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Library Research Award

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Books About Talking Vegetables:

How the Hesburgh Library Fueled my Research on VeggieTales

At the beginning of the spring semester, my professor from my theology class (for the Program of Liberal Studies) assigned a semester-long research paper on any adaptation of a biblical story. Having grown up watching VeggieTales, I chose to explore the series' interpretation of the Joseph story from Genesis, which we studied in class. Because my project focused on relatively recent subject matter and elements of pop culture, I was initially concerned that I would not be able to find enough strong scholarly material to support my argument. Thankfully, the Hesburgh Libraries not only had both books and articles, found through their robust databases, that were helpful to me, but also staff and resources to help make my research successful.

Dr. Julia Schneider was very helpful in demonstrating the vast amount of resources and tools the library has to offer, as well as research skills, especially how to make more fruitful searches for materials and use the library's databases. My professor used one of her class periods to take us to the library and introduce us to Dr. Scheider, the librarian for the Medieval Institute. Dr. Schneider then gave a presentation about the library's many resources, how to narrow down our search, and some tips and skills for enhancing our research. Especially helpful to me was Dr. Schneider's introduction to the library's databases, which make it significantly easier to find relevant but reliable sources. This was especially important for my project, which had a

somewhat unusual focus. Because my paper was focusing on an aspect of popular culture, it is often difficult to find scholarly sources through typical internet sources, as many of the results come from fans and marketing rather than scholars. Dr. Schneider addressed this challenge and gave me some strategies to get around it and successfully find materials I need. She also emphasized the importance of using strong and relevant keywords in database searches to narrow down broader topics. This is an invaluable skill for any type of research, but was particularly useful to me in my searches for scholarly material about the biblical story of Joseph, a topic which hundreds of scholars across centuries have explored. All in all, Dr. Schneider's program was extremely informative and helpful in getting me started on the research process.

Starting a research project is often daunting, so I decided to begin by searching in narrower categories and then branching out my search from there. I was concerned that there would not be sufficient material about VeggieTales, as it is a recent popular culture event, but I decided to begin by exploring that field to see what resources were available to me. I used the library OneSearch tool to get a full range of options, and I was surprised by the sheer volume of materials on the subject. Thankfully, two books on the subject were among the first items to appear from the search, and the library carried both of them. I checked them out immediately, and they proved invaluable to my project. After reading short summaries of the books and perusing their tables of contents, I was able to identify some themes I wanted to explore that the books did not discuss. This, in turn, helped me narrow my search for some shorter works, mostly scholarly papers, about those specific themes within VeggieTales, which I found by restricting my OneSearch criteria to articles and dissertations in addition to adding keywords to my search. Despite my initial concerns, I found plentiful materials through the library's searching tools.

These books and articles, in turn, helped me direct the scope and themes of my paper. However, after many searches, I discovered that I could not find any material about the specific VeggieTales episode I was focusing on--all of my materials discussed VeggieTales in general. While I was initially concerned about this, as I continued exploring the resources I had gathered, I realized that I had sufficient material to explore VeggieTales legitimately, but also an opportunity to provide new scholarly insights by applying those broader themes to a more specific aspect of the franchise. Both the physical books and the online articles the library provided access to were essential to my project.

Despite my initial expectations, the biblical Joseph story proved more difficult to research than the VeggieTales portion, mostly due to the sheer amount of materials available on the subject. To navigate this, I again used the library's OneSearch tool to see what was available to me. After exploring some of my VeggieTales sources, I was able to identify some themes that would be important to my paper and use keywords to find sources that incorporated these themes, especially about virtue and narrative roles, in their analysis of the biblical text. As I continued reading more of my sources, they led me to discover others. For example, several of my early sources on the Joseph story referenced a book written by Donald B. Redford. This led me to search for the book in the library's catalogue, and I discovered that the library actually carried the book in the theology department. Allowing my sources to guide my future research on the topic led me to other sources that significantly enriched my project. This was also an essential skill to narrow down the vast amount of information available to me. While this information overload was daunting at first, the ability to narrow down my search and use my

current sources to find new ones--which I had access to through the library--made my project successful.

Research can be a challenging undertaking, especially when you do not know where or how to start. Thankfully, Dr. Schneider's guidance helped make this task less daunting. Furthermore, the library's vast trove of physical books, as well as databases leading to rich academic sources, guided and defined my project. Because of these incredible resources available to me, I was able to successfully produce a project on a topic that has yet to be deeply written about: the VeggieTales adaptation of the biblical Joseph story.