



Spice Up Your Online Class with Gather Town

by Muhammad Aiman Abdul Halim

By now, most educators including myself have successfully adapted with various virtual meeting platforms such as Google Meet, Zoom and Webex. From our experience using all these different platforms, we can easily notice some similarities and differences in features which could either be appealing or not for classroom use. Some platforms are more user-friendly and easier to use, while others might be a bit complicated, but offer more tools and security features. There are so many options out there and it is our responsibility as educators to choose which platform is best for our students' needs.

Gather Town is one of the platforms that I had recently discovered, which seems to have great potential in establishing interesting and interactive online classes. Do not feel left out if you have never heard about it because Gather Town is a relatively new virtual meeting platform that was just launched on 3rd April 2021.



Students met around a campfire to discuss and analyse short stories they have read.



Screenshot of one of my classes via Gather Town. A student can be seen raising his hand to ask questions.

Why should you try Gather Town? Well, from my experience on the platform, I noticed five interesting features which make it more appealing than other virtual meeting platforms:

1. Fun and unique online classes

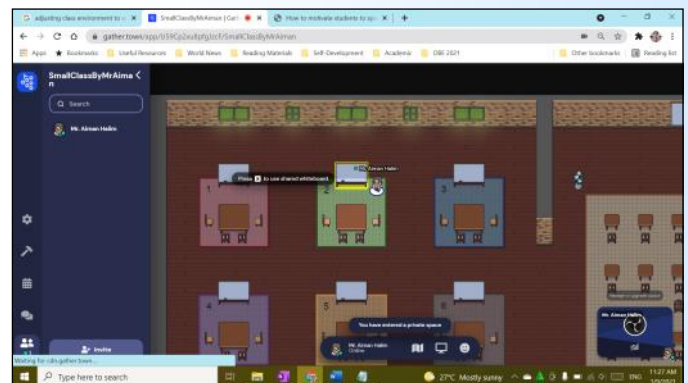
Why have class in a normal classroom when we can be in other places? In Gather, we have the ability to change our class environment to better suit our lessons and learning activities. I noticed that my students are more motivated to speak and interact in English when they are in a light-hearted environment that reduces their anxiety.

2. Personalisation—custom characters

Students can personalise their own avatar. Naturally, there will be more engagement and fun when students feel like they are in control of their learning process. The good thing about this is students could relate to their characters, resulting in better attachment with the online learning experience.

3. Easy-to-use breakout rooms

Yes, other platforms have breakout rooms too but here, the process is much simpler and faster. Students just need to enter the “private discussion area” for a private group discussion session, and I can listen to conversation in each area by simply stepping on the coloured squares.



Private discussion areas, with whiteboards to write down ideas.

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4. Customisable classroom

You can modify everything in your classroom! Possible environmental changes include the arrangement of chairs, tables, decorations and whiteboards. You can create separate areas for group discussions, set the teacher's desk and add books that contain links to real sources of references.



Students can interact with items, for example, reading texts from a book.

5. Eraser collaborative whiteboard

Eraser is quite similar to Google Jamboard, as a digital whiteboard that allows students to collaborate remotely on a shared space. Students can sketch out ideas, solve problems, or draw collaboratively and synchronously.

While all the aforementioned features are interesting and

worth a try, there are some limitations that educators should know:

1. The free version is limited to only 25 participants per meeting.

What is the pricing if we want to have more participants? It depends on two things: how many people are there going to be per meeting and the duration of the meeting for that number of users. The cheapest currently is USD2 per additional user for 2 hours meeting. You can have a maximum number of 500 users per meeting.

2. Gather is not supported in Safari and mobile devices at present.

We need to take this into consideration as students using the aforementioned devices might not be able to participate in Gather classes. I had personally conducted a survey among my students, and only used Gather when everyone is able to join the class. Hopefully, this will not be a problem anymore with future updates and improvements.

In short, lesson content is important, but the platform used for the delivery is equally important. I believe there is not a single perfect online learning platform out there. Hence, it is our duty as educators to choose and adapt any platform that best suits our teaching needs. We can use different platforms at different times throughout the semesters, but it is imperative to give clear instructions to the students to avoid any confusion.



1. There was this competition where the contestants had to hold 'something'. At the end of the event, the winner was a person who was physically disabled (he had no hands and no any feet)! What was that 'something'?

2. What kind of coat is always wet when you put it on?

3. I have branches yet I have no leaves, no trunk and no fruit. What am I?

4. How many bananas can you eat if your stomach is empty?

Answers are on [page 36](#)