

Around The World

WITHOUT LEAVING THE CLASSROOM

BY SAMANTHA LEAGUE



On May 6, OLP became one of 100 schools

nationwide to participate in the new Google Expeditions Pioneer Program, which brings virtual reality to the classroom.

"Built with teachers for teachers," Google Expeditions delivers interactive virtual reality via 360-degree panoramas. Teachers lead the experience through an app by annotating details and points of interest on the image while students watch through a Google Cardboard viewer. In order to see new sections of the panorama, students have to move their heads up, down and side-to-side. Many had a difficult time remaining in their seats.

"(There was) a lot of screaming, laughing and 'oh-my-goshing!'" said Katie Turner, the OLP English teacher who arranged the opportunity. "... Many students explained how incredibly powerful it was to observe our earth in a multi-dimensional space."

Turner found this opportunity on Twitter last summer and immediately applied. "As a CSJ school, OLP is committed to offering young women an education rooted in a deep care and concern for our earth and our dear neighbors upon it; what better way to encourage these goals than through an unequalled expedition into virtual reality?" she said.

Each teacher selected expeditions that were relevant to what students had been studying all year. Jeff Kirschbaum, department chair of religious studies, let his Social Justice class follow a teenage girl who is a Syrian refugee. "By seeing the living situation and schooling facilities of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, our girls were able to develop a heightened sense of empathy with girls just like them across the world," said Kirschbaum.



Alexis Bautista '19 on a Google Expedition with her Google Cardboard viewer.

The expedition had an impact on students. "It was eye opening. Literally," Denise Drachenberg '17 said. "Even though I knew I was looking at an image, it felt astoundingly real and extraordinary."

OLP impacted Google, as well. The representative was impressed by our teachers for executing lesson plans instead of simply playing around with the application. She noted science teacher Stefani Ma'ake, who gave her AP Biology students a virtual peak into the nervous system just a few days before their AP Exam.

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Our students visited the ocean, the moon, Jerusalem, Robben Island, Auschwitz, historic theaters across the world, and more. As Denise puts it, "this technology expands the boundaries of the classroom." It is only a matter of time before virtual reality finds a permanent home on OLP's campus.



Katie Turner leads her Honors English students through Verona, Italy because they had read *Romeo and Juliet* earlier in the year. The girls were able to "stand" on the street of the opening scene, where the ancient grudge turns violent.

