Google Lit Trips – A Review

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This free online application combines Google Earth and Google Street View as well as presentation slides focussed on literary works. Created by Jerome Burg, *Google Lit Trips* enables pupils to "become virtual travelling companions travelling right alongside characters in stories" (https://www.googlelittrips.org/aboutGLTGE/aboutGLT.php). Since the creation of the application in 2006, more and more novels have been added, and it now contains novels and literary texts suited for pupils in kindergarten and all grades in lower- and upper-secondary schools (https://www.googlelittrips.org/aboutGLTGE/aboutGLT.php). The application is therefore a resource that can be used both in second-language classrooms throughout the school system. The application requires a one-time registration through email, giving access to all the presentations available, as well as the opportunity to suggest new Lit Trips. A detailed document on how to access and use Google Lit Trips is also easily available (Google Lit Trips, "Viewing the new Google Lit Trip Premier Edition," 2021).

The application is relatively easy to use. Once a Google Lit Trip is requested, you will receive an email with a link directly to the Lit Trip. Upon clicking the link, you are taken to the application in Google Earth, and the presentation starts. In the presentation, about two thirds of the screen shows Google Earth, and you begin seeing earth from a distance. Here you can both move and look around as normally on Google Earth, as if you really are visiting the locations mentioned in the novel or story. When moving around in the slides, the screen quickly zooms out and "flies" to the next location in your text. The remaining third of the screen shows both pictures or text relevant to the literary work you are reading. The pictures can for example be from inside buildings or other important structures from the fictional location. The text gives more information, for example more information about the literary setting or quotes to help you understand the geographical location of the novel. When using the application, you have full control of the pace of what you see on the screen. For example

you can go back and forth between slides and spend as much time as necessary on the different slides (https://www.googlelittrips.org/aboutGLTGE/aboutGLT.php).

When using a tool like Google Lit Trips with EFL and ESL pupils, it might be advantageous to use novels suited for the grade level of the class, or perhaps even a grade level lower. Since English is not the pupils' first language, reading a novel in English and accessing the materials in Lit Trips might be more challenging than just reading alone for some pupils. For many pupils both in lower and upper secondary school, however, reading an entire novel in another language can be a great accomplishment and can develop a sense of confidence in their language skills. For many of these pupils, Lit Trips provides additional enjoyment and mastery and is something that they may even want to explore outside of class.

The application is well suited for teacher-oriented classes, as well as pupil-centred instruction. For example, in some classes, it would be beneficial for the teacher to read what is written on the Lit Trips presentation out loud for the class. This gives the pupils the opportunity to see the words on the screen and hear how they are pronounced, which may help their language development. In addition, the teacher or the pupil may decide how much time is spent on each slide. This gives the teacher the chance to fully explain what is happening in the novel, and may give the pupils a better understanding of the context of the novel and the geographical locations associated with it.

Another way to work on Google Lit Trips in class, is for the pupils to create their own Lit Trips. This may be better suited for pupils in upper secondary school, but some lower secondary pupils might also enjoy it. Google Lit Trips has a guide which explains how to make your own Lit Trip, which pupils should be able to use easily. Here, the pupils could have a project of making their own Lit Trips and then presenting to the class. Combining the tool with an oral presentation gives the pupils the opportunity to improve their oral skills in addition to their reading and writing skills. A project like this can be based either upon a novel chosen by the pupils or assigned by the teacher.

As with all digital tools, successful use in the classroom depends upon a number of factors. The tool can be initially time-consuming to teach and to use. First the pupils have to read the novel, and then learn how to use Lit Trip and its contents. In class, the presentations may also take up a lot of time, particularly if the teacher chooses to both read the text and elaborate on the pictures and maps. Despite the time investment, however, Google Lit Trips has real potential as an engaging tool in the lower and upper secondary English classroom.