



Abdelkader Education Project

“Transcending Boundaries...
Pursuing Knowledge and Virtue”

October 2011 News

2011-2012 Abdelkader Essay Contests with Awards and Honors

Two essay contests are open to Iowa students. The *High School Contest*, with support from Principal Financial Group, is open to juniors and seniors, and the “NEW” *College/University Contest* is open to all college students.

Students will gain knowledge needed to excel in our global environment by...

- Evaluating the significance of Emir Abdelkader’s life and his struggles during peace, war, imprisonment, and exile as applied to today’s world.
- Combining history and cultural understanding while supporting positive moral and social skills.
- Utilizing analytical, innovative and resourceful thinking beyond the facts.

Students will read *Commander of the Faithful: The Life and Times of Emir Abdelkader (1808-1883)* by John W. Kiser and discover Emir Abdelkader...

- A courageous humanitarian, hero, statesman, warrior, scholar, and holy man who was admired by Muslims and non-Muslims across different nationalities, religions, and social classes.
- His education was a cross between Marine Corps training, Trappist monk discipline, and classical madrasa instruction.
- His remarkable life story has relevance for today.

Students will learn...

- Why an Iowa town was named after an Arab Muslim freedom fighter.
- About the Middle East and Islamic culture through stories of real people.
- Why in 1883 The New York Times called Abdelkader "one of the few great men of our century"

For more about essay contest registration and deadlines, please e-mail kathygarms@yahoo.com.

“Reading Commander of the Faithful and writing the essay for the Abdelkader Essay Contest provided a unique opportunity for students in my AP Human Geography class to connect multiple continents, centuries, and cultures with course curriculum as well as a relevant local connection to the origin of a town’s name in Iowa.” **Mark Rhodes, Social Studies Teacher, Decorah High School**

Iowa Center for the Book Supports Abdelkader Essay Contest

At its September 2011 meeting, the Iowa Center for the Book’s Advisory Council unanimously agreed to help increase Iowans’ understanding of the Middle East and Muslims through reading. In particular, the Council supported promotion of the Abdelkader Essay Contest which is based on a reading and response to John Kiser’s book *Commander of the Faithful: the Life and Times of Emir Abd el-Kader*. “We have a long term commitment to encouraging Iowa students to read reflectively through our *Letters About Literature* reading/writing program,” noted Robin Martin, Coordinator for the Iowa Center for the Book. “Introducing the Abdelkader Essay Contest to a wider student audience fits nicely with our mission to stimulate public interest in books, reading, literacy and libraries.”

Montreal Conference Welcomes Kiser to Speak...November 11th-12th

Organized by University of Montreal's faculty of Theology and Religion, the conference is titled, "Emir Abd el-Kader and the West: Lessons of an inter-civilizational dialogue from yesterday till today." As one of ten featured speakers from around the world, Kiser's presentation is on "Abdelkader's life as an expression of virtue and Christian behavior."

Abdelkader Introduced at Iowa Talented and Gifted (ITAG) Conference

Barbara Petzen and Kathy Garms recently introduced the Abdelkader Education Project at the ITAG Conference in Des Moines with over 400 educators in attendance. Barbara's presentation titled "Glocalists at Work: Opening Windows from Iowa to the Muslim World" showcased unexpected connections between students' lives and environment to those of Muslim societies around the world including a link between an Algerian freedom fighter and the town of Elkader, Iowa. The Abdelkader Education Project includes student essay contests, educator workshops, curriculum, and public presentations.

Essay Award Winner Reflection

"In Emir Abdelkader, I found a counter-example to many of the beliefs about Islam that are a part of the political and social discourse of our nation. Abdelkader was undeniably Muslim. However, his Islam was one where people were dedicated to their communities. It was one where people were charitable, hospitable, humble, and wise. He envisioned a pious, but open and honest community. He did not exempt himself from this. Jihad means struggle. For Abdelkader, jihad was a struggle to improve himself, and to improve, even perfect, his own character and his own faith. The Emir constantly put others, be it his family, his friends, or complete strangers, before himself."

In His Own Words...

"Don't ask about a man's genealogy, but about his character, his life and his deeds. Drink the water. If it is pure, so is the source."
~ Emir Abdelkader

Ben Bernatz, Decorah, currently a student at Northwestern University

Nigeria and Indonesia to host *Commander of the Faithful* Seminars

"Honors Seminars" will convene in Indonesia and Nigeria thanks to Abdelkader Education Project partner organization Religions for Peace in NYC. The seminars will be "team taught" by one Islamic and one Christian professor and will focus on two books by John W. Kiser, *Commander of the Faithful: The Life and Times of Emir Abd el-Kader* and *The Monks of Tibhirine: Faith, Love and Terror in Algeria*. Both books inter-mingle history, religion and politics and celebrate authentic and positive expressions of Muslim and Christian faiths. Final papers will be written on the relevant lessons for their respective countries.

Commander of the Faithful to be in French

The French Dominican publisher, Editions Cerf, will be translating Kiser's biography *Commander of the Faithful* into French.

To learn more, please visit our website www.abdelkaderproject.org. Thank you for following our project. We welcome all questions and comments.

The Abdelkader Education Project Team...

Kathy Garms, Barbara Petzen, Sarah Sayeed, John Boyer, John Kiser