

Skeptical Programs for Generation Y and Beyond

B A R R Y K A R R

The Committee for Skeptical Inquiry (CSI) has many long-standing programs to encourage critical thinking in children and young people—the world's future skeptics.

For at least fifteen years, we have supported the Presidential Awards for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching program (PAEMST), which is the highest presidential honor for the teaching of mathematics and science in the United States. Each year 108 outstanding teachers of mathematics and science at the elementary and secondary education levels are honored for their contributions to teaching and learning. We donate a gift subscription of the *SKEPTICAL INQUIRER* to each and every recipient of this award because we feel it is important for us to support these wonderful teachers as they educate our future generations.

Over the years, we have provided scholarships to a number of students (in both high school and college) attending various CSI events, including our national and regional conferences and events like the Skeptic's Toolbox, held annually at the University of Oregon. We have also provided a number of research fellowships to students studying in the fields of science and anomalistic psychology at institutions like Goldsmiths College in London and the University of Hertfordshire under the direction of such famed lecturers as Christopher French and Richard Wiseman.

As I write this update, the Center for Inquiry Institute is underway here in Amherst. Joe Nickell is conducting a workshop on investigating the paranormal. Along with a number of participants from around the United States, we have helped sponsor three students from Russia and two from China. We have also offered an internship program for young people interested in learning about science and reason to work with us on projects such as running conferences and establishing local groups.

We have received well over 300 requests from textbook publishers, university professors, newspapers, magazines, local skeptical and humanist groups, and even television shows and movie producers to include material originally published in the *SKEPTICAL INQUIRER* in their works. We try to accommodate as many of these requests as we can because we know this material will continue to have an effect long after the magazine is put down.

CSI has also published a number of anthologies of *SKEPTICAL INQUIRER* articles. At least two of these books, *The Outer Edge* and *Bizarre Cases*, have been used by colleges across the United States for courses ranging from psychology to logic.

CSI and the *SKEPTICAL INQUIRER* field scores of requests from school children around the world for information on UFOs every year. Photocopying selected articles to send in response to their questions became too much for us, so CSI

published a book for young children called *Bringing UFOs Down To Earth* by Philip J. Klass to act as a primer on UFOs using terms and examples that children would find useful, entertaining, and educational. We gave away so many copies over the years that Prometheus Books eventually published a version in their children's book series for far wider distribution.

One of CSI's crowning achievements in reaching and teaching young skeptics is our involvement with the Camp Inquiry program. This year was our fourth participating in the program, and we are delighted to report that it was the biggest year yet, with forty-five campers aged seven to sixteen taking part in the weeklong event. The Camp Inquiry Web site states: "We think kids are uniquely situated to enjoy a new 'Age of Discovery.' Where others may see turbulent seas and dangerous impasses, we see opportunities—to create, to forge new paths, to open new communications, to tell new stories. And the best part is, the tools have been around for ages: science, reason, and skepticism remain the best means by which to navigate these unpredictable waters."

We also help sponsor the Center for Inquiry's Campus Outreach program, which helps establish and maintain groups, programs, and activities at hundreds of colleges and universities across North America and internationally. We send campus groups issues of the *SKEPTICAL INQUIRER* and information flyers for promotional use at their meetings and events, help them recruit speakers, and offer training in event planning and community organizing. Each year we help bring in a number of campus group leaders to our headquarters in Amherst, New York, for training lectures and workshops and provide them with the chance to meet others who have shared similar issues and experiences.

A number of years ago, CSI developed the Superstition Bash. A fun event for the whole family, the bash includes a superstition obstacle course, psychic misreadings, and misfortune cookies. We were overjoyed to see this concept adapted by the Exploratorium in San Francisco last year, exposing the public to critical thinking about dangers and fallacies of superstition and magical thinking. Educating the next generation of skeptics is an important task, one to which we can all contribute. □



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