

## **Lansdowne kids take imaginary wagon train Westward**

European settlers and Native Americans exchanged skills and shared customs last week at Lansdowne Elementary, where fifth-graders “traveled” to Oregon on wagon trains.

Lansdowne had secured a Vision 2020 grant for an artist-in-residence from the [Lexington Children’s Theatre](#), so the school invited education director Jeremy Kisling to lead a week-long drama workshop. The kids used role play, simple props and problem-solving skills involving geography, culture, the environment and economics as they studied the Westward Movement.

“Our bodies, our voices and our imaginations are our performing elements we use to become other characters,” Kisling reminded one group of youngsters Friday. “As we did our scenes on the Oregon Trail, we improvised.”

Throughout the week, the students were divided into family groups for their journey. They talked about what supplies they’d need and how much it would cost, pantomimed scenes of the rocky terrain and harsh weather conditions, and improvised a bear sneaking into camp to steal food.

“I think they’re really grasping the drama elements,” said Lindsay Thomas, their social studies teacher.

Kisling also taught the kids a few Native American words and signs, and they compared Native American and European forms of government, religion, food, art and medicine.

For the wrap-up exercise, Kisling – who brought along a few costumes from the Children’s Theatre – asked the settler students to show their Native American counterparts a new skill in exchange for safe passage through their land.

“Our imagination is a tool, so we have to develop and grow it,” he told the kids. “It’s especially important to us as artists.”