

Rancho Cucamonga school group's creative silliness earns trip to Iowa for Odyssey of Mind finals

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Grapeland Elementary School fourth- and fifth-graders Mekenna Schiaretti, rear, Nico Garcia, front left, Eija Kumlander, front center, Madelyn Coelho, front right, Cole Schiaretti, standing center, and Emily Aurangzeb, far right, practice their performance for the Odyssey of the Mind 2012 World Finals. (Will Lester/Staff Photographer)

RANCHO CUCAMONGA - Grapeland Elementary School's Eija Kumlander, 11, is playing the part Hamletta in a performance piece with six other classmates. Like Hamlet, Hamletta has a dilemma. She has to decide whether to sit in the front-row 2B seat at a baseball game or not.

You know, 2B or not 2B.

Sounds silly?

Well, it is.

Eija and the student group Odyssey of the Mind revel in silliness. They are more than happy to let their guard down in exchange for a few laughs.

It's this silliness that gave the group the opportunity to go to Iowa State University, where they will compete in the Odyssey of the Mind world finals next month.

The New Jersey-based Odyssey of the Mind is an educational program that encourages team-building and creative problem-solving.

Teams formed around the world work throughout the school year to create a project in the categories of mechanical, technical, performance and others.

Members of the Grapeland team put their brains together for an eight-minute musical theater piece based on William Shakespeare's famous line "To be or not to be."

Everything from the idea of the play to the props were imagined and created by the students. Madelyn Coelho, 10, learned how to saw pieces of an unwanted fence and transformed them into stadium seating.

Team coach Heidi Schiaretti said her role is merely to coax and guide the students.

"When they want to jump off the diving board, that's where I come in and ask, 'Is that logical?'" Schiaretti said.

The play is about Hamletta's dilemma. She is offered a ticket upgrade at a baseball game and decides to take it and leave her friend behind in the nose-bleed section. But once she takes her coveted seat, Hamletta finds herself next to an obnoxious guy talking on his cell phone and a new mother with a baby throwing up.

In Palms Springs, the Grapeland group won the regional competition to qualify for the statewide contest near San Francisco.

"When we won state, we were all slapping ourselves in the face," Madelyn said.

From May 23 to 26, the group will compete against their peers from all corners of the globe.

Emily Aurangzeb, 10, said the best part of the trip will be to travel with her friends.

"Winning would be a bonus," Emily said.

"We don't want to jinx it," Eija said.

But others are more confident about their chances in Iowa.

"We're going to bet all the corn that we're going to win," said Nico Garcia, 11.

The seven-member team, led by coaches Robyn Coelho-Smith and Heidi Schiaretti, consists of Emily Aurangzeb, Madelyn Coelho, Jack Connor, Nico Garcia, Eija Kumlander, Cole Schiaretti and Mekenna Schiaretti. The Grapeland Elementary group is currently looking for sponsors for the Iowa trip. Call the school at 909-463-7026 for more information.

Reach Wendy [via email](#), or call her at 909-483-9376, or find her on Twitter [@RanchoNow](#).