

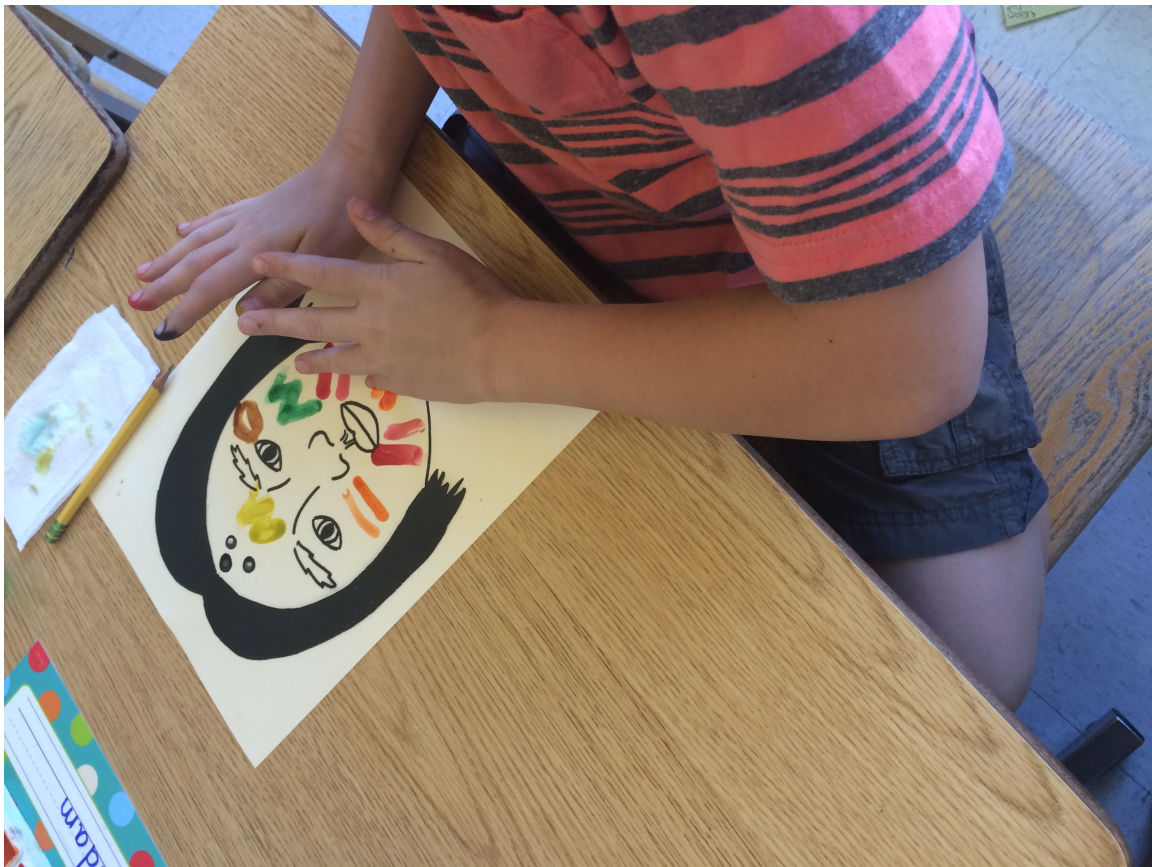
While driving along Moraga Road in downtown Lafayette one morning, you may catch the curious sight of a woman leading a group of schoolchildren down the street, holding a bullhorn and wearing a pioneer dress from the 1850's.

That woman is LPIE teacher Michelle Chan, who has been leading Lafayette third graders on a tour of the historical sites of the town for almost 10 years. The tour is part of the third grade curriculum, which includes the history of Lafayette.

LPIE has been providing Lafayette history instruction to the elementary schools for the past 20 years. The program includes three in-class lessons taught by LPIE instructor Mary McCosker, followed by a tour of downtown Lafayette and the Lafayette cemetery.

Third graders from Lafayette Elementary and Springhill took the course this fall, while third graders from Burton Valley and Happy Valley will do theirs in the spring.

McCosker, who has authored many books on the history of Lafayette including *A Town Called Lafayette – A Child's Historical Study*, says the classes and tours are a fun way for students to connect history with their hometown.



A third grader from Lafayette Elementary shows how Lafayette's indigenous people painted their faces with symbols.

“They love looking at a picture of an old building from pioneer times and when you show them what it looks like today it’s like turning on a light bulb,” she says.

McCosker conducts three different lessons in the classroom for each of the third grades. During the first lesson, the students learn about the Saklans, who were the indigenous people of the area. They do a Saklan face painting project and follow it up by writing a story about them.

Next, she does a lesson on the pioneer people who came to Lafayette in 1846. She talks about how the pioneers got here and what their life was like. That includes no electricity, plumbing or heating in the homes. Going to school was a privilege as most children worked on farms.

In the final class lesson, McCosker shows street maps of Lafayette and where the children can see the locations of significant historical sites. She then passes around artifacts from the period like old pocket watches and button-up shoes so that the students can get more of a feel for the history.



Students explore maps of Lafayette and build chalkboards that students used in pioneer times.

“Everything that we talk about is local. And it really is much more meaningful than just hearing about it in a book,” she says.

Finally, the students go on a tour of Lafayette with Michelle Chan, who takes them to historical landmarks such as the storefronts in Plaza Park, which used to house a pioneer store, hotel and grist mill. After the walking portion of the tour, students then drive with their chaperones to the Lafayette Cemetery to see gravesites of some of the town’s historical figures.

The highlight of the tour is going to Lafayette’s third schoolhouse (which is now the Lafayette United Methodist Church on Moraga Road) where Chan lets the students ring the bell in the church’s steeple.

Lafayette Elementary third grade teacher Melissa Barclay said her students not only enjoyed the LPIE lessons and walking tour, but most importantly, still remember many of the facts they learned during the unit.

“As a teacher I was excited to see how much the students retained from the in-class lessons,” says Barclay. “It speaks to the fact that students learn best when the subject is meaningful and relevant to them. Getting to walk through history makes it even better!”