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Writing for Developers: take your project docs to the next level

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Fun fact

About **50%* of responses** to “how to choose a development framework” questions on StackOverflow mention **documentation**.

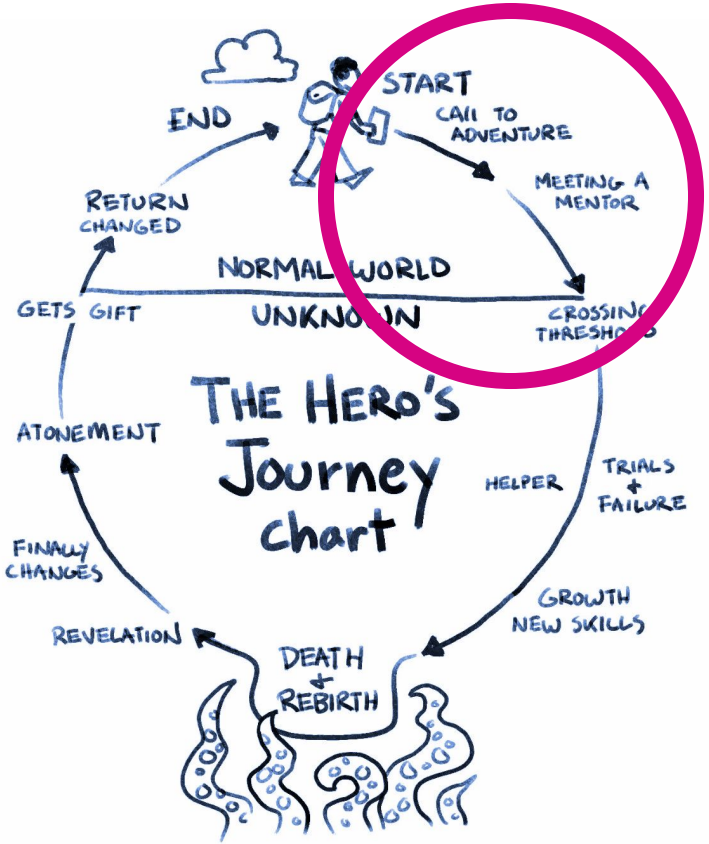
* This is a rough estimate done by me

A call to arms

CNCF is a community of **open source** projects. As far an open source project itself goes, there is no dedicated **support team**, no **sales**, and no **dedicated writers**!

We are what our partner organizations choose to staff, and what the community **chooses to contribute to**. And if we don't choose docs, they don't get done.

The hero's journey



Little Red Riding Hood

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What is your user's goal?

Learning about user goals

Talk to your users

Keep track of questions asked repeatedly

Outline the docs as a part of the epic

How new contributors can help

Submit GitHub issues and PRs

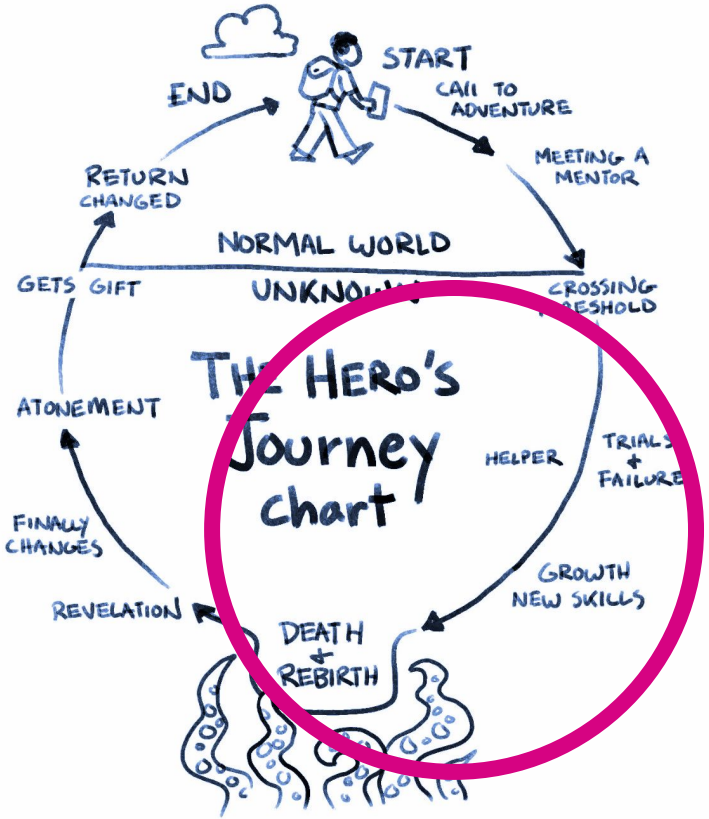
Make suggestions to the project team

Cherish your beginner's mindset

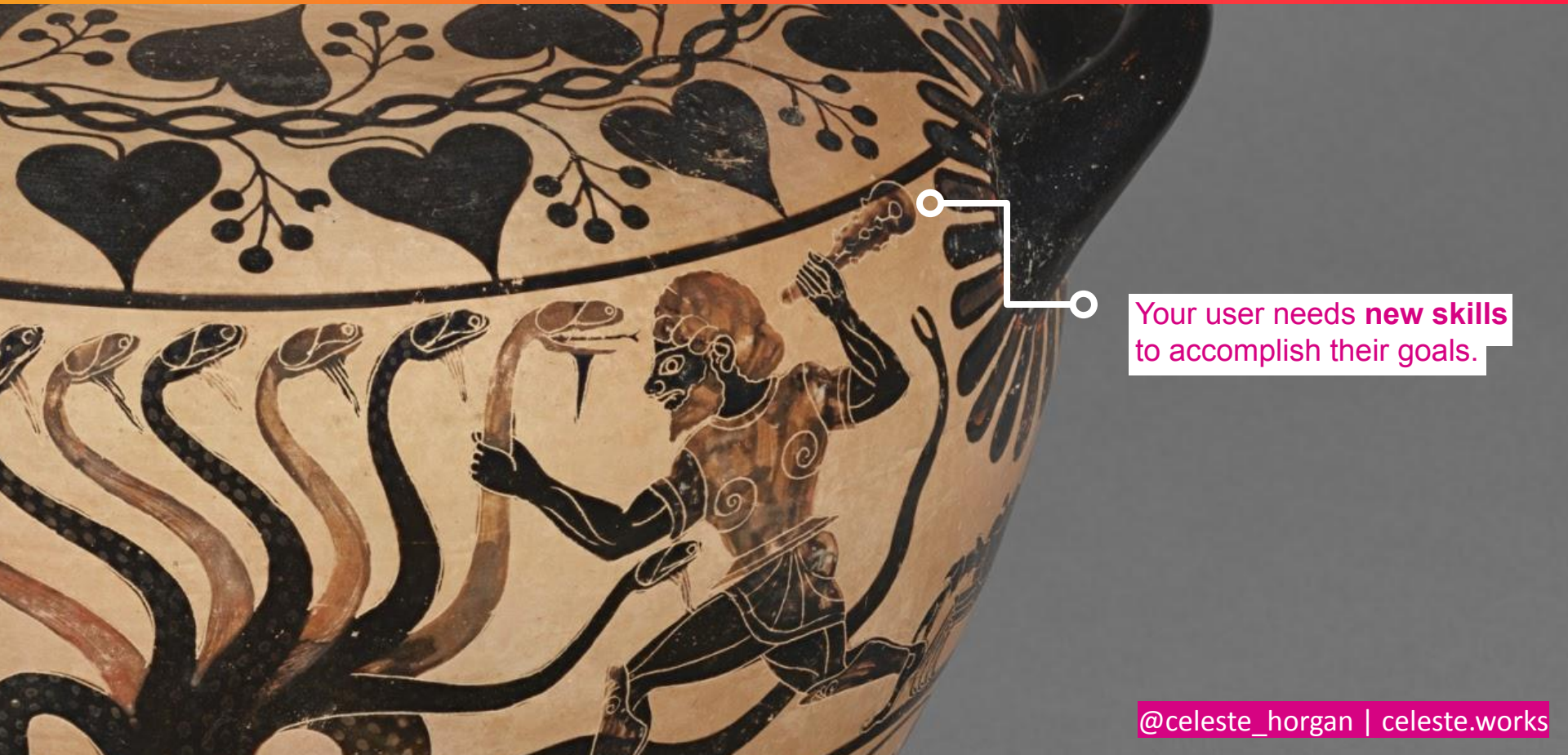
User goals and how to meet them

Common user goals	How to meet them
Evaluating new tech stacks	Concept docs, Quickstarts
Learning, passing certification exams	(API) References
Supporting an existing system	Tasks, tutorials and cookbooks
Finding info to solve a problem	Searchability & information architecture

The hero's journey



Hercules



Your user needs **new skills** to accomplish their goals.

How to explain anything

Concept

Explain at a high level

Why do they care?

+

Tasks

How do they do it?

Where are the pitfalls?

+

Reference

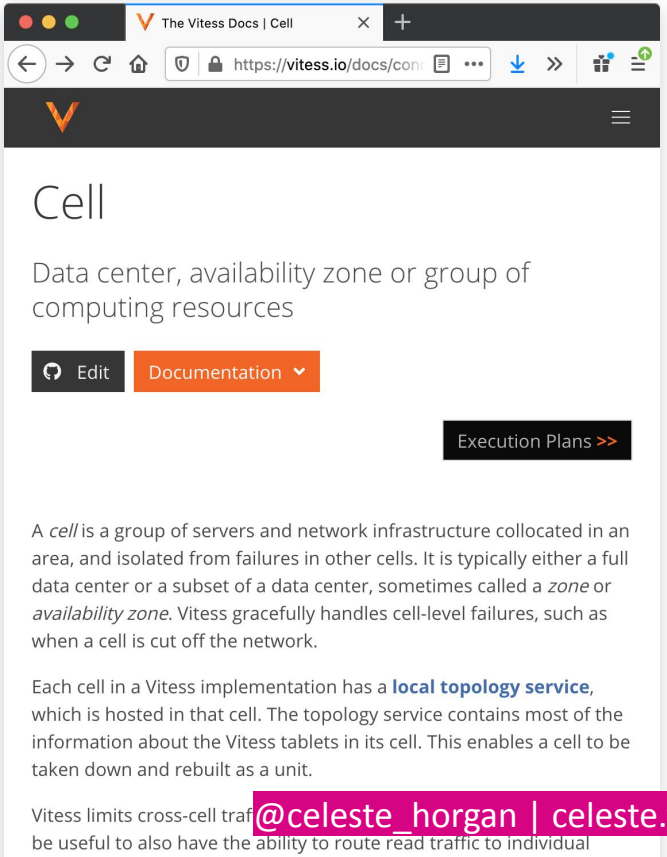
The long tail explanation

Lists of things

Concepts

Concept topics explain a feature at a high level.

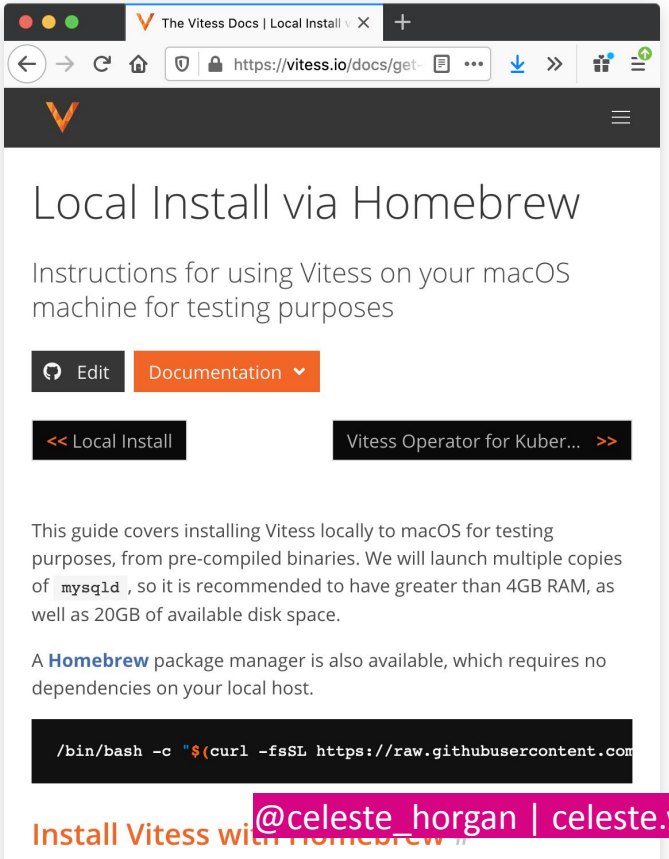
- Often use "_____ is a _____ which _____." sentence construction
- Briefly describes or links to other concepts related to the feature at hand
- Describes why a user might care about a feature, or common use cases.



Tasks

Tasks describe what a user can do with a feature.

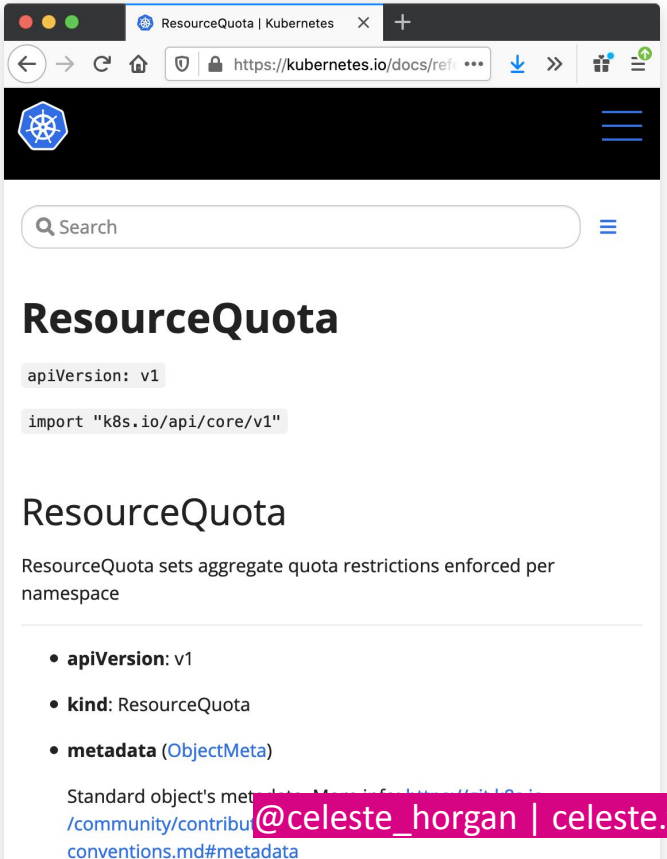
- Describe each step in sequence
- Install and quickstarts are task topics
- Simple tasks often map to CRUD (create, read, update, delete) functionality.
- Complex tasks which weave through many concepts/features are often written as tutorials
- Example code focused task topics like cookbooks or example repos work too, but should never be treated as standalone!



References

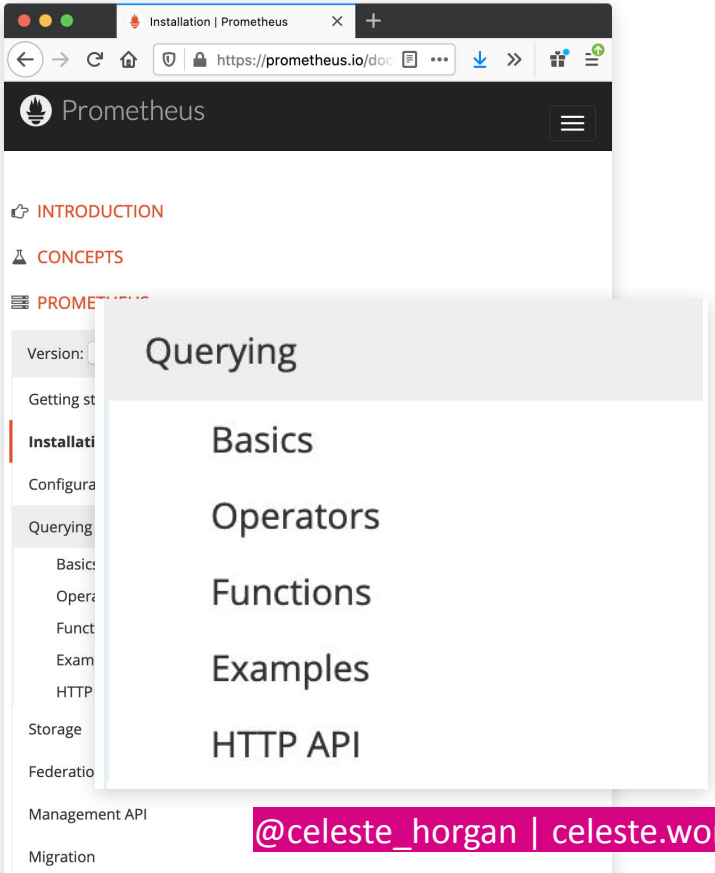
References provide lists of all options for a feature

- Often autogenerated from code comments or specs
- API references describe all endpoints and accepted data
- Command line interface flags, Javadoc-style documentation
- Completeness and accuracy is important here!
- Complex APIs benefit from request/response format code samples

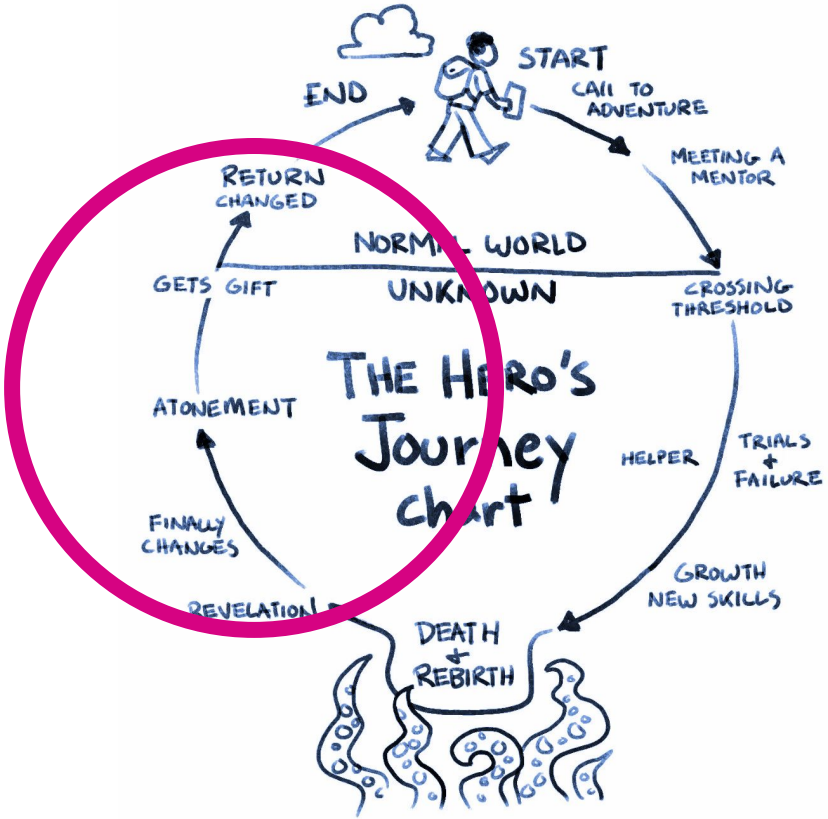


Putting it all together

Great docs almost always have all 3 types (concept, reference, task) present in some format.



The hero's journey



The hero returns, changed

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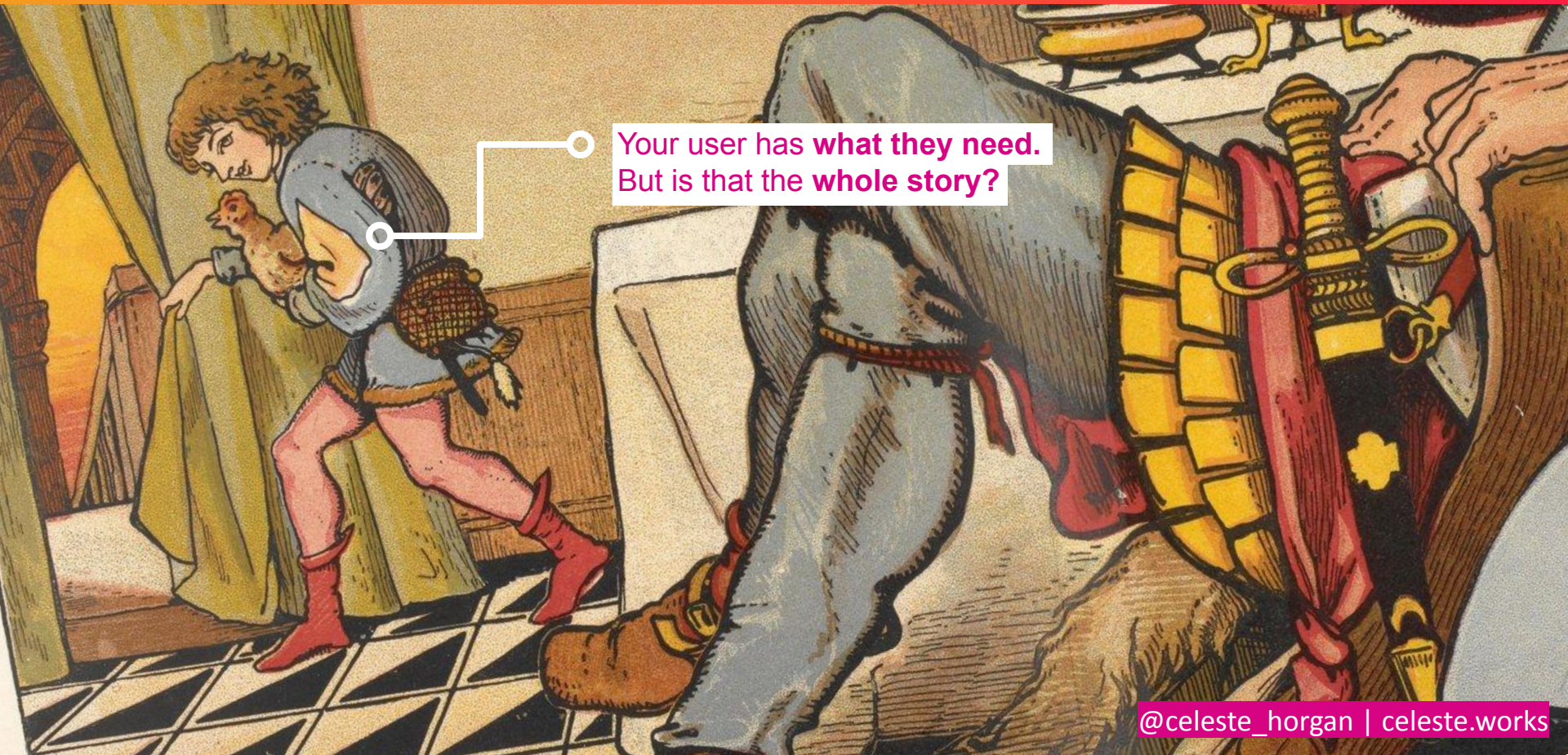
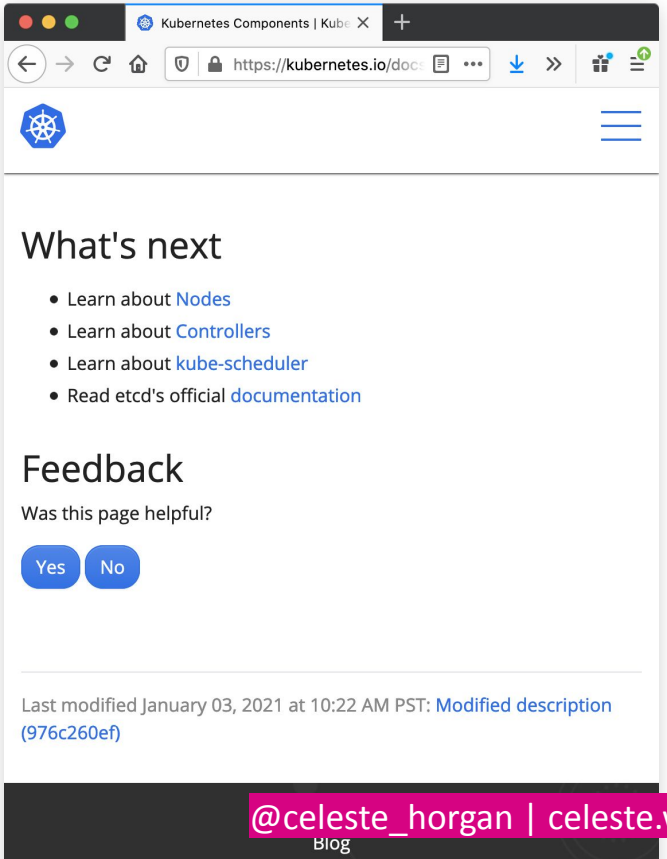


User flow

Great documentation shows its users where to go next

- Organize the entire doc set along a user flow: what can you expect people to do first? Second? Third? Last?
- Within a document, organize information from more general (concept) to more specific (task, then reference)
- Well-curated “learn more” links never go out of style



Docs are a team sport

New contributors and end users are key to great documentation: everyone needs help with their blind spots!

Thank you!

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Where to go…

- For CNCF projects looking for help with docs: Join us at CNCF techdocs office hours monthly!
- For new writers looking to help out: Any project's community meetings, or Kubernetes SIG Docs
- To find me: I tweet at @celeste_horgan, or find me on CNCF and Kubernetes Slack!