

Auditing FOR INCLUSIVITY IN YOUR TEXTS

Affirmations FOR RETHINKING THE CLASSICS

What texts do you teach, and what voices are heard? We hope that this resource will help you reflect on these questions for your own classroom.

Most of us can easily recall some of the books we were required to read in high school, no matter where in the United States we grew up. *Of Mice and Men*? Check. *The Scarlet Letter*? Yup. *Romeo and Juliet*? Us too.

We started this work together when we wrote a blog post about [inclusive pairings for 10 commonly-taught texts](#). Before you continue with our recommendations, we wanted to make some acknowledgements and provide you with some resources for your anti-racist work.

Educational scholars of yesteryear compiled a list of literary works that they deemed to be essential reading, used to build cultural capital and reflect a shared history. The issue is the majority (if not all) of the canonical decisions were made by white, middle class, cisgender males who chose works that often reflect the perspective of - you guessed it - white, middle class, cisgender males. While it is true that the canon has evolved a bit to include more modern classics such as *1984* and *To Kill a Mockingbird*, it is notable that these titles continue to be narrow in scope since they, too, serve to amplify white voices. Given the dynamic plurality of the citizens of our country, a large portion of our students' stories are being ignored or muted, all for the sake of past practice. **The good news is that we all have access to tools to expand the canon and move it toward inclusivity and intersectionality.**

1. REPRESENTATION MATTERS.

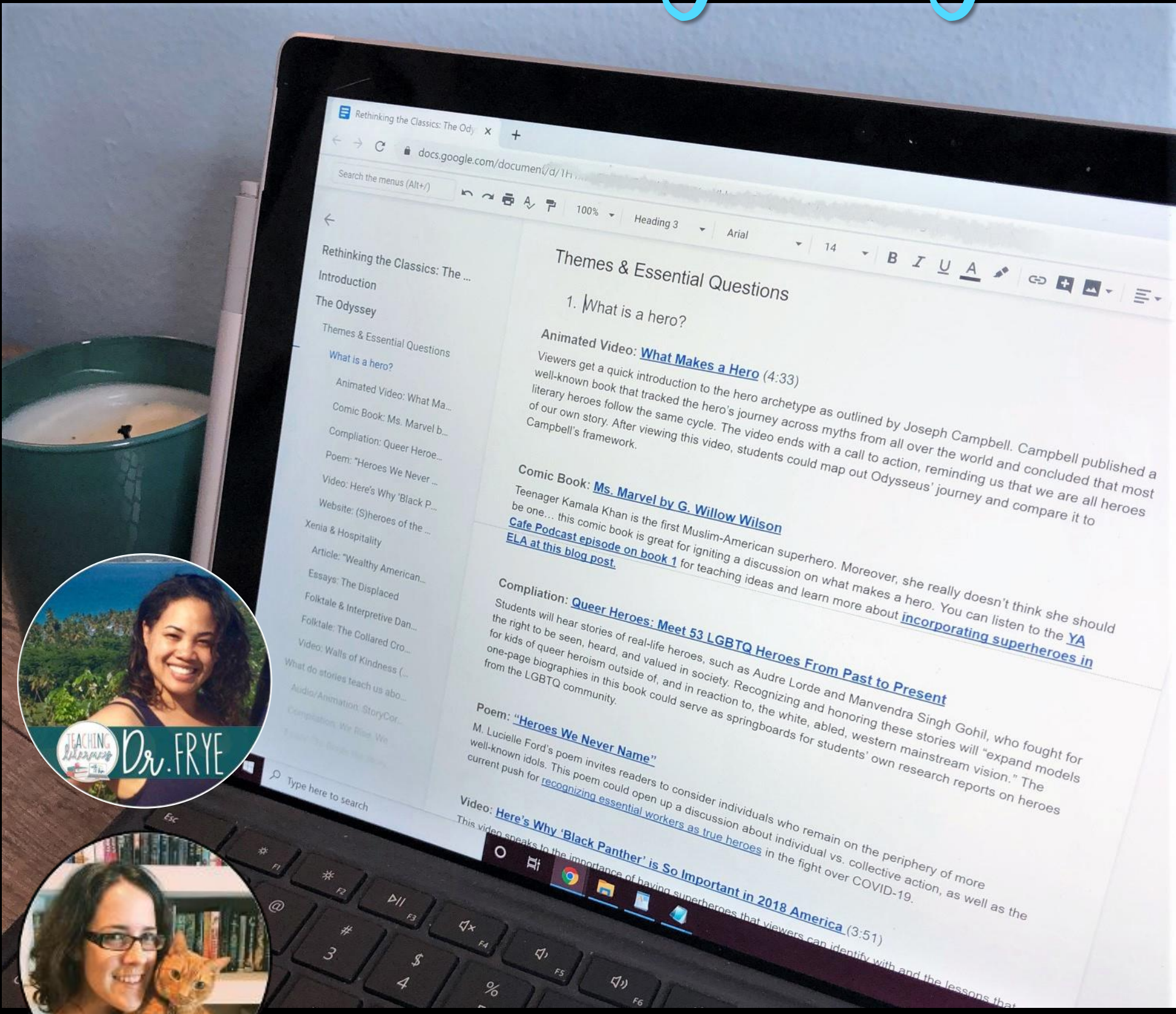
According to projected numbers from the 2020 Census Bureau, the majority of children living in the United States are students of color. In order to best meet the needs of all learners, it is critical that students see themselves reflected in the works presented to them. [Research shows](#) that readers make meaning and build knowledge when engaging with texts that they can relate to. Moreover, students have their very existence affirmed when they read texts written by and about people from their own culture, religion, orientation, etc. They learn that their voices matter, that their stories secure an important place within the larger human experience. Books also have the power to serve as windows, exposing students to lives that may differ from their own, leading to increased empathy instead of increased apathy.

2. DIVERSIFYING THE ELA CURRICULUM IS JUST ONE STEP.

Because racist practices are deeply woven into most aspects of life in the United States, we understand that diversifying the ELA curriculum is a fraction of the work that has to be done. There are powerful resources out there to guide you while reflecting on your own privilege, and dismantling racial bias.

Books:

RETHINKING THE CLASSICS: *The Odyssey*



Rethinking the Classics: The Odyssey

Introduction

The Odyssey

Themes & Essential Questions

1. What is a hero?

Animated Video: [What Makes a Hero](#) (4:33)

Viewers get a quick introduction to the hero archetype as outlined by Joseph Campbell. Campbell published a well-known book that tracked the hero's journey across myths from all over the world and concluded that most literary heroes follow the same cycle. The video ends with a call to action, reminding us that we are all heroes of our own story. After viewing this video, students could map out Odysseus' journey and compare it to Campbell's framework.

Comic Book: [Ms. Marvel by G. Willow Wilson](#)

Teenager Kamala Khan is the first Muslim-American superhero. Moreover, she really doesn't think she should be one... this comic book is great for igniting a discussion on what makes a hero. You can listen to the [YA Cafe Podcast episode on book 1](#) for teaching ideas and learn more about [incorporating superheroes in ELA at this blog post](#).

Compilation: [Queer Heroes: Meet 53 LGBTQ Heroes From Past to Present](#)

Students will hear stories of real-life heroes, such as Audre Lorde and Manvendra Singh Gohil, who fought for the right to be seen, heard, and valued in society. Recognizing and honoring these stories will "expand models for kids of queer heroism outside of, and in reaction to, the white, abled, western mainstream vision." The one-page biographies in this book could serve as springboards for students' own research reports on heroes from the LGBTQ community.

Poem: ["Heroes We Never Name"](#)

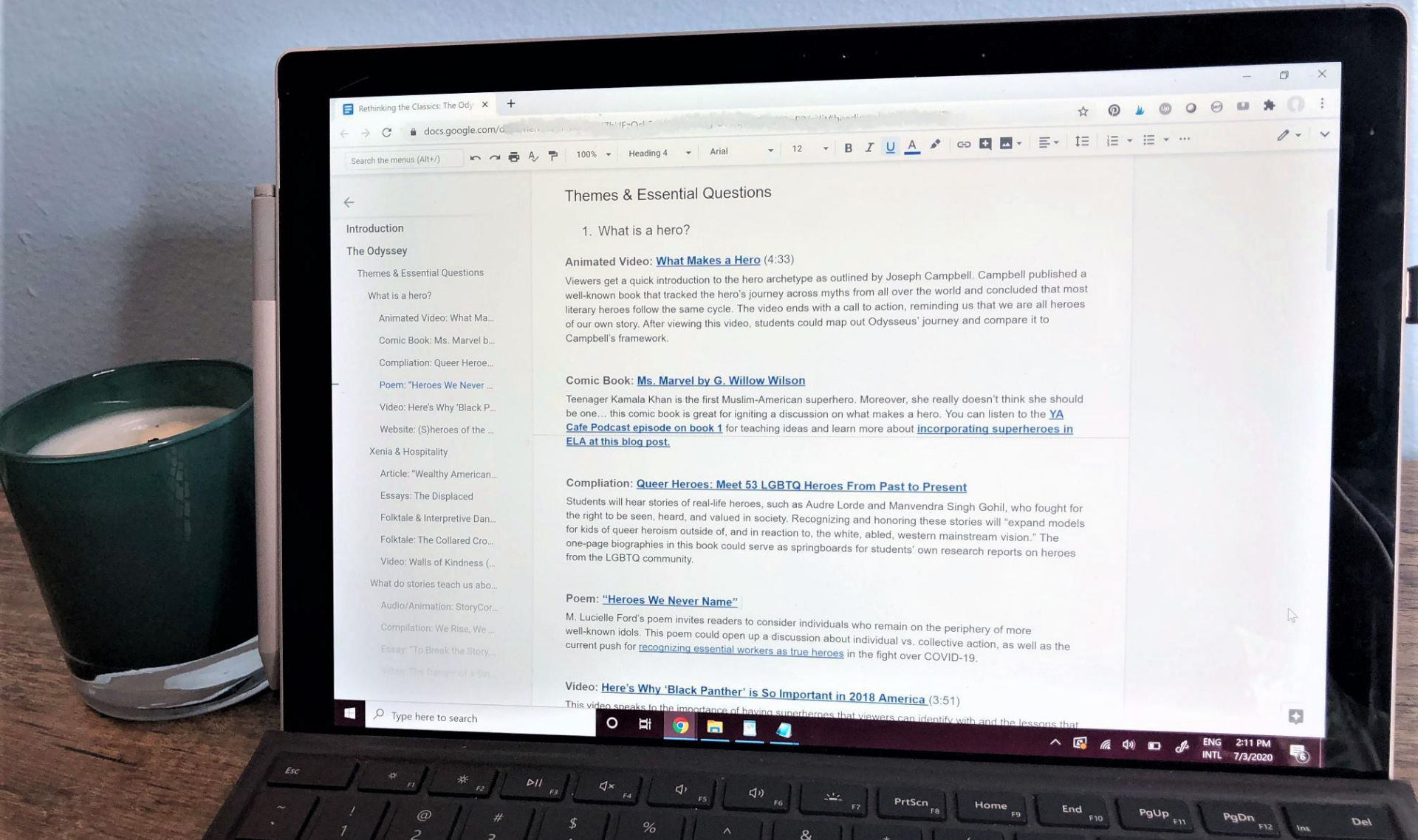
M. Lucielle Ford's poem invites readers to consider individuals who remain on the periphery of more well-known idols. This poem could open up a discussion about individual vs. collective action, as well as the current push for [recognizing essential workers as true heroes](#) in the fight over COVID-19.

Video: [Here's Why 'Black Panther' is So Important in 2018 America](#) (3:51)

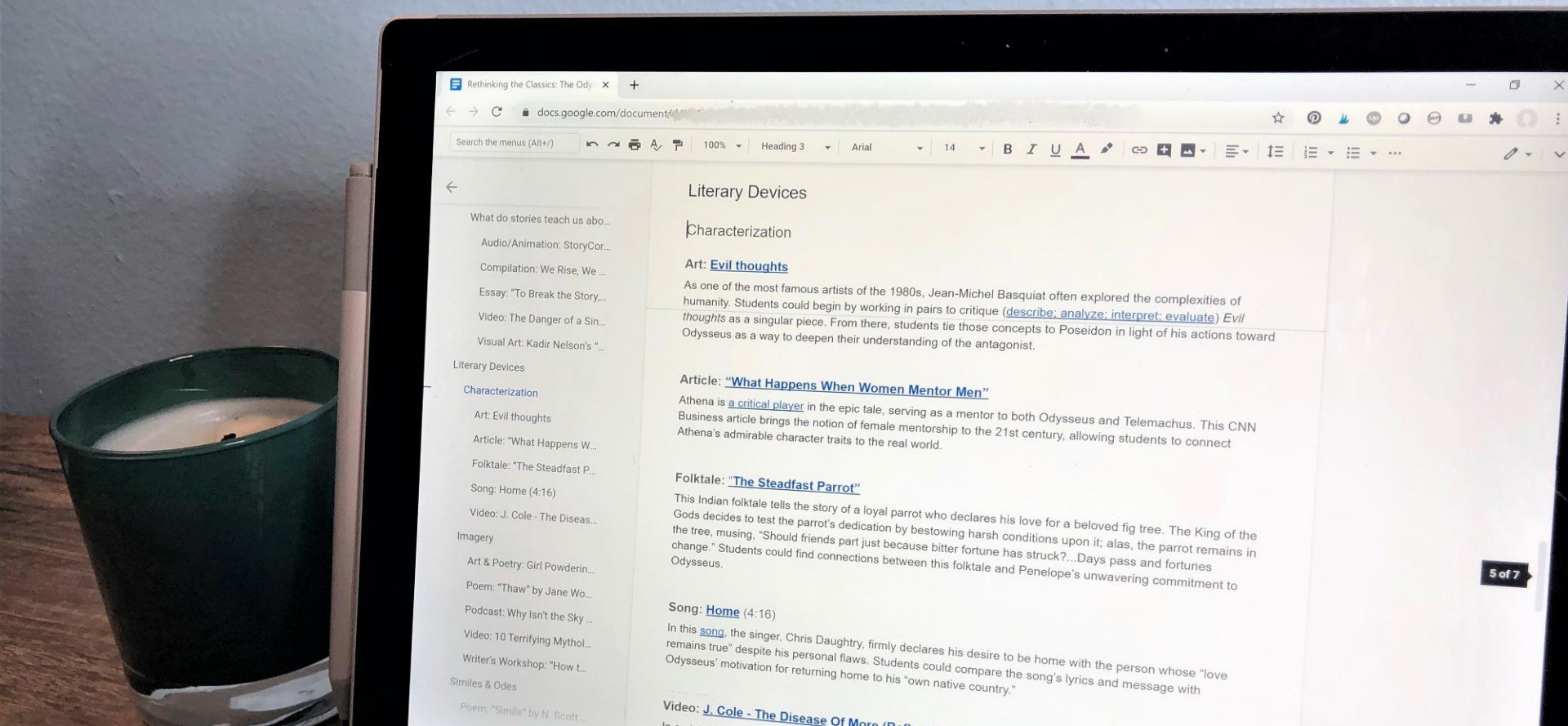
This video speaks to the importance of having superheroes that viewers can identify with and the lessons that



INCLUSIVE TEXT SUGGESTIONS



This is a curated list of inclusive text suggestions to help you supplement your unit on *The Odyssey* or advocate for curriculum updates.



All of the text ideas (articles, poems, songs, folklore, artwork, etc.) have been organized by Theme, Essential Question, or Literary Device. We've spent 15+ hours researching so you don't have to!



This resource includes expert tips on rethinking the classics. We're here to support you in your endeavors.