LESSON: Analyzing Memes

GRADE LEVEL: Adaptable for grades 7–12

SUBJECT: Multidisciplinary

TIME REQUIRED: Approximately 60 minutes

This is a *foundational* lesson that introduces key concepts and information to students.

RATIONALE

Memes—attention-grabbing images with clever captions that pepper social media feeds—permeate our cultural discourse. While memes have the potential to replace thoughtful conversation and impede connections between different opinions, with proper scaffolding they can be the entry point for critical thinking.

NOTE: Remember that memes are a way to construct collective identity and students can strongly identify with a meme. Acknowledge the negative *and* positive power of the medium and refrain from a personal response to memes students choose, giving the task of critically analyzing the meme back to the students.

OVERVIEW

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS
- What is the difference between opinion, fact, and belief?
- What are memes and how are they important in our culture today?
- What is an assertion? Reasoning? Evidence?

EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES
At the end of this lesson, students understand:
- How to distinguish between opinion, fact, and belief
- That memes are an important cultural phenomenon that require critical thinking analysis
- How to determine what a meme is asserting and if there's evidence to support the claim

TEACHER PREPARATION
- Familiarize yourself with memes if necessary
- Decide if you will provide examples of memes to analyze or let students select examples
- If students bring examples provide appropriate guidelines that align with your classroom needs
- Remember that memes are a way to construct collective identity and students can strongly identify with a meme. Acknowledge the negative *and* positive power of the medium and refrain from a personal response to memes students choose, giving the task of critically analyzing the meme back to the students.
- Student interactive

UNITED STATES
HOLOCAUST
MEMORIAL
MUSEUM

LESSON: Analyzing Memes

DIRECTIONS:

1. Ask students to name some of their favorite social media sites. How does social media shape their identities? Do they feel like the person they are IRL (in real life) is the same as the image they present on social media? How do they feel about the accuracy of information they see on social media?

2. Ask students to articulate the differences between belief, opinion, and fact. Responses can be recorded on the board/ chart paper or you can use Menti or Padlet.

3. Share these definitions:

> ### DEFINITIONS:
>
> - A fact is verifiable. We can determine whether it is true by researching the evidence.
> - An opinion is a judgment based on facts, an honest attempt to draw a reasonable conclusion from factual evidence.
> - Unlike an opinion, a belief is a conviction based on cultural or personal faith, morality, or values.

4. Ask students which one of these three (belief, opinion, fact) social media is the best at expressing.

5. Ask students if they are familiar with memes. What are they? Do they think they are influential? What do memes convey? After students have supplied answers ask if memes convey facts, opinions, or beliefs.

6. Share this information with students:

> ### DEFINITION:
>
> - Memes—attention-grabbing images with clever captions that pepper social media feeds—permeate our cultural discourse. The word "meme" was first coined by Richard Dawkins in 1976; he believed that cultural ideas, like genes, can spread and mutate. Their magnetism is scientific: a surge of dopamine is released when we see or share them because of the emotional responses they provoke[1].

---

[1]
https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2018/mar/04/has-dopamine-got-us-hooked-on-tech-facebook-apps-addiction

UNITED STATES
HOLOCAUST
MEMORIAL
MUSEUM

LESSON: Analyzing Memes

7. After briefly discussing the power of memes, share with students that they will be analyzing memes. Either provide a sample meme or students bring a meme to analyze. Share the student interactive.

8. For a meme to provoke critical thinking it should make a good argument, not simply express an opinion or belief. It should make an **assertion that is backed by reason and evidence (ARE).**

DEFINITIONS:

- **Assertions (A)** are statements about what is true or good or about what should be done or believed.
- Assertions are backed by **reasons (R)**
  - **Reasons (R)** are statements of support for assertions, making those claims something more than mere opinions. Reasons can be linked to assertions with the word *because*.
- Assertions and reasons are supported by **evidence (E)**
  - **Evidence (E)** supports the reasons offered and helps compel audiences to accept the assertion. Evidence answers challenge to the reasons given and can include examples, case studies, narratives, statistics, testimony, eyewitness accounts, and expert opinions[2].

9. Ask students to identify the assertion they think the meme is proposing.

10. Next, students construct the reason why the creator of the meme would make this assertion.

11. Students then conduct research to see if they can uncover credible evidence to support the message of the meme. Cite all sources.

12. Once completed, ask students what is the opposite message of the assertion? Ask them to try and find evidence to support the opposite message of the original assertion. Can it be done?

---

[2] https://www.comm.pitt.edu/argument-claims-reasons-evidence