



Just for fun, Ilene tries on the hat!



Oliver and the boys try their hand at needlepoint



Ava writes with a feather

## Los Perales Students Return to the 1850s

By Lee Borrowman

**D**ressed in jeans, plaid shirts and straw hats, or in gingham, aprons and braids, the boys and girls in Margrethe Ramirez's 3rd grade class at Los Perales last week got a little taste of what life may have been like for students in the days of one-room school houses, goose-quill pens and dunce caps.

For two days, the students and their teacher dressed for their roles as pioneers. Children were assigned parts to play as members of various pioneer families, from poor immigrant farmers to shopkeepers and wealthy ranchers.

The usual clustered table groups were separated and lined up to resemble rows of benches, on which sat the children ordered by age and gender. Girls were allowed to go first in everything, much to their delight. Boys had to learn when it was appropriate to

move their hats. Classroom lights were left off.

In an illustration of the rote memorization and recitation practices of the day, Ramirez asked her students to learn a short poem for their homework. The following day, each and every child in turn stood alone at the front of the classroom and recited the poem. A round of applause rewarded a successful attempt. When one slipped up, the entire class recited the poem again. Twenty students and half again as many recitations later, it seemed unlikely that any would ever forget "Trees."

Quill pens proved to be something of a challenge for many of the students. Fortunately for their parents, the children were armed only with washable ink. Needle-point turned out to be a more manageable endeavor, as

did writing with "charcoal" on slates. Ramirez also read aloud to the class, conducted a traditional spelling bee and led the children in a lively game of Ring Toss, among numerous other activities.

The students prepared for the simulation by studying about the pioneers. They read books such as "Sarah, Plain and Tall," and a section of their social studies textbook entitled, "If You Traveled West in a Covered Wagon."

Although technology did occasionally intrude, in the form of period music emanating from a cd player, Ramirez successfully created as real an historical experience as children in a modern classroom could have, as evidenced by the excitement of the students for the project and their subsequent renewed appreciation for life in the 21st century.

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