

How Do I Begin Building a Google Lit Trip?

Building a Google Lit Trip is a little like learning to play chess. It really only requires a few basic skills to get started, while at the same time like chess, one can also spend many hours learning the “craft” of designing and developing more sophisticated projects.

However, it is important to realize that the Google Lit Trip concept is quite broad. Google Lit Trips for elementary use are quite different from Google Lit Trips for university use. Also, Google Lit Trips developed by “professional educators” are significantly different from Google Lit Trips developed by students.

First Things First: Install Google Earth on your Computer

If the Google Earth application isn't already installed on your computer, you can neither build nor view a Google Lit Trip file. Google Earth is free and can be downloaded at: <http://earth.google.com/download-earth.html>. Simply download the application, install it, and you're good to go.

Basic Skill-Set for Working with Google Earth

Though there are several levels of mastery, the basic Google Earth skills necessary for building a Google Lit Trip are having the ability to find locations on Google Earth, being able to mark those locations with place marks and being able to draw paths representing the characters' movements from one location to the next.

An easy way to begin getting up to speed on using Google Earth is to watch the 12 short videos found here: <http://earth.google.com/tour.html>.

Additional short videos can be found here: <http://www.youtube.com/GoogleEarthVideoHelp>.

There are also links to several other Google Earth resources available on the [Google Lit Trip](#) website. Clicking on the Downloads etc. link at the top of any page and then clicking on the [Google Earth Resources](#) link in the sub-menu leads to a list of these resources for those wishing more information about the Google Earth application.

Also in the Downloads etc. area is a section called [Lit Trip Tips](#). In this area are several 1-2 page step-guides focused on specific Google Earth skills useful for building Google Lit Trips.

But, For Those Wanting to Get Really Serious...

Though it is certainly not necessary and many people pride themselves on never doing so, if you really want to get the answers to all questions regarding Google Earth, I'd suggest that sooner or later you read the entire Google Earth user's manual which is available here: <http://earth.google.com/userguide/v5/>. There is a link at the top of the page if you'd like to download and print it, but be sure you have lots of printer ink!

Although the skills required for building Google Lit Trips are not difficult, most people find their first effort more challenging than they had expected. I always advise that potential developers practice with a single chapter from a favorite novel or with a short story until they have a comfort level with the basics of the entire process.

Selecting an Appropriate Title

Since the heart of a Google Lit Trip is marking the locations of a story's settings, simply make certain that the story is set in locations that can be found in Google Earth. Thus, Dante's *Inferno* and *The Hobbit* are out. *Make Way for Ducklings* and *The Kite Runner* are in.

Another basic consideration is whether the characters "travel enough." If the story line does not move around a bit, there is little potential value in creating a Lit *TRIP*. The range of the trip is not important. The Google Lit Trip for *Candide* has the characters globe trotting over three continents while the Lit Trip for *Make Way for Ducklings* has its characters traveling entirely within the city of Boston. But, some movement is necessary. Stories like *Of Mice and Men* or *To Kill A Mockingbird* pose problems since although the locations can be found, the characters spend the vast majority of their respective stories in a relatively static location.

Additionally, it is important to remember that there are stories that use "fictionalized" locations that represent real locations such as *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* where the scholarship informs us that Mark Twain's St. Petersburg is a fictitious name for Hannibal, Missouri and that Jackson's Island is a fictitious name for Glasscock's Island. These titles can certainly be considered, though they may be more challenging in that additional research might need to be done to discover the true locations being masked by fictitious names.

It is important to also note that Google Earth is constantly updating its resources and therefore adding new possibilities for Google Lit Trips. The Sky layer now makes it possible to consider titles set "anywhere" in the known universe! And, after all, since there are at least a couple of resources in Sky that overlay the ancient constellations, it is possible to even consider the possibility of employing the Google Lit Trip concept to ancient mythology! Google Mars and Ocean now open up several additional possibilities for Google Lit Trips.

Collecting Content for a Google Lit Trip

Once you have an understanding of how to use Google Earth's basic navigation controls, place marks, and path tools, and have selected a suitable title to develop, it's time to collect the "content" for your Google Lit Trip.

My particular process for collecting content is to reread the book with a couple of colors of post-its or highlighters. I reserve one color just for references to any locations or hints at locations that will help me pinpoint them on the Google Earth globe where I can set place marks for the journey. I use the other color(s) to mark any reference for which I think I might be able to find:

- interesting images on the internet that might enhance or extend students' appreciation of the story.
- interesting websites that could provide supplementary information on historical or geographical references, biographical information, or cultural connections, etc. appropriate to the story,
- spots where the author is providing good material for thought-provoking questions and class discussion.
- interesting vocabulary use

Actually the possibilities are endless for pop-up window content. But, as a general rule I try to stay away from considering plot summaries as quality pop-up content at least for teacher-generated Google Lit Trips as this tends to remove the students' first opportunity to engage their own minds in appreciating the story.

This is one of the distinctions I make between Google Lit Trips developed by educators and those developed by students. For some students, being able to demonstrate the basic skills of decoding by including plots

summaries might have value. Though even in these cases, I like to advise teachers to *also* encourage students to consider including higher level contents such as speculations about characters' motives or possible future plot developments. Even for the youngest readers, having them include information about "new words" and information that "tells more about" historical events, and locations, and people referenced in the story helps them develop their reading skills beyond decoding levels.

Creating Place Marks

Sometimes, I collect all the content information for a title before beginning to create the actual place marks. Other times I "toggle" back and forth between collecting the content information and creating the place marks. For example, in complex works, I prefer to work chapter by chapter or "scene by scene."

In the [Lit Trips Tips](#) section of the Google Lit Trip website, the following step-guides are useful during this phase:

- [Finding Hard Location on Google Earth](#)
- [Making the Most Out of Place Marker Icons](#)
- [Formatting Place Marker Descriptions](#)
- [Capturing the Best Location View](#)

Other good resources for creating Place Marks include the following video clips available on the Internet:

- [Fly to any place](#)
- [Marking locations in Google Earth](#)

Including Images in Google Lit Trip Pop-Up Windows

The basic technical aspects of including images in a Google Lit Trip place mark pop-up window are explained in the [Formatting Place Marker Descriptions](#) step-guide found in the [Lit Trip Tips](#) section of the GoogleLitTrips.com website.

However, including images also raises ethical considerations regarding copyright issues. For this reason, when I am looking for appropriate images for a Google Lit Trip, I like to begin my search in the following websites since they are vast collections of images that provide clear information on the images copyright status, and they feature images that have some degree of copyright free permissions.

- Flickr's [The Commons](#).
- [Creative Commons](#)
- [Wikipedia](#) and [Wikipedia Commons](#)

If you have your own images to use, it is easy and free to post them to Flickr or Picassa and then to reference them in your place mark pop-up windows using the information available in the [Formatting Place Marker Descriptions](#) Step Guide.

Organizing Place Marks

It is important to begin organizing place marks early on using Google Earth's folder creation resources. Use the ADD menu in Google Earth to add a new FOLDER. A window will appear. Since this is the main folder within which all of your place marks will be located, give it a brief name that identifies the title of the book you're working with. For example, a good brief name for *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, might simply be "Huck

Finn.” However, try to avoid baffling abbreviations. For example, ” Adv_oHF” would not be a good name since the abbreviation, though clear to you, would not be intuitive to another person.

Within the Main folder, you can create any sort of internal folder system. For example, you might create an internal folder for each chapter or an internal chapter for each location the characters move to.

Cool Tip: Sometimes there seems to be neither rhyme nor reason as to where new place marks “land” in Google Earth’s side bar. The good news is that once you find a place mark in the sidebar it can be dragged to the appropriate folder. However, if you select the “target” folder by clicking once on it and *then* create the place mark, it will automatically land inside the folder you have “pre-selected.”

Once you have created all the place marks that you intend to have in a given folder, double check to see that they are arranged in “chronological order.” By this I mean, arranged in the order that you want users to view each of the place marks. The first “stop” place mark should be the top place mark in the folder and the “final stop” for that collection of place marks should be the last place mark in that folder.

Creating the Path

Though there are situations where a Google Lit Trip might benefit from *not* having a path marking the “itinerary” of the characters as they move through the story, those situations are quite rare. It is the path marking the itinerary that gives a Google Lit Trip a beginning, middle and end. It indicates the chronology of the travel and visually indicates where the characters are at a given point in the story as well as a clear indication of where they have been and where they are going next.

A collection of place marks without a path looks sort of like a dart board where there are no visual indicators of which of the many other place markers is the “next stop” on the journey.

The path tool is “easy once you get it.” However, it can seem a bit hard to manage until then. There is a simple step-guide called “[Adding Route Paths to a Lit Trip](#)” in the [Lit Trips Tips](#) section of the Google Lit Trip site that can help you wrap your head around this tool.

About Saving Google Lit Trips

It is unlikely that a completed Google Lit Trip can be developed in a single sitting. Whether you are “in progress” or ready to save a completed Google Lit Trip, it is important to understand Google Earth’s available options for saving files. I can not emphasize enough the value of keeping the place marks, paths and any other elements organized in folders and in the “chronological order” you feel a user should follow. When ready to save, like all applications, there is a Save command under the FILE menu. However, Google Earth offers four Save options rather than the typical Save and Save As... options.

Once you have developed all of the elements for a Google Lit Trip (place marks, paths, overlays etc, and organized them into folders, Google Earth provides the following four SAVE options under the File menu:

Save to My Places: This is generally not used when developing your own project. When opening any downloaded Google Earth file, by default it opens in the Temporary Places section at the bottom of the Places portions of Google Earth’s Side Bar. The purpose of this Save option is to give users an opportunity to decide whether they want that file to be kept available within the Google Earth *My Places* section of the Side Bar or

not. Essentially, this gives users the option of saving a file “inside” Google Earth, or saving it externally on their hard drive.

Save Place As... : This option allows the saving of a Google Lit Trip to any location external to the Google Earth application. Once a file is saved external to Google Earth it can then be emailed, burned to CD to be transferred via any of the normal file transfer methods. For those creating Google Lit Trips with the intention of submitting them to the Google Lit Trip project, this is the way to create a file that can be emailed.

When choosing this option it is critical to have selected the **main folder** of the project you have created. This way you will save the folder **and** all of its contents. If you have one element of a project selected such as a single place mark or one of your “sub-folders” then only that selected item will be saved.

When using this option, there is a choice of two file formats. The first is as a .kmz file. the second is as a .kml file. The difference is that ,kmz files are “zipped.” In truth, unless you are including elements that do not exist on the internet such as photos that actually live on your hard drive, either format will work fine.

But, I again suggest that including images or other elements such as videos that do not live on the the internet is risky and dramatically increases the size of your file possibly making them too large to transfer via email.

Save My Places: This option simply insures that changes made t anywhere in the *My Places* section of the Side Bar will be saved within Google Earth.

Save Image... : This option saves an image of the 3D section of the Google Earth viewer. Since Google Lit Trips are always viewed on the internet, this function or any simple screen capture process will save images of sufficient quality.