

Quest West News

The Newsletter for Camp Quest West

Announcing Our Essay Contest Winner!

I know many of you were waiting eagerly for the results of our first-ever "Win a Trip to Camp" Essay Contest for middle school students. The winning essay reminded me of parts of Peter Bishop's *30 second elevator pitch on Humanism* we used last year: "Beauty does not need to be understood to be loved, but truth becomes clearer and more beautiful the more it is investigated."

So, without further ado, we'd like to offer our congratulations to Dagny in Danville on the winning essay. Dagny chose to answer the question: *Is science the only way of knowing about the universe? Or are there other ways of knowing? Explain.*

Bravo! to all the other kids who took part in the contest. A big thank you to the contest donor and also to the second donor who stepped up to give the runners-up a \$25 prize each. Thanks to everyone who participated in this very satisfying process!

Dagny's Winning Essay



A meteor is an extraordinary act of the universe, along with other beautiful and mysterious occurrences that surround us. Long ago, a meteor fell and a watching caveman

produced the best explanation for it humans had at the time: that the gods

had sent it as a message or a warning. In his primitive mind he had no other means besides guessing to understand the meteor, since science had not been created.

In the present day, the explanations early humans created long ago still thrive. Even though the scientific method has been developed, things we cannot explain are sometimes still called the work of the gods. While this might ease our minds about the unknown, it doesn't bring us any nearer to the truth. The truth concerning the universe can be understood, but one must first dig through the layers of superstition and observe reality. Study is the root of science, for if we do not observe a thing, how can we hope to understand it? You learn about your subject, nurture an idea or a theory, and compare it against proven facts. Does it fit with these facts; does it obey the laws of physics and things we know to be true from previous research? Early humans had no way of understanding natural phenomena, so they could be excused for saying inexplicable events were acts of the gods. Present day humans have no excuse, for looking and guessing will not reveal the mysteries of the universe. We must research, test, consider, analyze, examine, compare, and use science to discover the universes' secrets. Science breeds ideas, but ideas must be proven before we can accept them to be facts. Truth is the product of science, and truth is always superior to fables. Feelings and instincts will not answer universal questions. Science is the only way to truly understand the universe.



Reminder: Early Bird Special Ends May 1!

There's just two weeks left to register for our early bird special prices. Don't miss out! Here's a quick rundown of your camping options this year:

Kids Camp

Who: Ages 8-15, 16-17 staff in training

When: July 13-19

Where: Grass Valley, CA

Cost: \$390

Transportation options: It's a bit of a drive. If you'd like to camp out for the week for your own vacation in Gold Country on the Yuba River, or just for a day on drop-off and/or pickup, we can make that happen for the price of a couple meals. Airport pickup/drop-off from SMF free

Teen Adventure Camp

Who: Ages 15-17

When: June 26-30

Where: Seattle, WA

Cost: \$500

Transportation options: Airport pickup/drop-off from SEA free

Mini Family Campout

Who: for families with younger kids

When: July 17-19

Where: Grass Valley, CA

Cost: \$25 reg fee + cost of meals (\$120 adult, \$80 child 5-8, \$50 child 3-4, under 3 free)

Four cabins available on first come, first served basis \$165 additional. Tent camping for no additional fee.

Kids Camp 2008 Program Highlights

We are so pleased that so many volunteer activity leaders from past years have expressed interested in returning and several new folks have thrown their ideas into the ring as well. Things are shaping up for a fabulous camping season. I wanted to highlight just a couple of special Freethought activities we'll be enjoying this year as well as give you a sense of "A Day in the Life of a Camp Quest Camper."



Emphasizing our Camp Quest theme of Evolution, we will be playing a game field-tested at the Atheist

Alliance Convention's mini Camp Quest last September involving color-coded tokens (genes) which we traded in timed intervals just like the stock exchange floor (30 seconds til closing folks!) and, afterwards, checked the weather to see which of us had the right traits to survive to the next round. This time around, we'll be throwing in a few additional mutations of our own.

We picked the theme of evolution because it's such a powerful means of understanding how all life is inter-related. We sense it's not always easy for people to understand because humans don't live long enough to witness firsthand the biggest and most exciting changes, like the descendants of dinosaurs growing feathers. Groups working to distract citizens away from the scientific process

often emphasize the random nature of mutations, while overlooking the power of natural selection and the build-up of changes over time, much like compound interest (also a mysterious feature of modern life, but equally useful). Our goal is to help our youngsters get a head start on understanding these pieces of the puzzle.



Finally, there are many kinds of evolution to explore, including personal evolution. **Constantine Lolos**, a big Joseph Campbell fan, will be on staff with us this summer and is already preparing

some drumming and campfire stories: fables and myths from the past. While not literally true, these stories served as a roadmap for Constantine at points in his life when he needed to make changes. "Change is the name of the game" according to Constantine. "Stories from the people who went before us were responses to their own environment and can illustrate some avenues of possibilities of life paths, dealing with challenges, other people, and taking risks." We can also "evolve" them and add new possibilities too, of course. We look forward to being inspired by Constantine and his stories.

A Day in the Life of a Camp Quest Camper

7:00 a.m.: Wake up
7:30 a.m. : Breakfast
8:30 a.m.: Cabin Cleanup & Staff Meeting
9:30 a.m.: Team Games + Morning Water Break

10:30 a.m.: Freethought Activity
11:30 a.m.: Lunch
12:30 p.m.: Downtime at the cabin (reading, chatting, journaling)
1:30 p.m. : Water Games at the Pool
2:30 p.m. : Electives: harmonica, recorder, improv, code breaking, survival skills, chess + more!
3:30 p.m. : Free time (archery open, pool open, arts open, basketball, volleyball)
5:30 p.m. : Dinner
6:30 p.m. : Cabin Rendezvous & Skit Practice
7:30 p.m. : Freethought Activity
8:30 p.m. : Campfire or other evening activity

Of course, there are lots of fun exceptions to this schedule, including our field trip panning for gold. (Yes, campers can keep all the gold they find.) Canoeing on the lake next door, Game Night and our first ever end of camp dance. Don't you wish it were summer already?

Staff : If You've Thought About It – It Could Be Your Year!

We've got about 7 of our 15 staff positions already filled and are looking for a few more volunteers.

If you like the outdoors, have a good sense of humor and are young at heart, this might be for you. If you've ever thought about joining us for the week, stop just thinking and go for it! Our staff



application is online at west.camp-quest.org/volunteer.htm or email us at staffing@west.camp-quest.org

We have staff coming from Nevada, Arizona and Kentucky as well as a number of California locals.

Here are some quotes from their staff applications: "Being around freethinkers nourishes me and I want the same thing for my 12 year old son."

And, on being asked what they would do if they had a camper who was a loner suggested "finding them a buddy and trying to be vigilant about being inclusive."

It's going to be a great year!

About Camp Quest West

Camp Quest West is a summer camp emphasizing critical thinking for girls and boys ages 8 to 17. It is affiliated with National Camp Quest (Ohio), the first secular summer camp for youth in the history of the United States. Camp Quest was specifically designed for children of atheists, agnostics, freethinkers, humanists, Unitarians, or whatever terms might be applied to those who maintain a naturalistic worldview. We are operating officially as a subcommittee of Atheist Alliance, an IRS 501 (c)(3) nonprofit organization and can accept checks under the Camp Quest West name. Contents © 2008 by Camp Quest West.

Camp Quest West Key Contacts

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