

# TechKnowledge

## Yes, They Can

*Google Lit Trips and games give kids a new perspective on social justice*

Children, especially girls, are finding supporters across the globe—some their own age—who are engaging with virtual education programs, an online game, and books that promote social justice and a better world.

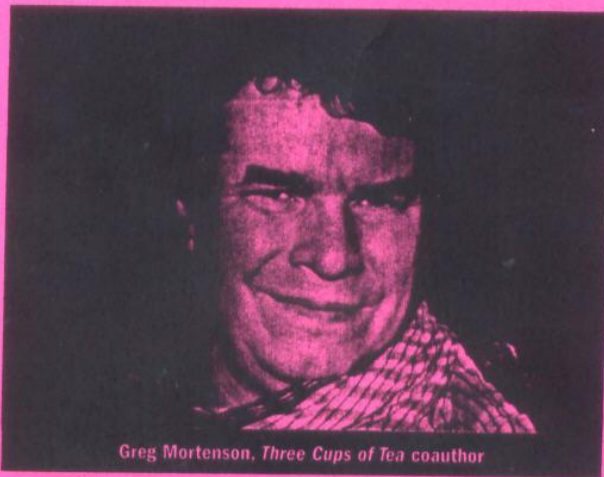
“Education seems like a simple thing,” says Greg Mortenson, coauthor of *Three Cups of Tea* (Viking, 2006) and founder of the nonprofit Pennies for Peace ([www.penniesforpeace.org](http://www.penniesforpeace.org)). “But it’s very powerful. It gives a child, and a community, hope.” Mortenson’s Pennies for Peace program has built schools—131, to be exact—in Pakistan and Afghanistan, countries where the Taliban continues to exert strict control by closing schools, especially those that educate girls.

Intrigued by Mortenson’s mission, K–12 classes are logging in to Google Earth to follow him on his trek, some while reading *Listen to the Wind* (Dial, 2009), a version of his story adapted for younger kids. These Google Lit Trips ([www.googlelittrips.org](http://www.googlelittrips.org)), as they’re called, allow students to map Mortenson’s travels, build wikis to share what they’ve learned about the countries the author has visited, and discuss his work as a virtual book group using Skype ([bit.ly/Nf49d](http://bit.ly/Nf49d)).

Taking another tack, the Emergent Media Center (EMC) at Champlain College in South Burlington, VT, is designing a virtual soccer game geared toward young boys, with players earning points based on how well they treat each other and the women in their lives ([bit.ly/44V2Cr](http://bit.ly/44V2Cr)).

“It’s built on FIFA fair-play rules,” says Ann DeMarle, EMC’s director. “You show respect on the field, and respect to the females in one’s life—not just your teammates.”

With an initial grant from the United Nations Population Fund ([www.unfpa.org](http://www.unfpa.org)), EMC went first to South Africa to work with students and now hopes to have the first of sev-



Greg Mortenson, *Three Cups of Tea* coauthor

eral episodes online and ready to play by the FIFA World Cup in June 2010.

Other groups, including the World Economic Forum’s \$100 million Global Education Initiative ([bit.ly/2HYK8z](http://bit.ly/2HYK8z)), are also tackling social injustice through education, as are writers from Mortenson to journalists Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn in their bestselling book, *Half the Sky: Turning*

*Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide* (Knopf, 2009).

Mortenson’s latest book, *Stones into Schools* (Viking, 2009), illustrates the success of his program, which earned its name by collecting 63,240 pennies from students, teachers, and families at Westside Elementary School in River Fall, WI, where his mother was the principal back in 1994.

In the story, he offers lessons that students and others can adapt, including his assertion that communities must “buy in” to the changes around them. Case in point: crafting a video game that boys really want to play or having villages help build the schools meant to educate their children.

“That buys us local support and may be why the schools are not being attacked by the Taliban,” says Mortenson. “I think what the Taliban fears the most is not bullets but pens. Their primary recruiting grounds are illiterate societies because educated women refuse to allow their families to join the Taliban, and they want schools and are fiercely protective of theirs.”—Lauren Barack

