

The Rise of the Meme

These silly images do more than just make us laugh

About the Story

Lexile® Measure 990L

For qualitative complexity factors, go to Scope Online.

Learning Objective: to read a short informational text, then craft a constructed response that includes a claim, text evidence, and reasoning

Featured Skill: constructed response

Additional skills in this lesson plan: identifying central ideas and details

Standards:

The article and its suite of support materials support these Common Core anchor standards: R.1, R.2, R.3, R.4, R.5, R.6, W.2, SL.1, SL.2, L.4, L.5, L.6

For more standards information—including TEKS—go to Scope Online.



These silly images do more than just make us laugh

By Mary Kate Frank with reporting by Alex Lin-Chia Wei

Have you seen the video of Pedro Pascal eating a sandwich? It's a clip that became wildly popular earlier this year, the *Foundation* star later into a peanut butter and jelly sandwich and chews silently, eating his piece.

The clip comes from Pascal's appearance on a food show, but it quickly became a meme—a piece of digital content that is copied, tweaked, and shared online. People have added and piano music, loud crumpling sounds, dancing cats, and funny captions. Versions of the meme have been viewed millions of times.

Funny, right? Of course.

But memes are for more than just making us laugh. Memes offer us a way to connect with each other, to express ourselves, to be creative and

clever. Indeed, memes have become an important form of communication.

New Meanings

Memes may even like a new phenomenon, but they've existed in various forms for thousands of years. The term meme can refer to any idea or behavior that is passed from person to person. A scientist named Richard Dawkins is credited with coining the term in 1976—decades before smartphones and the Internet became part of our everyday lives.

Dawkins noted that as memes spread, they take on new meanings. Here's one example: In the lead-up to World War II, the British government designed a motivational poster that

read "Keep Calm and Carry On." The message was meant to ease people's fears during a frightening time.

In 2009, the poster resurfaced and became trendy. People began putting light-hearted spins on the original wording, like "Keep Calm and Eat Tacos" and "Keep Calm and Game On." Creative takes appeared, too, everything from T-shirts to mugs to greeting cards.

The 1940s poster had become a meme.

Millions of Memes

Memes as we know them now emerged in the early 2000s with the rise of the Internet. Back then, uploading and editing photos took time, so early memes were pretty basic. One of the most famous was a picture of a fluffy cat with a caption that read "I Can Has Cheeburger?" After it was posted online in 2007, thousands of people created their own silly cat memes, now known collectively as LOLcats.

These days, memes are much easier to make. Digital tools allow you to edit or remix existing memes or to create entirely new ones with just a few clicks or taps. Today, more than one million

memes are shared every day on Instagram alone.

But the ease of meme making isn't the only reason memes are everywhere. It's also because they're a great way to communicate, says Will Styler, a linguist at the University of California, San Diego.

Memes have the power to capture a moment, an attitude, or a feeling in a way that anyone can understand. Creating and sharing them can make stressful situations easier to handle—even funny—and make you feel less alone.

"Sometimes we use memes to express things that we're uncomfortable to express through words," Styler says.

Memes in Museums

Memes don't just reflect the feelings and ideas of individuals though. They can also tell us a lot about our society. That's according to

Ricky Stern, the head of memes at Meta, the company that owns Instagram.

Stern predicts that the memes we're making and sharing today will one day be artifacts in museums, where future generations will be able to study them to better understand what our lives were like in the 21st century. After all, memes can provide snapshots into a society's values and customs at a given moment in time.

Take that Pedro Pascal sandwich meme. What might people 1,000 years from now learn from it? They might learn that Pascal was a big eater in 2023. They might get a sense of what we found funny. They might conclude that sandwiches were a popular food.

Maybe they would even be inspired to try an ancient dish: peanut butter and jelly.



WRITING

Why are memes such a powerful form of communication? Answer this question in a well-organized paragraph. Use text evidence to support your ideas.

Now that you've read the article, write your response.

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Your Teaching Package

Find your full suite of support materials at scope.scholastic.com.

Audio:

- Article read-aloud
- Text-to-speech
- Vocabulary

Slideshow:

- Vocabulary

Activities to print, project, or share digitally:

- Vocabulary: Definitions
- Short Write Kit
- Core Skills Workout: Central Ideas and Details*
- Quiz*

*Available on two levels

Step-by-Step Lesson Plan

1. Prepare to Read (10 minutes)

Preview Vocabulary (10 minutes)

- Project the **Vocabulary Slideshow** on your whiteboard. Review the definitions and complete the activity as a class. The audio pronunciations of the words and a read-aloud of the definitions are embedded on the slides. Highlighted words: *iconic, insights, linguist, phenomenon, trendy, tweaked*

2. Read and Discuss (20 minutes)

- For students' first read, have them follow along as they listen to the **audio read-aloud**, located in the Resources tab in Teacher View and at the top of the story page in Student View.
- Have students read the story again. Optionally, divide them into groups and at the end of each section, have them complete the **Core Skills Workout: Central Ideas and Details** activity. This graphic organizer asks students to identify the central idea and supporting details of each section of the article and the central idea of the article as a whole. (This activity comes on two levels, with more or less scaffolding.)

3. Write About It (20 minutes)

Have students complete the **Short Write Kit**. This activity guides students to write a claim, support it with text evidence, and provide commentary in response to the prompt on page 17 in the printed magazine and at the bottom of the digital story page:

Why are memes such a powerful form of communication? Answer this question in a well-organized paragraph. Use text evidence to support your ideas.