

Paige Curley

Thesis Reflection

My senior thesis was undoubtedly the most rewarding—albeit challenging—endeavor of my undergraduate career. I was extremely fortunate to be able to complete a joint thesis, marrying my English major with my Education, Schooling, and Society (ESS) minor to arrive at a cross-section of my passions: diverse literature and progressive literacy education. Writing a thesis in two departments also afforded me two incredible advisors: Professor Sarah Quesada from English and Professor Maria McKenna from ESS. Building off of already established relationships from previous courses, their invaluable advising granted me access to in-depth expertise and guidance while receiving robust feedback from interdisciplinary perspectives. Interdisciplinary studies have been a definitive feature of my time at Notre Dame and I am grateful this organically translated into my capstone project.

One of the most enjoyable aspects of my thesis was the ability to conduct field research at the Holy Cross Elementary School in South Bend. As a firm believer in the humanizing power of literature in education, I loved immersing myself in classroom book collections, analyzing the levels of representation and diversity, and proposing legitimate solutions with clear plans for implementation. Alongside this field research, I was able to analyze beautiful texts by Afro-Puerto Rican authors whose stories are powerful and necessary to the English canon. With these two elements working in tandem, my thesis project allowed me to work in the critical and theoretical realm while bridging that work into a local context with real world applications.

As with every aspect of our lives, the pandemic's arrival certainly upended my thesis process. Suddenly I went from working in Decio Hall and Remick Commons to writing the bulk of my thesis in a guest room. While finishing a thesis in the time of a pandemic ranged from surreal to taxing, I

am grateful for the open communication and support of the English department and my advisors' unwavering patience and flexibility. I'd like to specially thank Susan Harris, Sarah Quesada, Maria McKenna, Michael Macaluso, Rachel Parroquin, and Clare Roach for their guidance, expertise, collaboration, and support throughout this process. It is a beautiful and unique opportunity to delve so deep into topics that academically fascinate me and align with the work I wish to pursue throughout my career. Regardless of unexpected obstacles and challenging circumstances, I am grateful to have poured my heart and efforts into such a project.