



## CASE STUDY

# Thomson, GA, High Schoolers Bring Local History to Life Through Tour Creator



## Thomson High School

Thomson, Georgia

<https://ths.mcduffie.k12.ga.us>

Jennifer Newton, a media and instructional technology specialist at Thomson High School in Thomson, GA, is helping students bring local history to life while building real-world professional skills through Tour Creator. She worked with business teachers to help students in grades 9–12 create 360-degree virtual reality (VR) tours depicting the region's history. The tours are now featured on the [local tourism board's website](#) and are among the most popular on [Poly](#), Google's library of VR and 3D content. Jennifer shared her story with us.

### Why did you decide to use Tour Creator in your school?

I'm a Google Certified Educator, and when I read that Tour Creator was available, I thought it would be a great way to help promote our community, while teaching students marketing strategies and local history.

## **How does Tour Creator help you accomplish your instructional goals?**

Students in entrepreneurship and communications classes learned how to take attractive and appealing photos, write concise and intriguing descriptions, and develop strategies for marketing historical places in our community.

## **What strategies do you use when teaching Tour Creator?**

### **How do your students engage with Tour Creator—on desktop, mobile, Google Cardboard, or another device?**

To create the tours, we used a 360-degree camera to take photos at three local history sites: U.S. Senator Thomas E. Watson's 1865 estate at [Hickory Hill](#), [Wrightsboro-Quaker Village](#), and the McDuffie Museum's exhibit honoring musical virtuoso "[Blind](#)" [Willie McTell](#) (1901–1959). I encouraged students to experiment to determine the best shot to capture the scene, and to research the most important factual information to inform and captivate viewers. Students used a desktop computer to upload images and write the accompanying descriptions. To view the tours, we used mobile devices, VR viewers, as well as desktops, since the content can be easily viewed on a variety of different devices.

### **What advice would you give to a teacher who's using Tour Creator for the first time?**

Allow the students to decide what aspects of their tours are the most intriguing and appealing. Also, make sure students take several 360-degree images of the same scene from different angles. Students can also pull in imagery from [Google Street View](#) to supplement their tours.

### **How do you feel your students benefited from experiencing Tour Creator in the classroom?**

The [Thomson-McDuffie County Convention & Visitors Bureau](#) chose to use our students' tours on their website to promote our community's heritage. Students were thrilled to know their work can go beyond the four walls of the classroom—and be available to others from around the world.

### **How do you think Tour Creator can impact student engagement and learning?**

Tour Creator is a fantastic tool to engage students! Students were fascinated by how they could use it to research and learn about a topic, and then share that information in new and different ways. I can envision students using Tour Creator to document field trips; market a business, their school, or community; as well as create instructional tours about step-by-step processes used in chemistry or biology labs.

### **What are some of your favorite moments that you shared with students as you led them through a Tour Creator expedition?**

My favorite memory of using Tour Creator with our students was when they learned about a local resource they weren't familiar with. Despite growing up in

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**“Tour Creator has been an awesome experience—not only for our students, but for our community as well! We are excited to share our local history and showcase how people from our small town influenced politics, religion, and music on a national level. This will be an experience we will not soon forget!”**

*—Jennifer Newton, School Media and Instructional Technology Specialist, Thomson High School, Thomson, GA*

our community and having visited Hickory Hill as elementary school students, they learned so much from interviewing the house museum curator, and they asked such great questions based on information she was sharing! After leaving the site, they were so excited about what they had learned and to return to school to begin building the tour. It was an excitement every teacher wants students to experience...and to experience with them.

### **What do students enjoy about Tour Creator?**

Upon completing their projects, students had a great sense of pride and accomplishment knowing their work would be viewed in a public venue through the tourism bureau website. In addition, the tourism bureau's future goal is to have VR viewers and instructions available at each historical site for visitors to view our students' tours. Students also enjoyed that they were sharing information in a way other than the typical slide show presentation.

### **Can you tell us about a memorable tour that you and your students created?**

I think the students enjoyed creating a tour about Sen. Tom Watson's Hickory Hill estate most of all. There was so much information they learned about his political career, as well as his historical home, gardens, interests, and hobbies. This led to some great discussions among students about what scenes and information to include.

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#### **About Tour Creator**

Tour Creator is an authoring tool that allows teachers to create their own VR tours and incorporate them more directly into their lesson plans by guiding them with Expeditions or sharing the published tours with their students via the web. Learn more at [g.co/tourcreator](https://www.google.com/tourcreator)

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