

## **Reflection: Using Google Earth in an educational setting**

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Google Earth is STILL one of those online tools that “wow’s” even the most jaded technology critics. It is an amazing tool with a thousand uses, including tons of fantastic educational applications. Google Earth has been around for awhile and I thought I had heard some of the best classroom uses for it already... but being introduced to the “tours” feature made me really excited about the possibilities.

“Virtual Field Trips” have been one of those buzzwords that educators have been using to tout technology’s virtues for years. In the past, some of those “field trips” may have been as static as a slideshow and in general were a huge letdown to students (they know a good “field trip” when they experience one and looking at a slideshow does not meet that criteria). Google Earth brings us leaps and bounds closer to what I envision when I hear the term “virtual field trip”, and the tour recording feature makes it all the more immersive.

Teachers can use this tool to take students to literally anyplace on Earth. They can quickly and clearly see where their home and other landmarks are in relation to their destination, and the details Google offers for some places would let students take a virtual walk at street level. They can visit Paris, the Great Pyramids, and even the sunken remains of the Titanic. It is as immersive an experience as one can find on the web, and it is sure to satisfy the high expectations today’s students have. The ability to narrate the recorded tour makes this an excellent tool for teachers to record lessons as well as give students the opportunity to apply what they have learned and create tours of their own.

Lastly, since this was the first time I’ve seen the newest version of Google Earth, I have to betray my fanboy nature and express my excitement over the “flight simulator” tool they have integrated. They offer a choice of planes and the photorealistic landscape does as good a job as any flight simulator I’ve seen. This is another great way for students to experience Google Earth and give them an opportunity to explore the world in a gamelike setting.