

HELPFUL HINTS: SPANISH

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Mundo Gaturro – Using an argentine-based MMOG (Massively Multiplayer Online Game) to provide authentic learning opportunities in the Spanish classroom.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5TiAVPCmirE>

Mundo Gaturro is a flash-based massively multiplayer online game (MMOG) based on the popular argentine comic Gaturro. Players of the game are each given an avatar cat that they can maneuver around a virtual world called Mundo Gaturro. There is no cost to obtain a basic cat avatar. The only thing needed to register is an e-mail address. Once in the game, players can interact with other players using a chat interface. There is a limited list of pre-composed chat messages that can be selected or players can compose their own short original messages. Because the game is based in Argentina, the great majority of the kids playing it are argentine with the remainder being from other Spanish-speaking countries. The game provides non-native speakers of Spanish with a virtual immersion experience. All of the input in the game, of which there is a lot, is in Spanish.

Mundo Gaturro itself is divided into a number of different sections. There is a beach, a park, a city center, mountains, an island, etc. Each section features games, and tasks that the avatars can complete to earn coins (monedas) or other items for their cats. Each avatar is also given a house which they can decorate with the items they have collected. The coins can be redeemed for a limited set of basic items such as clothing, furniture, food, etc. Only avatars that have purchased a passport (with real money) are able to select from the much wider array of “passport” items available in the game. Although an avatar without a passport cannot buy these items they can be obtained through trading with other avatars. This provides additional incentive for students to interact with the others in the game.

I have had great success using this game with my students. It provides them with an amazing amount of authentic written input in the target language in an authentic context. I usually take a portion of a class to set up their accounts and give them a brief introduction to how the game works. After that I don't use it too often in the classroom, but encourage students to use it on their own outside of class. Sometimes I award them with bonus activities or points on assessments if they are able to complete certain tasks within the game on their own. Here is a list of some of the challenges I have given in the past:

- New vocabulary/expressions: List 15 new words or expressions you learned in the game.
- Make a list of 20 cognates you found in Mundo Gaturro.
- Grammar knowledge: List at least three pieces of old information that you either used or saw being used. List at least one new piece of knowledge (grammar concepts, not vocabulary).
- Write one observation you have made about either the social interactions of Argentine children or a cultural theme from Mundo Gaturro. Compare/contrast with your own social interactions and culture.
- Identify at least three expressions or colloquial uses of the Spanish language from Argentina found in the game.

- Identify at least five examples of internet/text message slang or abbreviations used by other Gaturros.
- Identify at least five examples of words borrowed from the English language used in Mundo Gaturro.
- Identify at least five misspelled words used by other Gaturros (not classmates).
- Hold an extended chat with another Gaturro on a variety of topics. (Must be in Spanish with a Gaturro not from this school!) With whom did you chat? What were some of the topics you talked about?
- Get an item only available to someone with a passport. (Must be obtained from a Gaturro not from this school!)
- Complete one of the more complex temporary tasks in the game and receive the **final** reward. What was the task? What was the reward? How did you get it?

These are just a few activities. I'm sure you can think of more ways to use this with your students.

In a future Helpful Hint I will tell you about how I have used Mundo Gaturro with several additional programs to provide students with spoken language opportunities, a key component missing from the game.