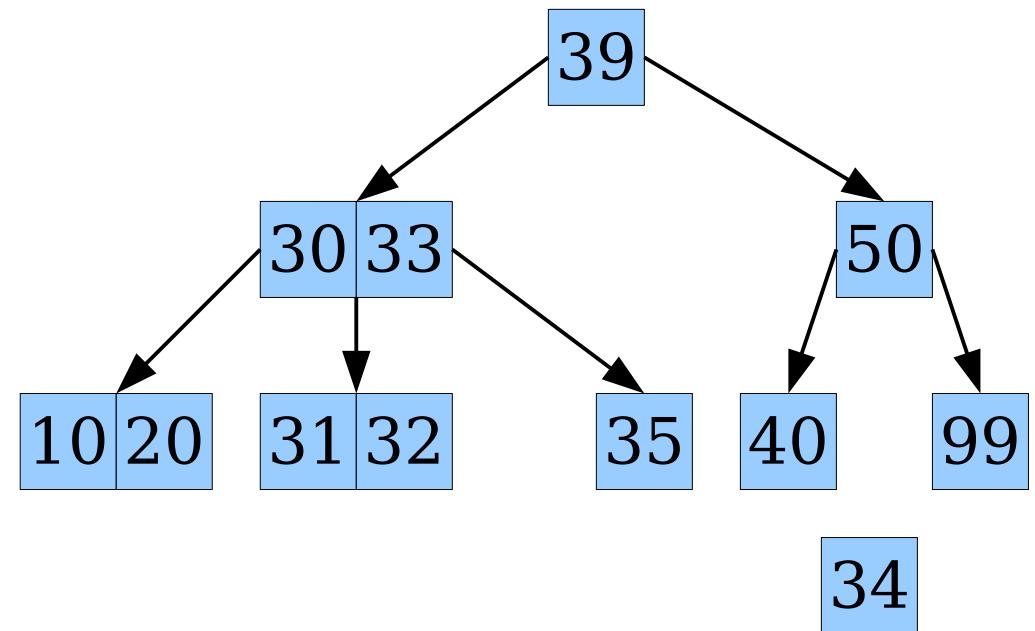
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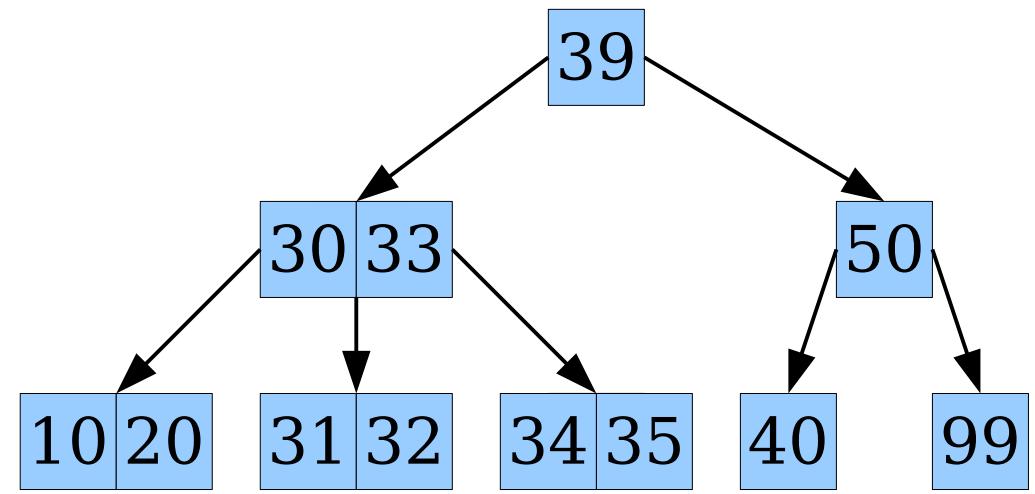
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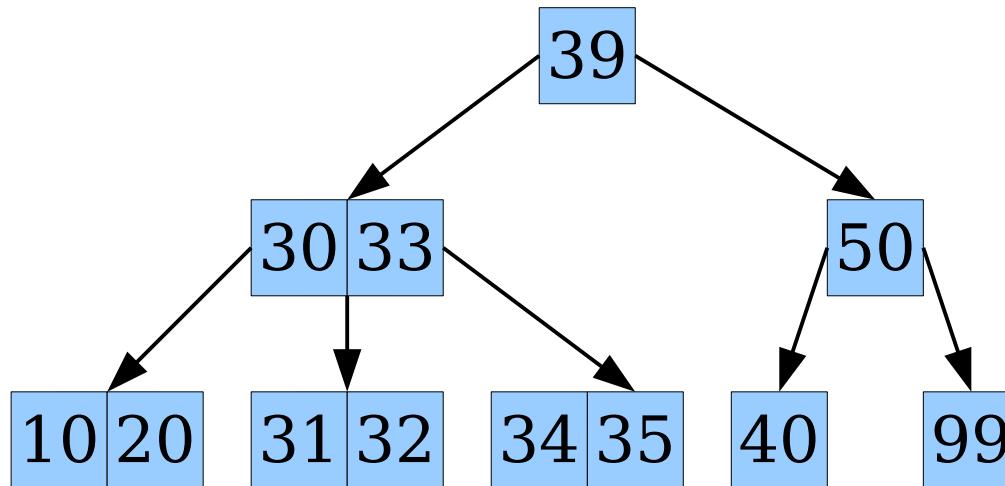
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Balanced Multiway Trees

- **General idea:** Cap the maximum number of keys in a node. Add keys into leaves. Whenever a node gets too big, split it and kick one key higher up the tree.



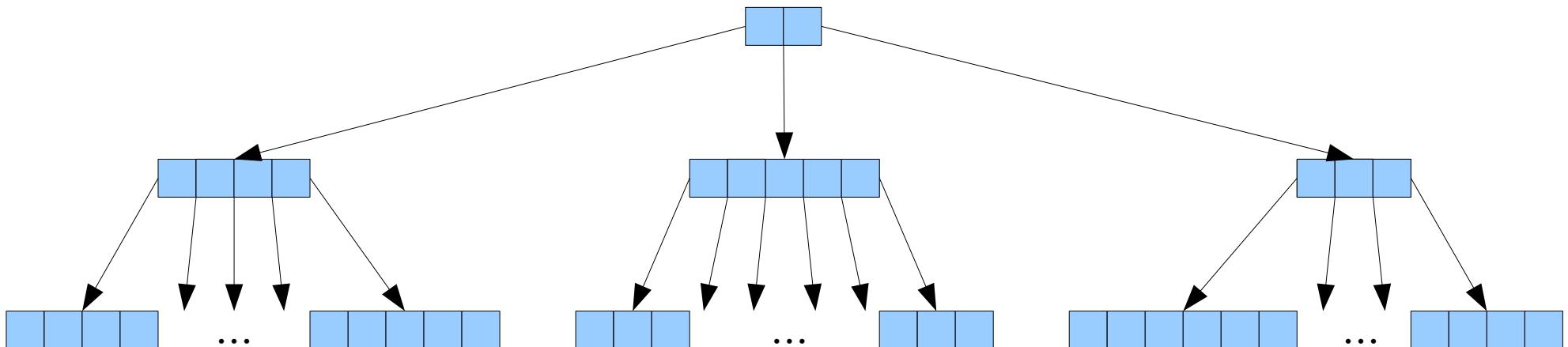
- **Advantage 1:** The tree is always balanced.
- **Advantage 2:** Insertions and lookups are pretty fast.

Balanced Multiway Trees

- We currently have a ***mechanical description*** of how these balanced multiway trees work:
 - Cap the size of each node.
 - Add keys into leaves.
 - Split nodes when they get too big and propagate the splits upward.
- We currently don't have an ***operational definition*** of how these balanced multiway trees work.
 - e.g. “A Cartesian tree for an array is a binary tree that’s a min-heap and whose inorder traversal gives back the original array.”

B-Trees

- A ***B-tree of order b*** is a multiway search tree where
 - each node has between $b-1$ and $2b-1$ keys, except the root, which may have between 1 and $2b-1$ keys;
 - each node is either a leaf or has one more child than key; and
 - all leaves are at the same depth.
- Different authors give different bounds on how many keys can be in each node. The ranges are often $[b-1, 2b-1]$ or $[b, 2b]$. For the purposes of today's lecture, we'll use the range $[b-1, 2b-1]$ for the key limits, just for simplicity.



Analyzing B-Trees

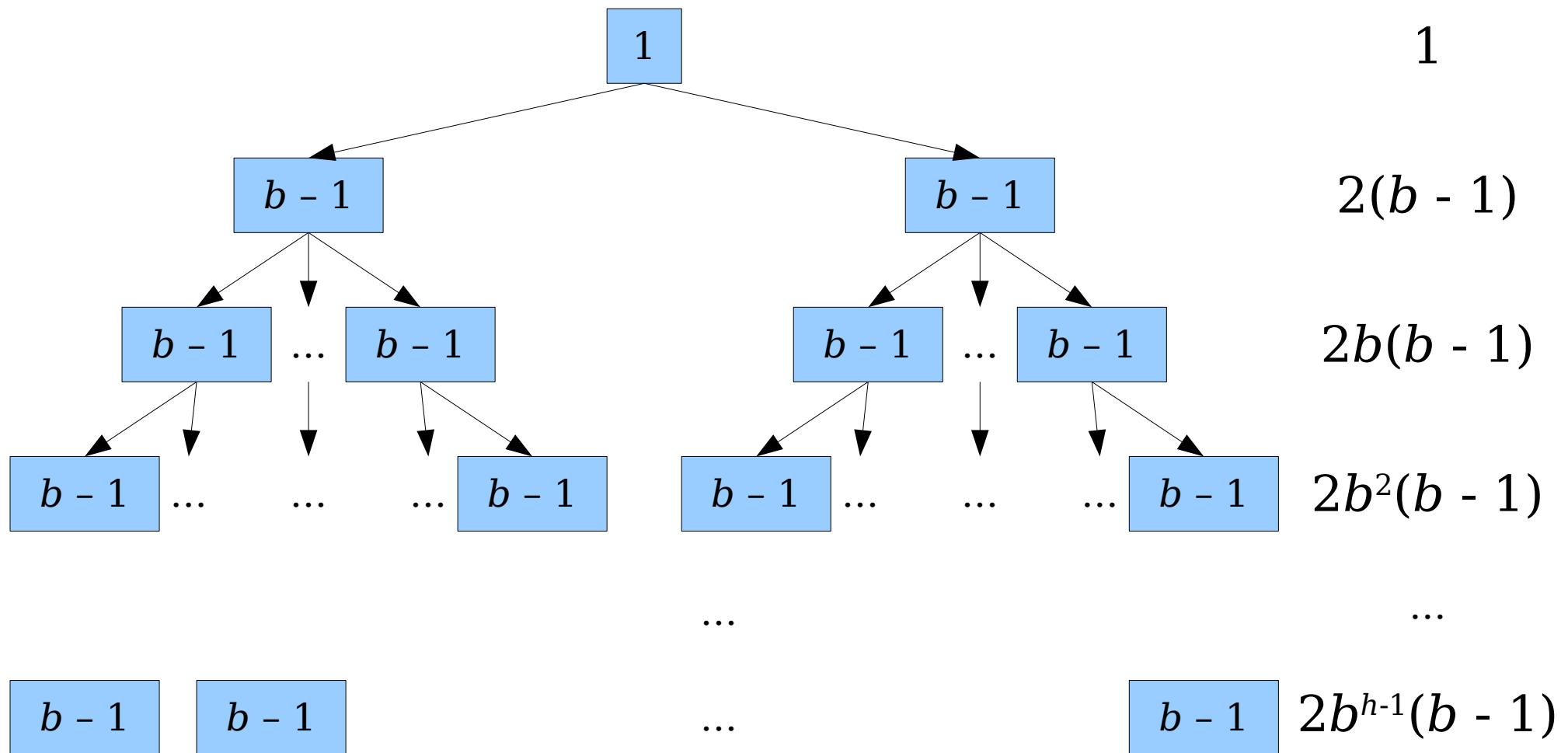
The Height of a B-Tree

- What is the maximum possible height of a B-tree of order b that holds n keys?

Intuition: The branching factor of the tree is at least b , so the number of keys per level grows exponentially in b . Therefore, we'd expect something along the lines of $O(\log_b n)$.

The Height of a B-Tree

- What is the maximum possible height of a B-tree of order b that holds n keys?



The Height of a B-Tree

- **Theorem:** The maximum height of a B-tree of order b containing n keys is $O(\log_b n)$.
- **Proof:** Number of keys n in a B-tree of height h is guaranteed to be at least

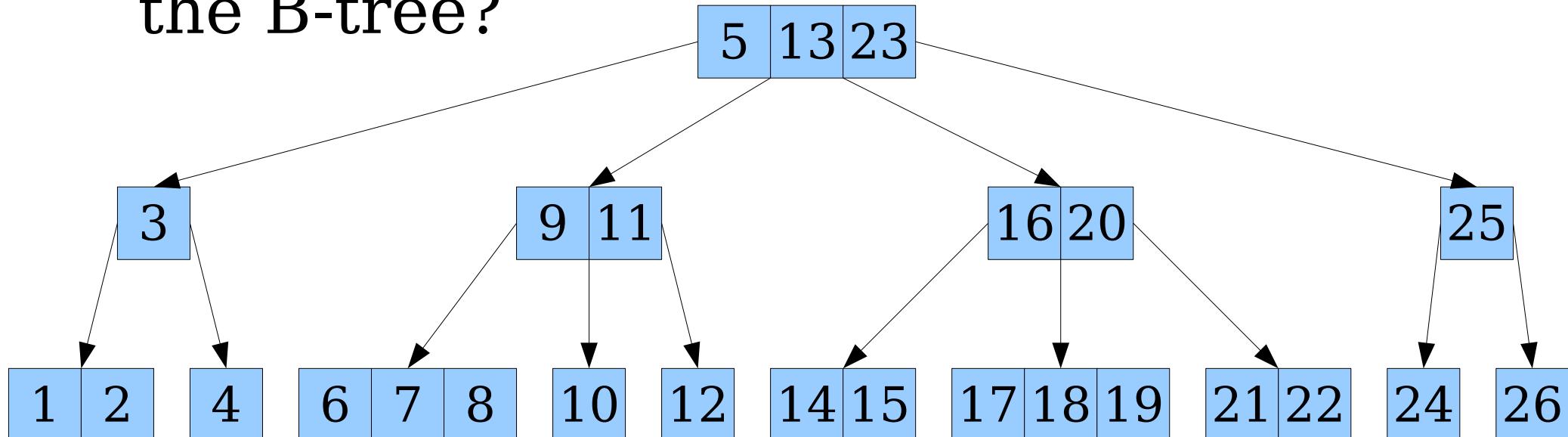
$$\begin{aligned} & 1 + 2(\mathbf{b} - 1) + 2\mathbf{b}(\mathbf{b} - 1) + 2\mathbf{b}^2(\mathbf{b} - 1) + \dots + 2\mathbf{b}^{h-1}(\mathbf{b} - 1) \\ &= 1 + 2(\mathbf{b} - 1)(1 + \mathbf{b} + \mathbf{b}^2 + \dots + \mathbf{b}^{h-1}) \\ &= 1 + 2(\mathbf{b} - 1)((\mathbf{b}^h - 1) / (\mathbf{b} - 1)) \\ &= 1 + 2(\mathbf{b}^h - 1) = 2\mathbf{b}^h - 1. \end{aligned}$$

Solving $n = 2b^h - 1$ yields $h = \log_b ((n + 1) / 2)$, so the height is $O(\log_b n)$. ■

Analyzing Efficiency

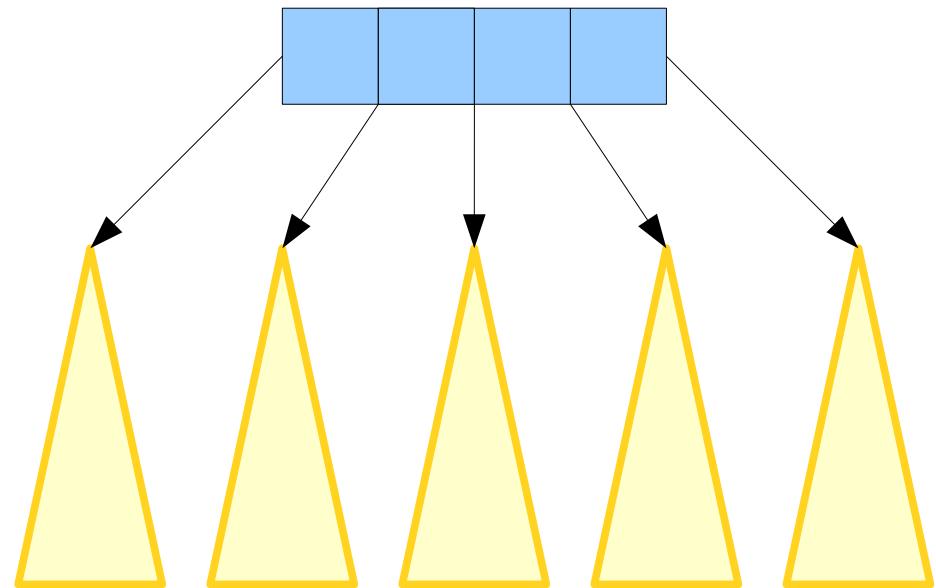
- Suppose we have a B-tree of order b .
- What is the worst-case runtime of looking up a key in the B-tree?

Answer at
<https://cs166.stanford.edu/pollev>



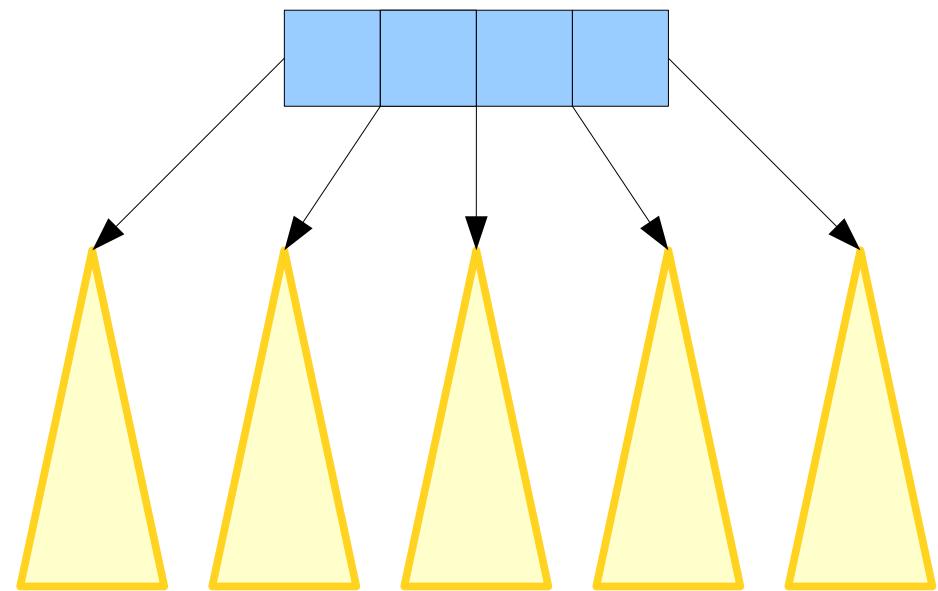
Analyzing Efficiency

- Suppose we have a B-tree of order b .
- What is the worst-case runtime of looking up a key in the B-tree?
- **Answer:** It depends on how we do the search!



Analyzing Efficiency

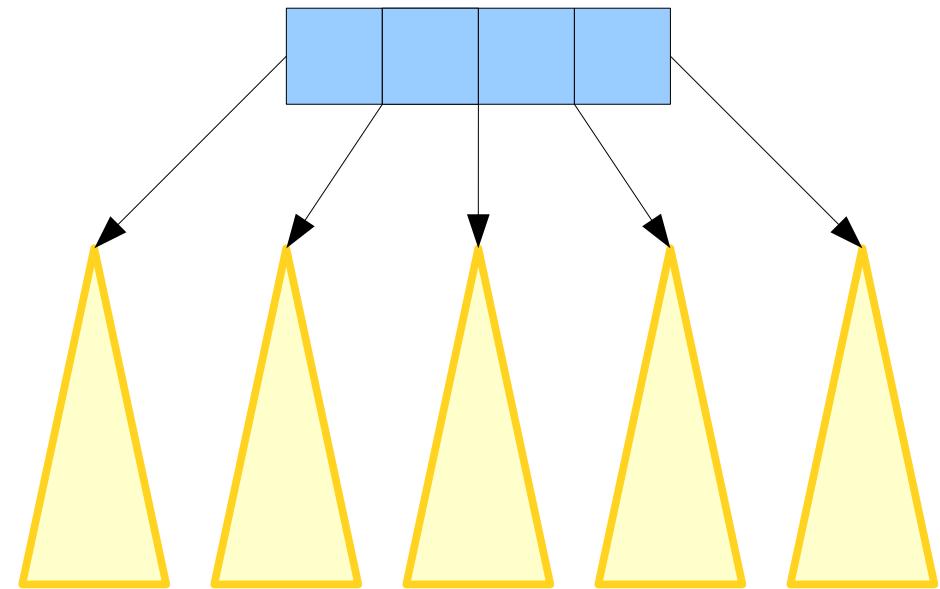
- To do a lookup in a B-tree, we need to determine which child tree to descend into.
- This means we need to compare our query key against the keys in the node.
- **Question:** How should we do this?



Analyzing Efficiency

- **Option 1:** Use a linear search.
- Cost per node: $O(b)$.
- Nodes visited: $O(\log_b n)$.
- Total cost:
$$O(b) \cdot O(\log_b n)$$

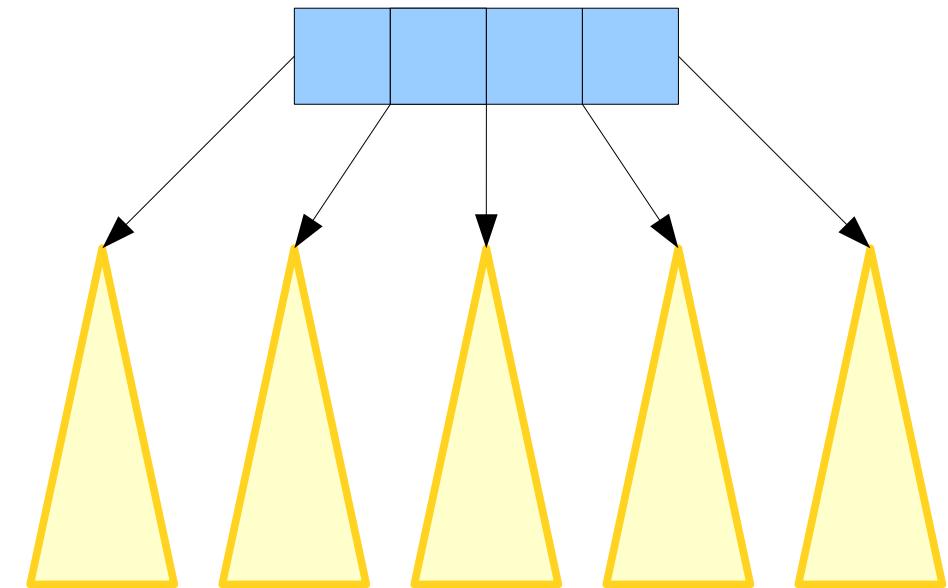
$$= \mathbf{O(b \log_b n)}$$



Analyzing Efficiency

- **Option 2:** Use a binary search.
- Cost per node: $O(\log b)$.
- Nodes visited: $O(\log_b n)$.
- Total cost:

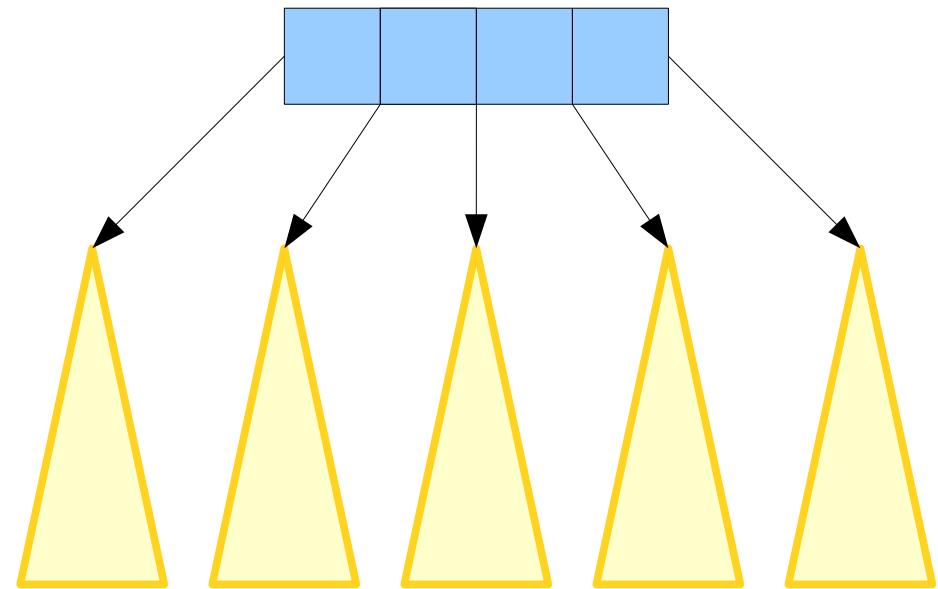
$$\begin{aligned} & O(\log b) \cdot O(\log_b n) \\ &= O(\log b \cdot \log_b n) \\ &= O(\log b \cdot (\log n) / (\log b)) \\ &= \mathbf{O(\log n)}. \end{aligned}$$



That's the same as for binary search or a balanced BST.
Why is that?

Analyzing Efficiency

- Suppose we have a B-tree of order b .
- What is the worst-case runtime of inserting a key into the B-tree?
- Each insertion visits $O(\log_b n)$ nodes, and in the worst case we have to split every node we see.
- **Answer:** $O(b \log_b n)$.



Analyzing Efficiency

- The cost of an insertion in a B-tree of order b is $O(b \log_b n)$.
- What's the best choice of b to use here?
- Note that

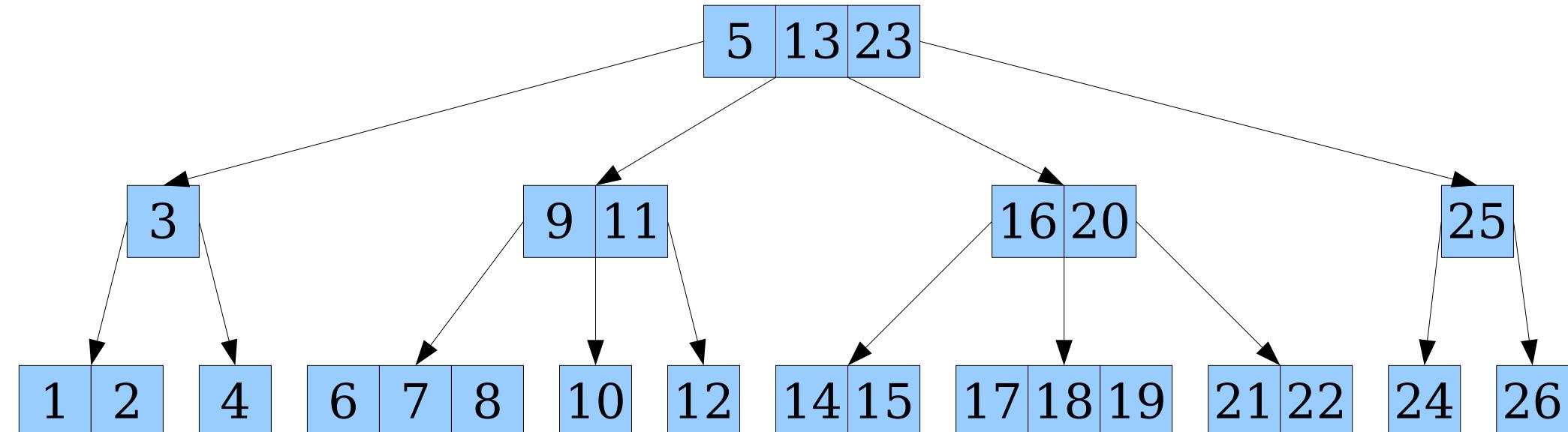
$$\begin{aligned} & b \log_b n \\ &= b (\log n / \log b) \\ &= (b / \log b) \log n. \end{aligned}$$

Fun fact: This is the same time bound you'd get if you used a b -ary heap instead of a binary heap for a priority queue.

- What choice of b minimizes $b / \log b$?
- **Answer:** Pick $b = e$. (Or rather, $b = \lfloor e \rfloor = 2$.)

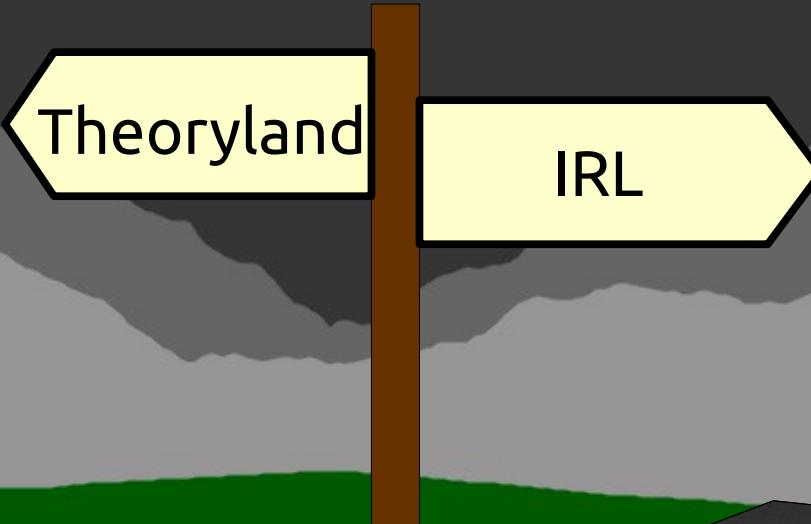
2-3-4 Trees

- A **2-3-4 tree** is a B-tree of order 2. Specifically:
 - each node has between 1 and 3 keys;
 - each node is either a leaf or has one more child than key; and
 - all leaves are at the same depth.
- You actually saw this B-tree earlier! It's the type of tree from our insertion example.



The Story So Far

- A B-tree supports
 - lookups in time $O(\log n)$, and
 - insertions in time $O(b \log_b n)$.
- Picking b to be around 2 or 3 makes this optimal in Theoryland.
 - The 2-3-4 tree is great for that reason.
- ***Plot Twist:*** In practice, you most often see choices of b like 1,024 or 4,096.
- ***Question:*** Why would anyone do that?



Theoryland

IRL

The Memory Hierarchy

Memory Tradeoffs

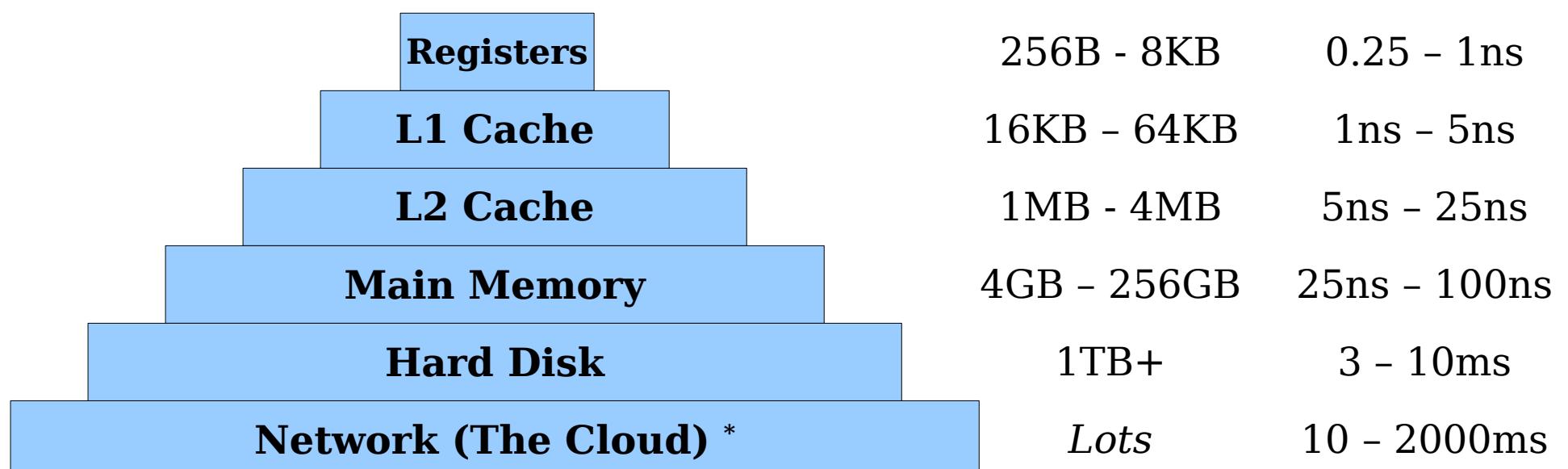
- There is an enormous tradeoff between *speed* and *size* in memory.
- SRAM (the stuff registers are made of) is fast but very expensive:
 - Can keep up with processor speeds in the GHz.
 - SRAM units can't be easily combined together; increasing sizes require better nanofabrication techniques (difficult, expensive).
- Hard disks are cheap but very slow:
 - As of 2025, you can buy a 4TB hard drive for about \$85.
 - As of 2025, good disk seek times for magnetic drives are measured in ms (about two to four million times slower than a processor cycle!)

The Memory Hierarchy

- ***Idea:*** Try to get the best of all worlds by using multiple types of memory.

The Memory Hierarchy

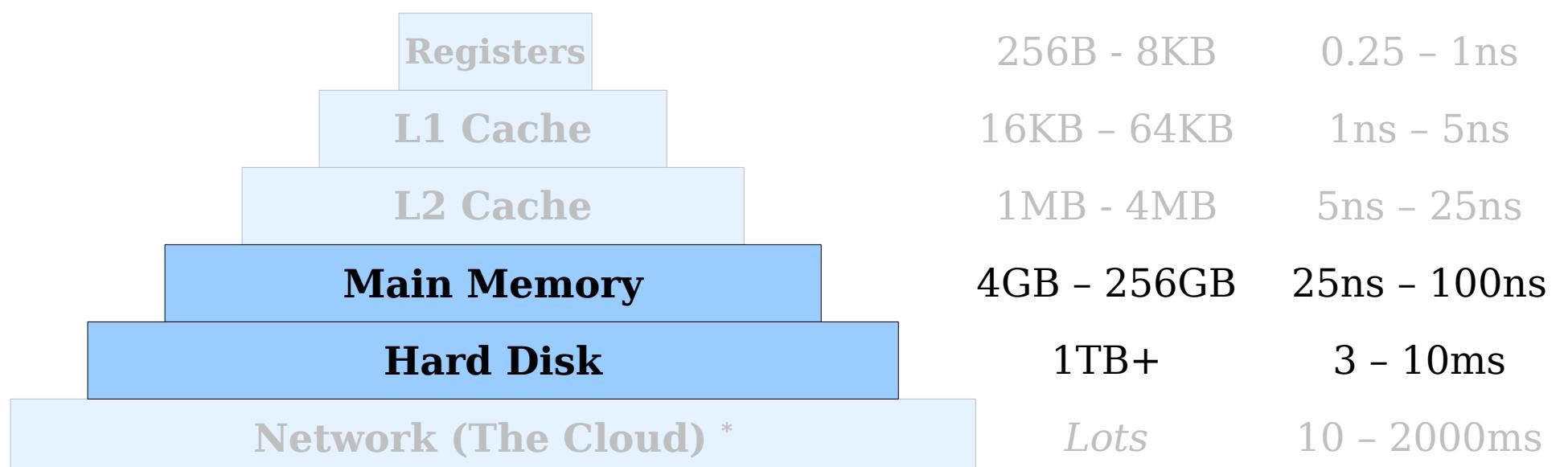
- **Idea:** Try to get the best of all worlds by using multiple types of memory.



* in some data centers, it's faster store all data in RAM and access it over the network than to use magnetic disks!

The Memory Hierarchy

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External Data Structures

- Suppose you have a data set that's *way* too big to fit in RAM.
- The data structure is on disk and read into RAM as needed.
- Data from disk doesn't come back one *byte* at a time, but rather one *page* at a time.
- **Goal:** Minimize the number of disk reads and writes, not the number of instructions executed.



“Please give me 4KB
starting at location *addr1*”

1101110010111011110001...



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Calculate...
Think...
Compute...



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- **Goal:** Minimize the number of disk reads and writes, not the number of instructions executed.



“Please give me 4KB
starting at location *addr2*”

001101010001010001010001...



Analyzing B-Trees

- Suppose we tune b so that each node in the B-tree fits inside a single disk page.
- We *only* care about the number of disk pages read or written.
 - It's so much slower than RAM that it'll dominate the runtime.
- **Question:** What is the cost of a lookup in a B-tree in this model?
- **Question:** What is the cost of inserting into a B-tree in this model?

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- **Question:** What is the cost of a lookup in a B-tree in this model?
 - Answer: The height of the tree, $O(\log_b n)$.
- **Question:** What is the cost of inserting into a B-tree in this model?
 - Answer: The height of the tree, $O(\log_b n)$.

External Data Structures

- Because B-trees have a huge branching factor, they're great for on-disk storage.
 - Disk block reads/writes are slow compared to CPU operations.
 - The high branching factor minimizes the number of blocks to read during a lookup.
 - Extra work scanning inside a block offset by these savings.
- Major use cases for B-trees and their variants (B⁺-trees, H-trees, etc.) include
 - databases (huge amount of data stored on disk);
 - file systems (ext4, NTFS, ReFS); and, recently,
 - in-memory data structures (due to cache effects).

Analyzing B-Trees

- The cost model we use will change our overall analysis.
- Cost is number of operations:
 $O(\log n)$ per lookup, **$O(b \log_b n)$** per insertion.
- Cost is number of blocks accessed:
 $O(\log_b n)$ per lookup, **$O(\log_b n)$** per insertion.
- Going forward, we'll use operation counts as our cost model, though there's a ton of research done on designing data structures that are optimal from a cache miss perspective!

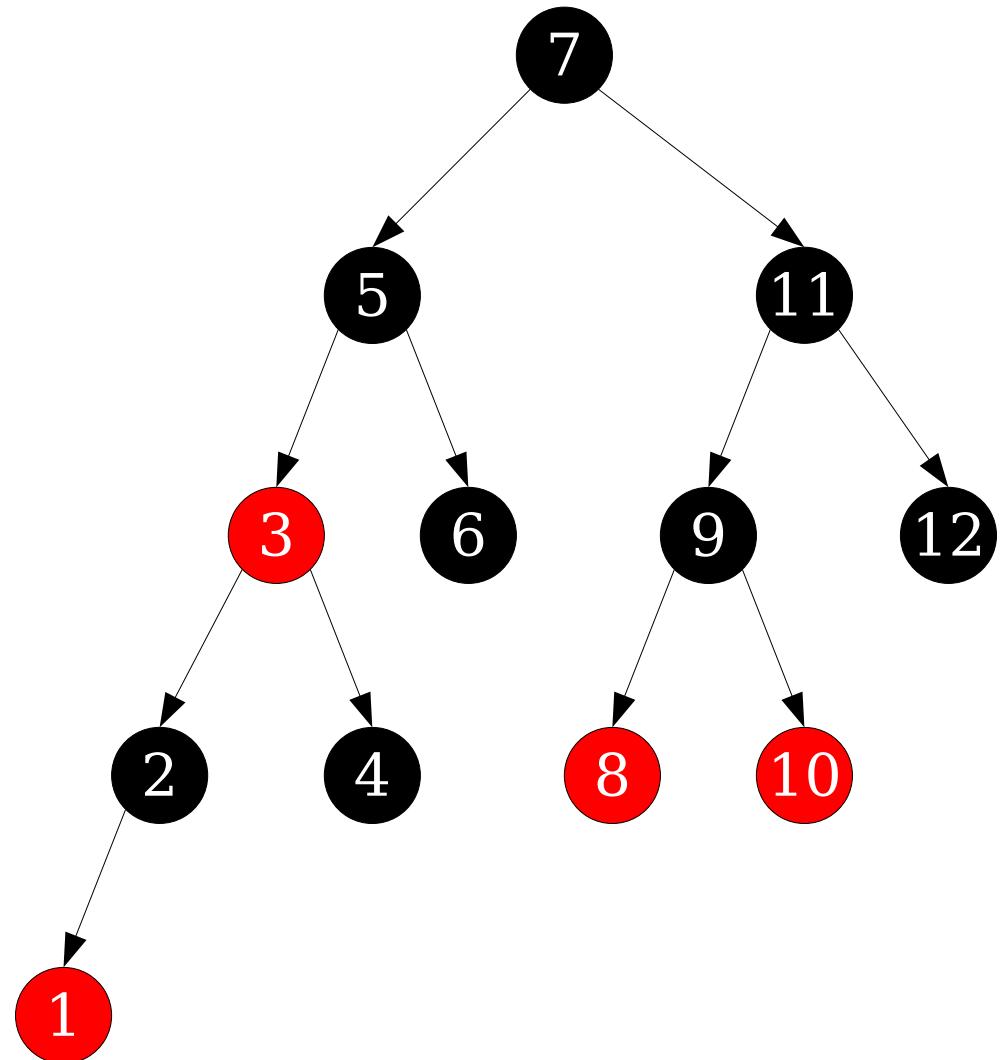
The Story So Far

- We've just built a simple, elegant, balanced multiway tree structure.
- We can use them as balanced trees in main memory (2-3-4 trees).
- We can use them to store huge quantities of information on disk (B-trees).
- We've seen that different cost models are appropriate in different situations.

So... red/black trees?

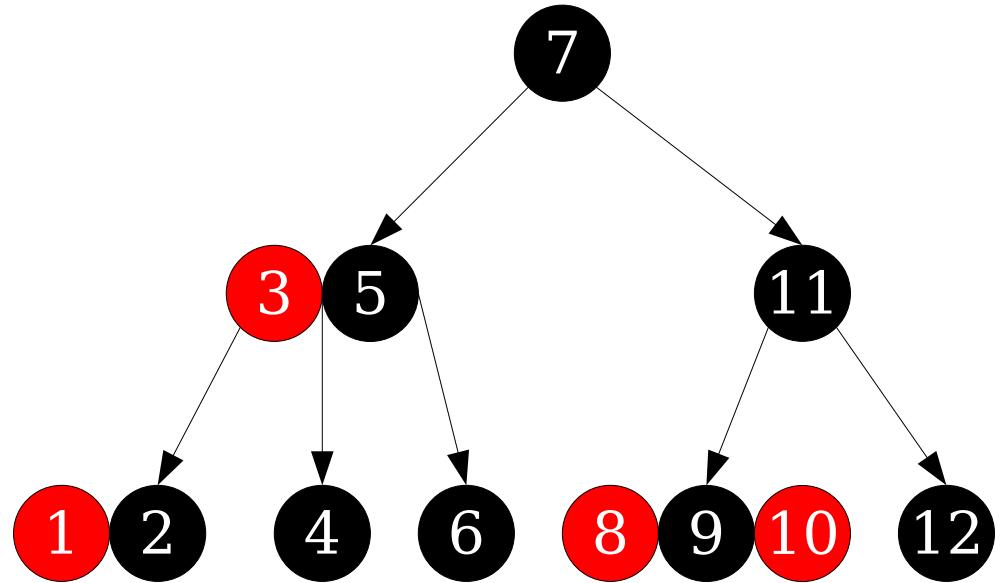
Red/Black Trees

- A **red/black tree** is a BST with the following properties:
 - Every node is either red or black.
 - The root is black.
 - No red node has a red child.
 - Every root-null path in the tree passes through the same number of black nodes.



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 - No red node has a red child.
 - Every root-null path in the tree passes through the same number of black nodes.
- After we hoist red nodes into their parents:
 - Each “meta node” has 1, 2, or 3 keys in it. (No red node has a red child.)
 - Each “meta node” is either a leaf or has one more child than key. (Root-null path property.)
 - Each “meta leaf” is at the same depth. (Root-null path property.)



***This is a
2-3-4 tree!***

Data Structure Isometries

- Red/black trees are an *isometry* of 2-3-4 trees; they represent the structure of 2-3-4 trees in a different way.
- Many data structures can be designed and analyzed in the same way.
- ***Huge advantage:*** Rather than memorizing a complex list of red/black tree rules, just think about what the equivalent operation on the corresponding 2-3-4 tree would be and simulate it with BST operations.

Next Time

- ***Deriving Red/Black Trees***
 - Figuring out rules for red/black trees using our isometry.
- ***Tree Rotations***
 - A key operation on binary search trees.
- ***Augmented Trees***
 - Building data structures on top of balanced BSTs.