

Integrating Literature and the Social Studies with Google Lit Trips

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When young people read or hear stories in the classroom, their interest is easily peaked. However, sustaining that interest and attention through a related social studies lesson is more of a challenge. Instructional approaches that enrich the context of stories and forge students' connections with the characters extend learning in meaningful ways. New digital tools offer teachers opportunities to simultaneously foster spatial intelligence while nurturing children's sense of wonder about place and location.

One English teacher, Jerome Burg, allowed his secondary students to become immersed in the literary adventures of the characters by using Google Earth and other integrated web-based resources. Burg termed these literary explorations "Lit-Trips." He created a Google Lit Trips website (www.googlelittrips.org/), which provides free access to pre-made Lit Trips for a range of books relevant to different subjects and grade levels.¹ Additionally, the website offers resources to guide teachers in designing their own Lit Trips, as well as structure learning experiences that combine digital mapping tools with the study of novels to enrich connections to literature as well as geographic content.

Through hands-on explorations of a text that has been enhanced with satellite imagery of the setting, videos of relevant content, and photographs, students become much more deeply immersed in the story and the related social studies

content.² The Google Lit trip is a mash-up of digital resources. Burg appropriated Google Earth to create "literary road maps that find a way to put students 'right in the back seat' of an unfolding journey."³ These "road maps" illustrate the geographic movements of characters in a story via satellite images focused on areas featured in the text. The settings of selected stories are traced to real places, and students are better able to visualize the evolution of the plot.









Another powerful aspect of this tool is the capacity to integrate visual representations. Visual information enhances students' understanding; and, in fact, can be processed more rapidly than textual information.⁴ Google Lit trips optimize the blending of knowledge from text, global navigation tools, and visual Internet resources (i.e., images, video, and web links). Integrating geographic representations allows students to "play" with static text and to see the literary

work in a new way (making connections to relevant and authentic places).

We have worked with elementary and secondary classroom teachers to design instruction that uses the settings of stories to infuse spatial learning throughout the year as well as introduce geographic vocabulary and concepts. A primary grade example details the creation of a new Lit Trip with accompanying simulation activities, and a secondary level exemplar describes implementation of a pre-made journey into instruction.

Google Lit Trips in the Elementary Classroom

In order to deepen the students' connection to literature and actively engage them in the learning process, hands-on simulation activities were designed as part of a Google Lit trip. After exploring pre-existing Lit Trips and learning how to plot the journey of characters on Google Earth by adding images, audio, and text to the place markers found on the mapping tool, a team of primary grade teachers created their own virtual expedition based on the book *How to Make an Apple Pie and See the World* by Marjorie Priceman. This book tells a story of a young baker who travels the world in search of all the ingredients necessary to

Ingredient	Place	Continent	Transportation
wheat 	Italy	Europe	Steamship 
eggs 	France		
cinnamon 			Any way you can
milk 			
salt 			
sugar 			
apples 			

How many continents are there on Earth? _____

Write the names of all the continents.

How many of the continents did you visit on your trip? _____

What ocean did you cross when you traveled from America to Italy?



The story said that you should take "any way you can" to get to Sri Lanka. What do you think would be the best form of transportation to get from Sri Lanka to England?

bake an apple pie. The story integrates literature with geography by introducing students to continents, countries, natural resources, and various modes of transportation.

In a Google Lit Trip, place marks are set at locations where events occur, and text, images, and/or hyperlinks may be added in a pop-up window at each mark. The teachers reviewed the book and used post-its to mark the locations in the text where interesting digital resources might extend students' appreciation. They selected websites with supplemental information and learning activities, crafted thought-provoking questions, and identified vocabulary to highlight. This content was then imbedded in the pop-up window of the place marks. The

place marks were linked with the pathway tool to guide the students as they traveled on the same journey as the character in the book.

In the Google Lit Trip for *How to Make an Apple Pie and See the World*, the first place marker prepared students for their trip and involved them in hands-on activities to track their journey through the story right along with the character:

Homemade apple pie is amazing. But we are unable to make it because the market is closed.

But what better way to make apple pie than to view the world while doing so.

Before we can get started, we first need to make our passport! Use the materials provided to put together your passport, and be sure to let your teacher see the

final product! Don't forget, at each stop you need to put the name of the country and its flag in your passport!

At the next major location, the place mark featured the outline of the country of Italy. In Italy, the young baker in the story was in search of semolina wheat. Similarly, the children in the class discussed how wheat was needed to make the flour for their pie. Embedded in the place mark was an excerpt from the story, a picture of Italy, and a link to www.wheatfoods.org/FlashForKids/index.html, which guided the children to more information on the milling process. Children also learned to recognize the distinctive shape of Italy by matching the correct outline of the country with the resource collected at the site.

At each place marker, the children responded to the following questions to reinforce the geography concepts they learned:

Where does the young baker travel next? How will she get there?

In search of the finest ingredients, the class then "traveled" to France, where they collected eggs and linked to <http://kids.nationalgeographic.com/kids/places/find/france/> to learn facts about the country. The children then joined the baker in heading deep into the rainforest of Sri Lanka, where they were reminded to stay very quiet to avoid an encounter with a napping leopard beneath a Kurundu tree. Just as the baker in the story gathered cinnamon from a tree, the children explored spices indigenous to Sri Lanka at a learning center which was set up with sight and smell samples of cloves, cardamom, pepper, nutmeg, curry leaves, mace, ginger and cinnamon.

The next stop was England, where the baker made the acquaintance of a cow to secure milk needed to make the pie. The students also learned about production and distribution of milk from the dairy to the supermarket at www.moomilk.com/teachers-resources/75-dairy-farm-game. As the trip continued, salt was collected from the Atlantic Ocean, and the baker and students traveled to Jamaica, where they learned about the processing



Recommended Resources

To begin creating lessons with Google Lit Trips, only a few basic skills are needed to put students in the front seat of these dynamic “road trips.” The following resources provide hints and tutorials to help teachers refine the craft of developing lively, integrated instruction that optimizes the exploration of geography with great literature.

- Google Lit Trip, www.googlelittrips.org/
- Creating Place Marks in a Google Lit Trip, www.youtube.com/watch?v=3l4y0xfiA3Y
- Adding Images in Google Lit Trips, www.youtube.com/watch?v=chm38KqK4KY&feature=channel
- Google Lit Tutorial, www.teachertube.com/viewVideo.php?video_id=80819

of sugar cane to prepare sugar for their pie. Then it was back to the United States to pick apples in Vermont. After tasting a variety of apples, the students in class reviewed all of the ingredients that they had collected along their travels.

At the end of the journey, students completed a handout to link the resource collected at each site with the country as well as the mode of transportation by which the character traveled to the location. (See the image on page 112.) The multimedia content, critical thinking questions, and hands-on exercises optimized an active learning approach that engaged students in exploring literature within the context of geography.

Google Lit Trips in the Secondary Classroom

In an 11th grade U.S. history course, we collaborated with a teacher to develop assignments that employed an existing

Google Lit Trip that was downloaded from the site and saved as a KML (Keyhole Markup Language) file that could be emailed, burned to a CD, or transferred via flash drive.

Marching for Freedom tells the story of how ordinary youth helped change history. Award-winning author Elizabeth Partridge draws on the vivid recollections of children who marched for civil rights from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama. (See the image on this page.) In this illustrated trip, biographical information and quotations from the text were combined with the satellite imagery to hone the students’ map-reading skills as they drew connections between place, story, and historical events. After reading the book, the Google Lit Trip allowed the students to physically visualize the progression of the events, chart the geographic movement of the young people, and draw parallels to their own

life experiences. As the students traced the trip, the addition of historical videos, web links, photographs, and critical thinking questions led students to have a fuller appreciation of the political and personal conflicts surrounding the event. They read with greater purpose and even suggested the addition of other place markers, using the search feature of Google Earth to identify associated sites and researching supporting documentation on the web. The place markers that students added included quoted material from the text and their own reflections on the events. Not only did the learning experience cultivate their reading and writing skills, but they also began to view travel in literature as something that had purpose and relevance. 📍

Notes

1. Jerome Burg, Google Earth Lit-Trips: A Different Way to Read Great Literature, www.googlelittrips.org (2009); Terence Cavanaugh and Jerome Burg have recently authored *Bookmapping: Lit Trips and Beyond*, which will be available in April 2011 from ISTE, www.iste.org/store/product.aspx?ID=1689.
2. Anna Adam and Helen Mowers, “Got the World on a Screen: Google Earth Serves up More Than a Geography Lesson,” *School Library Journal* 53, no. 4 (2007): 40-42; Lauren Barack, “The Earth, Classroom-Sized,” *School Library Journal* 52, no. 6 (2006): 28; Judy Britt and Gus LaFontaine, “Google Earth: A Virtual Globe for Elementary Geography,” *Social Studies and the Young Learner* 21, no. 4 (2009): 20-23; Jill Casteck and Jessica Mangelson, “Thinking Outside the Book: Reading the World with Google Earth,” *Book Links* 15, no. 5 (2008): 40-41; Melissa Wert and Scottie Girgus, “Traveling the Novel,” *Learning & Leading with Technology* 36, no. 6 (2009): 34-35.
3. Suzie Boss, “Google Lit Trips: Bringing Travel Tales to Life,” www.edutopia.org/google-lit-trips-virtual-literature (2008).
4. Chris Castiglione, “New Media Project: Information Visualization,” www.ccastig.com/wp/wp-content/uploads/2009/10/Google-Earth-and-Maps-in-the-Classroom_Castiglione.pdf (2009).

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