TOOL: Exploring Memes

Before you learn <u>how</u> to make a meme, you may explore:
- *what memes are.*
- *why people share them.*
- *how some memes mislead.*
- *how to help prevent the spread of memes containing misinformation.*
- *how memes can be used to make a positive impact.*

What are Internet memes?
- There are many different types of Internet memes, but the memes we will explore combine images with text captions. These are meant to be easily shared, copied, and remixed. If catchy enough, memes might spread virally online from person-to-person (or even <u>bot-to-bot</u>).
- Examine provided examples of Internet memes. Think about:
  - *What do you see that helped these images spread virally?*
  - *If it's funny, what makes it funny?*
  - *How do the image and text work together to make meaning?*

> Like biological *genes*, cultural *memes* compete, reproduce, and evolve. <u>Watch Richard Dawkins, who coined the term "meme," explain what he meant by "meme"</u>

What makes some memes spread virally?
- Memes are more likely to spread if they...
  - can be easily copied.
  - feel like an "inside joke." If you get the joke, you share it with others who you think will "get it" too. By sharing with the group who gets the joke, you may gain prestige and increase your status.
  - use images that:
    - are absurd, funny, or interesting.
    - have been used before in other memes.
    - have broad appeal (think cats and babies).
    - are recognizable from pop culture.
    - make you feel an emotion: amused, sad, angry, or curious.
  - communicate one simple idea.
  - use few words.
  - can be changed, adapted, or remixed by others.

How can some memes mislead or spread false information?
Images have long been used to persuade, misdirect, or misinform others. For many people "seeing is believing." Yet, photos can easily be manipulated.

The faked image above was shared widely claiming to show Hurricane Sandy over the Statue of Liberty. In truth, the image was created combining photos of a North Dakota storm with a photo the New York skyline.

Images can have false information added to them, changing their meaning.

erictucker @erictucker · Nov 9
Anti-Trump protestors in Austin today are not as organic as they seem. Here are the busses they came in. #fakeprotests #trump2016 #austin

A photo of these buses was Tweeted and spread online with the added text caption containing false information. The buses were, in fact, there to bring people to a software conference.

Images may be as tools of *disinformation*: information created to deliberately deceive or confuse.

After the shooting at Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, images like this one were created and spread to **falsely accuse David Hogg, a student survivor, of being a paid "crisis actor"** who travels from crisis to crisis when they happen to appear on camera.

While many memes spread virally because they make people laugh, memes can also be used to spread misinformation or even outright lies. Memes are intended to be seen by many, magnifying their impact. People tend to trust information shared by friends and so many repost memes without checking whether or not they are truthful. Memes may also feel more authentic because they are simple and appear to be made by "people like us" as opposed to "elite" media professionals like advertisers or news reporters.
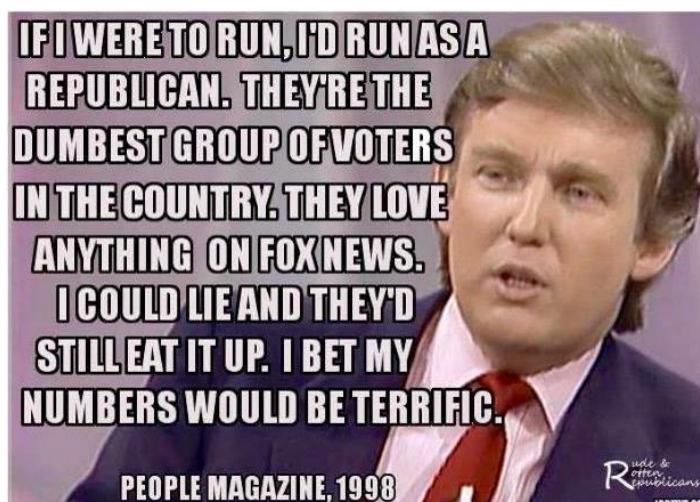
This meme used a false quote to mislead. Adding a specific source helped make the fictitious quote seem legitimate.

And memes can be used to build up negative associations in peoples' minds about a political candidate or other public figure.

How are the memes below used to show the political figures in negative light?

What can we do about misleading, untrue, or dishonest memes?

1. **Stop and think before you share.** Even if you think it's funny or agree with the message, be sure the information is fair and true before spreading.
2. **Check the information.** Here are some fact-checking sites. You may also follow and share suspect memes with *@mediawisetips* on Instagram and Twitter. Mediawisetips is a teen-led fact-checking campaign.
3. **Check the source.** Meme images rarely cite sources. Try searching online for the text to find the source. Go to KnowYourMeme to try to learn about the context and find more information. You may find the claims have no legitimate source or have been proven false.
4. **Check the image**. Because faking an image is easy.
5. **Check the quotes.** Because adding a made-up or out-of-context quote next to a person's photo is even easier.
6. **Check the conspiracy.** A "red-pill" or conspiracy theory may be misleading propaganda or promoting hate against a specific group or people.
7. **Do not share a false meme even to criticize it.** Others still might spread it and share it.
8. **Create your own Internet memes that are fair, truthful, and accurate**–as well as funny and catchy.

How might memes be used to have a positive impact?

Memes may be created to positively impact culture. Examine example memes provided in the Positive Memes Google Drive folder.

Discuss:

- *What are the core messages in these memes?*
- *How do the images and text interact to create meaning?*
- *Would you share any of these memes? Why or why not?*
- *How did the creator of this meme use images and text to persuade the audience?*