Memes and gifs as commentary

Description	Internet memes and gifs are often considered just as humorous and entertaining filling of the social media feed where they virally spread. However, they often also convey significant messages and commentary on current issues, like the 'Winter is Coming' memes referring to the popular TV series Game of Thrones, but often used to remind people of the consequences of climate change. During this activity, different forms and types of memes and gifs are first discussed, then the students create their own memes.

Tag

• Animation
• Design
• Graphic
• Instagram
• Photo
• Snapchat
• Social Media
• WhatsApp

Skills

PRODUCTION
• To create and modify drawings and designs
• To use drawing and design tools
• To create and modify photographic productions
• To use photographic and editing tools
CONTENT MANAGEMENT
• To search, select and download
• To manage content dissemination and sharing
SOCIAL MANAGEMENT
• To participate in social media
MEDIA AND TECHNOLOGY
• To take action and apply
NARRATIVE AND AESTHETIC
• To recognize and describe
• To evaluate and reflect
IDEOLOGY AND ETHICS
• To recognize and describe

Learning areas

• Foreign Languages
• Language
• Social Sciences
• Technologies

Card language

• English
• Spanish
• Finnish
• Italian

Structure

Sessions	2 - 3 (variable)

Duration	45' (variable)
Number of participants	10-30 participants
Age	• 14-16 • 17-18
Materials	• PC • Tablet device or Smart Phone

Process

Key questions	• What makes a meme popular? • How do I create a meme?
Development	The teacher introduces the topic: Internet memes and how they spread virally in social media. The first task is for the students, individually or in pairs, to browse the Internet for popular memes. (**5'**). Each student or pair should find three memes: • one funny • one suitable for the current mood • one that the student can't understand what its point is (**5'**) Then everyone in the group presents their three memes to the rest of the class. (**10'**). Discussion on the memes after watching them. How could they be classified? What kind of materials are used: images from films, comics, TV, personal photographs? Who are presented in them: pop stars, actors, politicians, athletes; cats, dogs or other animals? What is the message of the meme: Does it tell us anything about the mood of the sender? Is it commenting on other people? Is it commenting on some current issue? If it is not mentioned spontaneously in the discussion, the teacher may mention how the same image may be used with different captions, or vice versa. (**15'**). The teacher focuses on memes whose point was not clear. Those who got the point explain it to the others. If needed, Internet resources may be used to determine what is the message of the meme. Usually memes are based on intertextual references to popular or other well known media texts, and it may be necessary to recognize the reference before the message can be understood. (**10'**). In the second session, students have to create their own memes in small groups. In order to do this, they have to look for available meme and gif editors, to gather source materials – this may include taking photographs or video clips with smartphones or tablets. Finally, they should create at least 3 different memes. The students then present their memes to the rest of the class on a screen and tell them which editors and other tools they used to create them. (**30'**) After this, students have to think about possible ways to use the memes. Where could they be published? To whom are they addressed? How does the publishing happen? Those students who want to may publish some of their memes in social media platforms they regularly use, and which they consider appropriate for the specific meme. (**10'**). Closing discussion. (**5'**). **Follow up (optional activity)** *During the next lesson (one to seven days later), teachers check out how the memes have been shared, forwarded and commented. Discussion on why some memes may have gained more attention, and others possibly left unacknowledged. Teacher will describe the basic dynamic of viral distribution, where a critical amount of attention is required in the beginning, and how the peak is usually reached within one-two days, before fading out. (**20'**).*
Evaluation	Emphasis on understanding how many types of references/registers/source materials are employed in even quite simple memes, and how recognizing the references affects the reaction to the meme. Recognizing how liking and sharing of specific types of memes may tell much about the person and their tastes.
References for professors	• Giphy: https://giphy.com/ • Meme Generator: https://imgflip.com/memegenerator
Author	Raine Koskimaa. University of Jyväskylä (Finland), raine.koskimaa@jyu.fi