

Los Sims:
Bringing Spanish to Life with *Simulation*

A Teaching Guide for the Creative Classroom

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games require players to multi-task and use higher level thinking skills to operate the game by evaluating, synthesizing, understanding, analyzing, and applying. The incorporation of video games could be a very powerful tool for learning and, as educators, we have a responsibility to create an environment that will be the most conducive for learning.

Researchers tell us that students may be learning to be critical thinkers more from playing video games than sitting in our classrooms. YIKES! Imagine the success we may have if we combine video gaming with education? James Paul Gee states “The fact is, when kids play videogames they can experience a much more powerful form of learning that when they’re in the classroom”. Squire and Jenkins further explain “The kinds of learning gains we have seen with game-based learning environments have much less to do with increases in factual recall or the ability to choose correct answers and more to do with making complex ideas accessible to a different kind of student” (page 30).

Here are a few of the learning outcomes when video games are used in the classroom (outcomes may vary based on the game being used):

- Students learn by doing.
- Learning is student-centered, rather than teacher-centered.
- Students are challenged to use creativity and imagination to accomplish goals.
- Students take ownership of learning, as they are the primary decision makers in game playing.
- Students problem solve and accomplish challenging tasks and missions.
- Students are motivated by mastery in game playing.
- When students are involved in gameplay, they are actively engaged.

Why use video games to learn a language?

In order to create an interactive experience for language learners, using a simulation game will truly bring Spanish to life. Teachers are continually challenged by making content comprehensible to students and creating an authentic experience for language learning within the constraints of a classroom. The incorporation of video games will allow the teacher to use video games as realia (real things from the real world) for teaching and learning. You obviously can't bring in all the items you might find in a home to the classroom (such as a bed or a couch), instead you can bring The Sims house to the classroom. The visual component will reinforce the vocabulary and concepts being introduced by the teacher and the interactivity will motivate students to accomplish the task at hand. Instead of students looking at a still picture of a map of a house to learn vocabulary, they will be able to actually navigate the house by walking through rooms. The game allows the player to zoom in, change the scope of viewing, and even manipulate objects within the house. This is what makes The Sims effective in the language classroom.

Students acquire language in different ways and at different success rates based on the design of instruction. Video games incorporate most, if not all, multiple intelligences, and as a result instruction will appeal to a wider base of learners. The multiple intelligences include linguistic, visual spatial, music, bodily kinesthetic, mathematical/reasoning, and inter/intrapersonal. By incorporating a variety of intelligences in instruction through gameplay students will have the best opportunity to develop a deeper understanding of the content.

About Los Sims Teaching Guide

This guide was intended for use in the high school second year Spanish class, but could be adapted for any foreign language or level course. By the second year of Spanish, students are beginning to acquire the skills necessary to communicate with others to describe what they see in their environment.

The PC version of The Sims is used throughout the following lessons. Throughout this guide, the teacher will use The Sims displayed on a LCD projector for whole class instruction, in addition, students will work independently on laptop computers as well as working with partners to complete the instructional tasks. This may be modified to work with your available hardware/software.

Although this guide was designed for the foreign language curriculum, it could also be used for other curricular areas, as it has several educational applications for the high school curriculum. It could be applicable to an Effective Living class (which is part of either Health or Home Economics). Each of the following curriculum components could be addressed within the family life of *The Sims*: interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships, future planning and goals, budgeting, cooking, fashion, interior design, and time and task management.

Part 1: Teaching with Los Sims

The fact that The Sims is a well known video game will serve to peak the interest of students as video games are extremely popular amongst students and have probably never been incorporated into their classes. Students will be able to combine their interest for gaming with learning Spanish.

Materials

The following materials will be required to incorporate these lessons in your classroom:

- PC computer
- Laptop/Computer lab
- LCD projector
- Overhead projector and screen
- PC Software – The Sims
- System Requirements
 - Windows XP, 98, or 95
 - 233 MHz Intel Pentium
 - 64 MB RAM
 - 4x CD ROM
 - 1.4 GB free hard disk space (plus room for saved games)
 - DirectX 7.0 compatible sound card
 - Keyboard, mouse
- Copies of the Hot Sheet (one for each student) – in the Install guide for the software
- Copies of the Sofía description (one for each student) – Appendix A
- Copies of the house command worksheet (one for each student) – Appendix B
- Teacher key of the house command worksheet – Appendix C

Before you Begin

Prior to using this guide in your curriculum, I would definitely encourage you to play *The Sims* for a couple of hours to become acquainted with the software, including the software tutorial (it would also be beneficial to have students complete the tutorial on a day prior to the lessons). You will have a better understanding of how to effectively use these lessons, and it will probably also inspire you in others in which you may use this game to teach other concepts. You and your students should have basic computer skills to effectively use these lessons.

Part 2: *Los Simulations*

Lesson One – Create a Sim



Lesson One Description

In this lesson students will demonstrate comprehension of descriptions of people in Spanish by creating a Sim character based on the given information of what they look like, what they are wearing, and their personality traits. Students will also have the opportunity to create and design their own Sim and write a description of their creation.

Objectives

- Students will be able to demonstrate comprehension of these essential skills to learning a foreign language: reading and writing.
- To describe people – their physical and personality traits, as well as clothing and accessories.
- To use *The Sims* to build characters based on descriptions given in Spanish.
- To learn the control and functions keys in creating characters in *The Sims*.

Standards

California State Standards for Foreign Language

- *Communication Standard 1.1*: Students engage in conversation, provide and obtain information, express feelings and emotions, and exchange opinions.
- *Communication Standard 1.2*: Students understand and interpret written and spoken language on a variety of topics.
- *Communication Standard 1.3*: Students present information, concepts, and ideas to an audience of listeners or readers on a variety of topics.
- *Communities Standard 5.1*: Students use the language both within and beyond the school setting.
- *Communities Standard 5.2*: Students show evidence of becoming life-long learners by using the language for personal enjoyment and enrichment.

Local Standards- Essential Schoolwide Learning Results (ESLRs):

- Lifelong Learning
- Collaborative Learning

Lesson One Set-Up

You may choose to have both you and your student complete a Sims tutorial prior to incorporating the game in a lesson. The computer will guide you and teach you how to navigate yourself through the house. In addition, the following vocabulary should have already been introduced to the students:

- clothing and accessories
- facial features and body parts
- physical characteristics and personality traits

You may choose to use The Sims to introduce these concepts as well, by having a Sim character displayed on a LCD projector for all the class to see.

Lesson One Activity – Part I

For this lesson, students will be working independently on a laptop computer in the laboratory to create a Sims character.

1. Teacher should distribute the description of Sofía (Appendix A) to the students, as well as the Hot Keys (which can be found in the software Install guide). Students will be required to build a Sim that corresponds with her description in Spanish.
2. Students should open software program by clicking on Start menu → All Programs → Maxis → The Sims.
3. Click on *Create a family*.
4. Students should give the *Sim* character a last name and a first name based on the description (Sofía Escalante).
5. They will then be able to change the following on their character: gender, skin tone, clothing and accessories, personality (including zodiac sign).
6. Once they have completed creating their character and are satisfied, they should click *Done* on the bottom menu.
7. Students should then raise their hand and the teacher will check to see how closely the student creation resembles the original picture of Sofía (Appendix A).

Lesson One Activity – Part II

1. Students should begin the previous activity over; however, this time they will create a character based on their own personal preferences.

2. Once they have completed their creation, students should write a description of their character in Spanish using a word processor (using the teacher description of Sofía as an example).
3. Students should include the following in their Spanish descriptions:
 - Facial features (shape and size of face, eye size and color, nose type and size, lips, and any other distinctive features)
 - Hair color and style
 - Clothing and accessories (include colors, styles, material)
 - Personality (zodiac sign and it's five characteristics; such as neat, outgoing, playful, active, and nice)
4. Students should then save their creation in the network folder for access for future lessons.
5. If students finish early and time permits, encourage them to begin the game so they become familiar with navigating their character in their house (this will be especially important for future lessons).

Lesson One Extensions

Students can give oral presentations to the class in Spanish, by introducing their Sims character to the class (who they are, what they look like, what they like to wear, and what their personality is like). While they are giving the description, the Sims character would be displayed on an LCD projector for the class to see. You could even extend this presentation (possibly in two separate presentations) by having students describe a day in the life of their character while demonstrating the simulation to the class at the same time.

To effectively manage time, use the high or ultra speed mode on the game (2 or 3 key) to allow time for all the presentations to be given.

This lesson addresses several of the California language standards. Students will be required to read a description in Spanish and create a character based on the description (Communication 1.2). Students will then write a description of a character they created and possibly present it to the class (Communication 1.1 and 1.3). Students will use video games in the classroom as a tool to communicate in Spanish (Communities 5.1 and 5.2).

Lesson One Extensions (for upper level language classes)

Go to the official website of *Los Sims* in Spain:

<http://www.portalmix.com/lossims/historias/> and read the stories that gamers have created about their characters and families IN SPANISH! Create comprehension questions about a particular story for students to complete. Students may also create their own original stories about the character they created.

Lesson Two – Welcome Home

Lesson Two Description:

In this lesson, students will learn how to give informal commands and discuss household rooms and objects by using The Sims video game as a tool to do so. This lesson is designed for a second year Spanish class, although could be modified for either first or third year Spanish as well.

Objectives

- Students will be able to demonstrate comprehension of the four essential skills to learning a foreign language: reading, writing, listening, and speaking.
- Students will be able to follow and give informal commands in Spanish.
- Students will be able to talk about household chores and the rooms and objects you would find in a typical house in Spanish.

Standards

California State Standards for Foreign Language

- Communication Standard 1.1: Students engage in conversation, provide and obtain information, express feelings and emotions, and exchange opinions.
- Communication Standard 1.2: Students understand and interpret written and spoken language on a variety of topics.
- Communication Standard 1.3: Students present information, concepts, and ideas to an audience of listeners or readers on a variety of topics.
- Communities Standard 5.1: Students use the language both within and beyond the school setting.
- Communities Standard 5.2: Students show evidence of becoming life-long learners by using the language for personal enjoyment and enrichment.

Lesson Two Set-Up

Prior to beginning this lesson, it is important to introduce informal commands to the students. This activity will allow them to further practice and obtain mastery of the command forms. In addition, students will have already been introduced to gameplay with The Sims for a previous lesson – Create a Sim. If the Create a Sim lesson has not been completed prior to this lesson, please complete the tutorial with the students so they are familiar with navigating the Sim characters in the house.

Lesson Two Activity - Part I:

Teacher will use *The Sims* (PC version), displayed on a screen with a LCD display projector, to introduce the vocabulary associated with the house. Students will be able to associate visual images with the vocabulary and they will also become familiar with the layout of The Sims' house for future activities.

1. Teacher should point to room/object, say the word or phrase in Spanish, and have students repeat after them.
2. After going through all rooms/objects twice, teacher should point to a room/object and have class state in Spanish the word/phrase.
3. Checking for understanding: Ask for student volunteers to come up to the screen or with the mouse pointer to identify different rooms or objects in the house given by the teacher (*¿Dónde está el baño?* = Where is the bathroom?).
4. Teacher should then introduce household chores by commanding a Sim character to demonstrate the chore while modeling the Spanish to the students (and then having them repeat it).

5. Check for understanding: Ask students *¿Qué está haciendo él/ella?* (What is s/he doing?) while the Sim character is performing a chore. Use choral responses or student volunteers to answer the question.

Lesson Two Activity - Part II:

This part of the lesson will be used with one PC and an LCD projector displaying the house.

1. Teacher will have a student volunteer come to the PC while s/he gives commands in Spanish. Examples:
 - *Ve a la cocina y prepara la cena.* (Go to the kitchen and make yourself dinner.)
 - *Saca la basura.* (Take out the trash.)
 - *Limpia los platos.* (Clean the dishes.)
2. While one student is following commands given by the teacher, the rest of the class will be responsible for writing the commands the teacher states on a given worksheet (Appendix B). They will write the commands that corresponds with the numbered captured image of The Sim's house on their worksheet (Command one corresponds with picture one.).
3. Suggestions for practical application for whole class instruction:
 - The same student may stay at the PC until they make a mistake and then another student may be chosen.

- Or each student may be given three commands to follow and the best two or three students can have a face off.
- You can award students with participation points for the total number correct.
- Once you have modeled a few commands, you can ask student volunteers to give the commands. You can also require a student to give a command before they can try their hand at the PC.

Lesson Two Follow-Up/Debriefing:

At the end of the activity, the teacher will review the given worksheet with the class, using an overhead transparency (Appendix C), to check for accuracy of spelling and command forms. In addition, check for accuracy of the corresponding command with the picture of the house map.

Variation: You may have student volunteers write a command on the board or overhead.

This lesson addresses several of the California language standards. Students will be able to give and follow commands in the house (Communication 1.1). Students will work collaboratively with their peers by communicating in Spanish (Communities 5.2).

Lesson Two Extensions:

Students will be assigned to go home and write 10 commands that they can give to a student partner in class the next day. Students will work in pairs on the laptops and will alternate giving each other commands. As student A is giving the command, student B will navigate the Sims character on the PC based on the given command. If a student does not follow the command correctly, the student giving the command will be required to find another way to explain where to go and what to do in Spanish. Students will

demonstrate for the teacher comprehension of commands and household vocabulary by doing the activity in the teacher's presence.

Part 3: Teacher Resources

In addition to using this guide, you will find the following websites to be helpful in understanding and playing The Sims as well as exploring practical applications for your classroom.

- The Sims web page: <http://thesims.ea.com/us/>
- The Sims Resource Page: <http://www.sims1.thesimsresource.com/>
- The Sims Game Guide - Tips on how to effectively manage your Sims life and house: http://www.gamespot.com/gamespot/guides/sims_gg/

References

California Department of Education - Foreign Language Content Standards

<http://www.cde.ca.gov/re/pn/fd/documents/foreign-language.pdf>

Gamespot <http://www.gamespot.com>

Kuntz, Margy. *Teacher's Guide: An Educational Companion for SimCity 3000*.

The Sims Resource - <http://www.sims1.thesimsresource.com/>

The Sims Web Page - <http://thesims.ea.com/us/>

Squire, K. & Jenkins, H. (2003). *Harnessing the Power of Games in Education*. Insight
Vol. 3 Vision.

La Web Oficial del videojuego de Los Sims - <http://www.portalmix.com/lossims/>

Appendix A

Sofía Escalante

Se llama Sofía Escalante. Ella es alta y delgada. Tiene el pelo café y largo (hasta sus hombros) y está un poco ondulado. No tiene flequillo. Su cara es larga y ovalada. Tiene Sus labios son rojos y un poco grandes. Tiene una nariz normal y los ojos son cafes con pestañas largas.

Hace frío en el invierno, y por eso, Sofía lleva la ropa cómoda y caliente. Lleva los jeans apretados con botas negras. Tiene una chaqueta azul sin mangas con un suéter azul claro de lana.

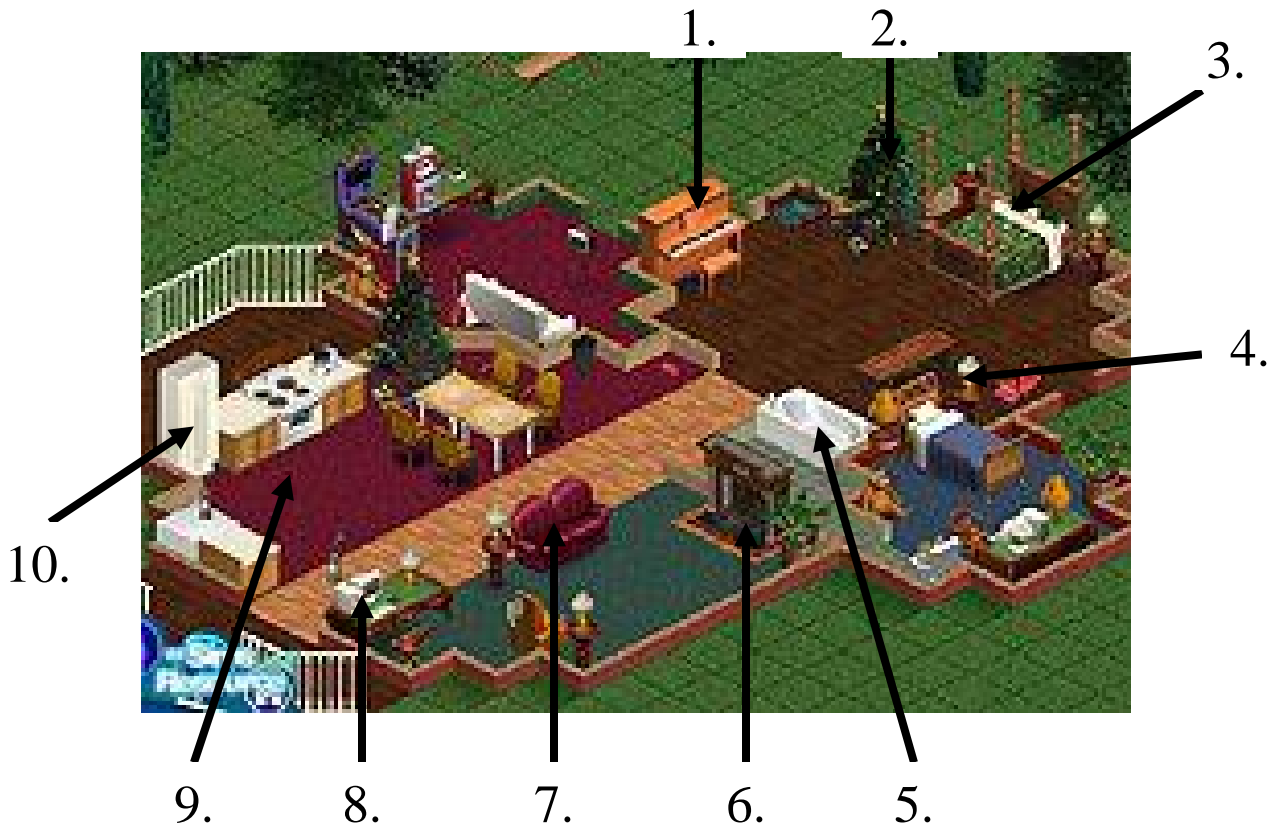
Sofía es capricornia. A ella le gusta divertirse mucho con sus amigos pero no es muy activa. Es organizada y a veces simpatico y a veces antipática.

Sofía should look like this:



Appendix B

La casa de Los Sims

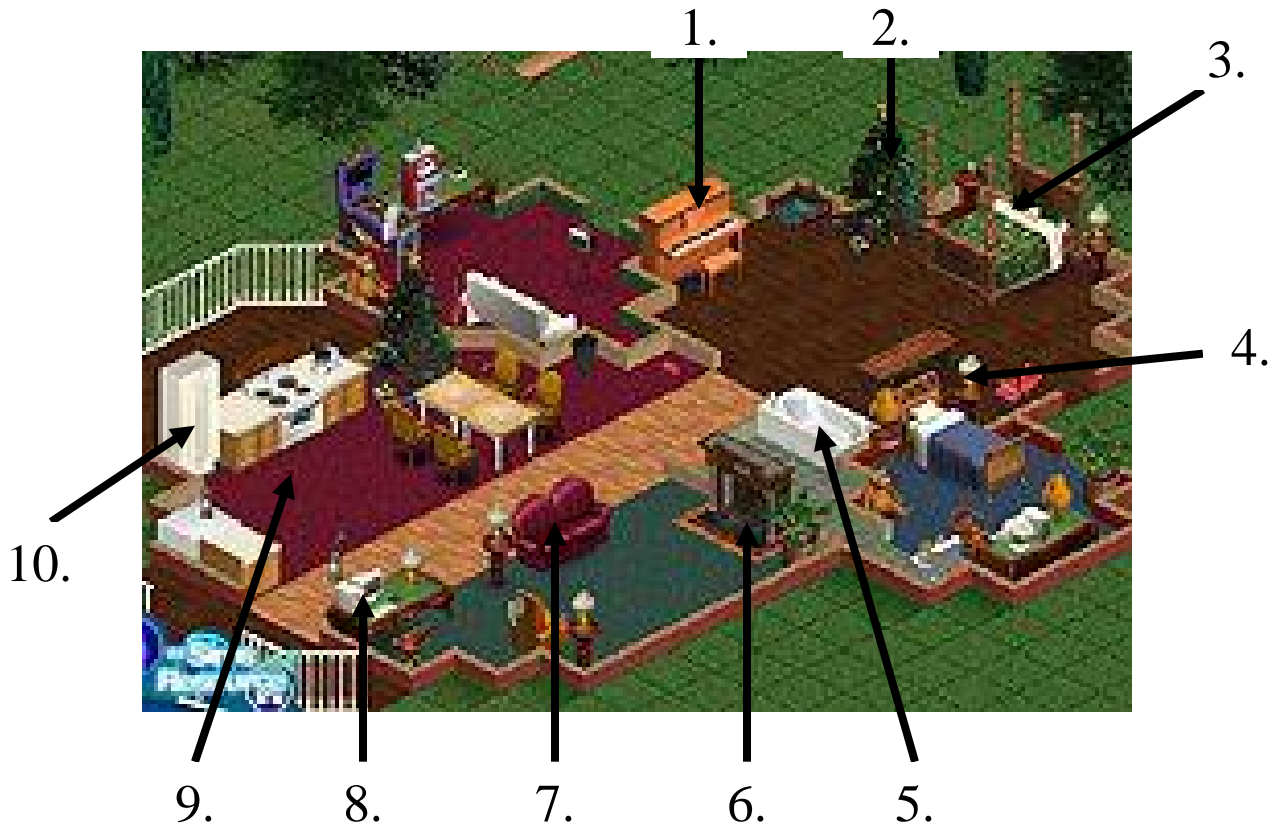


Los Mandatos

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

Appendix C

La casa de Los Sims (Clave)



Los Mandatos

1. Toca el piano. (Play the piano.)
2. Decora el árbol. (Decorate the tree.)
3. Haz la cama (Make the bed).
4. Apaga la luz (Turn off the light).
5. Bañate (Take a bath).
6. Enciende un fuego (Light a fire).
7. Siéntate en la sofa (Sit on the sofa).
8. Prende la computadora (Turn on the computer).
9. Limpia la cocina (Clean the kitchen).
10. Abre la refrigeradora (Open the fridge).