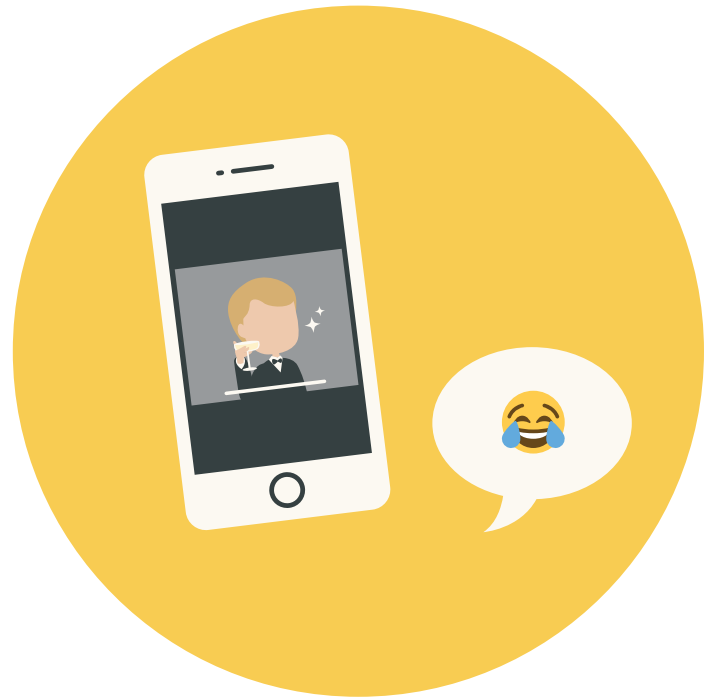


Memes

Pre-Reading

A. Warm-Up Questions

1. What is a meme?
2. What is an example of a meme?
3. Are memes long-lasting?
4. What is the purpose of a meme?



B. Vocabulary Preview

Match up as many words and meanings as you can.

Check this exercise again after seeing the words in context on page 2.

- | | |
|-----------------------|---|
| ___ 1. coin | a) the gradual adaptation of one thing into another |
| ___ 2. evolution | b) related to the cells a person inherits |
| ___ 3. catchy | c) the length of time something is valid or suitable |
| ___ 4. genetic | d) to be noticed or adopted after a while |
| ___ 5. go viral | e) to give an official name or phrase to a new concept |
| ___ 6. shelf life | f) the ability to surprise or upset people |
| ___ 7. catch on | g) a file format for animated images (graphics interchange format) |
| ___ 8. captioned | h) accepted or popular because it is fun to say or easy to remember |
| ___ 9. shock value | i) complex, involving detailed knowledge |
| ___ 10. GIF | j) something that combines two or more sources, a remix |
| ___ 11. sophisticated | k) supported with explanatory text (to go with a video or image) |
| ___ 12. mash-up | l) to spread very quickly on the Internet |

Reading

MEMES

What do they mean?

1. Did you know that the word “meme” came before the Internet? A professor named Richard Dawkins **coined** this term in his 1976 book *The Selfish Gene*. Dawkins studied the **evolution** of culture. He described the meme as a unit of cultural inheritance that spreads from brain to brain in a non-genetic way. A **catchy** hand-clapping tune was one example he gave of a meme. Religion was another. Like genes, memes evolve as they spread.
2. While **genetic** evolution is a slow process, cultural evolution can occur very quickly. In today’s modern world, the Internet allows memes to spread and evolve almost instantly. Catchy words, songs, and videos **go viral** via social media networks and the use of hashtags. Modern memes move and evolve very quickly, but they often have a short **shelf life**.
3. The word “meme” may have been coined decades ago, but the modern meme only **caught on** in recent years. A meme, as it is commonly known today, is a **captioned** image or video that is remixed and shared online within a certain culture. Memes often poke fun at human behavior and are meant to be humorous. Some memes also exist for their **shock value**.
4. Since memes are cultural, only certain people may understand the message. To *get* a meme, you need to belong to a specific cultural group, such as a generation (millennials) or a shared interest group (*Grey’s Anatomy* viewers). While popular memes, such as reaction **GIFs** (also pronounced “jifs”), may be simple enough for non-members to figure out, more **sophisticated** memes often involve **mash-ups** that require careful decoding. Getting and sharing a complex meme shows you belong to a group. Could that be why memes are so popular?

“Memes and the Internet—they’re made for each other. ...They are the shorthand of a hyper-connected group thinking in unison.”

—WIRED magazine

Note

- to *get* means to understand

Comprehension

Discuss these questions in pairs and write the answers in your notebook.

1. What is paragraph 1 mainly about?
2. What does the reading say about the role of the Internet?
3. Why does the reading mention the TV series *Grey's Anatomy*?
4. What example is given of a meme that may be easily decoded?
5. How does the reading end?

Vocabulary Review

A. Chunking

Create six expressions by pairing the words that are commonly found together in English. Write a sentence for each example.

Word List:

- | | | | |
|---------|----------|----------|--------------|
| • poke | • catchy | • to be | • process |
| • meant | • simple | • slow | • shelf life |
| • short | • fun | • enough | • tune |

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

Vocabulary Review cont.

B. Complete the Sentences

Complete the sentences using vocabulary from page 1.
You may need to change the word forms.

1. The word "Internet" was _____ in 1974 by professors at Stanford University.
2. My *Star Wars* meme didn't _____. I think it's because none of my followers are fans.
3. When you send messages with _____, I can't see them. My data plan doesn't include animated visuals.
4. Our group came up with a _____ plan to protect honeybees in our region. We know a lot about bee-decline in this area.
5. The image on its own was humorous. I don't get the _____ image, though.

Word Origins

PAIR WORK

A. Introduction

A root word is a word or part of a word that other words are made from.
The root *mem* comes from the Latin word meaning *mind*. Why do you think the word *meme* has this root?

B. Words

Work with a partner. Look at each of the following words. Why does each word have the root *mem*? Discuss how a root word can help you learn other words.

1. memory
2. memoir
3. memorial
4. remember
5. memorandum (memo)

C. Challenge

Work with a different partner. Can you be the first to think of at least three more words with the root *mem*? Raise your hand when you have at least three words!

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Explaining a Meme

I DON'T GET IT

A. How to Explain a Meme

Memes are often sophisticated mash-ups! You won't *get* a meme unless you have the background knowledge required. When you don't understand a meme, you can say this:

- I don't get it.

To explain a meme to someone else, try using this approach.

First, explain which group a person needs to belong to in order to understand the meme easily.

- You need to be a *Star Wars* fan to get this.

Then describe or show the original source (image, video, etc., before any captioning or remixing). For example, the original *Keep Calm and Carry On* motivational poster could be the original source.

- You recognize this, right? *
- Have you seen this before?

Next, explain any background knowledge that the cultural group shares.

- The new *Star Wars* movie is coming out this Christmas.

Finally, ask the person if they understand the meme now.

A: Now do you get it?

B: Yes, I get it now.

B. Practice

Think of a group you belong to that others in your class may not (e.g., cat owners). Find a popular meme to share. Use the steps you learned to explain the meme to your teacher or a classmate who does not belong to the same group as you.

***Note**

If the person is not familiar with the original source, the meme likely won't be funny or shocking to them.

Discussion

1. Is it important to you to feel like part of a group? Which groups do you belong to?
2. Is a hashtag an example of a meme?
3. Are gestures memes?
4. Why do younger generations understand memes more easily than older generations?
5. What social media networks are most useful for spreading memes, and why?
6. Do you think people waste too much time following memes and meme accounts?
7. Is there money to be made in meme-making?
8. How do you feel about social media networks shutting down meme-only accounts?

Meme Challenge

Your classroom is a culture of its own. Work in a small group. Create a meme that only your class would get. Share your meme with the rest of your class and vote on the best meme. (Look at some example memes for inspiration.)

Listening

Fill in the blanks as you listen to the recording.

MEMES

What do they mean?

1. Did you know that the word “meme” came before the Internet?
A professor named Richard Dawkins coined this term in his 1976 book *The Selfish Gene*. Dawkins studied the evolution of culture. He described the meme as a unit of cultural _____ that spreads from brain to brain in a non-genetic way. A _____ hand-clapping tune was one example he gave of a meme. Religion was another. Like genes, memes evolve as they spread.
2. While _____ evolution is a slow process, cultural evolution can occur very quickly. In today’s modern world, the Internet allows memes to spread and evolve almost instantly. Catchy words, songs, and videos _____ via social media networks and the use of hashtags. Modern memes move and evolve very quickly, but they often have a short shelf life.
3. The word “meme” may have been coined decades ago, but the modern meme only _____ in recent years. A meme, as it is commonly known today, is a captioned image or video that is remixed and shared online within a certain culture. Memes often poke fun at human behavior and are meant to be humorous. Some memes also exist for their _____ .
4. Since memes are _____ , only certain people may understand the message. To *get* a meme, you need to belong to a specific cultural group, such as a generation (millennials) or a shared interest group (*Grey’s Anatomy* viewers). While popular memes, such as reaction GIFs, may be simple enough for non-members to figure out, more _____ memes often involve mash-ups that require careful decoding. Getting and sharing a complex meme shows you belong to a group. Could that be why memes are so popular?

Answer Key

LESSON DESCRIPTION:

Students read about and discuss memes and social groups. This lesson includes speaking practice for “getting” and explaining memes. A class challenge is also included.

TEACHING TIPS:

See *Discussion Starters Teaching Guide* (<https://esllibrary.com/courses/72/lessons/>) for a variety of ways to use the reading.

LEVEL: High Int

TIME: 1.5–2 hours

TAGS: discussion, memes, meme, Internet, social media, group, groups, belonging, word origins

Pre-Reading

A. WARM-UP QUESTIONS

Have students work in small groups or discuss as a class.

B. VOCABULARY PREVIEW

- | | | | | | |
|------|------|------|------|-------|-------|
| 1. e | 3. h | 5. l | 7. d | 9. f | 11. i |
| 2. a | 4. b | 6. c | 8. k | 10. g | 12. j |

Reading (and/or Listening)

Read individually, in small groups, or as a class. Discuss the quote. You can also play the listening as your students read along. A gap-fill version of the reading is available on page 7. Help your students with vocabulary and expressions that they are unfamiliar with.

Comprehension

- Paragraph 1 is mainly about the history (etymology) of the word “meme.”
- The reading says that the Internet allows memes to spread and evolve very quickly (especially via social media networks).
- The reading mentions *Grey’s Anatomy* to show that modern cultural groups are sometimes formed by people who follow a certain TV show (or type of entertainment).
- Simple reaction GIFs are given as an example of a meme that may be easily decoded.
- The reading ends with a hypothetical question about belonging. (The reader is meant to think about the importance of belonging to a group.)

Vocabulary Review

A. CHUNKING

Example sentences will vary.

- | | |
|---------------------|------------------|
| 1. poke fun | 4. simple enough |
| 2. meant to be | 5. slow process |
| 3. short shelf life | 6. catchy tune |

B. COMPLETE THE SENTENCES

- | | |
|-------------|------------------|
| 1. coined | 4. sophisticated |
| 2. catch on | 5. captioned |
| 3. GIFs | |

(continued on the next page...)

Answer Key cont.

Word Origins

Review the concept of root words and have your students work in pairs to explore the root *mem*, which *meme* comes from. Discuss each word as a class following the pair discussion. Then challenge new pairs to think of other words with this root (make it a contest for fun). Possible answers for Part C include: *commemorate*, *memorabilia*, *membrane*, *membership*, *memento*, and *memorize*.

Your students may want to add new words they learn to a Vocabulary Word Bank:

https://esllibrary.com/resource_categories/104/resources/2173

Explaining a Meme

Work through the instructions on how to explain a meme.

Then challenge your students to try explaining one to you or another classmate.

Discussion

Answers will vary. Can be done in small groups or as a class.

Meme Challenge

Optional activity. Place students in small groups for this challenge. Before they get started on creating their own meme that only your class will “get,” bring in some example memes or ask students to bring in some of their favorite memes to show and explain. You may want to allow them to translate memes from their own language.

Listening

1. inheritance, catchy
2. genetic, go viral
3. caught on, shock value
4. cultural, sophisticated

SPELLING NOTE:

This lesson shows the American spelling of the word *Behavior*. Most other English-speaking countries spell it this way: *Behaviour*. Make it a challenge for your students to find this word in the lesson and see if they know the alternate spelling.