In the Classroom 97
Using Lit Trips in Your Classroom

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Stan Skrabut: Well, thanks for taking the time to listen to this podcast, it certainly means a lot. I know you could be doing other things, perhaps you are, but you're still hanging out with me and I really do appreciate it. Have you ever read a history book or a historical novel or even just a novel and wondered where these places were that they spoke about? Have you ever ever had a desire to tell your own story and show people parts of your story on a map? Well, I have and this leads us into this week's podcast episode.

This week we are going to take a deeper dive into lit trips. What is a lit trip? Well, basically you plot the location from a book to Google Earth. You can then follow the journey of the characters, it helps to bring the stories to life. You can then export the file and share it with others. This allows you to create a 3D tour of the story, it also augments the story, provides additional information that may not have been in the original story.

English teacher and technology integration coordinator, Jerome Berg, helped to develop this concept and put it on the map, and I'm sharing it with you. For example, I have started to do this. I read the book called *The Liberator*, it is a historical text, it follows the journey of Felix Sparks, commanding officer of one of the units. Basically, I followed his journey and plotted it on Google Earth.

This gave me a better perspective of where he was and the obstacles he had to face during these battles during World War II. Sometimes these things are hard to imagine but being able to put it on a map and see the terrain helps you do that. With Google Earth, you have an opportunity to get a close-up look of a place that you could not get from a normal map. Now we've used these large maps to show where units were placed in World War II.

Google Earth takes you down to the building, which I think is quite fascinating. When you're looking at one of these lit trips, all you do is double click on one of the links, and it will take you right to that place and it'll zoom right in and show you what the terrain looks like and where it's located in reference to everything else that's going on. I did this also for another book called *The Secret Rescue*, and I was able to follow the daring rescue of nurses who were trapped behind Nazi lines during World War II because their plane had crashed.

In this lit trip, there was actually three storylines that I plotted. One was the major group of nurses, the bulk of them, but there was a smaller group that was separated and had to follow their path, but also the path of the rescuers who came to look for them. Absolutely fascinating story, a piece of history that I had not seen before and that's how I did that. I organized that particular story by the three different storylines.

For the Felix Spark story, I organized it by chapter. Each chapter, I would plot out and as you were going through the book chapter by chapter, you can see what was going on. Now after I had done this for the Felix Sparks story, after I have done this for the nurses, I turned both of them on, on Google Earth and it was interesting to see that they were in the same area roughly at the same time and probably never had a chance to meet each other but I thought that was interesting to see how these different stories overlapped.

Depending on your level of sophistication, you can simply plot points on Google Earth and have your students quickly locate a specific region. Maybe you're talking about Mayan Ruins or the Aztecs, you can put points on the map to where those ruins are. When you double click, it will take you right down to the ruins, and show you where they are. If you're following a story, you can also add lines and other shapes.

These lines could be used to show the path if they're on a journey, for example. If you're talking about specific regions, you can draw shapes around those regions to identify those particular reasons. All the elements can be named and you can add rich descriptions that include text, links, videos, images and you can turn these into lesson activities where you are asking questions right in the descriptions of things that you want your students to focus on.

Now the most complex enhancement to Google Earth is using overlays. There are a number of historians who have done an admirable job with this basically like battlefields that they would take a map of the battlefield and show where the placements of units were and just overlay it, I've found these to be quite interesting. The nice thing is once you create one, you can just add it to your library and you can keep building on these.

Google Earth can be used on desktop computers or laptops, desktops, even Chromebooks. You can also access it from Chromebook. Basically, the file types that you're looking for are KMZ files or KML file, those are two file types that you can use to see how these lit trips were put together. Over the next few minutes, I'm going to share some graduated approaches that you can use to incorporate lit trips into your classroom.

Number one, use lit trips that other people have created. This is probably the simplest way that you can use a search on Google in order to find lit trips that somebody else has created and then you can open them up in Google Earth, you can look at them. You can also then further enhance them, if you wish. If you do a search on the internet for a book title and the phrase KMZ, you should be able to determine if someone created a lit trip for that book.

Some of the books that I know that have lit trips out there for them is *The Grapes of Wrath* by Steinbeck. You have *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley and *Make Way for Ducklings* which is an interesting story following the travels of these ducks up in Boston. I thought that was cool, being able to do that. These lit trips are based on different ages or different age groups from K through 20. You can find different lit trips that are already out there.

Cool thing about it, stories are already written all, you're doing is or all they're doing is bringing these stories to life by showing real places, real locations. You're basically augmenting what already exists. I talked about augmented reality in a previous episode so I will put that in the show notes. Definitely go check it out. The way that you augment this is with images or sights and sounds, just bring it to life.

If you do a search for KMZ, you will also realize that Google Earth is used more than for lit trips. There's all data repositories that use KMZ files to present information but we're going to focus on lit trips. The first one is using lit trips that other people have created. The next step is to create your own lit trips, and even when creating your own lit trips, this can be a graduated process.

One of the first ways is just simply plot points that are referencing locations in the book. You plot a point on Google Earth, these would be places that you want students to explore in more detail. When you plot a location, you will at least want to note the location and maybe provide a little bit of a description to that. There are two basic ways that you can create your KMZ file: you can plot directly to Google Earth, or you can use Excel and convert it into a KMZ file, and then import it in Google Earth.

Different reasons why you would want to do that, the easiest-- Well, each is got their pros and cons. To plot on Google Earth, you would basically pin a location and fill out the information that is provided when you create that pin, a title of the location and possibly a description. That would add it to basically a menu. There's a menu on the left-hand side, and it would add to that menu.

You can just control the order of that list on the left to guide students. If you had them working from top to bottom, you would guide them to each of those different posts. For plotting for using Excel, and I've provided these in the show notes, there's links to articles that explain how to use Excel to capture the different points that you want to put on the map and also how to include images and other HTML content. Definitely check that out if you want to do that.

Basically, you would create an Excel table and export it as plain text and you would rename it to a KML file that you could import into Google Earth. Nice thing about doing it this way is you or your students could work, say, starting with a Google spreadsheet and use it as a collaborative activity where they're collecting information, they're writing it up and it could be that you're collecting information dealing with a history project for a local area. You put all this information in the spreadsheet.

Once the students have determined the information is accurate put it in a spreadsheet and pull it up to Google Earth. That's one way of doing that. Once you have your points set, you can enhance them. As I noted, you can add a description. This can be plain text, if you want, or you can use rich text. To do that, primarily you are going to have to use HTML. HTML is the web coding language and if you want to bold things, if you want to change colors you've got to know how to use HTML to do that.

Fortunately, in the show notes I have sites that will provide examples on how to format those descriptions. We've plotted points, now we've added descriptions to points. The next thing is if you want to show the path of a character's journey, for example, you can connect those paths with lines. From one pin to another, you can connect it with lines, follow different paths to show how somebody travelled.

I've done this with all the lit trips, that I would follow the journey of like Felix Sparks or these nurses, and just follow them from location to location and talk about each. You can use somebody else's lit trips. You can create your own lit trips. The next thing is you can have students create lists and this I think is a wonderful activity for students. They can create their own personal stories.

I've done this in the past, created my own personal story, but they can also research a book and plot these points out and provide descriptions. I think it's just a nice way to expand the knowledge that is out there and available but also brings that book to life. It makes them explore different aspects of a story. If you're talking something, say, in the 1800s or 1700s, not only being able to plot the points but being able to do some research around that, what made that unique and relevant to that particular story.

Finally, for you and your students once you have a lit trip, if you wanted to, you could then do screen casting to turn it into a video. You could walk through your lit trip step-by-step and describe what's going on and what you're seeing and turn that into a video. I did that with my own personal stories and you can see those videos. I put a link to them in the show notes, so feel free to check those out. It gives you an idea of my personal story.

I took that idea from someone else and decided to try doing it. Different ways that you can use lit trips. Few of the different ways that I think you'll find interesting is, first of all, follow characters in a book. You can create a story map. This is where you follow the adventures of a character and plot the locations on Google Earth. You can use different colored pins and lines if you're tracking different characters.

Part of not only providing the location but maybe also the timeline and so you can have that information. When writing out descriptions for these different character points, you can provide descriptions of the area, quotes from the book, other relevant information as necessary. I've also taken many history classes and learned about many people and locations in those classes. Google Earth is a great tool to zoom in to those places.

Using OER content, you can enhance the text with Google Earth. You could combine the map and the content. You could build out a logical map by organizing the content by chapters. On that left-hand menu, like I said, you can move things but you can also create chapters, and then have subpoints under those chapters. You can turn things on and off so you're not showing everything all at once. You can control that.

When you're talking about something in class, you can pull up that Google Earth, do a deep dive right into that location and show it from pretty much ground level, what the terrain looks like, what the relationship is to other places. Basically, you can build

the collection of KMZ files for your use that you could use or your students could use and just keep building out this collection. That's another way there you can do it.

Just different places related to geography, history, literary stories. You can basically build these KMZ files. The other way to do that is just to improve on story telling. Telling personal stories. You or your students can also use Google Earth and screen casting to tell personal stories. As I mentioned, I used it to tell about my growing up in Tunkhannock, Pennsylvania. When I was between the ages of five and 17, I lived in different houses, what we did, the people we played with, and that's just a fascinating experience.

It basically adds to my personal history that I can share with my kids, my grandkids and let them know different things that I did when I was young. I first recommend that you plot your story in a KMZ file. Go to Google Earth that you create this file, and then walk through your story while you're screen casting. My story is in the show notes, so please check it out.

Well, that is it for lit trips. Lot's of different ways that you can do it, from using someone else's lit trips, to creating your own, having students create their own, different reasons why you would use it, follow character stories or plot out history. Just all kinds of great ways to do that, and just get better at telling stories. Speaking of stories, here is a plug for my book.