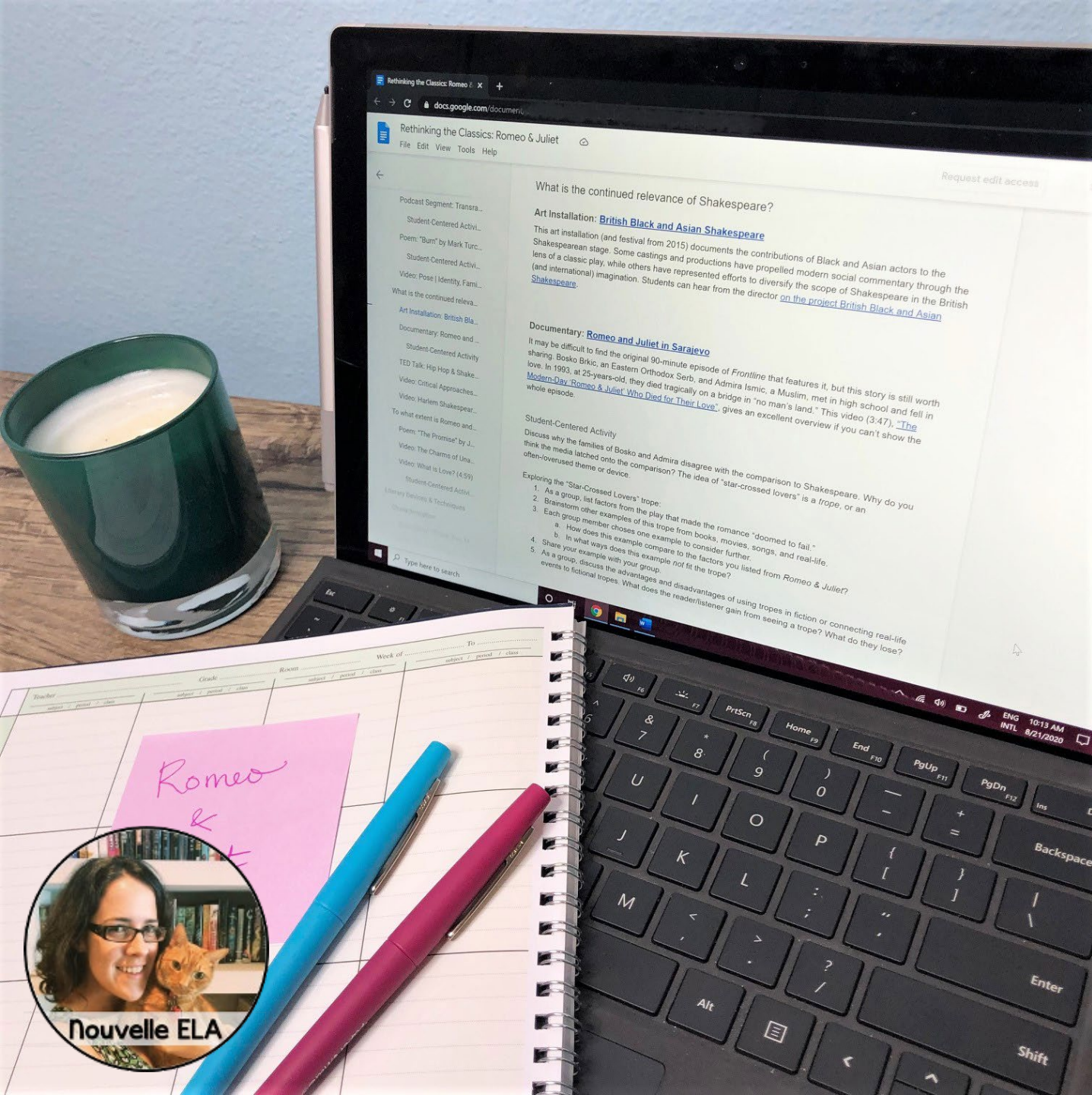


# 9th Grade Text Pairings

CURATED IDEAS FOR  
CLASSIC REQUIRED  
TEXTS



Rethinking the Classics: Romeo & Juliet  
File Edit View Tools Help

What is the continued relevance of Shakespeare?

Art Installation: [British Black and Asian Shakespeare](#)  
This art installation (and festival from 2015) documents the contributions of Black and Asian actors to the Shakespearean stage. Some castings and productions have propelled modern social commentary through the lens of a classic play, while others have represented efforts to diversify the scope of Shakespeare in the British (and international) imagination. Students can hear from the director [on the project British Black and Asian Shakespeare](#).

Documentary: [Romeo and Juliet in Sarajevo](#)  
It may be difficult to find the original 90-minute episode of *Frontline* that features it, but this story is still worth sharing. Bosko Brkic, an Eastern Orthodox Serb, and Admira Ismic, a Muslim, met in high school and fell in love. In 1993, at 25-years-old, they died tragically on a bridge in "no man's land." This video (3:47), [The Modern-Day Romeo & Juliet Who Died for Their Love](#), gives an excellent overview if you can't show the whole episode.

Student-Centered Activity  
Discuss why the families of Bosko and Admira disagree with the comparison to Shakespeare. Why do you think the media latched onto the comparison? The idea of "star-crossed lovers" is a trope, or an often-overused theme or device.

Exploring the "Star-Crossed Lovers" trope:  
1. As a group, list factors from the play that made the romance "doomed to fail."  
2. Brainstorm other examples of this trope from books, movies, songs, and real-life.  
3. Each group member chooses one example to consider further.  
    a. How does this example compare to the factors you listed from *Romeo & Juliet*?  
    b. In what ways does this example *not* fit the trope?  
4. Share your example with your group.  
5. As a group, discuss the advantages and disadvantages of using tropes in fiction or connecting real-life events to fictional tropes. What does the reader/listener gain from seeing a trope? What do they lose?



Nouvelle ELA



I'm black and I'm a member of the 1%

# UNSTEREOTYPED

Black 1%



## Rethinking THE CLASSICS

By Dr. Sheila Frye and Danielle



### Our Mission

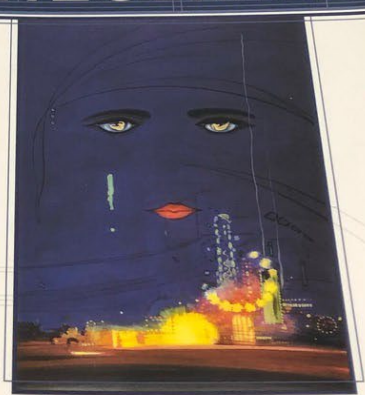
This resource will be part of a series to help teach core texts in order to add more inclusivity to their curricula. Changes, like paired texts you could incorporate, or changes, like substitutions you could request, need to replace every text from "The Canon" with a need to make our curricula more inclusive.

### Definitions

**Diversifying** - The act of organizing the material, assessments, and guest speakers, in a manner that reflects the diverse experiences, needs, and perspectives of all students.

**Decolonization** - The act of transforming teaching practice, such as discussion and theories of assessment, to decenter the dominant perspective. In other words, decolonization is recognizing the need to "decenter" in education, when in reality, we are centered.

F. SCOTT  
FITZGERALD

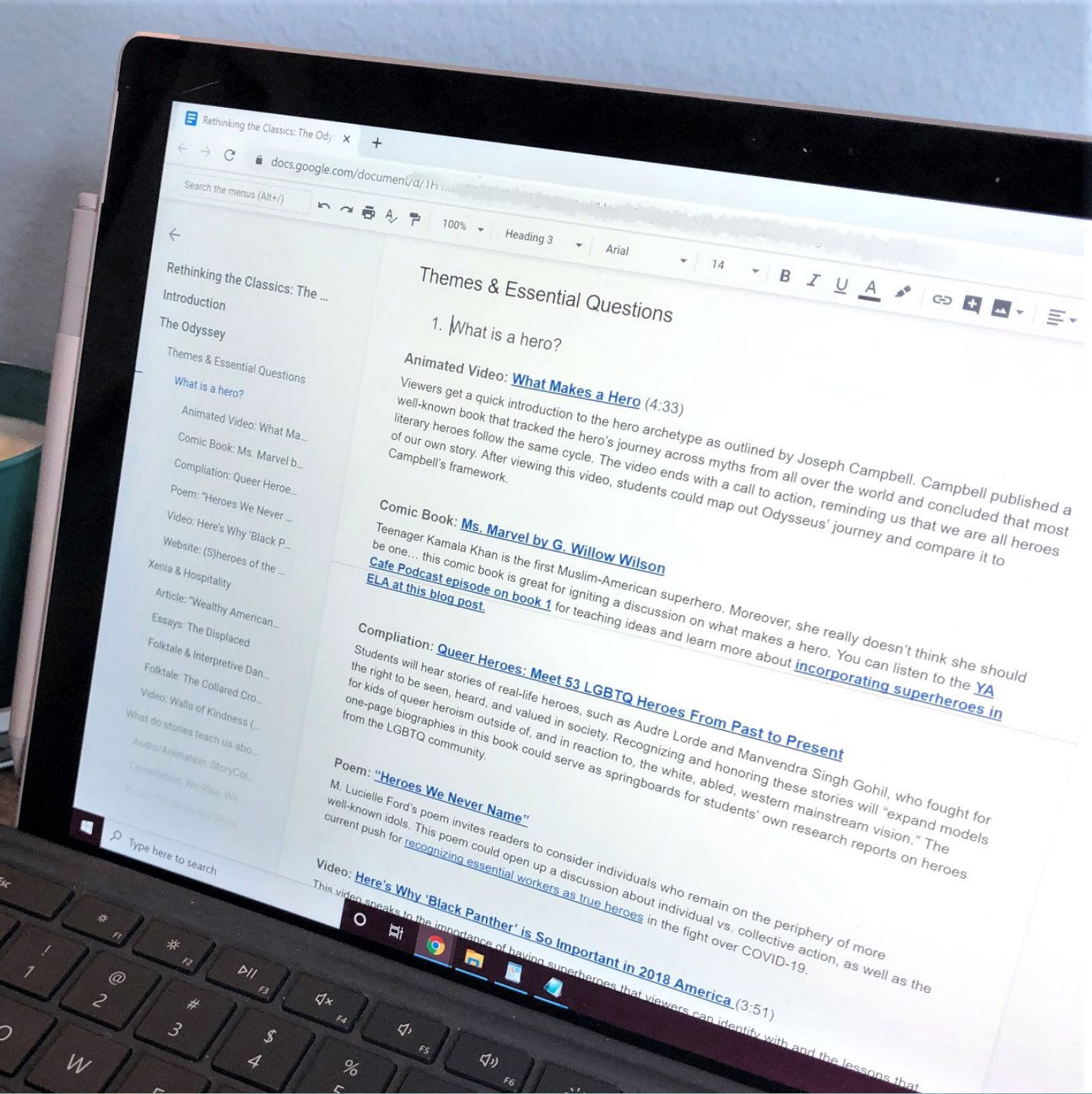


THE  
GREAT GATSBY

Each list has 30+ text pairing ideas  
for a classic text:

- The Odyssey
- Romeo & Juliet
- Teaching Shakespeare  
(for any Shakespeare play)
- To Kill a Mockingbird
- The Giver
- The Outsiders
- The Great Gatsby

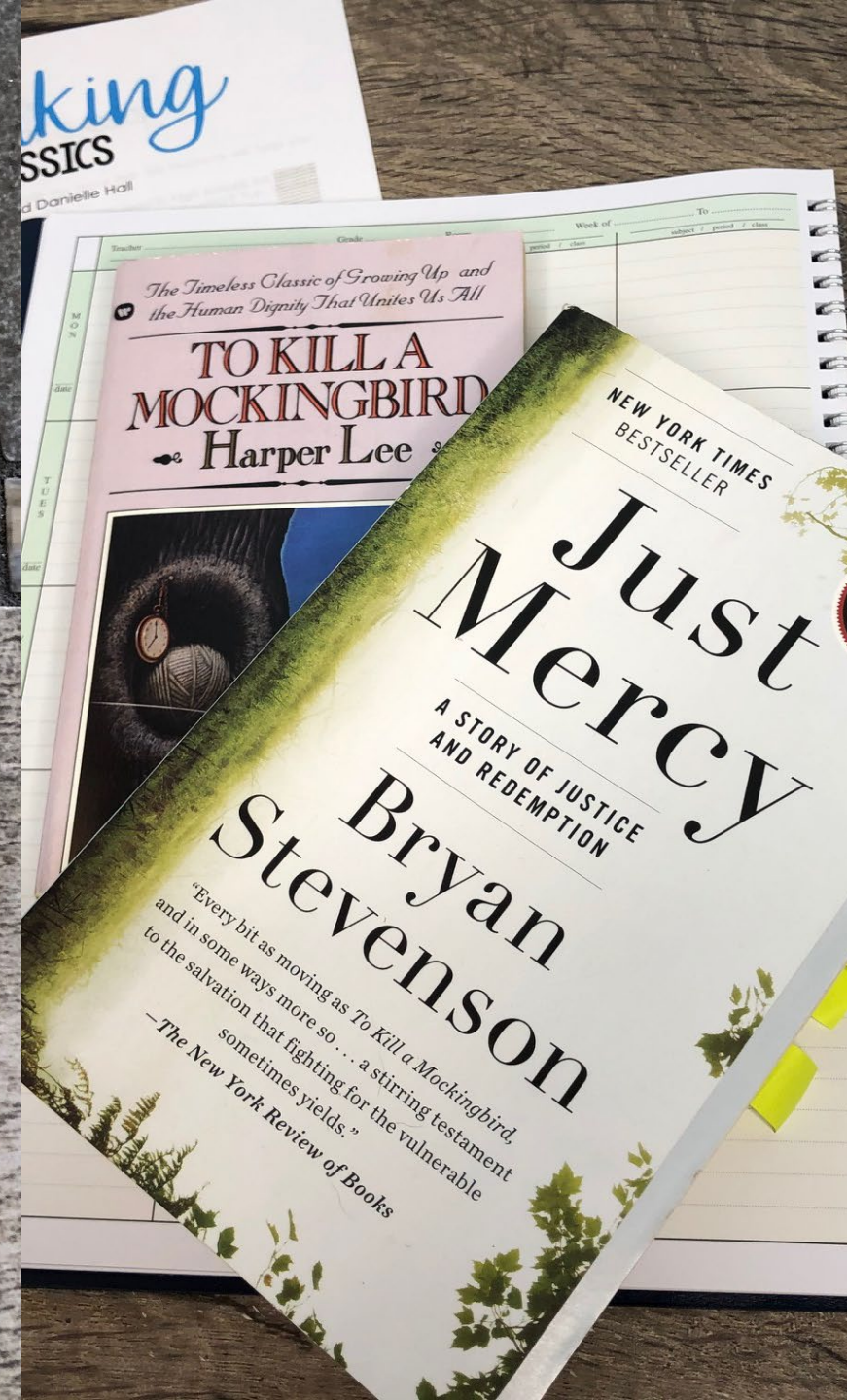
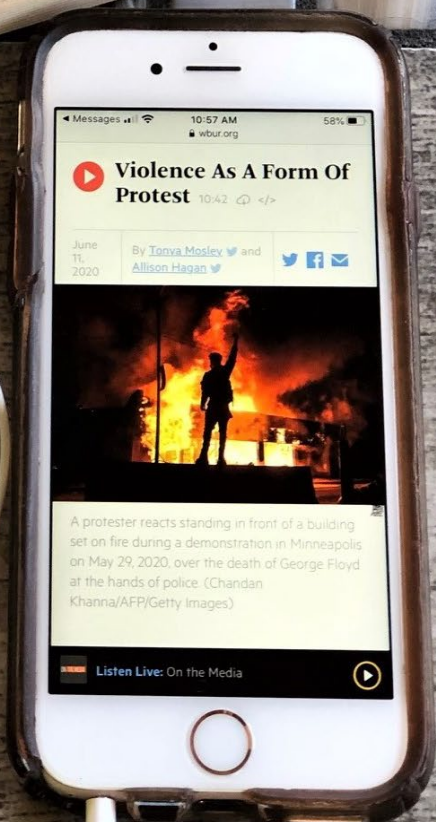
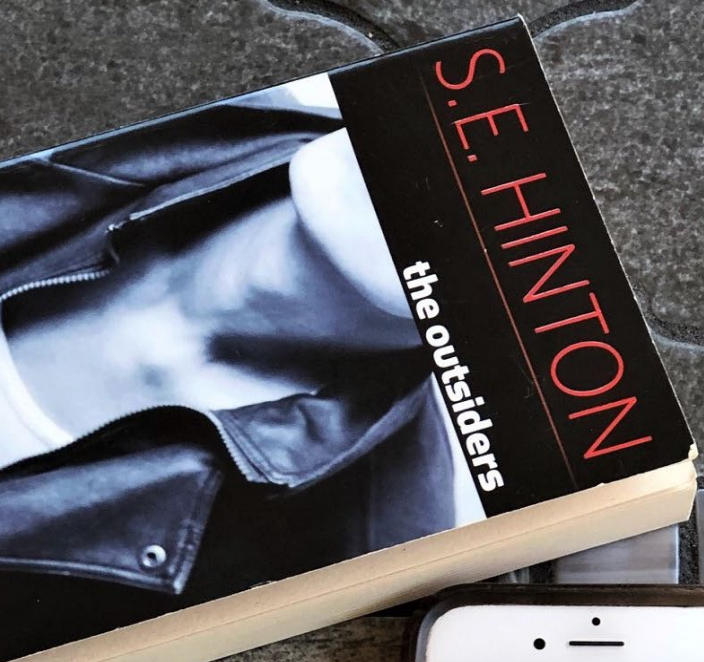




All of the text ideas (articles, poems, songs, folklore, artwork, etc.) have been organized by Theme, Essential Question, or Literary Device.

We've spent 15+ hours researching each text so you don't have to!







# EQ: What role does family play in one's identity?

## Example from R&J

Podcast Segment: [Transracial Adoptees On Their Racial Identity And Sense Of Self](#) (8:47)

This segment explores identity-formation in transracial adoptees by asking this essential question: *How did adoption form your sense of racial identity and your sense of self?* (Note: This segment is part of a larger Code Switch podcast episode, which could be found [here](#)). We urge you to go deeper into this complex topic by showing students [Sara Jones' TEDx Talk](#), where she shares her experience as a transracial/transnational adoptee who fought to “find the emotional oxygen to own [her] own story.”

Student-Centered Activity:

After listening to the podcast segment and viewing Sara Jones' TEDx Talk, invite students to [Think, Write, Read, and Repeat](#). This strategy asks students to sit quietly for one minute, pondering the information they just heard/viewed. Students then write down their thoughts for a full three minutes. When time is up, they silently reread their writing, circling two to three notable ideas. Give them an additional minute to write down any final thoughts that they may have. Finally, facilitate a discussion of identity and family. You may want to ask questions such as these:

- What is identity?
- What factors impact a person's identity?
- What parts of one's identity are predetermined?
- What parts are self-constructed?
- What role does one's biological, adoptive, and/or foster family play in identity formation?

## Literary Device: The metaphoric use of gold

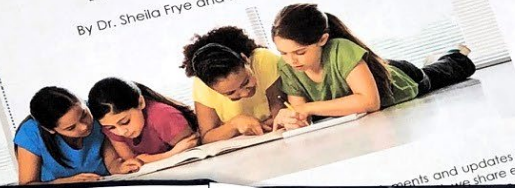
HITRECORD Collection: [Write a Poem \(or a Short Story\) Based on Theme of “Sunrise”](#)

HITRECORD is an online platform for community-sourced creativity started by actor Joseph Gordon-Levitt. This particular challenge, hosted by [Morgan Harper Nichols](#), asked people to contribute a poem or short story based on the theme of sunrise. This golden color - “the hardest hue to hold” - is symbolic of newness, opportunity, and purity. You may decide to analyze only one piece of writing with your students (“[Unbreakable Truth](#)” is a good one for this age), or have them go through the collection themselves and pick two or three that relate to the metaphoric use of gold in *The Outsiders*.



# Rethinking THE CLASSICS

By Dr. Sheila Frye and Danielle Hall



ments and updates for  
we share easy  
diffi-

## Auditing

FOR INCLUSIVITY IN YOUR TEXTS

By Dr. Sheila Frye

## 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 and secure an important place within the larger human experience. As we open up more windows, exposing students to lives that may differ from their own, we move away from instead of increased apathy.

This resource includes our tips and reflections on rethinking the classics.

We're here to support you in your endeavors!



## Romeo & Juliet

### Essential Questions:

- What role does family play in one's identity?
- What is the continued relevance of Shakespeare?
- To what extent is *Romeo & Juliet* a critique of romantic love?

### Themes:

- Free Will vs. Fate/Destiny

### Literary Devices:

- Characterization
- Tension & Suspense
- Irony

## Teaching Shakespeare

### Background Information:

- Critical Background for Educators
- Shakespeare's Life & Times
- Shakespeare's Language

### Essential Questions:

- What role does family play in one's identity?
- What is the continued relevance of Shakespeare?

### Themes:

- Free Will vs. Fate/Destiny
- Appearance vs. Reality
- Deception and Betrayal
- Gender Roles
- Class Structure

## The Odyssey

### Essential Questions:

- What is a hero?
- What do stories teach us about culture?

### Theme:

- Xenia & Hospitality

### Literary Devices:

- Characterization
- Imagery
- Similes/Odes

Each resource also contains suggestions for text replacements that have similar themes and literary devices



## The Great Gatsby

### Essential Questions:

- What is the historical context for The Great Gatsby?
- Is the American Dream still relevant?

### Themes:

- The American Dream
- Individualism and Collectivism
- Nostalgia

### Literary Devices:

- Imagery
- Symbolism: Gatsby's Mansion
- Symbolism: The Green Light

## The Giver

### Essential Questions:

- What is a utopia?
- How can societal rules help or harm us?
- How do personal choices impact a society?

### Themes:

- Individualism & Collectivism
- Memory & Wisdom
- Loneliness & Grief

### Literary Devices:

- Writing Personal Narratives
- Symbolism
- Irony
- Point of View

## The Outsiders

### Essential Questions:

- How are different social classes treated by society?
- What are the implications of stereotyping others?

### Themes:

- Peer Pressure vs. Independent Thought
- Hero Worship and the "Southern Gentleman" trope
- Responding to Violence with Violence

### Literary Devices:

- Types of Conflict
- Characterization
- Gold as a metaphor
- Alliteration

## To Kill a Mockingbird

### Essential Questions:

- How do people develop compassion and understanding?
- How can we use our privilege to help others?

### Themes:

- The Ideals of Justice vs. the American System
- Integrity
- Understanding Systemic Racism

### Literary Devices:

- Symbolism
- Irony