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Singer and songwriter Ann Zimmerman calls on a student Monday at Washington Elementary School in Hays. The Harvard-educated performer visited students to help them learn about area history for Kansas Day.

Singer, songwriter leads Kansas Day lesson

By JUDY SHERARD
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Washington Elementary School students mixed entertainment and fun with their Kansas Day lessons during a visit Monday from Salina singer and songwriter Ann Zimmerman.

Zimmerman has been performing since her childhood when she and her brothers sang in schools with their mother.

She's been performing professionally as a solo for about five years and also conducts workshops in lyric writing for students.

"Everything is fresh and new for kids. You can tell them stories that

older kids and adults would roll their eyes over, and kids get all excited about (them)," Zimmerman said.

Kansas Day is Thursday Zimmerman's performance is fun, entertaining and educational, said Brenda Meder, director of the Hays Arts Council, which presented the program.

Zimmerman wove stories about pioneers and life on the windy plains into historical songs about Kansas. The students learned how the pioneers captured the essence of summer by canning garden produce to eat in the winter. Then she sang a song illustrating the settlers' thrift in reusing items by turning a worn

coat into a jacket, shirt, vest, tie, button and finally the song.

Another song told of the settlers' ability to adapt to their new surroundings. Most traveled from the East, bringing their belongings in a covered wagon, expecting to build wood houses. Since there were few trees on the plains, they made sod houses instead. Zimmerman used a song about the leather hinges on the wooden door for the lesson.

For the finale Zimmerman and the youngsters sang the state song, "Home on the Range."

Zimmerman won the 2002 and 2003 Flint Hills Gathering songwriting contests, has recorded two

albums and is working on a third. Zimmerman earned an elementary education degree from Kansas State University and was a classroom teacher. She also has a law degree from Harvard.

She is a partner with her husband Dexter Eggers in Eggers & Zimmerman Law and Mediation and in E Bar Z Stables.

Performances sponsored by the Kansas Arts Commission and A-1 Plank & Scaffolding, also were scheduled at the other elementary schools in the county. The Victoria performance on Monday was canceled because of bad weather, but Meder planned to try to reschedule it.