

EDUCATION

# Westward ho!

BY JON POMPIA  
THE PUEBLO CHIEFTAIN

## Fourth-graders take a rustic virtual reality tour

There were forts to be explored, covered wagons to ride in, campsites to warm up to and cattle ranches needing a hand.

All from the comfy confines of a West Side classroom.

For Irving Elementary School fourth-graders, Thursday's Digital Learning Day offered the eye-opening, mind-expanding experience that is Google Expeditions — an immersive virtual reality tour through historical locales both far, and in this particular case, closer to home.

As in, "Go West, young man and woman," and be sure to drop in on Colorado.

"We're just launching this brand-new virtual reality lab, which is available districtwide," said Paula Herraez, a 21st Century Skills coach with Pueblo City Schools (D60.) "The goal is to build their background knowledge with images in order to increase their educational achievement."

Herraez said the program comes to the district with a minimal investment, as D60 technology personnel repurposed old phones to serve as gateways into the wonderful new, and old, worlds.

"What do you see in that room? Get your face in there so you can see it," fourth-grade teacher Mitty Solano said as she used an iPad to guide her charges through an incredibly realistic 3-D western cabin. "Look at their utensils. Look at their gun. You can see all of the things they used. But you won't see a cellphone there."

Another stop on the western tour was a gritty

**RIGHT: Kiana Jaramillo, 10, a fourth-grade student at Irving, uses virtual reality teaching tool glasses as she learns about the Old West. The goal is to build pupils' background knowledge with images to increase their educational achievement.**



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**Irvin Prieto, 9 (right), prepares to take part in the Google Expeditions Digital Learning Day lesson with a focus on Colorado history at Irving Elementary School on Thursday.**

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blacksmith shop, which immediately generated a burst of excitement among the young men.

"This is where they make the weapons!"

"Like spears."

"And axes."

"And knives."

"Blacksmithing," Solano interjected, "was an important craft. Blacksmiths learned to create and repair metal objects, including wheels, horseshoes, axes, guns, knives and other critical tools."

Indeed, inside the

shop were nearly touchable knives, axes, guns and other tools of the hunting and protection trade.

With other important stops on the sensational horizon — including those involving cattle, canoes, corn and Clark (with Lewis) — the

fourth-graders were predictably filled with excitement.

"So far, the thing that was most exciting was that we could go to a field and then experience what the Indians and the fur trappers

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were experiencing,” said Joshua Sandoval. “It felt like I was really there, which you can’t always get from a book.”

While the virtual cabin rooms had most of the creature comforts available in 1850, Mia Ceras-Carrillo said that while she found exploring interesting, there’s still no place like home.

“I liked to see the rooms to see how they did stuff,” Mia offered. “But their beds looked kind of uncomfortable and rough so I prefer my bed and my room.

“I’m sure it’s a lot warmer, too.”

*jpompia@chieftain.com*