

THE GHOSTS OF
GOOGLE EARTH
AN SAT VOCABULARY STORY



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BIG WORDS MADE SIMPLE.

The Ghosts of Google Earth: An SAT Vocabulary Story

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All the chattering souls gathered at 5 Manderly Place to discuss the most pressing matters of the century.

The address was an old one in Connecticut, the type you'd expect ghosts to convene at — perpetually windy and overgrown, with shingles falling from the roof and paint peeling from the walls. Lightning cracked outside; rain lashed at the windows.

Only New England spirits were welcome, of course, though very few were in attendance. Most had gone on to a better place and had no further interest in human affairs, unless their families were affected.

But some spirits preferred to stay right where they were, thank you very much. It was these spirits who convened that dreary October morning.

"Order, order!" Sir Gawain pounded his gavel on the dining room table, now positioned against the back wall as an impromptu judge's box.

The ghosts quieted until only Mrs. Wispinski's voice could be heard. Sir Gawain proceeded, for it was well-known that Mrs. Wispinski's loquacity was impossible to contain. He cast a sympathetic look at Mrs. Wispinski's companion, a Civil War-era soldier whose genial smile indicated he might be a bit deaf.

"There are three items on the agenda for tonight," Sir Gawain said. "The first two deal with hauntings. The defendants have been found guilty, and as we have said before, the Society for the Betterment of Spiritual Causes has a zero-tolerance policy for these matters."

"Hear, hear!" a voice called from the crowd.

"Therefore, I put forward a motion to remove Anna Jeffries and Samuel Nelson from the society, effective immediately. All in favor, say 'aye.'"

"Aye!" "Aye!" the crowd clamored.

Convene - Come together

Perpetually - Never-ending

Convened - Came together

Impromptu - Improvised; unplanned

Loquacity - Talkativeness; the quality of talking a lot

Genial - Friendly and cheerful

Clamored – Made a loud, chaotic noise

Sir Gawain drew a sharp line through the former members' names before proceeding.

"The last item requires more discussion," he began. "It has come to my attention that there is a new human technology which may threaten our very way of life. It is called Google World."

A wiry young man leaned down and whispered something to Sir Gawain.

"Google *Earth*," Sir Gawain corrected himself. "Unlikely as it may sound, they're photographing the entire world. Most pictures cannot capture our likeness, of course, but if the technology continues to progress..."

The crowd began to murmur, and Mrs. Wispinski's shrill voice rose above the crowd. "*Some* cameras capture us! I made the family photo at my nephew's wedding. *They* thought I was a shadow in the trees, of course, but my hair looked lovely..."

"Indeed," Sir Gawain continued. "And this gets to the heart of the issue. Who can say how much the cameras will capture? We must, I am afraid, prepare for the worst."

"But how!" an older woman cried out. Her hair was still in old-fashioned curlers, and they shook nervously on her head as she spoke.

"They've got no business, *no business*, taking pictures of us," a lumberjack growled.

The rest of the crowd echoed their sentiments. Sir Gawain allowed it for a moment before pounding his gavel once more.

"Too bad we just banished Anna and Samuel," Mrs. Wispinski said loudly, just as Sir Gawain opened his mouth. "Could've used them to take on these Goggles."

"It's *Googles*, Mrs. Wispinski," Sir Gawain said, "and under no circumstances will we consider a haunting."

Mrs. Wispinski sniffed, and Sir Gawain proposed a list of alternatives. They included: never go outside, only go outside at night, and hope Google's technology doesn't advance to the point where ghosts can be seen.

Banished - Sent away from a country or place as an official punishment

"I gotta say," the lumberjack interjected, stroking his grizzled beard. "I agree with Wispinski. A man can't survive all shut-up indoors like that. A good old-fashioned haunting is what we need."

Mrs. Wispinski shot Sir Gawain a triumphant look. "We can't reinstate Anna and Samuel now, of course. But if we agreed not to say anything, and acted very quietly, *we* could..."

The lumberjack nodded. "All in favor, say 'aye.'"

"Aye! Aye!" the crowd rang out. The futile cracking of Sir Gawain's gavel could barely be heard above the casting of votes.

* * *

The spirits schemed all night, considering ways they could haunt Google Earth without compromising their collective moral compass as members of the Society for the Betterment of Spiritual Causes.

Nothing could be done to harm the humans, they agreed. Sir Gawain finally agreed to join the ruse after this point was made perfectly clear.

Unfortunately, this severely limited the ghosts' abilities. They couldn't do much but cause a cold wind to blow through a room, but they resolved that when Google's little car drove by, it would be the coldest car north of Antarctica.

Days and months progressed until, one day, a telepathic message reached the spirits that Google would be visiting their very own Connecticut neighborhood.

"Get ready, people," the lumberjack growled. Mrs. Wispinski grinned and rubbed her hands together, giving her deaf companion a wink.

The spirits gathered on the front yard. As the car slowly pulled onto Manderly street, they unleashed a torrent of chilling wind.

Interjected - Said abruptly, usually interrupting a conversation

Triumphant - Victorious; proud of having won something

Reinstate - Restore (someone or something) to their former position or condition

Futile - Pointless

Schemed - Plotted; made secret or underhanded plans

Ruse - Trick

Resolved - Determined to do something

Telepathic - The ability to communicate through psychic means

Torrent - A violent, fast-moving outpouring of something

One of the women, who was holding her cat with one hand and pointing at the car with one palm, Iron Man-style, let out a delighted cackle as the windshield began to frost.

The bewildered driver put on his windshield wipers, but the spirits didn't let up. Mrs. Wispinski narrowed her eyes and continued aiming both palms at the vehicle. Her cheeks turned a pleasant shade of pink at the effort, giving her normally grey face new life.

Finally, the car turned the corner and the ghosts let out a jubilant cry. "Let's see him try that again!" Mrs. Wispinski said.

The ghosts celebrated with a special dinner that night, made with ephemeral indulgences from around the world. The international fare seemed fitting, considering they'd just put Google Earth out of business.

When Sir Gawain pounded his gavel some time later and informed them that they had not, in fact, been successful in derailing the technology, all the ghosts reacted with similar levels of dismay.

All the ghosts, that is, except for Mrs. Wispinski.

When she saw the photo that had been taken of 5 Manderly Place, she couldn't help but smile. With her rosy cheeks, she thought she looked quite attractive. Let someone try to mistake her for a tree *this* time!

Bewilderment - Confusion

Jubilant - Delighted; expressing happiness and triumph

Ephemeral - Lasting for a short time; describing things (mainly plants) that don't live long

Derailing - Throwing off course

Dismay - Distress