**7-28-21 Article Resources for Virtual Reality and 360-Degree Content**

**BLENDED LEARNING**

Go-to Resources for Virtual Reality and 360-Degree Content

As Google Expeditions and Tour Creator wind down, teachers can look to other resources for dramatic, immersive content that engages students.

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For years, I’ve taken joy in introducing virtual reality to educators at different schools. Armed with cheap [Google Cardboard](https://arvr.google.com/cardboard/get-cardboard/) viewers, Lenovo Daydream headsets, and free access to [Google Expeditions](https://edu.google.com/products/vr-ar/expeditions/) and [Tour Creator](https://arvr.google.com/tourcreator/), I could show classes the feng shui–inspired layout of China’s Forbidden City, point out the prayer notes tucked into the Western Wall in Jerusalem, or even explore the nooks and crannies of the human nervous system. There were hundreds of amazing Google Expeditions to choose from, and teachers could create custom VR experiences for their students, who could then design their own, complete with image overlays and audio narration. All that was required was an app and a headset.

Minds were blown, again and again.

But now both Google Expeditions and Tour Creator are shutting down on June 30, 2021. The Expeditions app will vanish from the app stores, and the existing VR expeditions will move over to [Google Arts & Culture](https://artsandculture.google.com/). Tour Creator is going away completely, so you won’t be able to create new expeditions.

Here are other options:

**EXPERIMENT WITH VR AND 360-DEGREE ALTERNATIVES TO TOUR CREATOR**

There are a number of apps and sites that, like Tour Creator, allow you to create your own VR and 360-degree experiences (digital spaces that one can explore from different perspectives but do not require a headset). Several are free or have a low entry cost and are [GDPR](https://gdpr.eu/), [COPPA](https://www.ftc.gov/enforcement/rules/rulemaking-regulatory-reform-proceedings/childrens-online-privacy-protection-rule), and [FERPA](https://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/fpco/ferpa/index.html) compliant.

Nearpod: As many teachers discovered during the pandemic, with a free [Nearpod account](https://nearpod.com/pricing?oc=License+Block&utm_campaign=License+Block&utm_medium=inapp&utm_source=nearpod&utm_content=silver), you can access more than 7,500 premade interactive lessons and 5,000 interactive videos and activities that can be customized and delivered to 40 students per session. Nearpod also [offers VR](https://nearpod.com/nearpod-vr), with more than 600 ready-to-run VR lessons: With a school- or district-wide subscription, students can take a [field trip to the Statue of Liberty](https://nearpod.com/t/social-studies/kindergarten/lets-visit-the-statue-of-liberty-L35472315), [explore evolution](https://nearpod.com/t/science/9th-grade/evolution-on-the-galapagos-islands-L32622911) on the Galapagos Islands, or take a trip to Tennessee to [create an algebraic equation](https://nearpod.com/t/math/9th-grade/expanding-a-playground-L32622407) to expand a playground to meet new community needs.

ThingLink: I was introduced to [ThingLink](https://www.thinglink.com/), an annotation tool that enables tagging (labels, text and media, and web content) to 360-degree images, by [Karalee Nakatsuka](https://twitter.com/historyfrog), an eighth-grade social studies teacher who used it to create an inspiring [Chinese Immigration Virtual Museum](https://www.thinglink.com/video/933947167515607041). Her museum is a 360-degree room (no headset needed) that includes a range of objects students can learn more about, photographs, and even audio of the historic reception of Madame Chiang Kai-shek when she emigrated to the United States in 1975.

Educators can create a free account on ThingLink to test out the basic features, create presentations, and publish an unlimited number of images, videos, and 360-degree images. To invite students (or have students create their own ThingLink virtual tours or interactive content), they need to upgrade to [Professional Teacher for the Classroom](https://www.thinglink.com/en-us/edu) or have their school or district purchase a [site license](https://www.thinglink.com/edu-options). (As of this writing, a plan for one teacher and 60 students starts at $35 per year, and a site license for 500 students or more is $2 per student.)

Both ThingLink and Nearpod’s VR content can be viewed as a 360-degree image or video on a browser, making it accessible for students using Chromebooks or tablets. If you happen to have Cardboard, plastic VR viewers, or stand-alone VR headsets like Oculus Quest or Lenovo VR Classroom, students can view ThingLink virtual tours and Nearpod VR lessons as a virtual reality experience.

YouTube: YouTube doesn’t provide tools to create your own VR experiences, but it’s still my top tool for finding quality 360-degree videos for instruction. I have found great VR playlists such as [Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* and the Globe Theatre in 360 degrees](https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLKpIZUOvB4u3ixZ3diq88xC_TcymhRO3y) and [World War II](https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLKpIZUOvB4u1qrqVAVYgGKw8NRjnLhnoq), as well as ones on social justice issues like [immigration](https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLKpIZUOvB4u0y1QNV0AUrga8xW4aa9oHx). I also rely on powerful 360-degree YouTube videos from media outlets like [*The New York Times*](https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PL4CGYNsoW2iCGZa3_Pes8LP_jQ_GPTW8w), [Discovery](https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLiCk2I6PXl5qm0CTvO6zXt3k33GTmcIvk), and [National Geographic](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCpVm7bg6pXKo1Pr6k5kxG9A).

360Cities: With [360Cities](https://www.360cities.net/), teachers can also create their own VR lessons using images and panoramas from this vast collection of 360-degree video, with [free access](https://schools.360cities.net/help#what-is-360cities-for-schools) for teachers.

**FAMILIARIZE YOURSELF WITH OTHER RICH CONTENT AVAILABLE FROM GOOGLE ARTS & CULTURE**

There’s a variety of free interactive content already on Google Arts & Culture that’s fully accessible via Chromebook or mobile device, much of which is 360 degrees and curated by experts.

Themes: This [impressive collection](https://artsandculture.google.com/project) from Google includes powerful [360-degree experiences](https://artsandculture.google.com/search?q=360) like “[Rio: Beyond the Map](https://artsandculture.google.com/project/rio-de-janeiro),” which takes users through the city’s favelas (shantytowns) and a trippy animated immersion into Bruegel’s [*The Fall of the Rebel Angels*](https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/bruegel-a-fall-with-the-rebel-angels-virtual-reality/9AFRlKVDYtPc_w).

Virtual reality tours: While they’re not the same as Google Expeditions, Google’s [virtual reality tours](https://artsandculture.google.com/project/virtual-tours), which enable users to explore masterpieces at famous art galleries and cultural sites around the world, are quite absorbing. They’re only available on the mobile version of Google Arts & Culture, so to experience them, you must install the mobile app on a smartphone and use a Google Cardboard viewer.

Augmented reality: Using a mobile device or tablet, you can view artifacts of animals, space, historical objects, and art in AR in [Reality Check](https://artsandculture.google.com/project/ar), also from Google Arts & Culture. As an example, take a look at 3D models like the [giant pangolin](https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/lQF6WmTX-KekKw), using your browser if a mobile device is not available. With the Reality Check mobile app, students can enjoy AR experiences similar to SnapChat: They can take selfies and videos using filters based on artifacts from museums or find portraits that look like them.