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Considering Contemporary:
Finding Purpose for Canonical Works in the Modern Classroom

By
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A thesis submitted to the Department of Education of The College at Brockport, State University
of New York, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in

Education

December 23, 2020

Abstract

There has been a longstanding debate on whether or not the canon should continue to deserve a place in the modern inclusive classroom. One side will argue that the canon contains meaningful lessons and content that influenced writings today, so it should still be thoughtfully taught, whereas other sides will argue that the canon is an overused crutch that teachers lean on instead of trying to find more modern, diverse texts. Considering both sides of the argument, there is a way to blend the canon and the contemporary in the modern day classroom without putting so much value on the canon. The canon can be a stepping stone for learning, but it does not have to be the entire path. Educators should be mindful of what students can learn from looking at the canon critically rather than passively, and use the canon to help reinforce skills that students develop from the contemporary texts that they read. There is a place where the canon and contemporary can live in harmony in the modern day classroom, but it must be done meaningfully and it involves commitment and intention on the teacher's part. The canon does not need to be praised or put on a pedestal, but it does not need to be erased entirely. There is value in critical analysis, and in using the canon as a place of comparison with contemporary texts, students can evaluate change, privilege, bias, and their own values—thus growing not only as students, but as individuals.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The Issue

There seems to be a debate among professionals about the teaching of canon literature in the modern day classroom (Shakespeare, Homer, all of the dead-white-men and beyond), and whether covering them is essential for the growth of student knowledge in a progressive society. One side of the argument would say that these texts are limiting, archaic, stifling, disengaging, and marginalizing; they can often be too difficult to comprehend to the point where the teacher spends more time getting through the actual reading of the text rather than having students actually absorb it. These texts are also full of bias and only carry the range of perspective that the old-dead-white-male author can bring to it. What good is that for the modern day classroom?

The argument for continuing to teach the canon however, doesn't completely disagree with this side either. The canons offer a lot for students to dive into, and that's not just for the sake of 'appreciating' the literature itself. Students can analyze and observe the evolution of language over the course of time (Law, 2012), look at the classics with a critical eye and challenge the perspective, and evaluate which parts of the literature were impactful enough to span centuries and remain relevant in the world we live in today (Woollard, 2017).

The canon represents pieces of history that are relics of the time that they existed in, but also works of culture that shaped language and ideas for the future, and those should be used as an opportunity to connect content areas and enrich students on how the time period can impact the writing itself ("Blended Learning Environments", 2020). The canon does not have to be taught in entirety, nor does it have to be taught with love or devotion. The canon should be used as foundational resources to understand the world in the past, present, and even the potential future. The canon is the past. The teachers are the present who can present the tools and skills

necessary for dissecting these texts. Then lastly, the students are the future who can take what they've discovered and use their new skills and knowledge to navigate the world with a larger lens of understanding and awareness.

The canon does not have to be taught on a pedestal, especially in the modern day classroom. In fact, canonical texts should exclusively be taught in a way such that they are viewed as documents to question, and not just blindly read and absorb. There is a place in the world where the classic and contemporary can co-exist and promote intellectual and individual growth. The canons are responsible for some of the major themes, phrases, and tropes that we see in pop culture and society today, so to rob students of the ability to see the core of it all would be a disservice to them and their ability to develop their own critical perspectives (Marshall, 2017).

Again, this isn't to say that we should be drilling students with the canon at full-force with the expectation that they'll understand everything and be able to resonate with the pieces, but we should be inviting students to compare these texts with modern versions (graphic novels, movies, music, retellings, etc.) and make connections between past and present in a way that is more productive than just reading the canon on its own, while also appealing to a range of readers and identities. In analyzing and reading the canon, even in part, students can become aware of not only the values and morals of characters, but the values and morals of themselves and how those compare and contrast with those in the text—thus gaining a deeper understanding of human nature (Camp, 2020). These moments of self-awareness and discovery can prepare students for the modern world by having them address and confront new feelings and emotions through literature, perhaps in a way that they wouldn't have been able to otherwise—and grow from it (Weeks, 2018).

There is a severe lack of diversity in the canon, especially within its authors, so teaching the canon is a perfect opportunity to find new ways to have students input themselves into the conversation and incorporate new ways to look at a text from a perspective that isn't a dead-white-man and make the curriculum more inclusive. It comes down to the framing and the intention of the teacher. What should students be taking away from the canon? If it can be addressed in a way that is engaging, responsive, and meaningful for the students, where there is clear purpose for their learning, then the recipe for success is on its way.

The canon should not be a one sided journey. The voices of students should be more present than the dense and often complex text that they're trying to tackle. Teachers should want the canon to be accessible and worthwhile, and unfortunately a lot of them weren't written with that intention, so it's up to us to buckle up and get that intention in gear. We shouldn't be making it about the canon itself, but about where the student can find their voices among centuries of language.

Rationale

One of the most difficult and complex 'canonical' texts to teach in the classroom today is *The Iliad* by Homer. It's long, it's not written in a narrative format that's conducive to student comprehension on first read, and it's got a lot going on from a culture and time from thousands of years ago. It's intimidating. Very little of the book is welcoming to a student on first glance. That being said, it is still one of the 'foundational' and 'pivotal' pieces of literature that shaped all literature after it. It's the story of the hero, the story of fate and destiny, the story of love and war, selfish pride, of the raw emotions we all face, it's the story of loss and revenge and what role we all can play and the choices we can make. It's not a fruitless piece. It's quite the

opposite, it's almost like there's *so much* to offer from it, that it seems virtually impossible to have students meaningfully understand all of these themes without getting stuck on the dense language and busying amount of elements. *The Iliad* is not an easy text to connect to students. Teachers who think they can just dump this text on students and expect them to comprehend it just by using a study guide and reading every page are the exact reason why the canon is falling so rapidly out of favor. It isn't a text that *needs* every single word read. It's also not realistic to expect students to completely absorb the whole text in the 4-6 week span of a typical unit. If a teacher genuinely wants students to enjoy *The Iliad* and actually learn something from it, then maybe, just maybe, we should consider the idea that the whole book doesn't need to be read, and that there are ways to blend this canonical text with newer content in a way that allows both to shine in their own right.

For the case of a work like *The Iliad*, it's also extremely valuable to have students look at it critically and ask questions. Jeanne Dyches furthered this belief in saying, "having students question what they are reading can actually get students more excited for class," (Woodbury & Nebbe, 2019, para. 7) and this is because the students deserve to have an active role in their learning, and should not be expected to get excited when they have an old, dense text dropped on them without any real care for their own opinions on it. There's a chronic problem where teachers just 'teach' books. Teachers need to take the time to teach students how to analyze and look at text critically so that when the time comes to look into a canonical text, they know how to ask questions. Students love to talk, they love to have opinions, but better yet, they love to know that their thoughts are *valued*. If teachers can help students learn the right way to ask/develop questions when reading, their thinking will be elevated, their discussions will be more intense, and the learning doesn't have to shut down when they take their eyes off the page.

Students should know beforehand that these canonical texts are not being shared because they are ‘right’, but because they have impacted the world, and literature, in both positive and negative ways. It should be used as a tool for students to interpret the world around them as they navigate it, and there is a way for teachers to use it appropriately for students’ best learning.

Purpose

The Song of Achilles by Madeline Miller covers the entire young life of Achilles and that of the plot of *The Iliad* in a young, fresh take that reads as a coming-of-age and tragic love story. It is outstandingly readable in comparison to *The Iliad* and is an entirely new perspective on the events prior and throughout the Trojan War because it’s seen through the eyes of Patroclus, someone directly connected to Achilles and not some omniscient third person, which immediately brings students in closer to the plot already. *The Song of Achilles* covers all of the background of the Trojan War and the involvement of all parties, it provides the entire life of Achilles that is unknown and hardly told in *The Iliad*, and it serves as a way to connect students to the content before even presenting them with any of the canonical text itself. This way, when they do look at *The Iliad*, they aren’t going in without a clue as to what or why and *how am I supposed to understand this?* Thanks to the fact that *The Song of Achilles* is written in a very YA style, they will be able to comprehend the story in a way that compliments their learning instead of hindering it. Students will be able to examine parts of *The Iliad* with full knowledge of what is happening and not have to get lost—in fact, they can take what they read in *The Song of Achilles* and compare it to that of *The Iliad* so that they can dig deeper, and not get caught on the surface.

Pairing a contemporary piece with a canonical piece opens so many doors for how a teacher could invite students to learn, and this rationale certainly won't be able to cover all of them, but it should go without much saying that using the contemporary with the canon is a wonderful way to bring students closer to the things that seem impossibly far away. Blay and Brown (2019) suggested that, "When a teacher incorporates newer texts alongside "classic" texts, this teaching move may help bridge the gap between a novel and a student's lived experiences," and I think that holds completely true because by pairing texts we are acknowledging that our students are not the same people as those in the canonical text, but it opens a door for students to see that text in a way that is familiar, relevant, inviting, and practical for them.

Now, students aren't necessarily going to relate directly to white, male, warriors and gods and goddesses from 2000+ years ago, but, students can relate to teenagers trying to grow up, a world where parents have high expectations, where friends betray us, where first loves are found and where loss is maddening. Not only that, but *The Song of Achilles* addresses LGBTQ+ relationships, adolescent sexuality, and gender norms that are all extremely relevant to today's society and students will likely take an interest to the fact that events taking place over 2000 years ago covered relationships and challenging gender norms in ways that are still happening now, and to the teenage hero Achilles, no less! Students still struggle with sexuality, students struggle with normative, contrived gender constructs, students still struggle with the same things that *The Song of Achilles* tackles through Achilles and Patroclus, which provides a place of resonance and self-awareness between the students and the material. Those types of themes and elements transcend time because they are what make people, people. Those tender points of

interest are what can really bridge gaps and bring students closer to the canon without having to actually dump the canon on them.

The Song of Achilles takes the heavy, verse rich content of *The Iliad* and morphs it into a book made for students and for anyone to enjoy, and it could truly change the way that teachers use, don't use *The Iliad* in the modern day classroom. In this sense one can completely agree with Torres in that, "There is room for both old texts that preserve voices from our history, and those that bring the lived reality of various cultures and traditions to the forefront," (2018) because we cannot act like the canon had no impact on the world we live in today. *The Iliad* set the stage for the hero, and *The Song of Achilles* acknowledges the culture and reality of our teenage students *today* and makes it relevant through language and a style that is exciting and true to them.

Summary

While it's easy to say that we can all just drop the hum and drum of the canon and pick up more contemporary alternatives, there comes the concern of the practicality in using these contemporary works in place of the canonical pieces, while still feeling like we are leading a classroom that meets the needs of the Common Core Standards. Many educators are well aware that there is value in YAL and modern works, but there comes that fear of actually taking the leap and making that transition--the fear of the unknown, of failure, of rejection by our students. Though I beg to ask of you all, then: what brilliance can exist without ambition? The classroom is a place of experimentation and discovery, and if we, as teaching professionals, cannot acknowledge the excellent new pieces of literature around us or consider letting go of the archaic methods because they are 'safe', we are robbing our students of the opportunity to grow.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

How the canon should be taught has been a debate since the canon began. In ancient Greece during the pre-Hellenistic age, there was a clear divide between the intellectual groups known as the Orators, the Sophists, and the Platonics, in which, “The debate was about critical thinking versus passive learning, and about accepting one’s culture versus questioning it,” (Casement, 1996, p.7) which boiled down to whether or not teaching the canon so rigorously in academics was worth it. Casement continued to dive deeper, since the canon has been taught for so long as a moral foundation for students to learn from almost blindly, his question then became, “...to what extent should they [students] absorb and revere them [the canon] and to what extent should they dissect, argue with, perhaps revise or reject them?” (Casement, 1996, p. 8).

Today, most classrooms have become complacent in the habit of teaching the canon passively, as something that students just ‘need’ to know, without much of a ‘why’ explanation. Unfortunately the Platonic approach of teaching canon critically failed to win over the public, and the Orators method of teaching the canon as cultural trophies rather than resources for reasoning became the dominant method (Casement, 1996). This advantage for the Orator teaching method created the longstanding construct of regarding the canon as ‘great’ and thus, canonization itself, but Casement’s point was that the Platonic method of looking at canonical texts with a critical lens is not new to contemporary society and that there’s always been people who dislike the status quo.

The canon is and has always been a problematic debacle and the issue lies in what the intention is when it comes to teaching it, and that creating individual critical thinkers is becoming more valuable than admiring western culture. This article by Casement highlights the exact dilemma that is being faced in the modern day classrooms: what purpose should the canon

fulfill, if any? There has clearly always been a divide, but where is the solution to bridging that divide? The goal of this review is to try and find a place for the canon in the modern day classroom that allows all students to thrive as thinkers.

Critical Arguments for the Canon

The canon should invite a conversation for change and an inspiration for social action in the classroom, rather than be dismissed or shunned from the classroom altogether. While the writings may be deemed as problematic and lacking a place in the modern class setting, there is still a way to incorporate them into the curriculum so that students can learn from them in a productive manner and heighten their higher thinking skills. Dyches and Sams (2018) believe that, "...canonical materials open up powerful conversations of hegemony and oppression," because it allows students to have discussions about absent voices, inequalities, and question the perspectives presented in the texts. To equip students with that ability, the canon should be seized as an opportunity to teach students to read against the literature, not with it, as Borsheim-Black, Macaluso, and Petrone (2014) believed. By having students read against a text, they will be filling in gaps by, "...reading between the lines to expose and interrupt embedded, dominant narratives, power dynamics, and perceived normalcy espoused by and hidden in the text," (Borsheim-Black, Macaluso, and Petrone, 2014, p. 4).

In a day and age where social justice and identity inclusion is more prevalent than ever, students can use the canon as a tool to discuss social justice within the classroom by evaluating, identifying, and analyzing where privileges stood, where they might still stand, in the past and present, in fiction and reality. Instead of reading what's on the surface, students will be archaeologists of literature, digging for perspectives and ideologies unseen at first glance. The

canon is a way for students to engage with different social concepts and challenges in order to further develop their own beliefs and ideas.

With all of that being said, teaching the canon today does not need to involve students reading the entire text, as has been traditionally done for decades, rather the opposite. We should be having students only use the canon as a referencing point or a resource, through excerpts or small chunks. The common core list of texts that teachers are expected to pull from and use in the classroom is hauntingly dry and unchanged, full to the brim with Shakespeare, Hemingway, Homer, Sophocles, and texts that were written any time but recently (Common Core State Standards, 2010). The canon itself, as seen in the common core standards, is limiting and notoriously non-responsive to a majority of students, so it should be limited in the way it is exposed and shared with them.

Furthermore, Hesse (1989) stated, “Works are not ‘inherently’ literary. What is admitted to the literary canon is always a function of who has the power to make such declarations,” (p. 21), which means it does not need to be taught in its textual entirety in order for students to absorb anything meaningful from it. Students do not need to sit and read all 300+ pages of a text that is not relevant to them, but there are potential excerpts that open a discussion for critical thinking, comparing and contrasting, and questioning. So perhaps teaching a ‘non canonical’ text as the dominant piece and using the canon as a tool for juxtaposition is more worthwhile. Torres (2019) believed that the canon can still exist in the modern day classroom, but that there should also be an effort to stop relying on the comfort of canon and, “...move away from what the system has given us for generations and towards the voices of justice and equity,” (para 14).

The canon, by standards, has to exist in the classroom, but there is room to bend. Gordon (2017) instead suggests that instead of spending twelve weeks on one canonical text that students

will trudge through (p.12), teachers should prioritize choice reading and introduce canonical excerpts between them, which will then, “...move our readers to think critically as they read any text and to be aware of sophisticated craft,” (Gordon, 2017, p. 17). This way, the canon becomes a tool for improving skills that are already being amplified through choice reading, and can be applied to the modern texts they choose to read instead of forcing them to read critically on a text they may not understand in the first place. These articles highlight how the canon does not need to be in the driver seat of our curriculum, rather it should be in the back seat: still there in the car, still needing to be checked on every now and then, but not necessary to keep the car driving.

To ensure that students will be getting the most out of the canon that we expose them to, we educators must actively mold them into critical readers so that they can feel empowered to take charge of their own learning. Students need to be equipped with effective reading strategies regardless of what they end up reading, because those strategies can open doors for interpretation across all genres and varieties of texts. It’s a matter of mindfulness and it’s the teacher’s job to set that stage for their students. Alongside that, comes the actual strategies themselves and how to implement them in the classroom.

The strategies should serve as tools to strengthen students’ higher order thinking skills by following Bloom’s Taxonomy as an appropriate scaffolding system (Himmele, Himmele, & Potter, 2014, p.41) and the taxonomy itself should be displayed in a student friendly manner in the classroom, with examples (Himmele, Himmele, & Potter, 2014, p.43) to provide ease of access and serve as a simple referencing point for students. Students cannot reach higher order thinking or apply strategies if they do not know what it looks like, so providing a clear model of Bloom’s taxonomy will set them up for success early on.

The bits and pieces of the canon that we choose to teach and utilize in the modern classroom need to be reinforced with strategies and methods that encourage the students to see a story from more than one angle, and be vigilant in avoiding the single story that Chimemanda Ngozi Adichie (2009) warned of. While the canon may rely on many single stories, there are opportunities for the students to see different sides and use their analytical and evaluating thinking to come up with answers of their own; it just involves using those contemporary texts and blending them within the curriculum. Himmele, Himmele, and Potter (2014) pointed out a close reading strategies that could be used to teach the canon productively and it revolves around reading from multiple perspectives, considering how the author lives in the text, and the importance of being a skeptic when reading (pp.53-55). With that being said, it's up to the teacher to make sure that these strategies are taught in an accessible way where students can use curriculum-free texts to help them practice and master the use of the strategies (Rhoder, 2002, p. 512) so that they can apply them to choice and curriculum related readings effectively.

None of these strategies require the canon to be taught in a glorified way, rather, they actually highlight the importance of taking the canon off of its pedestal. To validate this and also align it with that of Adichie's single story, Himmele, Himmele, and Potter (2014) stated, "The biggest problems with relying solely on a packaged text is that we perpetuate myths," (p. 55). The story within the book is not the full story. There are always going to be other perspectives, questions, and gaps that the author left for the reader's interpretation. We cannot limit our students by making them believe that the pages in the book are all that there is to it, but we do need to equip them with the skills to consider why things were written, and for who. In today's classroom there is no value to having students read and regurgitate hundred to thousand year old texts just because they've been around that long, and that regurgitation typically only lies in the

lower thinking realms of Bloom's taxonomy anyway. However, there is merit in having them read over notable passages with close reading strategies and use their higher order thinking to consider the canon in multiple contexts, across different texts, and be critical investigators of time, spaces, and humanity.

Teaching the Canon in the Modern Classroom

The canon has always been meant to reflect alleged universal lessons and stories that everyone can relate to, however, with the United States being more diverse than it's ever been, the content of the canon only relates to a select group of students, and marginalizes the rest. As Anderson (2019) stated, "The problem is that what was once defined as 'common' —middle class, white, cisgender people—is no longer the reality of our country," (para. 10), which is clearly reflected in the K-12 public enrollment statistics of 2019 (EducationData.org) where 54% of the total students in the U.S. were reported to be non-white. Considering that every city and state has its own demographics, these numbers could be drastically higher in certain areas, meaning that these canonical texts aren't inclusive to over half of the student population if not more. It's clear that the pedagogy needs to change if we expect students to engage with material. Students won't want to take part in learning if they can't see themselves represented, and the overwhelming amount of cisgender, white male produced canon from x years ago simply shows students that there isn't a place for their identity in the classroom, and that's just a completely incorrect method in today's day and age. The canon can include the many identities of our students, but it requires steep effort from the teacher and less focus on the canon itself. The focus needs to shift to one that celebrates diversity more than romanticizing the past. These articles

express the need for us to pinpoint our attention on our student demographics and mold a canon of our own, that embraces the old and the new—with more emphasis on the new.

While reading can sometimes be about the escape or fantastical adventure, students should be able to see themselves within the stories and also be exposed to different types of people, both validating their identity and enriching them with others. There is a dangerous amount of canonical texts that are centered around white protagonists and are written by white authors that have had a history of stereotyping and erasing the identities of other races, ethnicities, orientations, religions, and abilities. The classroom should be a place for diversity, and the canon is notorious for being more than lackluster in that realm. To highlight this issue, Bishop (1990) pointed out, “When children cannot find themselves reflected in the books they read, or when the images they see are distorted, negative, or laughable, they learn a powerful lesson about how they are devalued in society...” (p.1) which boils down to the fact that if students can’t see themselves within a text, they can’t connect with it, and therefore feel no drive to immerse themselves within its world, and centering the curriculum around it will be futile.

The traditional canon facilitates negative stereotypes and ideologies by having non-white characters often portrayed in exactly the ways that Bishop described, and it creates an alarming mentality that Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie called, the single story (Adichie, 2009). The single story robs people of their mirrors and instead solidifies them in literature as a trope or mechanism merely meant to enhance the benefit and story of the white protagonist. It perpetuates incorrect assumptions about students in the classroom and narrows their minds to only see people as they are portrayed in literature. As Adichie mentioned, the single story, “...emphasizes how we are different rather than how we are similar,” (Adichie, 2009) in a manner that only

marginalizes one from the other and prevents students from being the center of their own story, which just eliminates any opportunity for learning or growth.

In the classroom, contemporary and relevant texts that are responsive to the existing cultures of the students need to be present so that students can cultivate their own beliefs by experiencing perspectives that are similar and different to their own. These texts should be used to fill the gaps from the covered canon to eliminate the single story and serve as a mirror for students to find themselves in that canon, but in a way that does not involve praising the canon as truth and actually uses new texts to incorporate identities that can expose the single story of the canon. An amazing example of this would be to use *The Song Of Achilles* as the dominant text while using excerpts from *The Iliad* as the canonical reference, which will be highlighted later.

The canon prevents students from connecting with texts because over half of the students in US public education are non-white (EducationData.org, 2020) and so for the canon to successfully and purposefully exist in the classroom, teachers must incorporate texts that eliminate the single story and provide a mirror for students, so that not only can they enjoy it, but they can know that their identity is validated in the walls of their classroom. Contemporary texts can bridge that gap between the canon and the student so that there is room for visibility, critical analysis, and purpose.

The importance in incorporating the canon with the contemporary despite the challenges that could be faced is quite simple: it facilitates a classroom community. Community is one of the most important traits of a modern day classroom because of the fact that there are so many students of various abilities, races, ethnicities, religions, and orientations all sitting within those walls who desire to feel seen and loved. Neglecting or erasing the canon from the classroom isn't going to remove the fact that the single story still exists in society, or that there aren't always

going to be mirrors to see ourselves in, but acknowledging the canon, those hard situations, and using contemporary texts as a foundation—and doing it together as a class—can not only educate, but cultivate an inclusive community by tackling it together. Korbey (2019) resonated with the belief of continuing to have students read through challenging texts together, stating, “...it teaches students to engage in a balanced and civil discourse, asserting that ‘you can only really listen to someone else’s perspective on a story if you’re discussing a text that you have also read.’”.

Everyone has individual experiences, and if those experiences and perspectives can be brought to a text based discussion, it could make the canon seem more present than past, especially if a contemporary text can bridge them. Students will learn more from a text if they work on it as a group rather than alone, and they’ll realize that their views and ideas are just as meaningful as the author’s, as echoed by Beers and Probst (2013), “...when you talk with another about a book, you learn more than when you think it through alone. You learn more about the book, more about your neighbor, and perhaps even more about yourself,” (p.51). Merging the contemporary and the canon creates a space for everyone to be respectful, be heard, and learn from not just the texts, but one another.

One of the best tools a teacher can use in the modern classroom when it comes to teaching the canon is actually young adult literature. Young adult literature as a genre didn’t even exist nearly fifty years ago, and it’s merit is still up in the air depending on what educator you ask, but there is no denying that there’s no other genre that applies to young adult students more than young adult literature. Despite this, YAL is dismissed more often than not, and deemed as non-essential to the curriculum. However, when it comes to teaching the canon, the best way to scaffold those difficult or dense texts is to pair it with YAL because it can engage

students, create relatable connections, and serve as a ladder for literacy development (Rybakova & Roccanti, 2016). To not use YAL in the modern classroom is a waste of a practically invaluable resource. Not only that, but not including it, quite literally excludes the exact audience that makes up our classrooms--young adults. Affirming this, Groenke and Scherff (2010) echoed, "These novels have been written about adolescents, with adolescent readers in mind...when we omit young adult literature from our classrooms, we say to students that the kids in those books--and their lives--don't matter," (p. 2), which of course is the last thing that the modern inclusive classroom should do. The texts we choose to dominantly cover in the classroom should be ones that serve as mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors for students to grow with (Bishop, 1990), and YAL has a vast array of genres, plots, and characters that can align with all of the coming-of-age experiences that our students go through in adolescence, along with the necessary escapes and adventures to engage them.

That, and many young adult titles have connections to canonical pieces, so instead of just teaching the canonical text and risking losing student interest and engagement, teachers can use YAL to bridge the contemporary to the canon. The deliberate, meaningful inclusion of YAL in the classroom as opposed to following the comfortable curriculum of the traditional canon is essential to the positive social, mental, and emotional development of students. Students can find solace in their feelings and find answers without asking, which Rybakova and Roccanti (2016) emphasized, "...teaching YAL emphasizes the importance of student voices in constructing meaning and provides space for students to become active learners rather than passive receivers of information," (p. 32). Students will longer be 'reading' a text for the sake of the teachers who want to fulfill their common core standards; they will be reading because the teacher has provided them with a myriad of ways to say you matter, thanks to YAL.

Technology, Choice, and Canonical Pedagogy

There are plenty of options for incorporating the canon in the modern inclusive classroom, but these options will only matter if we can put it all into practice. Technology has advanced rapidly in recent decades, and it can be used in the classroom to facilitate fantastic differentiated instruction and provide for a wider variety of assessments. For too long have assessments revolved around multiple choice tests and traditional essays, and when paired with a standard canonical unit, it's no surprise that students check out pretty early. It restricts success only to the high achieving students, and doesn't provide any choice for other ways to show learning. Technology provides more resourceability than the traditional methods ever could since it isn't confined to a book (Wantulok, 2015, para. 9) and it's constantly updating and changing, so it allows students to remain engaged with new and relevant materials and content, instead of being limited to what sits between the spine of a book. Variety is the key to creating a successful unit because students need something to look forward to, a feasible goal, because in the end, "...students would choose to engage in the reading based on the assessment that was going to wrap up the unit," (Provenzano, 2020) and the success of the unit was entirely dependent on the types of assessments the teacher put before the class.

Making a conscious effort to allow students the choice to create with technology through project based learning would let them, "...engage in the reading in a personal way because they would be able to use digital tools they knew would best explain what they understand," (Provenzano, 2020) rather than just have one type of assessment that every student is expected to complete. Technology is one of the best ways to differentiate instruction and support all students because it allows them to share their learning in a unique and individualized way, even if the whole class is reading the same texts. The diversity that exists in the classroom needs to be

reflected through the types of assessments we present students, not just in the content itself, if we want the canon to remain a contender in the modern classroom.

In the realm of differentiating, students should have a number of choices for their assessment, because the focus should be on how the students can come to their response and not what response can they come up with that will satisfy the teacher. The goal of using technology in the classroom is to provide students with newfound autonomy, as affirmed by Edutopia.org (2010), “Technology helps change the student/teacher roles and relationships: students take responsibility for their learning outcomes, while teachers become guides and facilitators,” (para. 7). Students will be more inclined to take charge of their learning if they can be trusted to have control over what they create.

Students need opportunities to teach, and teachers need opportunities to learn about their students. For example, if there are students who are struggling writers, one choice could be to make a video that would be shown to the class. Students can role-play as a group to enact a scene from a text, film a movie trailer from their own creative lens, or do a parody of the text with their own quirky twist to show an exaggerated version of it. The act of producing a film for a project is a gateway to higher level thinking and active engagement because, “...preparing a script, considering how to portray a concept in a new way and review/editing of material, involves several stages of repetition of the content thus facilitating deeper learning,” (Hawley and Allen, 2018, p.4). Students don’t have to write in order to show that they’ve retained or understood content, especially when it comes to the canon which can be hard for some students to extrapolate upon on paper, so more hands-on forms of assessment could excite those who enjoy the interactive elements of the classroom experience.

On the flip side, perhaps if there are students in the class who are in fact, strong writers who need a challenge, another option could be to have those students try their hand at writing online fanfiction and do a ‘fic club’ where they share their adaptations and expansions of the story on a fanfiction outlet like fanfiction.net and then comment on each other’s posts. Fanfiction is a great way for students to insert not only themselves into the story, but also amplify silent voices of minor characters, fill plot holes, and take story wherever their imagination can lead, while living in the style of the original author’s work. It allows for a perfect blend of student driven creation along with following the ‘rules’ that the author set up, which could be especially helpful with the canon because it provides students with enough freedom to create their own narrative while also being cognizant of the characters, plot, or timeline they’re originating from. The benefit of using fanfiction as an activity or even a form of assessment is further justified by Sauro and Sundmark (2018),

“Fanfiction tasks can potentially serve as bridging activities; specifically, they can allow for the incorporation of texts selected by students to help guide their transformation of elements from an existing literary text into a new story that retains both linguistic and literary elements from the source text,” (p.4)

Producing online fanfiction could challenge strong writers to test the limits of their creativity and take the canon or the contemporary in a new direction, or perhaps even try to combine them both into a one new story altogether—the possibilities with fanfiction are practically limitless, and will likely stir a fire of inspiration in students who enjoy writing, or even those who don’t. Not only do both of these options utilize technology in completely different ways in order to develop

Bloom's higher order thinking, but both can be used to supplement the canon in the modern classroom of diverse learners. These are just two examples of what could be a thousand ways that technology could advance the learning in a classroom, but it comes down to the fact that teachers need to be aware of the learning environment they're creating for their classroom along with the individual abilities of their students so the assessments can meaningfully measure their mastery of the content (Stanford, Crowe, & Flice, 2010, p. 3). Every student will absorb the canon and the contemporary differently, so the way that they share it should reflect that, and technology is that door to accessibility.

While variety and choice are all well and good, there needs to be intention behind it beyond just giving students a literal choice of what they want to do. Why are they doing it? What's in it for them? If the canon and contemporary are expected to live in harmony, the voices of our students need to complete the trifecta. The perspectives of the canon and the contemporary are only so powerful when contained between one another, but when students are, "...given equitable opportunity to add their own voices to an ongoing dialogue between texts," (Dallacqua & Sheahan, 2020, p. 76) there is a dimension of learning that takes place that is beyond academic and blooms into personal development. Teachers need not forget that learning is not purely academic--it's more complex, holistic--and that students should be able to use multimodal composition along with the literacies that they've developed outside of the classroom (Faughey, 2019, p. 69) in order to communicate their own unique perspectives. Giving students that space to dive will allow them to access a learning that is beyond literature itself.

Chapter Three: Application

As mentioned before in the literature review, *The Song of Achilles* is an excellent choice to teach as a dominant text while using *The Iliad* as a canonical reference point for filling in gaps and critical review. I'd like to attempt to remove some of that fear of the unknown by providing an in depth justification for its place in the classroom, and how it can provide a more enriching experience for students beyond the traditional method of dumping a two thousand year old text like *The Iliad* on them.

The Song of Achilles is both an original treasure and a remarkable retelling of *The Iliad* that holds enough strength that students need not even read *The Iliad* in order to know the full extent of the Trojan War, and it provides a more personal, beautiful background on the life of Achilles that many had never considered, and from a perspective that is more intimate than the birds-eye view of *Homer's* telling. It is a masterpiece in its own right, and can serve as a strong alternative to its dated counterpart. With that being said, *The Iliad* can still be used, but simply as a tool to help amplify the experience of *The Song of Achilles*.

It is not enough to just show a handful of lessons and expect that everyone will understand the magnitude of its worth. However, after giving you a passionate overview, I will be including 3 lessons to serve as direct application, just to prove that it can hold its ground in the classroom. I cannot replicate the richness of the novel itself within the limits of this explanation, but I can try to share as much of its incredible merit as I can, so that hopefully it inspires educators to take that leap, stop clutching the canon so desperately, and make a more active effort in finding texts that connect with our **students**, not just our standards.

Overview of *The Song of Achilles*

The Song of Achilles by Madeline Miller (2011) is a novel rich with untold heroism that explores the relentless nature of fate, the monumental impact of love, and a reimagining of the Trojan War in a way that feels more deeply real than its predecessor *The Iliad*. The story unfolds through the eyes of Patroclus--Achilles' life long companion, lover, and the best of the Myrmidons--who, after being exiled from his own kingdom, grows up side by side with Achilles; the prince who was promised glory beyond Heracles. Through Patroclus' eyes we are able to see Achilles grow through adolescence and observe more than just the hero who raged upon Troy and lived on the scales of tragic glory. We are able to see the young prince who loved juggling figs, who loved Patroclus, who preferred to use his hands to play the lyre and his voice to sing rather than to throw a spear or cry out in battle. Through Patroclus, we are able to see the prince who would consider the constellations and what it took to reside among them.

The Iliad does not provide any real answer as to the nature or the origins of the deep bond between Achilles and Patroclus, and through *The Song of Achilles* we receive an immortal love story that transcends war and fate itself. From the affections of adolescence to a bond that transcends death, the word *love* isn't enough when it comes to Achilles and Patroclus, "He is half of my soul, as the poets say," (Miller, 2011, p. 299). The kidnapping of Helen by Paris draws them both into the war; Achilles by fate and Patroclus by oath, and in an effort to become the first hero who was truly happy, Achilles tries to test fate and not become the heartless war machine that the Greeks begged him to be. The tale does not focus on the unhinged rage of Achilles, rather it focuses on Achilles as a human with a soul--with pressures and expectations weighing on him like the world on Atlas--as someone who had never lost in battle, but lost

something far greater, and that loss was enough to fuel a pain that would rival fate itself and terrify the gods.

The Song of Achilles grips at the human spirit and has the reader begging that fate will be kinder, where we are so close to Achilles and Patroclus that *The Iliad* feels galaxies away, omnipotent and impersonal as the gods looking down on the war. We see everything that *The Iliad* had to offer but we are gifted with fresh eyes through Patroclus, and see the toll of Greek heroism, war, and fate on those who live in a world where glory is second to none. *The Song of Achilles* shows a side of the Trojan War that sings for the unsung and challenges the perceptions that the canons have laid out for heroes who are so much more than their legendary actions alone.

Incorporating the Canon

The entire purpose of this capstone is to validate the fact that contemporary, young adult focused texts can have just as much, if not more, value in the classroom than the canon that has been so vehemently utilized for generations. The canon does not need to be a crutch to lean on when it comes to meeting common core standards. Educators have become comfortable in the canon because it doesn't involve any innovation, but that's precisely why students are not connecting with the material or actively reading as much as they should be. Students will not want to engage, nonetheless *read*, if the curriculum is uninspired and irrelevant to their experiences.

As we develop away from the past, we must acknowledge that having students read entire canonical texts and regurgitate what we ask of them is not enough. Instead, a step in the right direction could be to shift curricular focus to a contemporary text and include pieces of a

canonical work as a point of comparison, critical analysis, and insight. Thus, students are still being exposed to the canon for deliberate and intentional purposes, whether it's to consider perspective, investigate themes, etc., but the canon itself is not the focal point of their learning. Not only that, but the canon tends to be difficult for students to digest, so by having the primary text be a more modern one geared towards young adults, students can use it to learn critical reading strategies and then be able to *apply* those strategies canon related work with more ease rather than try to read the complex canonical text and also apply strategies to it altogether.

The modern text can be the **foundation** for knowledge where students can become comfortable in their skill to break down and interpret textual elements, the canon can be the **springboard** for strengthening and reinforcing those skills through analysis, synthesis, and evaluation (Himmele, Himmele, & Potter, 2014), and then the **leap** will be for students to use the culmination of their higher order thinking to create something that uses what they've absorbed from both (Himmele, Himmele, & Potter, 2014), which is what the following lesson plans in this section strive to do.

The purpose of this section is, ultimately, to show that a synthesis between contemporary and canon can exist with even the most minimal inclusion of the canon, and that the enrichment should stem from modern texts, with the canon serving as a point to extend and expand understanding.

Lesson 1

Grade Level: 9

Subject / Content area: ELA

Unit of Study: *The Song of Achilles*

Lesson Title: All's fair in love and...judgment?!

Central Focus for the learning segment: Students will be engaging in their own mini Trojan War as they battle to align as many excerpts from *The Song of Achilles* and *The Iliad* to the appropriate theme. The goal is to reinforce their understanding of themes throughout the literature, while also being presented with multiple situations in which they must use their judgment and defend it.

Content Standard(s)

NYSCCLS RL.9.2. Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.

NYSCCLS W.9.4.. Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

Learning Objectives

*I can analyze an excerpt from either *The Song of Achilles* or *The Iliad* and determine the theme that it depicts.*

I can make a judgment as to whether, if put in the same position as Achilles, I would go into the war and fight or if I would refuse, and defend myself for whichever I choose.

Instructional Resources and Materials

- White board + magnets
- Tables
- Kahoot! Game for poll
- YouTube Video on the Judgment of Paris:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TOAraslCkgU>
- Paper balls: 10 with excerpts from *The Iliad*, and 15 with excerpts from *The Song of Achilles* (needs to be enough for every student, at least) (attached)

Instructional Strategies and Learning Tasks:

The most important choice! Anticipatory set (5 minutes): When students walk in, a Kahoot! Game will be pulled up and presented as a poll. Teacher will ask students to get settled in and log into the Kahoot game either on their phones or on their laptops. The poll will ask, “Which apple will you choose: love, wisdom, or power?” with a picture of golden apple underneath that is engraved ‘to the fairest’, and then the options below it. Students may only choose one, and they must choose independently. After everyone has made their choice, the results will show up revealing everyone’s choice. The teacher should consider the distribution of the responses and discuss and ask a few students to share why they chose the apple they did. Then, ask all of the students who voted for Love to stand up. Once standing, exclaim excitedly, “Congratulations, you’ve started the Trojan war! Woo!” The teacher could clap to add comedic effect, and hopefully other students will clap along just to add to the irony. Students have been reading *The Song of Achilles* for several weeks now, so they know of the Trojan War and that Paris kidnapped Helen of Sparta, but they may not have much prior knowledge on the context of the situation that led to Helen’s taking. This will provide more mythological explanation to how the Trojan War started and also put the students in the place of Paris without them even necessarily knowing it.

Video Transition--The Judgment of Paris! (5 minutes): Now that students have made their choices and are wondering how they’ve started a war, pull up the YouTube video: Drawn History: The Trojan War | History (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TOAraSlCkgU>). This is a 2 minute video that provides the context and mythology behind how Paris was even able to kidnap Helen of Sparta in a fun and animated manner. Now, students can connect what they’ve read so far in *The Song of Achilles* and the buildup leading to the war itself, and see how it began from the side that they haven’t seen since the narrative takes place on the side of the Greeks and more specifically, Patroclus. This video will assist in bridging the gap between ‘why was Helen kidnapped at all, and why is war beginning over it?’ and ‘What do Patroclus and Achilles have to do with it?’, because they will have some idea through what they’ve read, but this video will put it into a larger perspective rather than a more pinpointed one that they’ve read from. Not only that, but having animations and a dynamic voice guiding the video will attract students’ attention and hopefully make the connection easier for students who prefer visuals and verbal explanation. Also, cartoons are just extremely student friendly and something they’re used to, so if they’re struggling to absorb it from a textual standpoint, this will add another method of comprehension.

Love! War! More!--Activity Instruction (7 minutes): The teacher will have students count off in 2’s until half is assigned as 1 and half is assigned as 2. These will be their teams, because now they’re own Trojan War is beginning right here in the classroom! Group 1 will be the Greeks and Group 2 will be the Trojans. For the war, they will be turning the tables (literally) onto their sides and raining paper balls of crumpled up excerpts from either *The Song of Achilles* or *The Iliad* from behind their protective table barriers onto the ‘warriors’-- one student from each team will serve as their ‘warrior’ who will be between the tables and trying to catch one of the other side’s paper balls. Once they have one, they will open it up, read it to themselves, and then stick it to the white board that has 5 different themes divided in

columns (Love, War, Fate vs. Free Will, Perception, Adolescence), under whatever theme they believe it is showing (students will use magnets that are already on the board). Once they have both made their decision, they will read their quotes aloud for everyone to hear, and briefly explain why they put it in the theme column they did. Then, the 'Gods' (two students, one for each side, will be in charge of holding the key or the 'fate' scroll), representing all knowing power and the ultimate judgment, will determine if their answers were correct or if they unfortunately, didn't survive. Each quote will have a number designation, so the 'Gods' will only need to look for the number on the key and it will say the theme beside it (some may have multiple themes, which means either spot that the 'warrior' puts it, is acceptable), providing ease of access and maintaining the game's pace. If a 'warrior' doesn't survive, they will go behind the table barrier and a new warrior will be chosen for the next round and they will receive no points. If the 'warrior' gets the answer correct, they get one point, but if they've been up for more than one round, every right answer they get from then on is worth 2 points, so the goal is to get as many excerpts to their correct theme as possible and be the best of the Greeks or Trojans. Teacher will keep track of points on the Smart Board at the front of the room so students can see. Each round will proceed in the same fashion until all of the excerpts have been assigned to a theme. Between each round, all extra paper balls will be picked up by a volunteer from each side, making sure each side gets the same number of balls back.

**The quotes from *The Iliad* will provide some challenge for students but they can use what they've read from *The Song of Achilles* to decipher the canonical excerpts, and if they truly become stuck, the 'warrior' can call upon a member of their army to come read the excerpt and help them decide, but the catch is that the helper can't *speak*--they must use their body language to communicate, simulating how warriors in battle don't sit and talk, but act with their bodies and fight.

Greeks vs. Trojans! All is fair? --Setup and Activity (20-25 minutes): Activity will proceed. Students and Teacher will turn long rectangular tables onto their sides and students will wait behind them on their designated side. Teacher will get out two bowls full of paper ball excerpts and one will go to each side. Warrior's will be chosen by volunteer. Students behind the tables may only throw one paper ball each round. Once the warriors in the middle have each caught one from the opposing side, students behind the tables must stop throwing. Rounds will proceed until all of the excerpts have been placed with a theme. Teacher may choose to quietly play dramatic battle music in the background as students engage in the game. Points will be totaled up at the end to determine the winner.

Final Judgment--Quick write + Closure (10-12 minutes): After the game ends and the room is back in order, the teacher will now ask for students to pass their own judgment and put themselves in the place of Achilles. They've already made judgments as Paris and as analytical warriors, and now it is time to make a final judgment. At this point in *The Song of Achilles*, Achilles and Patroclus have accepted that Achilles must participate in the war and they set sail for Troy with Odysseus and the Greeks, but there is a long buildup before this where Achilles does not know if he wants to be a part of the war at all. If he goes into the war, he will become a hero, crowned the best of the Greeks and the one who would bring Greece one step closer to winning the war--his legacy would be forever remembered, but he will die young. However, if he stays out of it and lives a long life with Patroclus, fate claims that he will be forgotten and

his godlike abilities will fade. When Achilles has to make this decision, he is 16. Present this question to the class: *“If you were in Achilles position, and you had to either join a war that you know you would die in to become a hero, or you could live a long life with the ones you love but be forgotten and shamed as a failed demigod, which would you choose? Why?”* Have this question visible on a PowerPoint on the Smart Board and also read aloud. This is a thought provoking question that asks students to make a judgment call on a hypothetical situation, and apply their own morals and values so that they can connect with the conflict Achilles faces at an age quite close to their own. It involves students looking intrinsically so that they may try to resonate with what Achilles and Patroclus are going through, even though the students are thousands of years in the future. The Teacher will ask students to spend the rest of class answering this question either on a piece of paper or on their laptops (they’ll submit it to Google Classroom) and with their answer, defend their decision with at least 3 reasons. This is not meant to be any more than a paragraph, but students should still put a lot of thought into their decision. When complete, they can put their paper at the front of the classroom, or submit it in Google Classroom. This will be graded as participation. If students need pages to reference, Teacher should have students look to page 190 of *The Song of Achilles* if they need a reference.

Differentiation and planned universal supports:

Engagement: This lesson gives students plenty of room for choice from the start. Students are invited to choose during the poll at the start of the class, using their own moral compass to guide their choice, again during the activity when they are warriors determining the themes of excerpts, and again when they judge whether or not they would have done the same thing as Achilles and defend their reasoning. The lesson itself is centered around being relevant to students by being age appropriate, promoting lots of active participation, and encouraging students to use their imaginations as they ‘battle’ and also interpret complex excerpts in a creative fashion. Students are communicating with one another in order to meet a goal, and the goals they meet is directly related to their deepened understanding of content material. The goal is clear in the sense that the teacher has the points on a screen for everyone to see, and the goal is also to make sure all of the quotes are paired with a theme, so the students are further motivated to do their best not only for themselves, but their team, fostering a community effort. The animated video at the beginning of class along with the Kahoot! Game also provide relevance and value to the class because students are more likely to engage with content that is geared towards their age, and cartoons and games are familiar aspects of their lives outside of school, so bringing them into the classroom helps bridge gaps in understanding for all learners. Students who do not want to participate in the war itself can be the ‘Gods’ who are in charge of the answers, or as volunteers who clean up the battlefield after each round and give everyone their paper balls back.

Representation: Students will be using their background knowledge on what they’ve read in *The Song of Achilles* to determine the themes of several excerpts from *The Iliad*, which they haven’t read, but is the canonical text that *The Song of Achilles* was reimagined from, so the characters and conflicts are all the same. While the text is more complex than that of *The Song of Achilles*, the excerpts will be short enough where students will be able to decode and notice the relationships and events enough to determine what theme is being presented. The challenge in the lesson is to have students not only find themes in *The Song of Achilles*, but use their knowledge *The Song of Achilles* as a tool to help them decipher excerpts from *The Iliad*. Also, instead of just having students read about the judgment of Paris, using video representation allows visual and auditory learners the opportunity to absorb information more easily and it also allows for closed captioning as needed. For the final judgment where they write their paragraph, they will tap into their background knowledge as individuals in order to come to their decision and defend their choice, asking for students to think of their lives outside of the classroom and connect it to the conflict Achilles faces.

Action/expression: Students do not have to be seated for a majority of this lesson, and depending on the class, getting them up and active with one another will help keep them motivated and engaged. Students will be acting out their own war, moving the tables, throwing paper balls, and physically putting the excerpts in their designated theme columns, which is far more enticing to students than just sitting at their desks filling out organizers. Students will use media to share their responses through the Kahoot! Game instead of just sharing it out loud.

Language Function students will develop. Additional language demands and language supports:

- *Discourse*: Students will be expected to work as a team to ensure victory and also if their ‘warrior’ needs help, to do their best to communicate the theme to their ‘warrior’ without using words.
- *Apply*: Students will apply their knowledge of what they’ve read and what they know from *The Song of Achilles* in order to analyze excerpts from *The Iliad* for their themes.
- *Justify*: Students will justify their decisions throughout the entire lesson: when they choose an apple, when they choose a theme for an excerpt, and when they judge whether or not they would go to war or live a long life.

Type of Student Assessments and what is being assessed:

- **Informal Assessment**: Teacher will monitor student progress through participation and discussion. The Teacher will note how the students do in the Greeks vs. Trojans activity and how accurately they were able to assign excerpts to themes, and adapt teaching in future classes based on the results. Teacher will read over their judgment paragraphs for comprehension of the task but they will be counted for participation.
- **Formal Assessment**: None
- **Modifications to the Assessments**: N/A

Evaluation Criteria:

For this lesson, students will be evaluated based on their participation in the activities and their paragraph that they write at the end of class. The paragraph will not serve as a formal grade, rather more of a checkpoint where the Teacher can see how students are resonating with the material and how they insert their own perspective into the situations of the characters. The goal of the lesson is for students to make judgments in three different ways: through blind judgment, through analytical judgment, and intrinsic judgment.

Relevant theories and/or research best practices:

Burke, J. (2013). *The English Teacher’s Companion: A Completely New Guide to Classroom, Curriculum, and the Profession*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

CAST (2018). Universal Design for Learning Guidelines version 2.2. Retrieved from <http://udlguidelines.cast.org>

Lesson Timeline: ~60 minute lesson

Lesson 2

Grade Level: 9

Subject / Content area: ELA

Unit of Study: *The Song of Achilles*

Lesson Title: The Song of Perception!

Central Focus for the learning segment: Theme focus: perception. Medium of learning: music. Students will be critically analyzing songs to deepen their understanding of perception and perspective in regards to *The Song of Achilles*.

Content Standard(s):

NYSCCLS SL.9.5 Make strategic use of digital media (e.g., textual, graphical, audio, visual, and interactive elements) in presentations to enhance understanding of findings, reasoning, and evidence and to add interest.

NYSCCLS RL.9.11. Interpret, analyze, and evaluate narratives, poetry, and drama, aesthetically and ethically by making connections to: other texts, ideas, cultural perspectives, eras, personal events and situations.

Learning Objectives

I can analyze a song that directly connects to The Song of Achilles, examining elements of character perspective, relationships, and conflicts in regards to Achilles.

I can select a song that aligns with a character from The Song of Achilles and evaluate bias, emotions, perspective, etc. as well as provide a supporting example from the book as evidence.

Instructional Resources and Materials

- Smartboard and whiteboard
- *The Song of Achilles* by Madeline Miller (students will have copies)
- The song ‘Achilles Come Down’ by Gang of Youths
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vLPTIHKKY50>
- Teacher created Spotify playlist for *The Song of Achilles* choices:
<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/3x42mWEkflLveEKmRGSHIX>
- Graphic organizer (guided version attached)
- *The Iliad* quote of Achilles
- Song *Oblivion* by Bastille

Instructional Strategies and Learning Tasks

Anticipatory set (5 minutes): As students come in, have the song “Oblivion” by Bastille playing on loop with the lyrics pulled up on YouTube on one side of the smartboard, while in another window, beside the lyrics and song, have the following quote from *The Iliad* posted for students to consider as they listen to the song (once everyone is seated, the teacher should read this quote aloud for students):

*“My mother Thetis tells me that there are two ways in which I may meet my end. If I stay here and fight, I shall not return alive but my name will live **forever**: whereas if I go home my name will **die**, but it will be long ere death shall take me.” -Achilles, *The Iliad* (Book 9, p. 146)*

Students should be familiar with this quote, or at least this situation, because in a previous lesson they had actually written a paragraph on what their decision would have been if they were in Achilles’ position, so they should be confident with the context behind it. This quote is used to help activate prior knowledge from before, only this time the quote is from *The Iliad*, and students can now work from the same situation in a different format, in this case, the canon and music. As they sit down, ask them to, as they listen to the song a few times, just think about whose perspective the song could be from in regards to *The Song of Achilles*, and how the song makes them feel, or any extra thoughts that it might evoke from them. They are encouraged to use their knowledge of what they’ve read from *The Song of Achilles* so far to help make connections. Teacher should allow students to listen to the full song at least two times after reading the quote aloud for them so that they may compose their own answers. (This song was chosen because it contains a lot of repetition that students will pick up on, and centers around life, death, and legacy, much like the plight of Achilles in the quote and in *The Song of Achilles*.)

Small Discussion (3 minutes): When students are finished, the teacher will ask students to briefly share their thoughts with a peer close to them, and then come together as a class to share one/some of their takeaways from the song + quote. Then, ask whose perspective the song could’ve been from in regards to *The Song of Achilles*, how the music impacted their interpretation of the quote, and how they came to that answer. Do they feel closer to Achilles because of the quote or because of the music?

Introduction (16 minutes): Follow up by asking students, “How can a song influence our perception of someone?” Have students give some input on this question and pull up another song, *Achilles Come Down* by Gang of Youths (this will lead into the main direct teaching portion) music video w/ lyrics (let students know there are two explicit words in the song and to be mindful of their use and intention). The teacher will play the song/video and ask students to listen/read closely to the lyrics throughout the song and try to find out who the speakers of the song are, how they each perceive Achilles, and how the music is showing it. Teacher will provide students with a Graphic Organizer so that they can isolate one character from another as they listen, along with a copy of the lyrics if they’d like to mark it up or leave it blank until they go over it as a class. Teacher will model this by filling out their organizer while students listen and write as well. There are several potential answers (Patroclus, Antilochus, Apollo, Agamemnon), so students will be able to have an open interpretation here. Students will be asked to jot down notes about connections they may find, even if they are brief notes, just to keep track of their thoughts--these notes do **not** have to be in depth, just streamlined to however they like. Teacher will ask if students would like to hear the song a second time through in order to solidify their thoughts (time for this is allotted--the song is long, but rich with material to digest and discuss).

Achilles Come Down (15 minutes): (Teacher will pull up lyrics in a text document) Now that students have heard the song and taken notes, the class will come together to critically analyze the song for use of perspective and perception, using their knowledge of characters and relationships in *The Song of Achilles* for their base of analysis. Before class analysis, ask students what they gathered in their notes and Teacher should invite students to raise their hand if they’d like to volunteer to come up to the smartboard and mark up, underline, star, and show what they found. Then as a class, based on what the students came up with, do a close reading of the song, highlighting elements such as point of view, bias, theme, repetition in the chorus, conflict, tone, instrumental, etc., (these should not be ‘given’ to students, but should be asked in question format for example, like, “Why do you think the video contrasts light and dark between the narrators?” or “Interpret how each narrator wants Achilles to come down, do they mean the same thing?” or “How did each narrator make you feel, and what in the song made you feel that way?”) Students will be the ones identifying much of the connections, with teacher guidance (they should already have knowledge of content specific terms at this point but if they get stuck, Teacher should remind/guide them as needed). The goal is to have students distinguish multiple perspectives from one song, analyze how the song exemplifies varying perceptions of Achilles, and how they can justify it with what they’ve absorbed from *The Song of Achilles*.

Sing, Muse (15 minutes): Now that students have had a chance to work through perspective and perception as a class, they will have the opportunity for creative autonomy in order to find ‘The Song of ____’! Students will be able to find any song of their liking (that is appropriate) that they believe aligns with a character or characters from *The Song of Achilles*. They will then justify their choice by finding an excerpt from *The Song of Achilles* and provide a brief explanation (2 paragraphs) on who the narrator is and how they want us to perceive the character they’re singing about, much like the song *Achilles Come Down*, that they just analyzed. Students may evaluate bias, emotions, perspective, etc. The song choice is up to the student, but if they are struggling to find a relevant song, the Teacher will provide a link to a Spotify playlist that has been crafted to contain a number of songs that can clearly be connected to *The Song of Achilles*. Students are not limited to this list. The song and the excerpt must correlate in a way that is clear and the student must annotate the lyrics to show relevance (either on print copy or digitally if they’d like). Students should have at least 3-5 pieces of evidence as to why the song and excerpt connect (bias, theme, context, etc.), and how the role of perspective and perception play a role in how they are similar or how they are different. (Students will have the rest of the period to listen to/find a song that they like and they may use their cell phones + headphones if needed). Teacher will put Spotify link in the accessible Google Classroom for students to use if they need it. Students will start research and writing for the rest of the period and have a portion of the next class as well as two nights to complete their piece. Students can

The Song of _____ (5 minutes): Get a general head count of how many students have found their song, if any. If everyone has not selected one, remind them that they will have only 10 minutes at the beginning of next class to find one, and the rest of class will be spent annotating lyrics and finding their excerpt from *The Song of Achilles*. The teacher will share the song that they have chosen (yes, the teacher is also participating in this lesson, which students should find amusing) and say, “Here is My song of _____, and next class I will share my excerpt and justification with you all and we can analyze it together to see who sings my song and who they’re singing about!” This should give students a sense of ease knowing that the teacher is also participating and will give them another chance to reinforce their critical analysis skills. Students need ample exposure and time to build these critical habits, so analyzing the teacher’s work should be very beneficial to them. Students may consult with peers as they look for their song.

Differentiation and planned universal supports:

Engagement: Students will have a choice in the song that they use and whether they want to annotate digitally or traditionally. Lesson will maintain relevance by using multiple songs from their generation, allowing them to choose a song that is valuable and interesting to them as an individual for their analysis, therefore allowing them to use their imagination in a personalized way. Students will be able to choose if they'd like to mark up the lyrics during the listening portion, or if they'd like to wait until they do the whole-class close reading + analysis. Lesson will minimize distractions by spending a majority of the period working as a class. Challenge will be instilled by having students analyze as a class and then be asked to work independently to apply what they just did as a class in their own way. Students can choose to have a blank graphic organizer for the *Achilles Come Down* segment, or they can have a guided graphic organizer that helps prompt their note taking. Challenge will also be instilled by having students either find a song on their own, or find a song from a pre-designed playlist that the teacher will provide that they can then choose from. Students will work as a class and build on one another's responses to help respond to questions, and will have time to talk with their peers on potential answers. Students will be able to consult peers for song ideas and inspiration. In the following class, the teacher will provide a clear model for the goal and expected outcome of the mini-project by sharing their own version of the assignment.

Representation: Students will be watching a Youtube video with the lyrics written out so that students will not only hear the song, but also be able to keep up with the lyrics and read along with the large, accessible font. Students will have a visual representation of the song through the YouTube video since it will not only have the lyrics, but also have dynamic expression to help convey meaning (light vs. dark shift in visuals to show change in narrator/perspective). Lesson will utilize background and prior knowledge by revolving around what they've read so far in *The Song of Achilles*, as well as having the lesson begin with making them connect a quote from *The Iliad* with a song, requiring them to use what they know from *The Song of Achilles* to apply it to a canonical excerpt and connect with a song as well. Students will highlight ideas, relationships, and patterns through their analysis of the song lyrics, evaluating the dynamics of the YouTube video, use of a graphic organizer to differentiate perspectives, and their knowledge of *The Song of Achilles*. All vocabulary, syntax, structure, and linguistic elements will be clarified through annotation by both the teacher and the students as they are asked to come up to the smart board and highlight/markup what they thought was valuable.

Action/expression: Students will be able to come and write on the Smart Board during the *Achilles Come down* analysis, getting them out of their seats and allowing them to actively participate instead of remain sedentary. Students will be able to compose their responses by using multiple media, in this case, music, in order to show their own creative interpretation of characters and use of perception in *The Song of Achilles*. Students will be able to set goals and develop planning skills by completing a checklist for the project at the end of class so they can see what they still need to complete and how they should manage their time for next class.

Language Function students will develop. Additional language demands and language supports:

- *Vocabulary*: Students will be expected to have previous knowledge of vocabulary such as perception, perspective, theme, plot, character, tone, mood, etc.
- *Discourse*: Students will be expected to work as a class to analyze the song on the Smart Board and share their thoughts on how music and writing can be connected and identify what elements are present.

Type of Student Assessments and what is being assessed:

- **Informal Assessment**: Teacher will monitor student progress through participation and discussion of content and analysis
- **Formal Assessment**: Will be graded mini project after due date (not during this period)
- **Modifications to the Assessments**: N/A

Evaluation Criteria:

Students at this point are almost finished with *The Song of Achilles*. They understand the relevance of music and how it is a major theme of the novel, as well as the fact that the way Achilles is perceived in history is a major concern for the novel's narrator, Patroclus. This lesson segues into creative interpretation and imaginative justification where students can use the music they *actually* like/listen to, and **apply** it to the content. This way, students can see how they can contextualize their learning and bring their personal world into the world of literature, and blend them successfully. They can take any route with it: romance, sadness, angst, anger--whatever they like, and that's what adds such a fun element to this project. This is *their song*. They will be evaluated based on the attached rubric (below). This lesson focuses more on building their confidence in the mini-project and getting them started, but eventually they will be graded and evaluated.

Relevant theories and/or research best practices:

Burke, J. (2013). *The English Teacher's Companion: A Completely New Guide to Classroom, Curriculum, and the Profession*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

CAST (2018). Universal Design for Learning Guidelines version 2.2. Retrieved from <http://udlguidelines.cast.org>

Lesson Timeline: ~60 minute lesson

Lesson 3

Grade Level: 9

Subject / Content area: ELA

Unit of Study: *The Song of Achilles*

Lesson Title: The Hero's Song -- final project

Central Focus for the learning segment: This lesson will focus on introducing the final project of the unit, where students will be choosing what they would like to create in order to show their learning and that they can apply what they've learned of heroes and perception from *The Song of Achilles* to their own interests, lives, and cultures.

Content Standard(s):

NYSCCLS W.9.3.f. Adapt voice, awareness of audience, and use of language to accommodate a variety of cultural contexts.

NYSCCLS SL.9.4. Present information, findings, and supporting evidence clearly, concisely, and logically such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and task.

Learning Objectives

I can choose a medium of expression and create a project that shows what a hero looks like through my perspective.

*I can develop on what it means to be a hero based on what I've learned from *The Song of Achilles* and apply it to the hero I chose to use for my project.*

I can explain how my perception of my hero impacted my choices.

Instructional Resources and Materials

- SmartBoard
- *The Song of Achilles* by Madeline Miller (students will have copies)
- Spotify
- Choice 'Song' board + Rubric (attached)
- Poster paper + markers
- Google Classroom
- Youtube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A_HjMIjzyMU

Instructional Strategies and Learning Tasks

I need a hero! Anticipatory set (8 minutes): As students enter the classroom, direct students to take their seat at a table that has a poster that interests them most. Around the classroom will be five different posters that have five different categories listed among them: Music, Movie, Art, Writing, and Social Media. These will all be different topics that students can choose from for their final projects, however they don't know it yet and the Teacher should keep this unknown for the beginning of the lesson so that they get some raw responses from students. As they take their seats, ask them to think of 2 reasons **why** they like their chosen topic and share them with their group until everyone has shared. After sharing in their group, the Teacher will ask students to take 3 minutes, or until the YouTube video begins to play, to write down ~5 of those reasons onto their designated poster using markers.

As both a signal for attention and a means for getting students to laugh, the Teacher will pull up and begin playing *Holding Out for a Hero* from the Shrek 2 movie on YouTube until they are all back in their seats (play about half of the video, ~2 minutes). This will serve as a lighthearted segue into the introduction of the final project and hopefully stir their budding interest since they haven't been told anything yet.

Who's your hero? Introduction (10 minutes): Once students have settled in, the teacher will answer the biggest question in the room--why are we all sitting here in these groups, why are we doing this? The teacher will let students know that they will begin their final projects for the unit today, and sitting in these groups was the first step. The teacher will tell students that for their final project, they will be able to have the creative freedom to choose what they would like to use as their medium for showing their *Hero's Song*. The teacher will ask students to close their eyes for a moment and think about someone, anyone, real or fictional, who they see as their hero and would like to show them for more than just their actions. While they think, the teacher will pass out the 'Song Board' (choice board) instructions for their final project but give it to them face down. Then, students can open their eyes and write down their hero on the back of the paper. The teacher will then ask students to consider, "If you had to tell the Song of your hero that you just wrote down, would you be able to do it using the topic you just chose?" Give students time to absorb. Follow up with, "If you believe you can, stay where you are. If not, please switch to a category that you think you would best be able to tell the Song of your hero." This is meant to help students become aware of their own preferences in showing their learning, and so the teacher can see what modes students prefer to express their knowledge in.

Choose your adventure! Instructions (12 minutes): Students may now flip over their papers to reveal the Song board (attached) for their final project. There are 5 choices for the way they would like to do the project, all of which were the ones that they made posters on. Students will have the freedom to choose whatever one they'd like, and they will have 3 full class periods to complete it. Each of the topics has potential ideas for what they could do for their project, but if they have an idea that isn't listed, they can propose it to the Teacher for approval. The point of this project is not to focus so deeply on *The Song of Achilles* as a book, but to focus on using what they've learned about the legacy & humanity of heroes through Patroclus' song of Achilles and applying it to their own lives, interests, values, to identify those that they see as a

hero, and sing their 'song'. Students have spent the entire unit shifting their focus from within the novel, gradually outward, towards the world they live in, and this final project will serve as a show for what they've accumulated throughout the unit on a personal level. Teacher will orally read the project options and also give students time to read it over independently. After students have had time to look over the options, the Teacher will inform students that if they need some project examples to look at to help them get a better idea of what they are expected to do, they can find some in the Google Classroom in the 'Hero's Song: Example Projects!' folder. A rubric for the project will also be accessible in the Google Classroom for students to monitor their progress as they work (physical copy will be available the following class). Time will be allotted for students to ask clarifying questions. Students may work in pairs of two if they can agree on a hero and if their idea is relevant for the involvement of two people. Students also do not have to use the hero they wrote down initially, but they should know who their hero is by the end of class.

Research (25 minutes): Students will spend the rest of class time brainstorming for their project, picking their category, choosing their hero, and running any potential ideas by the Teacher. The Teacher will rotate between group tables to consult with students in small groups as they work. Students may listen to music on their headphones to help their focus and conduct research on cell phones if necessary. This chunk of class time is for students to settle on what they'd like to do before actually having work periods for the following three classes.

Closure (5 minutes): Teacher will briefly bring the class back together and, using the smart board, have students come up and write down any materials or requests that they might have in order to complete their projects (paint, colored pencils, access to the courtyard or hallways for filming, access to the library for privacy and less distractions, etc.) so that by the time they have their next class, the Teacher can have everything prepared so students can get right into their work. The Teacher will make note to try and accommodate for all of these so that students can complete their projects to their fullest potential. This will also help students become more invested because the Teacher is actively making an effort to give them as much freedom of expression as possible and access to resources beyond just their own classroom.

Differentiation and planned universal supports:

Engagement: Students will have individual choice in the sense that they are choosing their hero, the category in which they would like to create their project, as well as what form they would like to express it in. Even if the option is not on the Song board, the student has free reign to run any idea by the teacher for approval, and as long as it is something they're passionate about and can appropriately show their learning, they may do so. Students also have the choice to work in a pair of 2 if they can agree on a hero and decide on an idea that will serve a purpose for having 2 people involved. This project is also responsive and relevant in the way that it encourages students to use things like music, movies, art, and things that they use in their daily lives in order to complete the assignment. Using the Shrek movie clip will also get students laughing and pique their interest as to what's to come next in the lesson. The whole goal of the project is for the student to do what interests them and make that choice for the benefit of their own learning, rather than have every student be stuck doing the same exact project, this one allows for varied results, different intensities, and allows students the comfort of leading their learning. It's more about process and less on product. The project varies in demands and promotes challenge by having less teacher guidance/structure, and more independence. It also has different categories for them to choose from, all ranging in effort and resources required from the student. Students will be invested in the project because they have control over it, and it's all centered around categories that intermingle with their daily lives that they can manipulate into something unique. In today's world, not everything is about writing an essay as a final project, students need to know how to express themselves with the resources of their generation. To minimize distraction as students begin to research, lights can be dimmed so that students do not have to strain their eyes as they work on their phones/computers.

Representation: This lesson focuses on gradually exposing students to the whole project instead of just throwing the whole assignment on them at once, so that students can be introduced to the parts bit by bit before they are able to read over the 'Song' board and actually get started. Subtitles for the YouTube video are available to be played in English or any other language depending on the students in the classroom who may speak another language or have hearing impairments.

Action/expression: Students will be using multiple media and multiple types of tools to compose their projects and communicate to their audience. Students will be up and moving as they work with their group to fill out their category poster, and will likely navigate around the room until they decide on which category they're confident in. Students will also be able to share their responses aloud if they cannot write on the poster. Students also have multiple modes of expression in the fact that they can choose a writing dominant project, a more musically dominant one, an artistic one, etc., they are not all required to express their understanding in the same way. Students will also be able to monitor their progress by self-assessing with a rubric once they're done with their project, and they will fill it out before they present so they can be confident that they have completed all the requirements. Students will have access to the rubric physically and digitally and can reference it throughout their work periods so they can monitor their progress. The rubric is not meant to intimidate students or be too convoluted, it is meant to serve as more of a reference so that students can be sure that they are meeting the expectations of the project and getting each part completed. The focus is not so much on **what** the students produce to satisfy the rubric, rather the focus is on **how** they show their learning.

Language Function students will develop. Additional language demands and language supports:

- *Discourse:* Students will be expected to work in peer groups in order to fill out their category posters, and communicate their ideas with the Teacher if they would like to do an alternative to the options given.
- *Construct/Create:* Students will be creating an expressive piece of their choice that uses perspective and perception to represent their hero.
- *Justify:* Students will justify their creative choices in their explanation & presentation and how those choices appropriately show the desired representation of their hero.
- *Apply:* Students will apply their knowledge of the perception of hero's and the value of perspective from *The Song of Achilles* to their own projects

Type of Student Assessments and what is being assessed:

- **Informal Assessment:** Teacher will monitor student progress through participation and discussion and rotate between tables to consult as needed.
- **Formal Assessment:** Will be graded on the final project when they present, four class periods from this one (rubric attached).
- **Modifications to the Assessments:** N/A

Evaluation Criteria:

This is the final stretch of the unit where students will be creating their own ‘Song’ for someone that they deem to be a hero. This person can be real or fictional, and they are encouraged to use their imagination to the fullest so that we can truly see the whole ‘Song’ of their hero and not just their actions. The goal is for students to get close with their hero and really try to know them on a level beyond what would be shown through media or written in history books, etc., and share that with the class. Patroclus did not want Achilles to only be remembered as the man who raged upon Troy, killed Hector, and served as the greatest warrior for the Greek advantage in the Trojan war--he wanted Achilles to be remembered for his personality, his compassion, and his ability to love. Students are encouraged to consider the deeper elements of what makes humans heroes, and what composes them, and show that through their own expression or ‘Song’. Students should be tapping into their emotions, values, and the perspective that they can bring to the table as well as how they can attempt to change the way that heroes are perceived. Students will be evaluated based on the rubric attached, but the Teacher is really looking to see *how* every student shares their thinking differently and what medium allows them to show their understanding best--process over product. This is the time for students to connect with their hero and create with their thoughts, emotions, and unique perspectives.

Relevant theories and/or research best practices:

Burke, J. (2013). *The English Teacher's Companion: A Completely New Guide to Classroom, Curriculum, and the Profession*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

CAST (2018). Universal Design for Learning Guidelines version 2.2. Retrieved from <http://udlguidelines.cast.org>

Lesson Timeline: ~60 minute lesson

Lesson 1 Materials

Quotes from <i>The Song of Achilles</i>	Quotes from <i>The Iliad</i>
<p>“I swear it.’ We sat like that a moment, hands touching. He grinned. ‘I feel like I could eat the world raw,’” (Miller, 2011, p. 105)</p> <p>“And I wanted to be able to listen, to digest the bloody images, to paint them flat and unremarkable onto the vase of posterity. To release him from it and make him Achilles again,” (Miller, 2011, p.224)</p> <p>“She wants you to be a god,” I told him. “I know.” His face twisted with embarrassment, and in spite of itself my heart lightened. It was such a boyish response. And so human. Parents, everywhere. (Miller, 2011, p. 55)</p> <p>“I embraced those thin, wiry limbs. I thought, <i>This is what Achilles will feel like when he is old</i>. And then I remembered: he will never be old.” (Miller, 2011, p. 190)</p> <p>“Did they believe those slender limbs could hold against an army of Trojans? Could a boy of sixteen really be our greatest warrior?” (Miller, 2011, p. 197)</p> <p>“If every soldier killed only those who’s personally offended him, Pelides, we’d have no wars at all.” (Miller, 2011, p. 178)</p> <p>“He is a weapon, a killer. Do not forget it. You can use a spear as a walking stick, but that will not change its nature.” (Miller, 2011, p. 207)</p> <p>Who knows what might have happened then? The air was close with the iron-salt smell of her death. Human sacrifice was an abomination, driven from</p>	<p>“For my own part I shall stay here seated on Mount Olympus and look on in peace, but do you others go about among Trojans and Achaeans and help either side as you may be severally disposed. If Achilles fights the Trojans without hindrance they will make no stand against him. They have ever trembled at the sight of him, and now that he is roused to such fury about his comrade, he will override fate itself and storm their city.” (Butler, 2008, p. 322)</p> <p>“Would, by father Zeus, Athene, and Apollo, that not a single man of all the Trojans might be left alive, nor yet of the Argives, but that we two might be alone left to tear aside the mantle that veils the brow of Troy.” (Butler, 2008, p. 256)</p> <p>“I say further, and lay my saying to your heart, that if you send Sarpedon safely to his own home, some other of the gods will be also wanting to escort his son out of battle, for there are many sons of gods fighting round the city of Troy, and you will make everyone jealous.” (Butler, 2008, p. 265)</p> <p>“And yet—so be it, for it is over; I will force my soul into subjection as I needs must; I will go; I will pursue Hector, who has slain him whom I loved so dearly,” (Butler, 2008, p. 297)</p> <p>“A dark cloud of grief fell upon Achilles as he listened. He filled both hands with dust from off the ground and poured it over his head, disfiguring his comely</p>

our lands long ago. And his own daughter.” (Miller, 2011, p. 204)

“The rosy gleam of his lip, the fevered green of his eyes. There was not a line anywhere on his face, nothing creased or graying; all crisp. He was spring, golden and bright. Envious death would drink his blood, and grow young again.” (Miller, 2011, p. 168)

“And you think to steal time from the fates?”

‘Yes.’

‘Ah.’ A sly smile spread across his face; he had always loved defiance. ‘Well, why should I kill him? He’s done nothing to me.’” (Miller, 2011, p. 171)

“I conjure the boy I knew. Achilles, grinning as the figs blur in his hands. His green eyes laughing into mine.” (Miller, 2011, p. 368)

“Men will hear of your skill, and they will wish for you to fight their wars.’ He paused, ‘What will you answer?’

‘I do not know,’ Achilles said.

‘That is an answer for now. It will not be good enough later,’ Chiron said.” (Miller, 2011, p. 90)

“My pulse jumps, for no reason I can name. He has looked at me a thousand thousand times, but there is something different in this gaze, an intensity I do not know. My mouth is dry, and I can hear the sound of my throat as I swallow.” (Miller, 2011, p. 63)

“There is no law that gods must be fair, Achilles,’ Chiron said. ‘And perhaps it is the greater grief, after all, to be left on earth when another is gone. Do you think?’” (Miller, 2011, p. 84)

“But I would have the memory be worthy of the man. I would have you be yourself, not some tyrant remembered for his cruelty. There are other ways to make Agamemnon pay. We will do it. I will help you, I swear. But not like this. No fame is worth what you did today.” (Miller, 2011, p. 296)

face and letting the refuse settle over his shirt so fair and new. He flung himself down all huge and hugely at full length and tore his hair with his hands.” (Butler, 2008, p. 295)

“The two wept bitterly—Priam, as he lay at Achilles’ feet, weeping for Hector, and Achilles, now for his father and now for Patroclus, till the house was filled with their lamentation.” (Butler, 2008, p. 400)

“Achilles made signs to the Achaean host and shook his head to show that no man was to aim a dart at Hector, lest another might win the glory of having hit him and he might himself come in second.” (Butler, 2008, p. 355)

“Dog, talk not to me neither of knees nor parents; would that I could be as sure of being able to cut your flesh into pieces and eat it raw, for the ill you have done me, as I am that nothing shall save you from the dogs--it shall not be, though they bring ten or twenty fold ransom and weigh it out for me on the spot, with the promise of yet more hereafter.” (Butler, 2008, pp. 358-359)

“Thrice did Patroclus charge at an angle of the high wall, and thrice did Apollo beat him back, striking his shield with his own immortal hands.” (Butler, 2008, p. 272)

“My doom has come upon me; let me not then die ingloriously and without a struggle, but let me first do some great thing that shall be told among men hereafter.” (Butler, 2008, p. 357)

“Oblivion” by Bastille

When you fall asleep
With your head
Upon my shoulder
When you're in my arms
But you've gone somewhere deeper

Are you going to age with grace?
Are you going to age without mistakes
Are you going to age with grace?
Or only to wake and hide your face

When oblivion
Is calling out your name
You always take it further
Than I ever can

When you play it hard
And I try to follow you there
It's not about control
But I turn back when I see where you go

Are you going to age with grace?
Are you going to leave a path to trace?

But, oblivion
Is calling out your name
You always take it further
Than I ever can

When oblivion
Is calling out your name
You always take it further
Than I ever can

“Achilles Come Down” by Gang of Youths

[Verse 1]

Achilles, Achilles, Achilles, come down
 Won't you get up off, get up off the roof?
 You're scaring us and all of us, some of us
 love you
 Achilles, it's not much but there's proof
 You crazy-assed cosmonaut, remember your
 virtue
 Redemption lies plainly in truth
 Just humour us, Achilles, Achilles, come
 down
 Won't you get up off, get up off the roof?

[Verse 2]

Achilles, Achilles, Achilles, come down
 Won't you get up off, get up off the roof?
 The self is not so weightless, nor whole and
 unbroken
 Remember the pact of our youth
 Where you go, I'm going, so jump and I'm
 jumping
 Since there is no me without you
 Soldier on, Achilles, Achilles, come down
 Won't you get up off, get up off the roof?

[Pre-Chorus]

Loathe the way they light candles in Rome
 But love the sweet air of the votives
 Hurt and grieve but don't suffer alone
 Engage with the pain as a motive

[Chorus]

Today of all days, see
 How the most dangerous thing is to love
 How you will heal and you'll rise above

[Verse 3]

Achilles, Achilles, Achilles, jump now
 You are absent of cause or excuse
 So self-indulgent and self-referential
 No audience could ever want you
 You crave the applause yet hate the attention
 Then miss it, your act is a ruse

It is empty, Achilles, so end it all now
 It's a pointless resistance for you

[Verse 4]

Achilles, Achilles, just put down the bottle
 Don't listen to what you've consumed
 It's chaos, confusion and wholly unworthy
 Of feeding and it's wholly untrue
 You may feel no purpose nor a point for
 existing
 It's all just conjecture and gloom
 And there may not be meaning, so find one
 and seize it
 Do not waste yourself on this roof

[Pre-Chorus]

Hear those bells ring deep in the soul
 Chiming away for a moment
 Feel your breath course frankly below
 And see life as a worthy opponent

[Chorus]

Today of all days, see
 How the most dangerous thing is to love
 How you will heal and you'll rise above
 Crowned by an overture bold and beyond
 Ah, it's more courageous to overcome

[Verse 5]

You want the acclaim, the mother of
 mothers
 (It's not worth it, Achilles)
 More poignant than fame or the taste of
 another
 (Don't listen, Achilles)
 But be real and just jump, you dense
 motherf**ker
 (You're worth more, Achilles)
 You will not be more than a rat in the gutter
 (So much more than a rat)
 You want my opinion, my opinion you've
 got
 (No one asked your opinion)

You asked for my counsel, I gave you my
thoughts
(No one asked for your thoughts)
Be done with this now and jump off the roof
(Be done with this now and get off the roof)
Can you hear me, Achilles? I'm talking to
you

[Bridge]
I'm talking to you
I'm talking to you
I'm talking to you
Achilles, come down
Achilles, come down

[Pre-Chorus]
Throw yourself into the unknown
With pace and a fury defiant
Clothe yourself in beauty untold
And see life as a means to a triumph

[Chorus]
Today of all days, see
How the most dangerous thing is to love
How you will heal and you'll rise above
Crowned by an overture bold and beyond
Ah, it's more courageous to overcome

Lesson 3 Materials

Name: _____

‘Song’ Board!

My hero is: _____

MUSIC	Create a Spotify playlist that you think represents the life and legacy of your hero! The playlist must include at least 8-10 songs , be titled, and you must provide a brief 2-3 paragraph explanation of how these songs represent your hero as a whole individual, from both your perspective and how you believe others should perceive them. If you have any other ideas, just ask me for approval!
ART	Create a collage of images using either physical media (magazines, printed pictures, photos, etc.) or digital media (Tumblr images, google, Instagram, Pinterest, etc.) that serves as a snapshot of the life of your hero! You must also include a brief 2-3 paragraph explanation justifying how this best represents your hero as a whole individual, from both your perspective and how you believe others should perceive them. If you have any other ideas, just ask me for approval!
MOVIE	This one is a lot more open ended--create a movie trailer for the life of your hero! Of course, you can't include everything about your hero in a trailer, but try to show us the truest representation of your hero as an individual, not just a hero. Your trailer should be at least 3 minutes long! You can include other people, music, clips from online, anything you think would help convey your ‘Song’ of your hero! You must also include a brief 2-3 paragraph explanation justifying how this best represents your hero as a whole individual, from both your perspective and how you believe others should perceive them. If you have any other ideas, just ask me for approval!
WRITING	Write a poem or short story about your hero! You can take a route much like Patroclus and do narrative (minimum 5 pages double spaced), or you can take a less writing intensive approach and write a poem collection (3 poems)! Go wild with your imagination and put yourself in the middle of it all! You must also include a brief 2-3 paragraph explanation justifying how this best represents your hero as a whole individual, from both your perspective and how you believe others should perceive them. If you have any other ideas, just ask me for approval!

SOCIAL MEDIA	<p>Fan of Tumblr, Instagram, or Pinterest? Good news! You can create a series of posts using a platform of your choosing that represent your hero--these can be quotes, images, gifs, whatever is available! Make sure you're capturing all sides of your hero from your perspective, and make sure you're showing them in the light that you'd like them to be perceived (how do you want everyone to view them, according to your posts?! We all know influential social media is, so be wise! Your social media handle must be named 'Song of (your hero's name)' and don't forget that you're doing this from your perspective, but your posting about your hero! Your page should have at least 8-10 posts! You must also include a brief 2-3 paragraph explanation justifying how this best represents your hero as a whole individual, from both your perspective and how you believe others should perceive them. If you have any other ideas, just ask me for approval!</p>
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Hero's Song! Project Rubric

Points	0-1 points	2 points	3 points
Completion + Effort	Student did not complete the project or did not complete enough to present. Little to no effort.	Student completed the project with moderate effort but may not have met all of the requirements for their category.	Student completed the project with high effort and met all of the required expectations for their category (length, explanation, content).
Relevance of adaptation	Project was irrelevant or was not appropriate to task.	N/A	Project was relevant and appropriate to task. Student uses their 'Song' to creatively highlight their hero with thoughtful intention.
Representation of perspective & perception (+ written portion)	Student did not make a connection between perspective and perception or how their hero is represented through their project.	Student made connections between perspective and perception and how their hero is represented, but the connections are surface level.	Student made clear, in-depth connections between perspective and perception and how their hero is represented.
Presentation	Student did not present because project was not completed enough (<i>not including exceptions or extensions</i>)	N/A	Student presented their project in a way that everyone could follow. Presentation was well-organized and student was able to logically explain their reasoning.

Total points: _____ /12

Chapter 4: Conclusions

To bring everything full circle; there is no perfect answer as to what we as educators should be doing when it comes to the canon. However, there are plenty of options and choices before us that can at least prevent us from sticking to the dull sameness that the canon has presented for so many years. Educators have to start being active advocates for changing their curriculum into something modern and meaningful for their students. The canon by itself is not enough, and it's not enough for schools to expect students to be excited about a text that's been taught the same way for decades upon decades. The value of diversity and inclusion should take precedence over whether or not a student can identify a double entendre in *Romeo & Juliet*. The canon does have a place, but it's not a big place, or a monumental place like it's been given for generations--it's more of a small little barstool instead of throne.

For many educators, the canon has served as a safe space where they can lean on the comfort of canon instead of the ambition of innovating a new unit with contemporary texts, and I think the most important first step in shifting the attitudes towards the canon in the classroom involves educators actually caring about their students as individuals and not just as students. Yes, we are teachers, we want them to do well and know all of the cool things we know, because that would make them more well-rounded *students*, not necessarily more well-rounded *people*. It's not about what we want them to know at the end of the day, it's not about us at all really, it's about how we can cultivate what students bring into the classroom and teach them to harness their knowledge in different settings. The longer we treat the canon as something that represents greatness, the longer we discriminate and alienate our students from feeling like they can achieve that very thing: greatness.

We need to be better for our students. We can't have the nerve to be excited about the two thousand year old canon while also being skeptical of books written within the last decade that actually portray the dynamic experiences and lives of our students. If we're going to care about the canon, we have to care about the contemporary, too. Not only is that the equitable thing to do, but it's the right thing to do. School can be one of the only places where students can feel safe, and relying on the canon neglects the fact that students need more than just *Mr. Darcy* to get through the day. They need to see themselves in modern books to cope with their experiences, see how characters handle similar situations, and develop a confident sense of self that oftentimes the canon just can't do. Perhaps the educators need to be educated, and maybe we can learn more from our students than has been led on for the last two thousand plus years.

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