



# How Do I Begin Building a Google Lit Trip?

An Authorized Step-Guide for Use on Full-Featured Laptops and Computers

This step-guide focuses upon the basic steps for building a Google Lit Trip intended to be submitted for possible publication on the Google Lit Trip site.

[GoogleLitTrips.org](http://GoogleLitTrips.org)

## Preface

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, many hours learning the “craft” of designing and developing more sophisticated projects.

Since the Google Lit Trips project appeals to a wide range of educators and students from kindergarten through graduate school, it is difficult to come up with step guides that speak appropriately to educators with such a wide range of backgrounds regarding literacy and literary reading pedagogy; as well as to those with wide ranges of technology skills. It is also important to realize that Google Lit Trips for elementary use are quite different from Google Lit Trips for university use, and that Google Lit Trips developed by “professional educators” are significantly different from Google Lit Trips developed by students.

**Important Note:** Though Google loves and promotes Google Lit Trips, the Google Lit Trip project is not a Google project. GLT Global ED (dba Google Lit Trips) is a 501(c)(3) educational nonprofit. For this reason, it is important to know that Lit Trips not intended to be submitted for publication on the Google Lit Trip site may not refer to or distribute their projects with any implications that they are “Google Lit Trips.”

## First Things First: Install Google Earth on your Computer

Traditional Google Lit Trips are files built using the Google Earth application on full-featured laptops or desktop computers.

Google Earth for laptops and desktop computers can be downloaded at: [earth.google.com](http://earth.google.com) at no cost. Simply download the application, install it, and you’re good to go.

It is not yet possible to build Lit Trip projects on the Google Earth versions for tablets or Chromebooks.

## Basic Technology Skill-Set for Working with Google Earth

The basic *technology skills* necessary for building a Google Lit Trip include the ability to:

- find locations on Google Earth
- mark those locations with place marks
- create content for the place mark popup windows
- draw paths representing the movements from one location to the next.

**Important Note:** The basic skills required for building Google Lit Trips are not difficult. However, like learning to ride a bicycle, most people find their first effort more challenging than they had expected. We always advise that potential developers begin getting up to speed on building projects in Google Earth by watching some of the short tutorials found [here](#).

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It is not necessary to complete all of these tutorials. We recommend the following to get started:

Access the 30 minute [Annotating Google Earth](#) Tutorials

- Watch the three-minute video at the top of the page. It includes a very brief overview of several skills that can be learned in the tutorials that follow.

**Note:** There are some skills (noted below) that the Google Lit Trips project does not generally employ since they are either a bit advanced or do not currently work as described on all computers.

We suggest that you go through all of the tutorials *except the following*:

- Add polygons  
Polygons are, by only rarely used in Google Lit Trips
- Embed YouTube videos in your balloons  
Though we do encourage the inclusion of video in Lit Trips, the instructions in this tutorial no longer work on all computers. We have a special workaround for this issue that we will be happy to help you with should you find YouTube videos you wish to include.

Access the 10 minute [Using views & perspectives](#) in Google Earth. The ability to control the views and perspectives is one of the most useful skills we employ to move the traditional “mapping” paradigms towards an immersive virtual reality experience.

## 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 or estimated in Google Earth. Thus, the “Inferno” and *The Hobbit* are out, while *Make Way for Ducklings* and *The Kite Runner* are in.

Another basic consideration is whether the story settings “move around enough.” The range of story settings is not important. For example, 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.

On the other hand, stories like *Of Mice and Men* or *To Kill A Mockingbird* pose challenges since although the locations can be determined or estimated, 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 travel enough, but use “fictionalized” locations that represent real locations . This is the case with books 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.

## 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 when reading paper-based books is to reread the book with a couple of colors of post-its or highlighters. When reading digital versions of books on my iPad, the available tools for highlighting in color, underlining, creating marginalia, bookmarks, and searching the story for all of these notations is very impressive.

In either case, 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, videos or other resources on the internet that might enhance or extend students' appreciation of the story.
- interesting websites that could provide supplementary information such as relevant 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 discussion starters..
- interesting vocabulary, examples of literary devices, and other content of value that enhance literacy and literary reading skills.

**Quick side trip:** Those of you using digital text on tablets may want to view this [short video](#) I created for a friend who was responsible for delivering professional development to a staff just adopting iPads.

Actually the possibilities are endless for pop-up window content. But, as a general rule we try to minimize the focus upon plot summaries, 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.

By the way, this is one of the distinctions we 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 be a very valuable opportunity to learn and demonstrate the levels of basic literacy skills they have achieved. Though even in these cases, for students of appropriate ages, we like to advise teachers to also encourage students to consider including higher level content such as speculations about characters' motives, possible future plot developments, and their recognitions of the relevance of the story's themes in their own lives. 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.

## Organizing Place Marks

Before adding your first placemark, use the "ADD menu" in Google Earth to add a new FOLDER that will hold your entire collection of placemarks. Since this is the main folder within which all of your place marks will be located, type the book title in the window that will appear.

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.

**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 even better, if you select the "target" folder by clicking once on it and then click the place mark, button the place mark 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, arrange them in the order that you want users to view each of the place marks. Generally speaking placemarks should match the order in which readers "reach those locations while reading. Should you need to move a place mark, it can be dragged into its appropriate position among the rest of the placemarks.

## Creating Place Marks

There is no “right” or “wrong” process for creating place marks. Sometimes, I collect all the content information for a story 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 collect content and create placemarks either “chapter by chapter” or in a “location by location” fashion.

In addition to the Google tutorials mentioned above, we also provide a collection of “bite-size” step guides without cost in the [GLT Store](#) focusing upon various “How To” tasks common in the development of Google Lit Trip placemarks.

## A Few Words About Including Media 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 this short video “[Adding Images to Google Lit Trips.](#)”

If you have your own images to use, it is easy and free to post them to Flickr and then to reference them in your place mark pop-up windows using the information in the Adding Images to Google Lit Trips video.

It is important to remember that including images, also raises ethical considerations regarding copyright compliance. For this reason, when I am looking for appropriate images for a Google Lit Trip, I generally like to begin my search in Wikipedia. The first reason being that Wikipedia clearly identifies every image’s copyright status when an image is clicked. The other reason being that Wikipedia’s intention to be an encyclopedia makes it easy to search for any topic to see what imagery is used.

You can find several other websites that provide copyright-friendly imagery in the step guide entitled “[Copyright-Friendly Images.](#)”

**Important Note:** Many educators have some degree of understanding of what is generally referred to as “[fair use](#)” when using copyrighted materials in their classrooms. An important clarification is to note that fair use allows teachers to use copyrighted materials in their classes *with some restrictions*. However, we choose to take the high road in recognizing that because we distribute our resources via the internet, that claiming fair use as a defense for using copyrighted materials does not fall within the strictest interpretation of “a teacher using materials within his or her classroom.” We prefer to either use copyright-friendly images or to ask for direct permission from the media’s owner to use copyrighted material.

Whether the media is copyright-friendly or we have received permission to use copyrighted-media, we ask that all media include a caption explaining what the media’s value is in the particular place mark and that the caption be followed by a link back to the media’s original source.

## Adding Text to a Placemark

The content of a placemark obviously varies significantly between Lit Trips designed for primary students and older students. The sophistication of the content deepens as students’ literacy skills and literary reading skills advance. However, in general, it is our intent to distinguish our resources from those such as Cliff and Spark Notes in that we do not want to provide a convenient alternative to actually reading the original story, but rather we want to design an experience that engages students in such a fashion that within the grade level expectations for literacy and literary reading, engage them discovering for themselves why a story might have significant relevance in their own lives. For this reason we attempt to avoid the Lit Trips taking on the tone of “teaching at students” preferring to create an environment where students engage in higher level critical thinking where they do the critical thinking

that leads to the joy of discovering for themselves the relevance a story brings to their own lives. For example, with rare exception we do not include questions that have “right” and “wrong” favoring what we call Discussion Starters that usually do not have “easy” answers. We want students to realize that the greater questions worth contemplation frequently are those where people of different opinions might well have different thoughts regarding how a character might handle a difficult situation or how they themselves might handle or might have handled similar situations.

We like to limit Discussion Starters to no more around five per placemark. Our rule of thumb is try to create a placemark that does not require scrolling. We are not always successful but we like to impose this challenge more as a target than as a firm rule.

As mentioned earlier, we tend to limit text that summarizes plot. We occasionally include very brief quotes from the story, primarily to act as a “set point” for the more interesting Discussion Starters that follow.

## Formatting Text

Unlike standard word processing tools, Google Earth does not have formatting bars with buttons controlling font, font sizes or font styles. We suspect that these conveniences are on the horizon, however until then formatting text in Google Earth requires “just a bit” of coding to accomplish these tasks. Although the very mention of the word “code” causes a bit of anxiety in some, the amount of code necessary is extremely minimal.

A Basic Text Formatting step guide can be downloaded in the [GLT Store](#).

## Adding Links to a Placemark

Web Links offer an easy way to access interesting supplementary information. For those working with Common Core for English Language Arts. These links can provide a relevant integration of Informational Reading.

We generally have offer a few primary guidelines for selecting websites to link to:

- Consider the grade level reading level appropriateness for likely grades where the story might be taught.
- Consider the source. Are there indicators of reliability?
- Keep it relatively brief and to the point. For example, while reading a passage about Hoovervilles when *The Grapes of Wrath*, it is better to link to a web page specifically addressing Hoovervilles than to a website offering everything you need to know about the Depression that happens to have a section about Hoovervilles.
- Sites with rich media are more engaging than text only sites. While sites with advertising should be used with caution as it is often the case that advertisements may sometimes be inappropriate for students.

A video tutorial for explaining how to create Links can be found [here](#).

## Creating the Path

Though there are situations where a Google Lit Trip might benefit from not having a path line marking the story’s “itinerary,” 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 clarifying 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 “[Marking Routes with the Path Tool](#)” in the GLT Store.

## About Saving Google Lit Trips

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. 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.

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 save 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.

**Finally...**A free step-guide for submitting Lit Trip projects for possible publication on the Google Lit Trips site can be found in the GLT Store.