

Bridging Cultures: Muslim Journeys

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Table of Contents

3	About Muslim Journeys
4	The Scholars and Advisors
8	The Collection
10	Humanities Themes
18	The Bookshelf
21	Let's Talk About It
25	Resources for Public Programming
29	Programming in the Field
29	A. Distribution of Venues
31	B. Public Impact
35	C. Local Programming Highlights
39	D. Local Challenges
42	E. Continued Programming
44	Evaluation



A musician plays an Iranian drum, known as a daf, at "An Afternoon of Rumi," held at the Contra Costa County Library in Walnut Creek, California.

Appendix A: List of Bookshelf Venues

Appendix B: List of Let's Talk About It Venues

Appendix C: Executive Summary of Evaluation, New Knowledge Organization

Appendix D: Five Let's Talk About It Essays (full text)



About Muslim Journeys


During a time of rapid global change, the vitality of our twenty-first century democracy depends on a commitment to understanding the historical and cultural forces that have shaped and continue to shape our world. To that end, the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) launched a special initiative in 2011, **Bridging Cultures**, which sought to engage the power of the humanities to promote understanding and mutual respect for people with diverse histories, cultures, and perspectives within the United States and abroad. The Bridging Cultures initiative encompassed a broad array of themes and programming informed by the best in humanities research and scholarly insight.

As part of its Bridging Cultures initiative, NEH collaborated with the American Library Association (ALA) to present Muslim Journeys, a multi-faceted effort to bring humanities programming about Islamic history and culture to libraries and state humanities councils across the country. During the 2012 – 2014 implementation period, more than 3,140 Muslim Journeys programs were conducted in nearly 1,000 sites, reaching audiences of 414,849 people in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and the Virgin Islands. The project provided 25,000 books, 3,000 DVDs with public performance rights, over \$550,000 in programming grants, and many other resources to support these public events.

In January 2011, NEH took the first step in developing the Muslim Journeys project by convening a one-day brainstorming meeting in Washington, D.C., and inviting humanities scholars and public programming experts, including librarians, state humanities council staff, educators and ALA staff, to participate. During this and subsequent meetings, a broad group of Muslim Journeys advisors worked to address two strategic goals:

- to increase Americans' understanding of the rich cultural heritage associated with Islamic civilizations around the world **by providing public libraries with a new set of resources**, vetted by scholars, that would introduce Muslim cultures to Americans; and
- to **use these resources, and public programs interpreting them**, to foster an appreciation among members of the American public of the pluralism of cultural forms and traditions within the Muslim world.

Between 2011 and 2015, NEH and ALA collaborated on the Muslim Journeys initiative, hosting two planning meetings, six pilot programs, a collection development grant for 1,000 libraries and state humanities councils, a scholar-led reading and discussion grant for 125 libraries and state humanities councils, two national orientation workshops for grant project directors and local scholars, and a third-party evaluation of the project.



The Scholars and Advisors

From the first planning meeting in January 2011 until final Muslim Journeys programs concluded in December 2014, NEH and ALA were supported by many outstanding humanities scholars and public programming advisors.

The **Muslim Journeys Planning Group** participated in a January 2011 brainstorming meeting that focused on establishing project goals, audiences, and programming structure for the national initiative. These individuals included Abdullahi An-Na'im, Charles Howard Candler Professor of Law, Emory University; Thomas Asher, Program Director, Academia in the Public Sphere, Social Science Research Council; Cemil Aydin, Associate Professor of History and Director, Ali Vural Ak Center for Global Islamic Studies, George Mason University; Susan Douglass, Grant Project Manager, Ali Vural Ak Center for Global Islamic Studies, George Mason University; Timothy Grimes, Community Relations and Marketing Manager, Ann Arbor District Library; Nabil Matar, Professor of English, University of Minnesota; Azar Nafisi, Visiting Professor and Director of Cultural Conversations at the Foreign Policy Institute, Johns Hopkins University; Azim Nanji, Senior Associate Director, Islamic Studies, Stanford University; John Voll, Professor of Islamic History and Associate Director, Prince Alwaleed bin Talal Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding, Georgetown University; Deborah Watrous, Director, New Hampshire Humanities Council; and Hillary Wiesner, Director, Islam Initiative, Carnegie Corporation of New York.

The **Muslim Journeys Pilot Sites** hosted reading and discussion programs, as well as visits from a project evaluator, to learn more about public reaction to books and program formats being considered for national implementation. These individuals included Terrilyn L. Chun, Systemwide Programming Coordinator, Multnomah County Library; Dr. Tugrul Keskin, Assistant Professor of International and Middle East Studies, Center for Turkish Studies at Portland State University; Timothy P. Grimes, Community Relations and Marketing Manager, Ann Arbor District Library; Dr. Sarah Lilly Heidt, Professor of Philosophy, Ecumenical Theological Seminary; Teresa D. Totten, Branch Manager, DeKalb County Public Library; Dr. Youness Elbousty, Visiting Assistant Professor of Middle Eastern and Asian Studies, Emory University; Lisa L. Wells, Assistant Director for Library Services, Pioneer Library System; Dr. Charles Kimbell, Presidential Professor and Director of Religious Studies at the University of Oklahoma; Linda Holtlander, Assistant Director, Loudoun County Public Library; Dr. Cemil Aydin, Director, Islamic Studies and Director, Ali Vural Ak Center for Global Islamic Studies, George Mason University; Homa Naficy, Manager, Outreach and Multicultural Education, Hartford Public Library; Janet Bauer, Associate Professor of International Studies, Trinity College; and Aida Mansoor, President, Muslim Coalition of Connecticut.

Many additional scholars and advisors supported the Muslim Journeys project during the implementation period, including Roger Allen, Professor of Arabic & Comparative Literature, University of Pennsylvania; Glaire Anderson, Associate Professor of Art History, Department of Art, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill; Ali S. Asani, Professor of Indo-Muslim Religion and Cultures and Director of Prince Alwaleed bin Talal Islamic Studies Program, Harvard University; Frannie Ashburn, Director (retired), North Carolina Center for the Book; Sheila Blair and Jonathan Bloom, Norma Jean Calderwood University Professor of Islamic and Asian Art (jointly held), Boston College; Edward E. Curtis, IV, Millennium Chair of the Liberal Arts, Professor of Religious Studies, Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis; Vincent Ercolano, Editor and Writer; Renata Holod, College of Women Class of 1963 Term Professor in the Humanities, History of Art Department, University of Pennsylvania; Linda Komaroff, Curator and Department Head, Art of the Middle East, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, LACMA; Amy Landau, Associate Curator of Islamic and South Asian Art, The Walters Art Museum; Peter Mandaville, Professor of Government and Politics, Co-Director, Ali Vural Ak Center for Global Islamic Studies, George Mason University; Frances W. Pritchett, Professor of Modern Indic Languages, Columbia University; Nasser Rabat, Aga Khan Professor and the Director of the Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture, Massachusetts Institute of Technology; Nadia Roumani, Program Officer, Doris Duke Foundation for Islamic Art; Daniel Tutt, Director of Outreach and Foundation Relations, Unity Productions Foundation; and David A. Zonderman, Professor and Interim Department Head in History, North Carolina State University.

*An attendee reads Acts of Faith by Eboo Patel
at a New York Council for the Humanities gathering.*



In addition to the experts noted in this section, a team of six leading Muslim Journeys scholars were invited by NEH and ALA to identify an important theme for consideration as part of the project, select materials for a five-part reading and discussion series that would explore that theme, and write an essay raising key questions presented by both the theme and the supporting books. During the course of Muslim Journeys, these lead scholars also developed content to support public programs and participated in national orientation workshops for the local librarians, state humanities council staff, and scholars involved in Muslim Journeys program implementation.



Deborah Amos's (Points of View theme, page 14) reports can be heard on NPR's award-winning *Morning Edition*, *All Things Considered*, and *Weekend Edition*. Amos joined NPR in 1977, first as a director and then a producer for *Weekend All Things Considered*. Amos joined ABC News in 1993 and spent a decade in television, reporting for ABC's *Nightline* and *World News Tonight* and the PBS programs *NOW with Bill Moyers* and *Frontline*. Upon returning to NPR, Amos took up the post of foreign correspondent in Amman, Jordan, and then London Bureau Chief. Amos won widespread recognition for her coverage of the Gulf War in 1991. A year later, she published *Lines in the Sand: Desert Storm and the Remaking of the Arab World* (Simon and Schuster, 1992). She is a former Nieman Fellow at Harvard University, has taught journalism at Princeton University, and is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations. Her latest book is *Eclipse of the Sunnis: Power, Exile, and Upheaval in the Middle East* (PublicAffairs, 2010). She lives in New York City.



Leila Golestaneh Austin (Literary Reflections theme, page 12) is Professorial Lecturer in Global Theory and History and Middle East Studies at Johns Hopkins University's Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS), where she also directs the Cultural Conversations project at the Foreign Policy Institute and co-directs the Global Politics and Religion Initiative. Dr. Austin's research interests include the role of religion, literature, and political culture more generally in defining politics and policy-making, and the history and politics of the Middle East and North Africa. She received her Ph.D. in political science from Columbia University and her M.A. in International Affairs from SAIS. Dr. Austin's most recent articles include *The New Opposition in Iran* (2010) and *The Politics of Youth Bulge: From Islamic Activism to Democratic Reform in the Middle East and North Africa* (2011).



Giancarlo Casale (Connected Histories theme, page 11) holds a Ph.D. in History and Middle Eastern Studies from Harvard University, and is currently Associate Professor of the History of the Islamic World at the University of Minnesota, where he has taught since 2005. He is an expert in Ottoman history, early modern empires, and the history of geography and cartography. His book, *The Ottoman Age of Exploration* (Oxford University Press, 2011), was awarded the Cundill Recognition of Excellence prize in 2011.



Frederick Mathewson Denny (Pathways of Faith theme, page 13) is Professor Emeritus of Islamic Studies and History of Religions in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Colorado at Boulder. An alumnus of the College of William and Mary and Andover Newton Theological School, he also holds M.A. and Ph.D. degrees from the University of Chicago and has previously held teaching appointments at Colby-Sawyer College, Yale University, and the University of Virginia. He has conducted field research on Qur’anic recitation, Muslim popular ritual, and the characteristics of contemporary Muslim societies in Egypt, Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan, and North America. His publications include a widely used college level textbook, *An Introduction to Islam* (4th ed. Pearson Prentice Hall, 2010) and several edited volumes. He is founding editor of the scholarly book series *Studies in Comparative Religion* at the University of South Carolina Press. He was lead editor for the second edition of *Atlas of the World’s Religions* (Oxford University Press, 2007). Denny served for eleven years on the board of directors of the American Academy of Religion.



Kambiz GhaneaBassiri (American Stories theme, page 10) is an Associate Professor of Religion and Humanities at Reed College. He received his bachelor’s degree in Religious Studies from Claremont McKenna College and completed his master’s and doctoral degrees in Islamic Studies at Harvard University. GhaneaBassiri’s scholarship stands at the intersection of religious studies, Islamic social and intellectual history, and American religious history. His most recent book, *A History of Islam in America* (Cambridge University Press, 2010) traces the history of Muslim presence in the United States through colonial and antebellum America, through world wars and civil rights struggles, to the contemporary era. His work has been supported by fellowships from the Carnegie Scholars Program (2006–2008) and the Guggenheim Foundation (2012).



D. Fairchild Ruggles (Art, Architecture, and Film; Islamic Art Spots, page 15) is Professor in the Department of Landscape Architecture at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. She received her A.B. in Visual and Environmental Studies from Harvard and M.A. and Ph.D. in the History of Art from the University of Pennsylvania. She has taught art, architectural, landscape, and cultural history at universities that include Cornell, Binghamton, and Harvard. Her first book, the award-winning *Garden, Landscape, and Vision in the Palaces of Islamic Spain* (2000), explored the complex cultural conditions that gave rise to the built landscape of al-Andalus, and in her award-winning *Islamic Gardens and Landscapes* (2008), she extends this to the Islamic world as a whole. Her other publications include a series of volumes on cultural heritage, and *Islamic Art and Visual Culture: An Anthology of Sources* (2011).



The Collection

The Muslim Journeys Scholars, in collaboration with NEH and ALA project staff, identified a core collection of **books** and **films**, chosen for their thematic significance, potential to promote individual learning, and their power to encourage community discussions and open doors to greater cross-cultural understanding. The selected materials, listed below, comprise the **Muslim Journeys Bookshelf**. These materials were granted to 953 libraries and state humanities councils in 2012, used as programming resources by Bookshelf grantees, and featured in reading and discussion programs as part of a related grant called **Let's Talk About It**.

Books

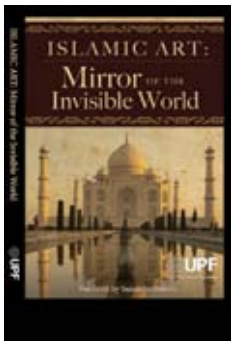
- *Minaret* by Leila Aboulela
- *A Quiet Revolution* by Leila Ahmed
- *The Conference of the Birds* by Farid al-Din Attar, translated by Dick Davis and Afkham Darbandi
- *The House of Wisdom: How Arabic Science Saved Ancient Knowledge and Gave Us the Renaissance* by Jim Al-Khalili
- *Prince Among Slaves* by Terry Alford
- *Islamic Arts* by Jonathan Bloom and Sheila Blair
- *Muhammad: A Very Short Introduction* by Jonathan A. C. Brown
- *The Columbia Sourcebook of Muslims in the United States*, edited by Edward E. Curtis IV
- *In an Antique Land* by Amitav Ghosh
- *When Asia Was the World: Traveling Merchants, Scholars, Warriors, and Monks Who Created the "Riches of the East"* by Stewart Gordon
- *Leo Africanus* by Amin Maalouf, translated by Peter Sluglett
- *The Arabian Nights* (anonymous), edited by Muhsin Mahdi, translated by Husain Haddawy
- *In the Country of Men* by Hisham Matar
- *The Story of the Qur'an: Its History and Place in Muslim Life* by Ingrid Mattson
- *The Ornament of the World* by Maria Rosa Menocal
- *Dreams of Trespass* by Fatima Mernissi
- *Rumi: Poet and Mystic*, edited and translated by Reynold A. Nicholson
- *Snow* by Orhan Pamuk, translated by Maureen Freely
- *Acts of Faith* by Eboo Patel
- *The Children of Abraham: Judaism, Christianity, Islam* by F. E. Peters
- *The Art of Hajj* by Venetia Porter
- *House of Stone* by Anthony Shadid
- *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood* by Marjane Satrapi
- *Broken Verses* by Kamila Shamsie
- *The Butterfly Mosque: A Young American Woman's Journey to Love and Islam* by G. Willow Wilson

Films with Public Performance Rights



Prince Among Slaves

Directed by Andrea Kalin
Produced by Unity Productions Foundation, 2007



Islamic Art: Mirror of the Invisible World

Directed by Rob Gardner
Produced by Unity Productions Foundation, 2011



Koran by Heart

Directed by Greg Barker
Produced by HBO Documentary Films, 2011

Islamic Art Spots

The DVD *Islamic Art Spots* included seven illustrated video essays written, developed, and presented by Professor D. Fairchild Ruggles and produced by Twin Cities Public Television as part of the Muslim Journeys project. These video essays provide an introduction to Islamic art and architecture in a way that relates to the project themes and readings, referencing additional primary source texts.

Oxford Islamic Studies Online (OISO)

As part of the Bookshelf, ALA, NEH, and Oxford University Press offered a one-year subscription to [Oxford Islamic Studies Online](#) (OISO). This authoritative, dynamic resource brings together the best current scholarship in the field for students, scholars, government officials, community groups, and librarians to foster a more accurate and informed understanding of the Islamic world. It features reference content and commentary by renowned scholars in areas such as global Islamic history, concepts, people, practices, politics, and culture, and is regularly updated as new content is commissioned and approved under the guidance of Editor in Chief John L. Esposito.



Humanities Themes

Let's Talk About It Series

The Muslim Journeys collection was organized around five themes: **American Stories**, **Connected Histories**, **Literary Reflections**, **Pathways of Faith**, and **Points of View**. Each theme was developed to support a five-book reading and discussion series following the ALA's **Let's Talk About It program model** (see page 21). In keeping with this long-running model, the national project scholars developed a framing essay for their chosen theme, illuminating the reading selections and offering thematic context for local scholars, librarians, and program attendees. Excerpts from the essays appear below, with complete versions included as Appendix E.



American Stories, developed by Kambiz GhaneaBassiri, Reed College

Although Muslims did not attain a sizable presence in the United States until the 1960s, they have been part of American history since colonial times. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, tens of thousands of Muslims were captured in Africa and brought to America to be sold as slaves. Through their religion, these Muslims fought both to survive slavery and to make sense of their new circumstances.

By the 1910s, an estimated 60,000 Muslims from South Asia, Eastern Europe, and the Middle East had immigrated to the United States, finding employment as factory workers, farmers, and merchants, and it was not long before they began rooting themselves in the United States by founding mosques and community centers. This was also a time when many black Americans converted to Islam; some would even form distinct movements in its name (e.g., the Nation of Islam).

History books often divide the world into a “modern West” and a “traditional Orient,” ignoring the history of Muslims in America. American Muslims’ stories fly in the face of that strict opposition of East and West. By virtue of being both American and Muslim, these stories draw attention to the ways people of varying religious, cultural, ethnic, and racial backgrounds interact with one another to shape and reshape their individual lives and American society. As such, they open new vistas on the formation of Muslim and American identities in the modern world.

Books include *Prince Among Slaves* by Terry Alford; *The Columbia Sourcebook of Muslims in the United States*, edited by Edward E. Curtis IV; *Acts of Faith* by Eboo Patel; *A Quiet Revolution* by Leila Ahmed; and *The Butterfly Mosque: A Young American Woman's Journey to Love and Islam* by G. Willow Wilson.



A Bookshelf display at High Point University in High Point, North Carolina.



Connected Histories, developed by Giancarlo Casale, University of Minnesota

Centuries before the dawn of the modern age—even before the voyages of Christopher Columbus and Ferdinand Magellan—the world was already a surprisingly interconnected place. Braving the high seas and the desert sands, merchants peddled their wares from the Mediterranean to China. Scientists and scholars, drawn to the far corners of the world by a thirst for knowledge, traveled just as far, searching out their peers and sharing the latest ideas about the mysteries of nature. And missionaries and holy men, as they spread the good word of their respective faiths, plied the same roads—inevitably meeting one another, debating the merits of their divergent creeds, and taking inspiration from each other as they pondered the meaning of life and the nature of the divine.

All of the books in this list explore this theme of Connected Histories, a new way of understanding the past in which Islam and the West, far from being locked in an endless “clash of civilizations,” are seen instead as products of this cosmopolitan

and inextricably intertwined history. By highlighting the intellectual inheritance shared by Islam and the West, their mutual bonds of monotheism, and the surprising intensity of their cultural and commercial interaction, as well as the individual experiences of the many merchants, missionaries, and other adventurers who journeyed “to the other shore,” these books all chart a path to a new vision of the world of our ancestors, a world that was as remarkably complex and dynamically interconnected as the one we live in today.

Books include *When Asia Was the World: Traveling Merchants, Scholars, Warriors, and Monks Who Created the “Riches of the East”* by Stewart Gordon; *The House of Wisdom: How Arabic Science Saved Ancient Knowledge and Gave Us the Renaissance* by Jim Al-Khalili; *The Ornament of the World* by Maria Rosa Menocal; *Leo Africanus* by Amin Maalouf, translated by Peter Sluglett; and *In an Antique Land* by Amitav Ghosh.



Literary Reflections, developed by Leila Golestaneh Austin, Johns Hopkins University

Islam has long provided a source of inspiration through which Muslims experience, understand, and guide their everyday lives. The readings for this theme can be seen as literary reflections on Muslim piety and communal concepts such as ethics, governance, knowledge, and identity. Each one reveals transformations in faith and identity, as Muslims living at different times and in different places have interpreted Islamic traditions to meet their distinctive cultural realities and spiritual needs.



A Bookshelf display at River Forest (Illinois) Public Library.

From formal poetry and the oral tradition of public storytelling to the more contemporary forms of memoir and the novel, many Muslim authors have posed questions about Muslim piety and identity. What does it mean to be a good Muslim? What does Islam require of women and men? How should a good Muslim behave within society? Does Islam promote specific political norms or practices?

The readings for this theme can be seen as literary reflections on questions such as these. Islam has long provided a source of inspiration through which Muslims experience, understand, and guide their everyday lives. In the works featured here, answers to these questions differ from one reading

to the other, as each reflects the society in which it is written. Together they reveal how Muslims living at different times and in different places have interpreted Islamic traditions to meet their distinctive cultural realities and spiritual needs.

Still there are common threads that tie the readings together. *The Arabian Nights*, for example, is a cultural touchstone, serving in many subsequent literary works of the Muslim world as a source of inspiration for navigating between tradition and modernity, as the sanctuary of an idealized past in troubled times, or as a foil for exploring tensions between a secular establishment and the cultural revival of the Islamic faith in a globalized world. And, as each of these books considers various, contrasting pathways toward transcendent faith and worldly identity, the mystical overtones of Muslim Sufi philosophy serve to complement formal religious requirements and local conditions.

Books include *The Arabian Nights* (anonymous), edited by Muhsin Mahdi, translated by Husain Haddaway; *The Conference of the Birds* by Farid al-Din Attar, translated by Dick Davis and Afkham Darbandi; *Snow* by Orhan Pamuk, translated by Maureen Freely; *Dreams of Trespass* by Fatima Mernissi; and *Minaret* by Leila Aboulela.



Pathways of Faith, developed by Frederick M. Denny, University of Colorado

Following the correct pathway to spiritual fulfillment and success is a key Islamic principle. Readings for this theme explore the basic requirements for learning and obeying the precepts of the Qur'an, following Muhammad's teachings, and engaging in specific formal practices. Also introduced are the pathways leading from Judaism and Christianity to Islam, the youngest of the three Abrahamic religions; the divergent paths followed by the Sunni and Shia communities; and the mystical routes to spiritual fulfillment known as Sufism.

The theme Pathways of Faith resonates with Islam's most important principle: following the correct pathway to spiritual fulfillment and success. One significant pathway for Muslims is Islam's place as the youngest religion in the extended Abrahamic family of Jews and Christians. Islam's fellow monotheistic believers may be traced back to the earliest roots of Jewish tradition in the Patriarchal Age of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as reported in the biblical book of Genesis and finding fulfillment down through generations in the work of Moses, the Hebrew prophets, and Jesus of Nazareth. Thus, Pathways of Faith pays attention to all the children of Abraham, "the People of the Book": Jews, Christians, and Muslims.

Although the Islamic tradition respects its two older siblings, its own pathway of faith has specific teachings and required practices based in its revealed scripture, the Qur'an ("recitation"). Muslims believe that the Qur'an was recited by the angel Gabriel as a series of revelations from Allah to the Arabian prophet Muhammad, whose own life, teachings, and personal example also came to be deeply respected by the growing Muslim community through imitation, and by being handed down in the form of oral reports addressing a range of spiritual, ethical, and legal issues. Thus, learning and obeying the precepts of the Qur'an and following Muhammad's teachings are central aspects of Islamic belief and practice.

All Muslims share central doctrines (e.g., Allah is one, Muhammad is his prophet) and practices (daily prayers, fasting, almsgiving, the pilgrimage to Mecca known as the hajj), but there are historical political differences that divide the global Muslim community (Umma) into two major subcommunities: the Sunni majority and the smaller, but no less important, Shiite community. There are also optional mystical pathways known collectively as Sufism that provide richly varied opportunities for spiritual fulfillment.

Books include *The Children of Abraham: Judaism, Christianity, Islam* by F. E. Peters; *Muhammad: A Very Short Introduction* by Jonathan A. C. Brown; *The Story of the Qur'an: Its History and Place in Muslim Life* by Ingrid Mattson; *The Art of Hajj* by Venetia Porter; and *Rumi: Poet and Mystic*, edited and translated by Reynold A. Nicholson.



Points of View, developed by Deborah Amos, international correspondent, National Public Radio

The most recognized narratives of the Islamic world often come to Westerners in the daily news. The drama of conflict, chaos, and war abruptly arrives in the morning newscast or paper along with the toast and coffee. But the “news” gives us scant details about how people live their lives in Islamabad, Fez, Cairo, or Tehran. The human experience—loves, losses, births, deaths—is the currency of the novel, the memoir, the personal history. These stories can provide the riveting and recognizable details of falling in love, coming of age, navigating irreconcilable loss, or making difficult choices. Understanding and examining Islamic culture through memoirs and fictional works can bring a new awareness of our shared values and difficulties, as well as our shared successes. Islam as a religion often fits into these stories’ plots in the way that a local church community might play a role in an American work of fiction.

The novel is a relatively recent addition to the literary tradition of the Arab and Islamic worlds. Poetry, an ancient art, is much more revered—as are other modes of storytelling, some of which we explore in *Literary Reflections*. Still, the novel produced the first Muslim winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature, 1988 honoree Naguib Mafouz of Egypt, and in more recent decades a legion of writers producing imaginative works that are accessible and illuminating, and that have become familiar to readers worldwide.

“Cairo writes, Beirut publishes, Baghdad reads” is an old Arabic saying that reflects an earlier literary culture before it was threatened by fundamentalism and all but extinguished by repressive governments. Recently, courageous writers have been exercising atrophied literary muscles again by taking on taboo topics of oppression, corruption, inequality, and women’s rights in a creative variety of narrative formats.

The five narratives in *Points of View* are a diverse sampling across geography, time, and culture. The voices they feature are not only those of Muslims, but also non-Muslims reflecting on the experience of living in Muslim-majority societies in all their diversity. Although in no way an exhaustive collection, these books—like Muslim-majority societies—do not offer one story, but tell many stories and represent some of the best in contemporary storytelling.

Books include *In the Country of Men* by Hisham Matar; *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood* by Marjane Satrapi; *House of Stone* by Anthony Shadid; *Broken Verses* by Kamila Shamsie; and *Dreams of Trespass* by Fatima Mernissi.



Art, Architecture, and Film Collection

Additional Muslim Journeys collection materials were less formally organized into a sub-collection titled **Art, Architecture, and Film**. This section comprised books, films, and a series of video essays called **Islamic Art Spots** that explore the art and architecture that appears throughout each Let's Talk About It collection of books.

Materials included the films *Koran by Heart* (2011), *Islamic Art: Mirror of the Invisible World* (2011); and *Prince Among Slaves* (2007); the books *Islamic Arts* by Jonathan Bloom and Sheila Blair and *The Art of Hajj* by Venetia Porter; and Islamic Art Spots, which were designed, written, and presented by D. Fairchild Ruggles specially for the Muslim Journeys Bookshelf.

Art, Architecture, and Film, developed by D. Fairchild Ruggles, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Most of us have encountered Islamic art in one form or another. Oriental rugs, white ceramic dishware decorated in cobalt blue, and buildings with horse-shoe-shaped arches can be found throughout the United States and around the world, and are vaguely understood to be “Islamic” in some way. But what makes a work of art “Islamic”?

Islam is a way of life as well as a religion, and it has given rise to distinctive cultural and artistic idioms reflected widely across Muslim societies. The phrase “Islamic Art” includes works of art created for religious purposes, such as an illuminated Qur’an, a mosque, or a prayer rug. But it also refers to objects that serve secular purposes in lands historically ruled by Muslims, which might include the ornate ceramic tiles on the walls of a sultan’s palace or the architectural features of the humblest Muslim home. Eclectic and innovative, Islamic art has benefited from the willingness of Muslim artists to adopt new ideas, materials, and techniques from many sources. This receptivity to the new was encouraged by the pilgrimages to distant holy places and international trade and travel that have been and continue to be important in the lives of many Muslims. Islamic art has also been enriched by the contributions of non-Muslims who at times enjoyed protected status under Islam and participated in the culturally diverse societies exemplified by Baghdad, Cairo, and Cordoba, centers of art and learning where religious minorities, as well as



Performers play at a Muslim Journeys event in Walnut Creek, California.

newly conquered ethnic groups, could become full contributors to society.

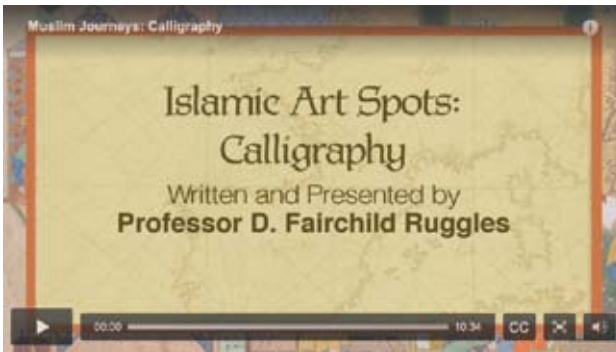
And yet, the arts of the Muslim world are distinctive and visibly different from Western arts. In mosques, tombs, Qur'ans, and other works of art that have an explicitly religious purpose, Islam shuns human and animal figures

because they might be mistaken for divine effigies or idols. Instead, artists created a lively ornamental tradition that features crisp geometric and swirling vegetal patterns. Meaning is communicated by calligraphy—the most esteemed of art forms—inscribed in Qur'anic manuscripts, emblazoned on the walls of buildings, and even woven into textiles.

The **Islamic Art Spots**, a series of short films that can be viewed in any order, provide access to the art of Muslim societies through their exploration of seven key topics:

- **Calligraphy:** Regarded as the highest expression of Islamic art, calligraphy appears in manuscripts, on objects of both sacred and secular use, and in proclamations on the walls of buildings.
- **Mosques and Religious Architecture:** Diverse in both architecture and function, mosques and other religious buildings are places both large and small, designed for both solitary prayer and public gatherings.
- **The Arts of Trade and Travel:** The obligation to make the pilgrimage (known as the hajj) to Mecca, combined with the Islamic world's tradition of global trade, makes international travel important in the lives of many Muslims.
- **Islamic Gardens:** In the often-daunting natural environment of the Middle East and other regions of the Islamic world, gardens are sanctuaries of pleasure, reflections of the paradise promised to the faithful, and symbols of humankind's place on earth.
- **Islamic Textiles:** Whether used as floor coverings or luxurious ceremonial robes, textiles ensure that treasured art plays a part in Muslims' daily lives.
- **Geometry:** The lines and curves of geometry not only provide the basis of ornamental design in Islamic art; they also characterize the timeless, breathtaking architecture of the Muslim world.
- **The Arts of the Book and Miniature Painting:** Made first on parchment and later on paper, illuminated manuscripts and miniature paintings have lively scenes that provide fascinating windows onto the Muslim world of the past.

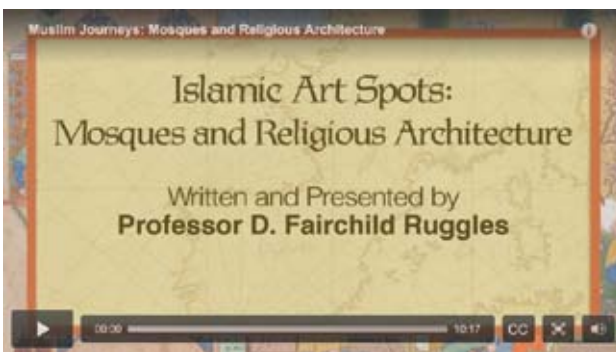
Islamic Art Spots



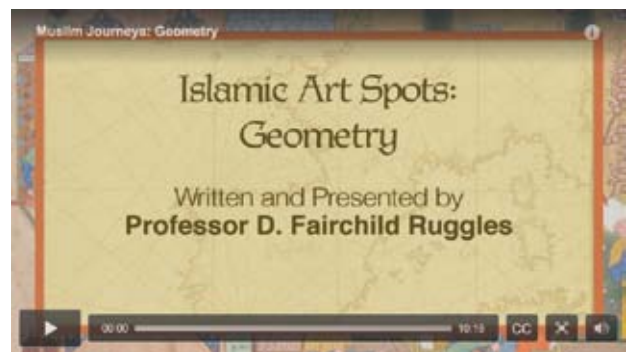
<http://bridgingcultures.neh.gov/muslimjourneys/items/show/219>



<http://bridgingcultures.neh.gov/muslimjourneys/items/show/223>



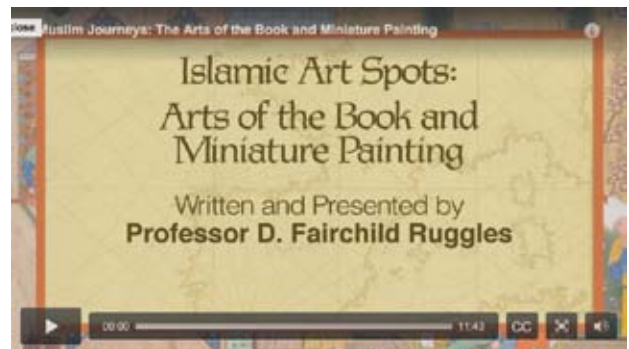
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<http://bridgingcultures.neh.gov/muslimjourneys/items/show/225>



<http://bridgingcultures.neh.gov/muslimjourneys/items/show/222>



The Bookshelf

The Muslim Journeys Bookshelf was a collection development and public programming grant offered by ALA in cooperation with NEH.

Public, academic, and community college libraries, as well as state humanities councils, were invited to apply for the Bookshelf online from June 15 to October 25, 2012. Submitted proposals were evaluated by a team of peer reviewers, and successful applicants received the **Muslim Journeys Bookshelf collection** (described on page 8) in January 2013.

To be considered for a Bookshelf grant, applicants were required to describe their plans to host at least one program that would introduce the collection and its themes to patrons and the broader community. Applicants were also encouraged to identify and work with one partner organization, such as a performing arts organization, humanities or arts council, museum, civic group, faith-based or interfaith organization, or another group willing to help plan, organize, and extend the audience for public programs.

NEH and ALA encouraged collaboration among libraries within library systems to facilitate community-wide exploration of the Muslim Journeys themes. The online application process enabled the central office of a public library system to apply on behalf of all its member libraries, up to a total of one hundred.

Eligible Bookshelf programs included:

- viewing and discussion programs focused on one or more of the Muslim Journeys films;
- reading and discussion programs, using multiple copies of Muslim Journeys books available within a library system;
- poetry readings and/or musical performances;
- exhibition of local collections of Islamic art;
- discussion of the Muslim Journeys books on local cable TV and radio programs;
- scholar-facilitated discussions of topics in Islamic history and culture, drawing on the Muslim Journeys themes and resources; and
- lectures by local scholars with expertise in the program themes.

In January 2013, NEH and ALA awarded the Muslim Journeys Bookshelf to **953 libraries and state humanities councils**. Grantees included 36 state humanities councils, 79 community college libraries, 181 academic libraries, and 657 public libraries in all 50 U.S. states, the District of Columbia, and the Virgin Islands.

Bookshelf programs were hosted from January to December 2013, and final reports were received from more than 90 percent of grantees. These final reports indicated that a total of 1,988 public programs were presented, with attendance of 382,480.

In Their Own Words: Muslim Journeys Grantees on the Bookshelf

“The very best part of the Muslim Journeys Bookshelf grant experience was seeing the patrons engaged and learning about Islam and asking questions that they might have felt inhibited in asking in any other setting. By the Longview Public Library providing a safe place to discuss sometimes controversial subjects related to Islam, it gave patrons an opportunity to gain first-hand knowledge about a religion that they have many questions about but are generally not able to ask and get answered. Thank you to the ALA and NEH for providing the opportunity for our community to learn more about Islam, to expand our knowledge base, and provide the impetus to create programming to address a need in our community. Thank you!” –*Longview Public Library, Longview, Texas*

“Our programming was created within our campus community, but from the beginning we intended to include local community members, especially local Muslims, in our programs. To this end, members of the Islamic Center of Hattiesburg and the New Medina community were informed of events, invited to attend them, and encouraged to contribute to the resulting discussions. This effort was successful. Local Muslims attended every event and contributed their valuable insights. For just one example of this participation, before our showing-and-discussion of the movie *Persepolis*, a lively Facebook discus-

sion ensued in which local Muslims and non-Muslims discussed their feelings about the film and argued about perceived virtues of the film. This commentary then expanded as Muslims, especially Iranians, engaged in religious and cultural debates beyond issues found in the film. This discussion thus proved to be an ad hoc beginning to the event itself. During the discussion period at the event, several Muslims from the local community expressed their opinions of the film and offered personal stories from their lives which reflected themes of the film. ... In this way local Muslims were involved in the execution of our events and both Muslims and non-Muslims alike have expressed satisfaction with this outcome.” –*University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, Mississippi*




Patrons gather at an event at the Smithville (Texas) Public Library.

library at the Dr. Ali Asani event [“Muslim Journeys: Understanding Islam & Muslims Beyond the Headlines”]. A little-seen community in Kansas City attended this lecture, and more than a few stopped afterwards to express thanks for the library and the museum for putting a spotlight on Muslims and Islamic culture. The library heard the typical remarks from new attendees to a library-sponsored event: “I had no idea the library could do this!,” “I will be signing up to receive the monthly Calendar of Events,” “Thank you for this event and the chance to show Kansas City another side of Muslims and Islam outside of the news.” Partnering with the Nelson-Atkins Museum [was] a delight and working with Kimberly Masteller, curator of the South and Southeast Asian Art Collection, was smooth and collaborative at every stage of planning.” –*Kansas City Public Library, Kansas City, Missouri*

“What stands out for KCPL for [the Bookshelf] grant experience is meeting all the new visitors to the

“As the world continued to experience acts of terrorism by different groups globally and in our own neighborhoods, the Muslim Journeys Bookshelf Collection demonstrated the sheer beauty of the written word, of Islamic art, of different experiences expressed through narrative, poetry, history. . . and the opportunity to share discoveries about ourselves and others, both commonalities and differences, in a close, non-confrontational way. The Muslim Journeys Bookshelf gave us the tools to move forward and to learn from ourselves and from faculty colleagues about the Collection—with lots of tools provided by NEH and ALA. Faculty who attended our brown bag events shared teaching strategies. Students discovered new and rich materials in book and film. All GPC libraries benefited from the addition of complete sets of the Bookshelf Collection—and we are very grateful.”

Georgia Perimeter College, Clarkston, Georgia



Let's Talk About It

Let's Talk About It: Muslim Journeys was developed based on **Let's Talk About It**, a reading and book discussion program model launched on a nationwide level for libraries by ALA in 1982. Since that time, ALA has developed 42 diverse Let's Talk About It series, and facilitated their implementation in thousands of libraries across the country.

Let's Talk About It: Muslim Journeys was the second programming grant offered to libraries and state humanities councils as part of the Muslim Journeys initiative. Available only to sites that were selected to receive the Bookshelf, Let's Talk About It: Muslim Journeys was a scholar-led reading and discussion program designed to foster opportunities for informed community conversations about the histories, faith, and cultures of Muslims around the world, using the core Bookshelf collection materials as the basis for programs.

Bookshelf grant recipients were invited to apply for a Let's Talk About It grant online from January 15 to March 29, 2013. Submitted proposals were evaluated by a team of peer reviewers, and successful applicants received a programming grant of \$3,500 to support implementation of their program series. Library project directors were required to attend an orientation workshop during the summer; local scholars and state humanities council project directors were also encouraged to attend. Travel stipends of \$1,000 were provided to institutions that elected to send a project scholar to the workshop.

Participating libraries planned a five-part series of reading and discussion programs, to take place every two to four weeks, depending on local preferences. The library recruited a humanities scholar to lead each discussion, and implemented a marketing effort to promote programs to the widest possible public audience. Sites selected to receive a Let's Talk About It grant chose one of five themes, each developed by a nationally known scholar, on which to focus their series. These themes, which are detailed beginning on page 10, included **American Stories**, **Connected Histories**, **Literary Reflections**, **Pathways of Faith**, and **Points of View**.

Programs were implemented between September 1, 2013, and August 31, 2014. By the spring, many communities had expressed interest in continuing their Let's Talk About It programs. Thus in April 2014, NEH and ALA offered an additional programming stipend of \$1,000 to nineteen of the participating sites to host an additional Let's Talk About It series on a second Muslim Journeys theme. Sites that participated in this extended effort arranged to use book collections purchased by fellow grantees, typically for only the cost of shipping materials.

As part of the Let's Talk About It program, 124 sites hosted at least five reading and discussion programs on a Muslim Journeys theme. These sites included 47 academic libraries, 11 community college libraries, 53 public libraries, and 13 state humanities councils. Participating councils were required to support a Let's Talk About It program series in at least two organizations in their state.

NEH and ALA made Let's Talk About It grants to sites in 38 states and the District of Columbia. Through these grants, a total of 1,013 individual programs were offered, drawing 27,842 attendees.

When completing the final report, 80 of 123 grantee institutions responded that they would definitely like to host another LTAI program on another subject. Another 30 sites indicated that they would consider new LTAI opportunities. Only 13 grantees said they would not be interested, and most cited limited staffing and resources as the reason for this answer.



A Bookshelf display in Walnut Creek, California.

In Their Own Words: Muslim Journeys Grantees on Let's Talk About It

“Including film along with [the Let's Talk About It] books is fantastic. It opens up so many programming opportunities — having a series, showing one film, combining with other programming. We appreciated that the films came with materials and rights to show — so important, as obtaining the rights can be expensive and prohibitive. [We also appreciate] that the program is so well researched, came with funding to purchase a set of books, and has such a wealth of educational materials supporting it. We have long wanted to create such a series, but lacked the funding and expertise to do this. It meets a need for libraries as well as humanities councils. For us, libraries wanted Points of View in particular because it seemed the most accessible for their patrons. ... And after library groups have been engaged by “entry” series, they will be able to go deeper, making the other series potential follow-ups for the future. ... [Muslim Journeys] inspired us to reach new audiences, meet real needs of people in our state, expand our family of scholars and partners, and programming ideas. THANK YOU!”

—*Maine Humanities Council, Portland, Maine*

“The Macomb Community College Libraries couldn't be more pleased with the end result and significance that the LTAI grant has had not only on the college, but the surrounding community as well. The grant has brought a wealth of knowledge and a new understanding of a culture and people that play a significant role within the immediate area of Southeastern Michigan. Strong and lasting partnerships were made as a result of cultural programming efforts afforded to the college with the addition of the LTAI: Muslim Journey's grant. Students from all backgrounds...expressed their appreciation for learning the long history and cultural significances of Islam, as well as a renewed sensitivity towards the discrimination wrongly placed upon the Muslim people from 9/11 to date.”

—*Macomb Community College Libraries, Warren, Michigan*

“During the spring 2014 semester, Booth Library hosted its Let's Talk About It: Muslim Journeys series. In addition to the five scheduled book discussions, we had two film screenings, three panel presentations, and an opening ceremony to launch the programming series. ... Despite the cold weather, Eastern Illinois University faculty, staff, students, and members of the community showed up in strong numbers for the [kick-off] event, with 103 people in attendance. ... Working on the series has been a most rewarding experience. The opportunity afforded by NEH and ALA to bring Muslim Journeys to libraries has stimulated the sharing of valuable and timely dialog on this relevant contemporary issue. We were unsure of how the local Muslim community would react to our programming, but the series was very positively received by our campus and community, as noted time and again in our event evaluation forms. Members of the Muslim community contributed to our exhibits and brought friends and family members to attend many programs. ... While the day-to-day operations of the library are necessary, important, and often gratifying, it is ventures like Muslim Journeys which help expand the evolving roles of libraries in ways that we remain important and meaningful.”

—*Eastern Illinois University-Booth Library, Charleston, Illinois*

“Our goal for the LTAI: Muslim Journeys grant was to educate our patrons and community members about Muslim Americans. We hoped to break down barriers and confront prejudices that people may have about Muslims in America. We had decided to explore the American Stories theme because we believe that by reading and discussing the books the audience would discover a people they can identify with. Our participants came away from this series with an increased knowledge of the Islamic faith, the Muslim world, and what life has been like for Muslim Americans. They continuously asked incredible in-depth questions throughout the series. They read books outside the required readings and have continued to request new books on Islam and the Muslim culture and history. Our religious studies, history, and political book collections have greatly increased since the Let’s Talk About It: Muslim Journeys series. I strongly believe our participants’ perspectives of the Muslim community have changed since the series. The barriers and prejudices have been brought down, at least for a small group of people in Pennsylvania.”

Middletown Free Library, Lima, Pennsylvania



Resources for Public Programming

During the course of the Muslim Journeys initiative, NEH and ALA produced a variety of humanities programming resources for use by participating libraries, state humanities councils, and the public.

Thematic Essays

In keeping with ALA's long-running Let's Talk About It program model, NEH and ALA invited Muslim Journeys scholars to prepare an essay on one of the **project's themes** (described beginning on page 10). These essays offer an accessible overview of the subject area and provide a broader context within which readers may consider and understand each book in the series.

The thematic essays provided the framework for five Muslim Journeys reading and discussion program series in libraries. In addition to providing printed essays for libraries to share with their audiences, NEH and ALA also made them available online as learning resources for groups or individuals interested in pursuing a reading program outside of a library. Complete text of each essay has been included in Appendix E.

Discussion Points

Muslim Journeys scholars developed sample discussion points for each book in their thematic series. These discussion points were available to libraries that received a Bookshelf grant, as well as to the Let's Talk About It grantees. Developed to stimulate engaging conversations about the Muslim Journeys books, the discussion points were used in participating libraries' programs, and also served as examples for local Muslim Journeys scholars who developed their own discussion frameworks based on local interest.

Supplemental Materials Lists

In order to support both ongoing individual exploration and public programming, Muslim Journeys scholars developed annotated related material lists for each theme. The content selected for these lists ranged from fiction and nonfiction books, to films, to primary source materials, to online resources. ALA published related reading lists on the project website, where they were downloaded for use by librarians, scholars, and the public.

Film Program Guides

For each film in the Muslim Journeys collection, NEH and ALA offered a **Film Programming Guide** to support screening and discussion events in libraries. Written by Muslim Journeys scholars, these guides offer content for a ready-to-implement program, including an introduction to the film, focus points for viewers to consider during the screening, and open-ended discussion points to facilitate conversation and connection after viewing.

Islamic Art Spots

Provided on DVD as part of the Bookshelf grant, the **Islamic Art Spots** are seven visual essays, presented in a series of short films designed to make art from Muslim societies an integral part of the Muslim Journeys programming experience. The Art Spots were written and presented by D. Fairchild Ruggles, Professor of Art, Architecture, and Landscape History, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, and produced by Twin Cities Public Television. Each Art Spot is also available for viewing online at <http://bridgingcultures.neh.gov/muslimjourneys/>.

Site Support Notebooks

As part of the award package for Let's Talk About It: Muslim Journeys grantees, ALA provided a **Site Support Notebook** developed to orient librarian project directors and state humanities council staff to the program model. The Site Support Notebook, offered online as well as in print during workshops, is a 66-page guide covering all elements of program planning, implementation, and evaluation for the series.

Workshops

ALA convened two national orientation workshops for Let's Talk About It: Muslim Journeys grantees. Library project directors were required to attend a workshop; NEH and ALA offered additional financial support for optional attendance by scholars and state humanities council staff. Taking place on June 26–27, 2013, in Chicago and August 15–16, 2013, in Denver, the Muslim Journeys workshops offered attendees an opportunity to connect with their counterparts across the country, hear from Muslim Journeys scholars about the humanities content of the project, participate in a model reading and discussion program led by a humanities scholar and national program advisor, join an interactive session on managing community controversy, and learn about best practices for local partnerships, promotion, audience recruitment, discussion moderation, grant administration, and more. Video recordings of scholar presentations are available via ALA's Programming Librarian YouTube channel.

Webinars

To support prospective Bookshelf applicants and encourage competitive proposals, ALA hosted two webinars that focused on application development in advance of the October 2012 submission deadline. The first, *Public Libraries Bridging Cultures: Exploring Islamic History*, was held on August 29, 2012, and the second, *Outreach for Academic Libraries: Bridging Cultures Bookshelf*, was held on September 12, 2012.

ALA offered a third webinar in response to librarians' need to prepare for and manage possible local controversies related to the Muslim Journeys programs or materials. Co-led by Lesley Williams, Muslim Journeys project director from the Evanston Public Library, and Martin Garner, chair of ALA's Committee on Professional Ethics, *Muslim Journeys and Your Community: Managing Controversy, Maximizing Impact* was held on October 24, 2013.

Webinars were attended by more than 200 librarians and are available in ALA's online learning archive.

Promotional Materials

Both the Bookshelf and Let's Talk About It grantees were offered print and online access to a full suite of **promotional and marketing materials** to support their efforts with audience recruitment, publicity, and outreach. These included sample press releases, media alerts, public service announcements, and letters requesting community support; customizable posters, flyers, and postcards; bookmarks, bookplates, and web banners; sponsor and program logos; and pocket folders and thematic essays to share with participants.

Muslim Journeys Website

The Muslim Journeys project website — <http://bridgingcultures.neh.gov/muslimjourneys/> — was developed to introduce the Bookshelf collection to the American public and to enrich the experience of readers by offering online resources that place the books and documentary films in a larger context. By visiting the website, those who seek broader paths for making their Muslim Journeys may find programming resources created for the project, as well as a rich array of primary resources and interpretive articles intended to enhance understanding of ideas and events encountered in the books. The website was created by the Ali Vural Ak Center for Global Islamic Studies at George Mason University and the National Endowment for the Humanities.

In Their Own Words: Muslim Journeys Grantees on Supporting Resources

“We could not have brought attention to the [Muslim Journeys] collection and related programs and displays without these outstanding materials. The thematic essays were introduced at the start of several of the faculty brown bag discussions. Our MJ Bookshelf Reader's Guide is one example of the many ways in which we incorporated these materials — not only in our marketing and publicity, but also for learning and understanding. Visuals were used by our Marketing and Public Relations department to prepare flyers. Flyers were distributed to faculty mailboxes. Posters were put up throughout the campuses and delivered to our community partners for promotion and distribution as well.”

—*Georgia Perimeter College, Clarkston, Georgia*

“I thought the [Let's Talk About It: Muslim Journeys] workshop was very well organized and efficient. I learned a lot, met terrific people, and enjoyed the area. Thank you so much for everything. I am more confident in the program now and look forward to the next few months.”

—*Anonymous attendee, August 2013 workshop in Denver, Colorado*

“Both presenters [in the *Muslim Journeys and Your Community: Managing Controversy, Maximizing Impact* webinar] stayed on topic, answered questions from participants, and were very knowledgeable about handling conflict related to programming.”

—*Anonymous attendee, October 2013 webinar*

“We used a great deal of the support materials provided by NEH and ALA for the Bookshelf. The discussion points were used for our two film series discussions, the bookmarks were placed throughout our building, the poster was put on a bulletin board, promotional materials were used in displays, theme information was posted on our website, we printed out and made available multiple copies of the theme/title brochure, and a notebook with essays and titles was on display at our programs. It was very helpful to have all of these items in one place to make use of. The artwork is striking and something that it would be difficult for us to reproduce on our own with the same quality, so we made good use of it. It’s great to be given access to all of the promotional material and definitely made things easier on us, much appreciated!”

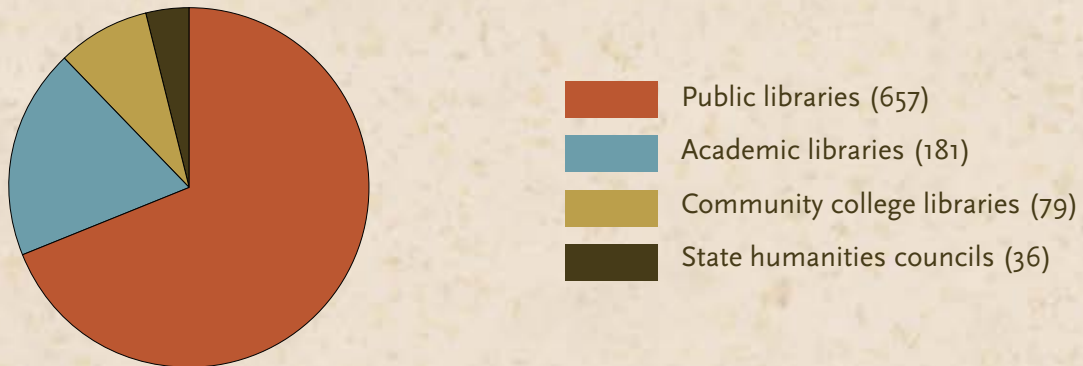
Ypsilanti District Library, Ypsilanti, Michigan

Programming in the Field

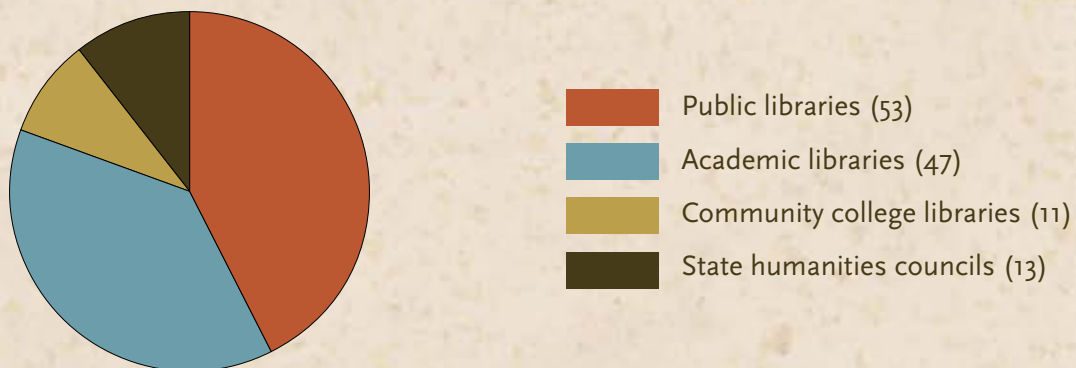
A. Distribution of Venues

Muslim Journeys programs were presented in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. California had the greatest number of participating libraries (117), with Georgia (77), New York (76), and Illinois (60) coming in with the second, third, and fourth highest numbers of participating sites. A complete list of [participating venues](#) may be found in Appendix A.

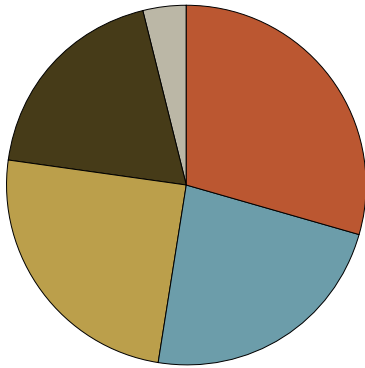
Participating Bookshelf institutions
by organization type



Participating LTAI institutions
by organization type



Number of participating libraries by community size

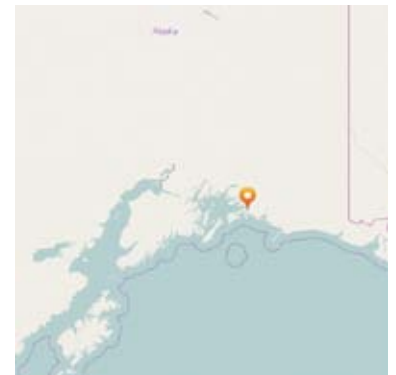


- <24,999 (281 library branches)
- 25,000 – 99,999 (221 library branches)
- 100,000 – 499,999 (234 library branches)
- >500,000 (181 library branches)
- N/A (36 state humanities councils)

Participating Bookshelf and LTAI institutions



Map image courtesy of Mapline



B. Public Impact

Through both the Bookshelf and Let's Talk About It, the Muslim Journeys initiative provided an outstanding, curated set of materials to library collections throughout the country, and connected librarians to scholarly resources and professional development opportunities that continue to support timely, thought-provoking, and affecting programming for public audiences. In a survey of Bookshelf grantees conducted in September 2013, 90% of respondents said that the project "provided high-quality, relevant materials for [the] library's collection" and 83% felt that it "inspired people to learn more about an unfamiliar subject."

Libraries in hundreds of diverse communities offered a wonderful range of Muslim Journeys programs and events, including film screenings, book discussions, cultural celebrations, poetry readings, panels, lectures on art and architecture, exhibits, and more. Review of final reports from grantees described several significant ways that the Muslim Journeys had a positive impact in different communities. Specifically, Muslim Journeys:

- brought new ideas and cultures to the public, providing audiences with satisfying and meaningful programming that exposed them to new ideas and cultures;
- expanded library collections, meeting a collection development need by providing topical content that was often underrepresented in libraries;
- inspired outreach by fostering new partnerships between libraries and other community organizations;
- attracted new library users by showcasing programs about and focusing marketing efforts on traditionally underserved populations;
- supported adult learners by inspiring formation of core learning groups in their communities;
- advocated for libraries as community commons by supporting their efforts to serve as a central and safe space where unfamiliar topics and sensitive conversations can be explored; and
- strengthened academic communities by encouraging collaboration between departments and sparking greater faculty interest in using library resources for coursework.



Patrons at an event in Walnut Creek, California.

Additional information about the impact that Muslim Journeys grant making had on libraries, communities, and the public may be found under Evaluation (page 44) and in Appendix C. The following quotes have been taken from final reports to show key examples of the above impacts on libraries of different types, in a variety of locations, serving diverse communities.

In Their Own Words: Muslim Journeys Grantees on Public Impact

Bringing New Ideas and Cultures to the Public

“It was gratifying to see how receptive this community was to the programming and the whole idea of exploring the Muslim experience. The Muslim community in this area is very small so the larger community has very little exposure to the culture, traditions, and literature of the Muslim world or diaspora. Though our community is intellectually curious about most things, we weren’t sure how this thematic focus would be received. We have found that they have embraced the opportunity to learn more about the experience of Muslims both in America and around the world. We did not receive any angry sentiments about the programming; curiosity and concern would be words more applicable to the response from the general public. This grant gave our community a way to get beyond stereotypes.”

–*Wilmette Public Library, Wilmette, Illinois*

“The public’s response to the materials and programming was overwhelmingly positive. Attendees appreciated the opportunities to learn about something unfamiliar, from developing a new understanding of a different culture, to hearing a new poetic form. The Bookshelf collection, both the books and the films, gave patrons ways to delve further into these new subjects.

“These grants inspired our patrons. ... [who] would approach the librarians looking for additional materials based off their new inspiration. ... Much of Muslim culture is not well known to many Americans, but these grants demonstrated how art and literature can be the bridge that unites people across the globe. Poetry, in any form, can inspire with its universal themes of love, beauty, and spirituality. Art can elicit the same emotional response no matter how or where it is created. [Muslim Journeys gave] the Milwaukee Public Library the ability to share these experiences with our patrons.” –*Milwaukee Public Library, Milwaukee, Wisconsin*

Expanding Library Collections

“Without the [grant], we would not have the resources to purchase such a sizeable collection of unique materials. Since all these items are made accessible online and the librarians are aware of these resources, they will continue to benefit our students and faculty in their research in Islam and other related topics.”

–*City Colleges of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois*

“Being able to add an in-depth selection of books on [this] subject matter is an amazing achievement for a small library.”
Canby Public Library, Canby, Oregon

Books on display at Multnomah County Library in Portland, Oregon.

Inspiring Outreach

“The success of the Muslim Journeys Bookshelf programming was due to the support of our local community partners. We contacted a number of Washington, D.C. universities – George Mason, Howard, and Georgetown – and were warmly welcomed. Scholars were eager to participate. ... Everyone contacted agreed to do something, and even as we transitioned from idea to reality we only lost one of the ten partners we had sought. Two major non-profits – America’s Islamic Heritage Museum and the Islamic Society of America – came aboard to talk about global issues and issues facing Islamic Americans. The local mosque, Masjid Muhammad, went above and beyond to share their culture and their stories. [T]heir presentations garnered the largest attendance.”
–*Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Library, Washington, D.C.*

“[T]he library partnered with the Peace Advocacy Group at Baker Prairie Middle School. Screening the films at two different locations created exposure to two significantly different population groups. We reached twice as many people for the film screenings and were able to create awareness for the Muslim Journeys Bookshelf throughout the Canby School District. ... After having received the Muslim Journeys grant, the library also applied for and received a grant from the US Institute of Peace, which enabled us to continue our community discussions. It was amazing to watch how one grant propelled another and consequently resulted in more attention for the Muslim Journeys Bookshelf. The second grant enabled us to offer a daylong residency exploring art and diversity through poetry and the creation of a peace mosaic.” –*Canby Public Library, Canby, Oregon*

Attracting New Library Users

“The exhibits at the library and the museum... brought in new library users and uncovered an unserved or underserved segment of Greenwood’s population. It made the library staff more aware of the need for greater diversity in selecting



Reading at an event at the Smithville (Texas) Public Library.

materials and offering programs.... One woman, a Muslim who dresses traditionally, became an active volunteer because she said she realized she was wanted and welcome at the library when she saw the Bookshelf exhibit.... A doctor came to the library at the end of August and donated four new copies of the Qur’an because he felt they were a better translation than the ones the library had. He had not been a library user until he came in to see the Bookshelf exhibit for himself. He was very impressed with its quality. Kudos to your selectors.” –*Greenwood County Library, Greenwood, South Carolina*

“[A]fter all the contact we had with the Muslim community in creating this event, they started using the public library as customers. ... Thanks for being the catalyst for these wonderful transformations in our community.” –*Harris County Public Library / Lone Star College-Tomball Community Library, Tomball, Texas*



Program attendees listen to a presentation at the Corning Community College in Corning, New York.

Supporting Adult Learners

“There were some very amazing moments during the Muslim Journeys Bookshelf grant experience. This is not an easy topic in [the] post-9/11 and post-Boston bombing climate in small-town America. ... The [Bookshelf] was a catalyst toward promoting understanding and respect in our community across cultures and religions. The grant gave our community a chance to open the door to great partnerships and enrich our library’s collection to present diverse and accurate views of the Muslim world.

“It was truly a rewarding experience to see the interaction of the speakers present at the ‘Islam in Your Community’ panel discussion. Shaykh Abdul Haqq Sazonoff provided a unique perspective on Islamic spirituality and the common ground that exists between all religions. Area physician Dr. Samadani shared from his own experiences of being a medical professional and how his faith factored into his medical practice. Local business leader Salim Mohammed and his daughter ... offered insight into the accumulation process of an immigrant and growing up in a Muslim household in America. Wisconsin prison Chaplain Daniel Coate brought to light how his Muslim faith supports his role as Chaplain for people of all faiths in the detention facility that he works in and how he aids all interested inmates to a spiritual path of their choosing. Many of the attendees found the discussion panel a very personal, meaningful and ‘from the heart’ experience.”
–*Beaver Dam Community Library, Beaver Dam, Wisconsin*

Libraries as Community Commons

“The response of the diverse communities of Abiquiu to the Bridging Cultures: Muslim Journeys grant was [wonderful], in that social circles which coexist geographically but mix very little came together to enjoy presentations of Islamic art and music. ... Distinct groups in Abiquiu came out for this and celebrated together as never before.”
–*Pueblo de Abiquiu Library @ Cultural Center, Abiquiu, New Mexico*

“The very best part of the MJ Bookshelf grant was the honest discussion after viewing *Koran by Heart*. We had multiple faiths represented in the room and also had an Iraqi refugee, who was able to answer questions based on her experience living in an Islamic country. Thanks to the skilled facilitation, we were able to address sensitive issues and create a safe learning environment.”
–*Regis University, Denver, Colorado*

Strengthening Academic Communities

“The best part of the grant experience was the opportunity it provided for reaching beyond the libraries’ walls to different parties – faculty, staff, students, local businesses – in an effort to really publicize the materials and find ways to create events for which they are useful resources. The grant provided community-building focus, which allowed us to expand our own knowledge and that of the surrounding community – both university and town – of a subject about which there has been little to no programming up until this point.”
–*Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, Virginia*



C. Local Programming Highlights

Between the 953 grantees that hosted a Bookshelf program, and the 124 grantees that hosted at least five Let’s Talk About It programs, library users in nearly every part of the country had access to outstanding events in multiple formats that explored the Muslim Journeys materials and themes.

This section provides an overview of select programs offered in academic, public, community college, and high school libraries, located in rural as well as metropolitan areas. Program summaries, quotes, and photographs have been taken from local media coverage, final reports, and correspondence with project staff.

West Virginia University Libraries, Morgantown, West Virginia

On November 6, 2012, the West Virginia University Libraries, the WVU Religious Studies Program, and the Islamic Center of Morgantown co-hosted a public read-in and discussion event featuring selections from the Muslim Journeys Bookshelf.



WVU students from a variety of disciplines and backgrounds read selections from poetry, prose, and personal narratives. Each reading was followed by a discussion moderated by Aaron Gale, chair of the WVU Religious Studies Program; and Imam Sohail Chaudhry, who teaches at WVU and serves as Imam at the Islamic Center of Morgantown.



“In our post-9/11 world, a greater understanding across cultures is more important than ever before, yet the purpose of this program is not to provide political or historical context. Rather it is to explore and celebrate the great richness of Islamic culture by sharing a variety of literature,” said Beth Toren, media and religious studies librarian for the WVU Libraries.

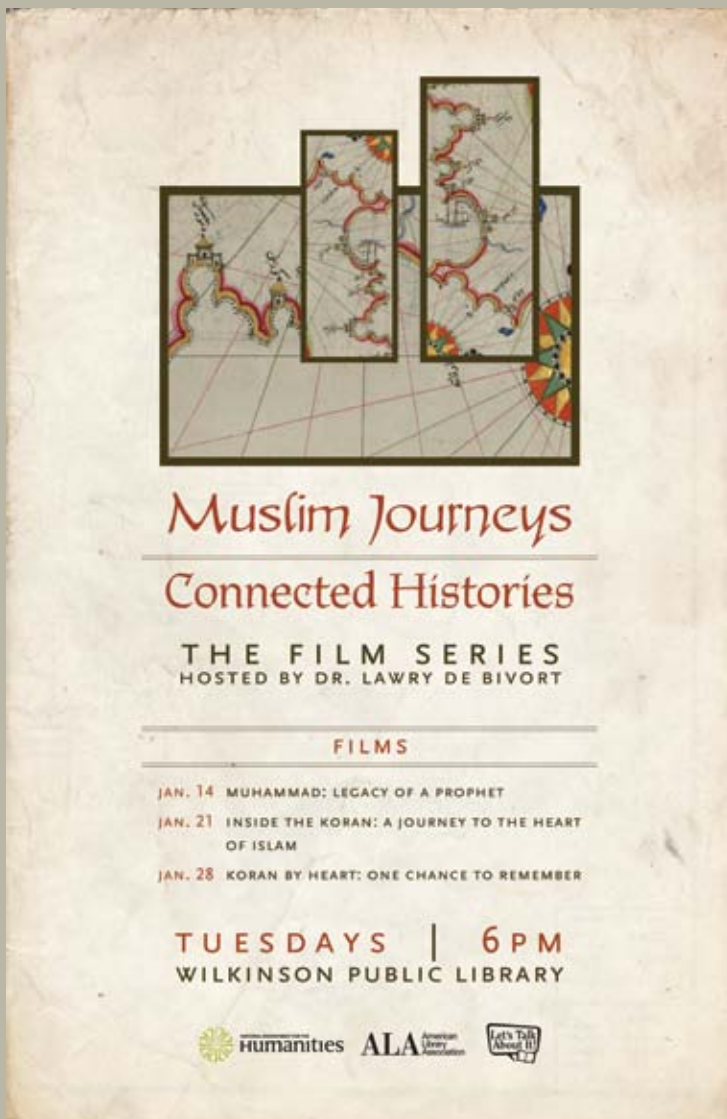
“Sharing literature helps us recognize commonalities that transcend geographic origins or religious beliefs. Recognizing our common humanity broadens and balances our perspectives,” Toren said. “We are all brothers and sisters, daughters and sons, mothers and fathers, and individuals.”

Images from top to bottom: Brendan Muckian-Bates, a master’s student in history and a graduate teaching assistant with the Center for Women’s and Gender Studies, offers some thoughts before reading a few poetry selections.

Muslim Journeys Bookshelf co-project directors pose for the camera following the read-in: Imam Sohail Chaudhry, who teaches at WVU and serves as Imam at the Islamic Center of Morgantown; Beth Toren, media and religious studies librarian for the WVU Libraries; and Aaron Gale, chair of the WVU Religious Studies Program.

Participants in West Virginia University’s Islamic Culture Read-In discuss books from the Muslim Journeys Bookshelf.

“The atmosphere at the Islamic Culture Read-In was great. ... We had men and women, atheists, a Catholic in the process of converting to Islam, an imam, a pagan, Muslims, Christians, and I didn’t ask or identify everyone’s spiritual or religious practices, but I knew of these [offhand]. ... We had professors, local citizens, librarians, and university students, both undergraduate and graduate. ... The variety [of the readings] was wonderful; the students took their time from demanding schedules to share something of themselves that they really didn’t have to give. It took place in November – the busiest month of the year in our academic library. ... Everyone that attended cared. It was better than I could have imagined, and that was because we created an ensemble. ...Bravo to the readers and the people that selected these books for the [Bookshelf] grant.”



Let's Talk About It: Wilkinson Public Library, Telluride, Colorado

Libraries that received a Let's Talk About It grant were required to host five scholar-led reading and discussion events. However, many dramatically exceeded this requirement, presenting a diverse selection of additional programs to increase the community's focus on the Muslim Journeys project themes. The Wilkinson Public Library offered 15 public events with support from their Let's Talk About It grant, drawing more than 300 participants.

In addition to their core reading and discussion events, the Wilkinson Public Library hosted a three-part film series aimed at familiarizing audience members with crucial elements of Islam. Screening and discussion events were facilitated by Dr. Lawry de Bivort, a local Islamic scholar who has travelled extensively in the Middle East and acted as an advisor to the U.S. government on issues in the Muslim world.

The library also offered a poetry series titled "Where Poetry Meets the Divine," which was a three part exploration of influential Sufi Mystic Poets – Hafiz, Rabia, and Rumi – led by local poet and teacher Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer.

A lecture titled "Women in Islam: A World of Contradictions," was presented by Dennis Aronson, a retired professor from the West Virginia College of Graduate Studies. A screening of *Persepolis* was well attended and offered an alternative to more academic portions of the program series.

Multnomah County Library, Portland, Oregon

In support of their Let's Talk About It series, the Multnomah County Library presented several different arts and cultural programs. "A Visit with Al-Andalus Ensemble" was held at the Hillsdale Library. This contemporary World-chamber trio of oud, violin, and guitar moves between the classical and the modern, subtly weaving tradition with sophisticated innovation into an energetic musical tapestry, earning the Al-Andalus Ensemble a devoted international audience. The core of the ensemble is the married couple Tarik and Julia Banzi, scholars, musicians, and artists whose lives reflect their commitment to create peaceful understanding between the East and the West. Turnout for the event exceeded the limit of the Hillsdale Library's meeting room capacity. An intergenerational audience enjoyed the program and offered positive feedback: "Excellent quality, authentic, educational," "Thank you for sharing Al-Andalus with the community!," "Such a service to have this at the community library."

The Multnomah County Library also partnered with the Muslim Educational Trust (MET), using the library's exhibit space to host "1,001 Inventions: Muslim Heritage in Our World." This was a combination of a traveling exhibit and items from the personal collections of members of MET. An opening reception featured a presentation from a teacher at the Oregon Islamic Academy, covering Muslim history and highlighting some of the items on display.



Patrons and panelists at the Multnomah County Library in Portland, Oregon.

The library's "Art of Arabic Calligraphy" event was both an introduction to calligraphy as well as a hands-on workshop opportunity for beginning calligraphers. Finally, "From Baghdad to Cordoba" was an interactive music and dance program intended to take place on the "lawn" of the North Portland Library. It was moved inside due to weather, and included a brief impromptu concert in the main reading room, followed by dancing upstairs.



Corning Community College, Corning, New York

As part of its Muslim Journeys grant, Corning Community College hosted “Veiling around the World,” a one-hour talk that addressed the complexities and diversities that exist in the traditions of the purdah and hijab. Eighty people attended the event, which was held on March 18, 2013. The scholar was Dr. Kathryn March, Cornell University Professor in Anthropology and Feminist, Gender and Sexuality Studies, who has conducted research in the different ways in which people relate their own experiences and reflections to larger cultural and esthetic frameworks.

On November 5, 2013, Corning Community College hosted Arthur A. Houghton, Jr., Corning Community College Professor of Art, for a film screening and discussion of “Islamic Arts: Mirror of the Invisible World.”



Conrad Weiser High School, Robesonia, Pennsylvania

Located about 75 miles northwest of Philadelphia, Conrad Weiser is a public high school serving about 1,000 students in grades 9 through 12. On March 8, 2013, the honors global studies class showcased their work, as well as the Muslim Journeys Bookshelf materials, in an effort to increase student awareness of Muslim books, art, and the religion in general. Over the course of the day, 700 students perused the projects.

The event “demonstrated the five themes of the grant, but was discussed and presented by students themselves to other students who came in for a session of learning. It was dynamic, interactive, and we feel that the students were introduced to more authentic sources of Islamic information.”

Dr. Kathryn March gives a presentation about veiling at Corning Community College.

D. Local Challenges

Underscoring the need for well curated materials and programs dealing with Islamic history and culture, not all communities that participated in the Muslim Journeys initiative received the grant with uniform enthusiasm. Librarian project directors, staff, and scholars in some areas received complaints about their involvement in the project, a few programs were interrupted by protesters and hecklers, and some staff received requests to remove the materials from the library collection.

Since challenges to content, particularly in public libraries, occur with some regularity across the country, ALA was well prepared to offer support materials, workshop presentations, and webinars to best equip grantees to manage controversy if and when it arose. Several existing resources developed by ALA's Office for Intellectual Freedom were of particular usefulness, including [ALA's Intellectual Freedom Manual](#), [Religion in American Libraries: Questions and Answers](#), [Diversity in Collection](#)

[Development: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights](#), [Public Library Collection Development Policies and Intellectual Freedom](#), [Guidelines for Responding to Complaints](#), and [Public Relations and Dealing with the Media](#).

Although positive community feedback in response to Muslim Journeys programs greatly outweighed negative reactions, there were a few communities that encountered difficulty. Below is information about some of the local challenges experienced during the grant term, taken from final reports and correspondence with ALA staff.



Stair Public Library, Morenci, Michigan

When Colleen Leddy, director of the Stair Public Library, applied to host Let's Talk About It: Muslim Journeys, she sought to offer her community an opportunity to learn about and understand other cultures and religions in a "hands-on," personal, interactive way. The library already hosted two monthly book discussion groups that were



Students perform a traditional dance known as dabke (above) and try on traditional Muslim dresses (left) at the Stair Public Library in Morenci, Michigan. Photos courtesy of DAVID GREEN/State Line Observer.

very well attended, so she selected the Points of View theme, thinking it would offer the predominantly Christian community a chance to learn about Muslims and Islam through personal stories.

In a rural community of about 2,500 residents, over 95% of whom are white, the project seemed an excellent way to learn more, discuss another culture, and broaden viewpoints. Thus it came as a surprise to the library administration when some members of the community expressed objections to the library's programming.

Almost immediately after the NEH grant announcement, a patron voiced concern that a Muslim group might be financing the project in order to cast Islam in a positive light – "propaganda" in the guise of an intellectually stimulating program. Soon after library staff explained the project funding to this person, other patrons came in to express disapproval and question why the library would get involved in the project.

Later, a couple who had been under contract for several years to clean the library abruptly submitted their resignation. Although they cited a need to cut back on work hours to the library director, they shared with others in town that the resignation was because the library hosted Muslim Journeys but "never does Christian programming."

On the day of the library's Muslim Journeys kick-off — an event designed to give guests a greater understanding of the Arab and Islamic world — an elderly Navy veteran

traveled more than half an hour to Morenci, stopping at the Veterans of Foreign Wars hall, the American Legion post, several stores, and the newspaper office, trying to incite people to attend the event and protest. After learning that the program's scholars were Vietnam and Iraq combat veterans, the individual calmed down and left without protesting at the library.

Despite these challenges, Muslim Journeys programming was well received at the Stair Public Library, and the librarian cited participation in the grant as a positive experience that helped fulfill the mission of the public library.

Smithville Public Library, Smithville, Texas

After news announcements that the Smithville Public Library had received a Muslim Journeys grant, some members of the community came in to the library to express their anger and ask that the materials be removed from the library and the grant funds returned. Due to the patrons' conduct, which included checking out books and stating in person and on social media that they would not be returned to the library, staffers said they felt anxious, and feared for their safety. Individual staff members received personal threats and were named as being hostile to the values of the community from the pulpit of a local Christian church.

In recognition of their work administering the Muslim Journeys grant, the library received ALA's Gordon M. Conable Award, which honors a library that has demonstrated a commitment to intellectual freedom and the Library Bill of Rights. The staff at the Smithville Public Library was recognized by the Smithville City Council and the Public Library Association for standing up against censorship.



In the words of library director Judith Bergeron, “Despite the powerful negative reaction and the stress it has caused library and city staff, everyone involved with the grant program would do it again. This has been an important program for our community. As one person mentioned in an op-ed, no matter what your views are on this issue, an important aspect of the debate has been the fact that our children are watching a civil exchange about a controversial issue in our community, hopefully learning the lesson that it is both important to listen and try to understand someone else’s point of view and that it is important to be able to be free to speak openly about your own opinions. We are grateful for the opportunity to bring this quality programming to our small, rural Texas town. Thank you.”

Librarians Casey Dees, Lois Chastain, Erikka Hillard, Lisa Duty and Judy Bergeron hold their Gordon M. Conable Award from the Public Library Association while standing in front of a shelf holding books from their Muslim Journeys reading series. Photo courtesy of SUZANNE HODGSON/ AUSTIN COMMUNITY NEWSPAPERS.

Orland Park Public Library, Orland Park, Illinois

According to the *Chicago Tribune*, “What a southwest suburban library had promoted as an educational forum this week on Muslim life in America quickly turned into a contentious debate about Islam. The tone for the Thursday evening event was set while the three panelists at the Orland Park Library were still introducing themselves. In the first of many interruptions, a half-dozen audience members stood up and demanded that everyone recite the Pledge of Allegiance.”

The event, titled “Muslims Today,” was the fifth in a series of seven Muslim Journeys programs that the library organized to explore Islamic life and culture. The panel discussion included Thomas Maguire, Associate Director of the Center for Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Chicago; Amir Toft, a doctoral student in Near Eastern languages and civilizations at the University of Chicago; and Iman Sedique, a doctoral student in sociology at Northwestern University.

With 74 attendees present for the panel discussion, library staff eventually had to call police to remove a representative from Act! For America who continued to exhibit hostile and disruptive behavior. After a small group of hecklers was removed, the program continued.

During their Muslim Journeys series, the library also offered a book discussion of *Minaret*, a screening and discussion of *Islamic Art: Mirror of the Invisible World*, a performance by the Jasmin Jahal Dance Troupe, a presentation of “Songs & Stories from Mesopotamia & Ancient Egypt,” and three panels featuring humanities scholars from the University of Chicago.

In the words of Diane Srebro, assistant head of adult services, “The library is pleased that the Muslim Journeys Bookshelf grant drew high attendance figures to programs. The books, videos, and reference sources enhanced the collection for adult library users [and a] series of programs mixing hard topics with festive activities served to promote the 25 bookshelf selections. The significance of [Muslim Journeys] to the community was summarized by a *Southtown Star* columnist, Phil Kadner. He wrote ‘A Thank You to Orland Park Library,’ which was published on Thursday, August 29, 2013. Kadner noted the necessity for education and programming to assist the population in learning about Islam and understanding the culture of Muslims who live in Orland Park. ... The Bridging Cultures: Muslim Journeys Bookshelf was noted to be a success.”

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E. Continued Programming

Although the grant term for Muslim Journeys has ended, the collection materials and resources continue to support and inspire additional programs across the county. Below are three examples of continued Muslim Journeys programming.

Michigan State University Libraries and East Lansing Public Library

Following their Muslim Journeys grant experience, the East Lansing Public Library, MSU Libraries, and leaders from the Islamic community on campus and in the Lansing area launched the Muslim Journeys Book Club in October 2015. The club meets several times during the academic year to discuss books important to Muslims or addressing issues important to Muslims, and features speakers from MSU's faculty followed by group discussions.

"The idea is to bring people together around a book so that, even if you're not Muslim and know very little about Islam, you'll have read the book and have something to talk about," Middle Eastern studies and anthropology librarian Deborah Margolis said.

The club's participating faculty members hope to educate Muslims and non-Muslims alike about the misconceptions many Muslim people face.

"There are many misconceptions about Muslims in America, and there are many misconceptions among Muslims about America," director of MSU's Muslim Studies Program Mohammad Khalil said. "These kinds of programs are meant to improve the discourse."

After their Muslim Journeys grant program ended, the desire to continue studying Islam and Muslim experiences remained among those involved. A schedule of upcoming programs is available on the book club website, at <https://www.lib.msu.edu/node/4371/>.

Somerville Public Library, Somerville, Massachusetts

Since their Muslim Journeys grant concluded, the Somerville Public Library has established plans to loan its complete Let's Talk About It book collection to three additional libraries in Massachusetts for implementation of additional Muslim Journeys reading and discussion series. Important work related to the project continues in Somerville as well.

"In light of local Islamophobia, the head of the Human Rights Commission for the City of Somerville asked [the library] to continue doing programs similar to those in Muslim Journeys as a complement to their work," said Kevin Kelly, Reference and Community Languages Librarian at the Somerville Public Library. In April 2015, the library began this work by hosting a lecture titled "The Rise of Islamic Feminists," which was presented by Elizabeth Segran and filmed by SCATV Somerville. Dr. Segran is staff writer at *Fast Company*, whose work has also appeared in *The Atlantic*, *Foreign Policy*, *Foreign Affairs*, *The Nation*, *The New Republic*, and *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Her book, *The River Speaks*, was published in 2012 by Penguin Books. In June 2015, as part of Gay Pride month, the library hosted a screening of *A Jihad for Love*, a documentary about LGBT Muslims. Upcoming program schedules are available on the [library's website](#).

Maine Humanities Council, Portland, Maine

The Maine Humanities Council has continued circulating its Muslim Journeys collection materials throughout the state, well beyond the grant term. In September 2015, the Lewiston Public Library kicked off a Muslim Journeys film series with a showing of the HBO documentary *Koran by Heart*. The film was followed by a short discussion led by Reza Jalali, the Coordinator of Multicultural Student Affairs at the University of Southern Maine. The film series at the Lewiston Public Library is supported by a grant from the Maine Humanities Council. Additional Muslim Journeys film screenings supported by the Council will occur in libraries and other nonprofit organizations throughout 2016.

The Maine Humanities Council also continues supporting Let's Talk About It: Muslim Journeys reading and discussion series throughout the state, in partnership with the Maine State Library. As part of the council's long-running Let's Talk About It programming, they will continue loaning the Muslim Journeys books to libraries, identifying scholar facilitators, providing publicity materials, and offering advice on organizing and publicizing programs.





Evaluation

In August 2014, NEH provided ALA with additional funding to support a third-party evaluation of the Muslim Journeys initiative. ALA selected New Knowledge Organization (NKO) to perform this comprehensive, summative evaluation.

NKO pursued a two-phase, mixed-methods approach, employing parallel qualitative and quantitative assessments. During the first phase of the evaluation, NKO completed a critical review of all project documents to explore aggregate learning inferred from submitted reports, anticipated claims related to public impact, and open questions related to the project outcomes suggested in the social science literature. This phase also included collaborative development of a set of evaluation tools for, and a cycle of communication with, sites that received two Let's Talk About It: Muslim Journeys grants.

During the second phase of evaluation, NKO distributed co-developed program evaluation forms to LTAI series attendees, library administrations, local scholars, and community partners. Additionally, the evaluators convened six online discussion forums for grant administrators to explore programming impacts, and conducted critical case study explorations at ten sites that hosted an LTAI series.

Highlights from “The Impacts of Muslim Journeys: Summary Final Report” prepared by New Knowledge Organization include the following.

Bookshelf Outcomes

- Libraries valued the [Bookshelf reading list](#), which offered reliable, scholarly recommendations for use in collection development and in reading and discussion programs to support active learners.
- Attendance at events and discussions drew audiences of similar scale to other discussion groups in both academic settings and public libraries.
- Project directors felt the Bookshelf collections offered intellectual depth, introduced new content that was engaging for readers, addressed key cultural issues, and helped deepen conversations in many communities.
- Some libraries used the materials to start cultural collaborations with Islamic, Middle Eastern, and North African community organizations and developed strategies for reaching other cultural groups based on this new model.
- Academic libraries report that faculty found the collections useful for expanding use of libraries' resources for coursework and helped students and student cultural groups to expand their engagement with their library.
- All libraries felt that ALA and NEH sponsorship and scholarship gave their own efforts credibility, which in some cases dispelled criticism that emerged in several communities.

Let's Talk About It Outcomes

- Core learning groups were small contingents of highly involved lifelong learners with active interest in exploring new ideas and camaraderie. Their reported actions demonstrated that they were most likely to be actively involved in advancing cultural understanding and tolerance in their communities, particularly in places without a lot of diversity.
- LTAI events sparked institutional collaborations with community organizations already working on topics integral to the program mission. These partner organizations added value through supplementary resources, venues, and support – efforts that library staff anticipate will persist beyond the program.
- Some libraries expanded LTAI resources to include hands-on events focused on Muslim cultures' visual art, craft-making, music, poetry, food, and clothing. This experiential programming tended to focus on multicultural communities and successfully introduced the library to new users from the local Muslim community.
- No two programs followed the same strategy. Most were tailored to known community interests, with each project director working with the visiting scholar to develop strategies for engagement around the basic program structure.

Overall Program Value

NKO concluded that the Muslim Journeys program fulfilled the intention of NEH's Bridging Cultures initiative and illustrated possible new directions for assessing the impact of humanities programs on communities. In particular, engaged program attendees actively promoted principles of cultural inclusion in their communities. At a professional level, programming staff, educators, and humanities academics were most likely to advance their own practice when offered carefully curated resources as a point of departure. For library staff and community members, these resources provided valuable assets to launch new collaborations, while disciplinary scholars used the resources to help learners and stimulate new areas of study.

Future Evaluation Strategy Recommendations

NKO's report suggests ways that ALA might refine their evaluation strategies for future programs.

- Most libraries employ post-event surveys for evaluation, which may limit data. Some question structures may also elicit only positive responses. NKO recommends a two-part evaluation process including a brief group reflection facilitated by LTAI scholars or project directors followed by a simple survey. This survey would ask two questions: how the program worked best and how it might be improved.
- Rather than rely on recollection by project directors, NKO recommends gathering frequent short observations after each program to increase dataset accuracy and range of outcomes.

Future Program Recommendations

- Project directors requested greater detail on the background of the project, clarification about why specific deliverables were sought, and detail on the scholarly decision-making that led to the selections. They felt this information would help them attract potential audiences and address challenges from detractors.
- Leaders would like an online forum to share new ideas and adaptations to help them discuss local conditions, such as tactics for delivery or methods for engaging with new local partnerships.
- Scholars felt a shared set of program guiding questions would support participants in placing their own cultural story in relation to the program readings.

Complete Third-Party Evaluation Reports

The full text of “The Impacts of Muslim Journeys: Summary Final Report” may be found as Appendix C. This document includes complete information about NKO’s field work, copies of all instruments used during program evaluation, as well as additional recommendations to ALA and NEH for gathering reporting information from libraries during future programming initiatives.



Patrons applaud performers at a Muslim Journeys event in Walnut Creek, California.