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### How Do You Meme?: Using Memes for Information Literacy Instruction

Christina Boyle

*CUNY College of Staten Island*

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## **How Do You Meme?: Using Memes for Information Literacy Instruction**

### **Abstract**

Memes, or image macros, have become a standard method of digital information sharing. This is especially true during times when current events ignite a heightened desire for information seeking among students. Memes can be sources of misinformation, such as during events of the past decade, including recent presidential elections, social justice movements such as Black Lives Matter, and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Librarians need to address this format in their information literacy teachings. In this article, the author briefly outlines the rise of internet memes, discusses how higher education students are engaging with them, and highlights some problematic meme-sharing throughout some of the aforementioned events of the past decade. Within the modern information landscape, where misleading information and fake news abound, librarians can and should create and share their own educational memes designed to promote information literacy by example. These librarian-authored memes should also demonstrate source attribution and ethical information sharing practices. Resources for meme creation, tips on how to use them within information literacy instruction, and examples of how the author has included them in her own pedagogy are included.

*Keywords:* social media, memes, information literacy, misinformation, critical literacy, libraries

### **Introduction**

Internet memes, often in the format of captioned images called image macros, are rapidly consumed and shared widely online by our students. Memes have become a standard method of digital information sharing, for better or for worse, especially during times when current events ignite a heightened desire for information seeking. Memes appeal to internet users since they are

often succinct, visually eye-catching, and easily digestible. Their visual nature is conspicuous within social media feeds, quickly capturing attention while users scroll through a stream of countless posts. Memes originally started gaining popularity online to share jokes and entertaining thoughts in the form of relatable images with humorous captions added. As users realized how easily these shareable information nuggets could be created, memes began to evolve into sources of false or misleading information, often with political or ideological motivations (Barnes, Riesenmy, Duc Trinh, Lleshi, Balogh, & Molontay, 2021). This has become increasingly prominent during major events of the past decade, including recent presidential elections, social justice movements such as Black Lives Matter, and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Misleading memes often appeal to pathos and/or reliance on confirmation bias, making them prime clickbait. Anyone can create a meme, and once they are shared on social media, it becomes difficult or even impossible to determine who the original creator was and what authority they had to propagate information on the associated topic. Due to this emerging use of memes, librarians need to address this format in their information literacy teachings, just as we address the many other vehicles of information that our students are encountering and using on a regular basis.

In this article, the author briefly outlines the rise of internet memes, discusses how our students are engaging with them, and highlights some problematic meme-sharing throughout some of the aforementioned events of the past 8-10 years. She proposes that librarians combat the challenge of ubiquitously misleading memes by taking advantage of this familiar genre and creating counter-memes that encourage the critical evaluation of information (especially that which is circulated on social media). Within the modern information landscape, where misleading information and fake news abound, librarians can and should create and share their

own educational memes designed to promote information literacy by example. These librarianauthored memes should also demonstrate source attribution and ethical information sharing practices. Resources for meme creation, tips on how to use them within information literacy instruction, and examples of how the author has incorporated them into her own pedagogy are included.

Librarians have more source types to address in their information literacy instruction than ever before. Internet memes, though maybe not the first format that comes to mind when we think of how our students seek information, are ubiquitous and therefore impossible to ignore. “Meme” was first coined by Richard Dawkins in his 1976 book, *The Selfish Gene*, to refer to “a unit of cultural transmission” (Dawkins, 1976, p. 249). According to Google Trends data, the word “meme” was not commonly entered into the search engine until around 2011, when it began to steadily climb in popularity (Google, n.d.). Although 2020 seems to have slightly less meme searches on Google (remaining above a score of 60 out of 100, with 100 indicating the peak popularity of a term), between mid-2016 and mid-2020, searches for the term “meme” remained above 80 out of 100. Prior to 2011, this term was at less than 1 out of 100 (Google, n.d.) Of course, this single analytic is not enough to make a comprehensive claim about the significance of memes within society, but it certainly reflects their major increase in popularity. This is not a paper on tracking memes, nor is it one that delves into the propagation of memes, but rather is one that highlights the importance of memes as a vehicle for information – very often misinformation – and suggests strategies for using this to instead promote information literacy instruction.

Memes have found their way across the internet, regularly going viral and being shared at lightning speed before anyone has a chance to evaluate their validity. To return to rise of popular

memes, we can consider the infamous “Grumpy Cat,” everyone’s favorite cranky cat, or “Doge,” the relatable Shiba Inu dog (“Grumpy Cat,” 2012; “Doge,” 2010). The recognizable image of a cat named Tardar Sauce was not a meme, but once the image of this cat along with the alias “Grumpy Cat” was altered with the addition various captions, this became one of the most well-known memes on the internet. This is an opportune moment to note that, for the purposes of this paper, the simplified term “meme” will be used to refer to such digital images, which are generally image macros with text superimposed onto the picture. These memes are the result of combined information – the product of a user connecting text with a visual in order to convey a new, synthesized meaning. An important defining factor of memes is that they are not just bits of content that are shared widely. Rather, they have been adapted in some way, sometimes using a viral image or quote that is then combined with some other resource and then shared and consumed widely.

### **Review of Literature**

As I will discuss in the below literature review, librarians and educators have been addressing the growing significance of memes as methods of communication and information sources in recent years. Many have incorporated them into their own instruction or have suggested methods for facilitating meme creation among learners. Although there are many librarians who create memes for various contexts in the available literature, I have not found any works that both encourage librarians to author memes to encourage information literacy among college students while also providing clear guidance on how to do so. This is the very aim of this paper. The author identifies an opportunity for information literacy instruction and demonstrates how to use and create original memes as instructional tools that will resonate with our students in a unique and relevant way.

Unsurprisingly, due to the ubiquity of memes online, there is a rather robust body of literature that focuses on memes and information. An entire emerging discipline centers on the subject of memetics, which is the study of “how culture evolves through the creation, selection, and replication or transmission of information patterns or memes: ideas, beliefs, theories, and other sorts of mental constructs” (Oxford Reference, 2022). This field of study is a rather interdisciplinary one, and appears as a branch of either Linguistics or Communication most frequently within the literature. Although her research does not focus on memes within education, I would be remiss not to acknowledge the work by Lindor Shifman, whose extensive meme and mimetics research explores how memes spread and contribute to cultural communication (Shifman & Thelwall, 2009; Shifman & Lemish, 2011; Shifman 2012, 2013a, 2013b, & 2018). To examine memes is not necessarily part of memetics, but since this is a budding area of research, it feels prudent to mention this, albeit briefly. Memes themselves have a somewhat elusive definition. As mentioned above, a meme can be any piece of cultural information, in a variety of formats. For the purposes of this paper, the literature review focuses mostly on the conversation surrounding memes that are image macros or short videos, since these types of memes are the ones relevant to the author’s overall assertions. Henceforth, in this paper, when the word “memes” is used, it is in reference to these, unless otherwise specified.

### ***Mememes and Critical Literacy***

The current conversation on memes in education is incredibly nuanced and vast, ranging from explorations of memes as outreach and marketing tools for libraries (Bell, 2018; Croft, 2020) to considering memes as products of political and religious discourse (Aguilar, Campbell, Stanley, & Taylor, 2017; Kulkarni, 2017; Elmore & Coleman, 2019; Ross & Rivers 2017; Moody-Ramirez & Church, 2019). Many of the published literature on memes and current events

underscores how entrenched memes are with discussions of fake news and misinformation. The dialogue on memes as educational tools overwhelmingly leans towards assigning students projects in which they evaluate and create their own memes to practice summarizing newly learned concepts in a novel format. Memes are often the end result of a research project, as in the paper by Beucher, Low, and Smith (2020), where middle-school students create memes to demonstrate their cultural understanding after learning about the Dakota Access Pipeline. Student-authored memes are also present in the article by Cately (2019), who asserts that students should create memes to foster their creativity while simultaneously practicing with digital tools. Cately further affirms that student meme creation is also intellectually stimulating in ways that are fresh and engaging, which is crucial for Millennials and Gen-Z'ers who are entering into an increasingly social and digital workforce (2019).

By requiring students to design memes that convey newly learned content, educators appeal to digitally immersed generations of students while also prodding them to succinctly and creatively demonstrate their learning, as seen in the papers by Purnama (2017), whose students made memes to practice their English language learning, and by Riser, Clarke, and Stallworth (2020), whose students were tasked with creating scientific memes, complete with supporting research, as an assessment of their scientific literacy. Riser et al. (2020) compared this to students who completed a more traditional research writing assignment, and found benefits to the meme assignment, including a better research experience. Faidley (2021) had students assess internet memes that focus on portraying the college experience as part of their honors education at the University of Akron. Although memes were not the main focus of Faidley's article, the natural inclusion of them as a media avenue for his students to analyze further solidifies meme's growing presence in education. Martínez-Cardama and Caridad-Sebastián (2019) performed a

study to explore visual resources, including memes, on social media as a teaching method to digitally native students. They conclude that memes foster collaboration among students as well as a connection between the students and instructors. College students were tasked with the creation of new political memes in order to exercise further critical thinking, and they found this assignment enjoyable and rewarding (Wells, 2018).

The discussion on memes in the classroom is incredibly robust, with many scholars recognizing and emphasizing the role memes play within critical literacy (Harvey & Palese, 2018; Ireland, 2018; Robinson & Robinson, 2020). Johnson (2018), among others, spotlights memes' role in the spread of misinformation and fake news, drawing attention to the importance of evaluating these digital information bites as part of regular information literacy teaching. Robinson & Robinson (2020) add in digital literacy to the list of literacies that require thoughtful consideration of memes, citing students' constant engagement with technology and social media as beneficial growth and experience with highly transferrable and necessary skills in today's world.

In the extensive research that has been published on memes in recent years, authors discuss the necessity for educators to teach their students to be critical of memes. In Harvey and Palese's article, "Nevertheless Memes Persisted: Building Critical Memetic Literacy in the Classroom" (2018), the authors present the idea that we need to teach critical information literacy in memes due to our students' constant interaction with them. Harvey and Palese encourage educators to help hone their students' "critical mimetic literacy" (2018, p. 260) by incorporating memes into education. Similarly, in Ireland's article, "Fake news alert: Teaching news literacy skills in a meme world," (2018), she highlights the well-known problem of our students and patrons using memes as main sources of information (particularly for news). She



urges librarians to use memes as teachable objects for information literacy and to create their own memes (as well as infographics) to instruct users using visual-heavy formats that they are already used to using in their daily routines.

The argument of this paper builds mainly on the work of Harvey and Palese and Ireland, among others, by also insisting that librarians approach meme evaluation by creating original memes themselves. Ireland (2018) mentions that librarians can connect with library users “on the same level that fake news does” by making memes and infographics (p. 127), but provides no specific instructions on how to create such memes. The current author is, in a way, synthesizing this while also including anecdotal experiences with creating memes for classroom use.

Although there are many studies that focus on how libraries and educators can include memes in their teachings on critical literacy, this paper adds to this body of discussion by instead centering on how librarians should use memes in library instruction in direct engagement with students, not only encouraging their evaluation, but also creating their own to use specifically as teachable tools.

### **Memes Throughout Notable Events**

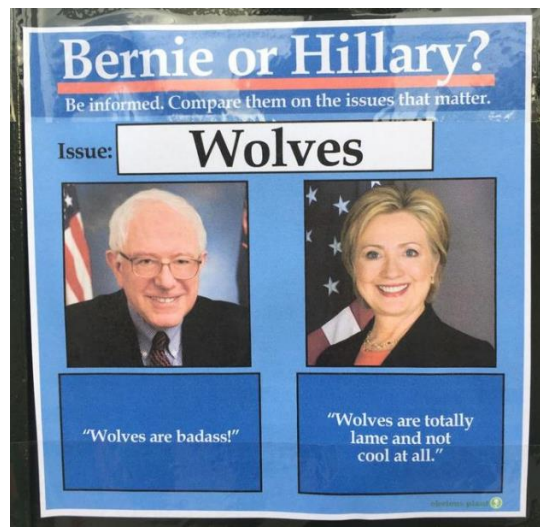
To adequately provide a foundation for discussing memes and information literacy, it is first valuable to provide a brief highlight of memes and their role in the spread of information, particularly misinformation, throughout recent events in the United States. There are many notable examples from throughout the 2016 presidential election and social movements such as Black Lives Matter, as well as memes that arose during the COVID-19 pandemic. Anyone with an internet connection would have noticed the many memes circulating on social media leading up to the 2016 and 2020 presidential elections. The author does not seek to make any claims on if or how the memes that were spreading had an effect on the outcome of elections, as that is not

relevant for the current discussion, but she will highlight some of the memes that were visible during this time to provide examples of the types of image macros that were prominent and spreading misinformation. Frighteningly, 14% of American adults who were surveyed cited social media as the most helpful source of information surrounding the 2016 presidential campaign, which included about one third of adults aged 18-29 (Gottfried, Barthel, Shearer, & Mitchell, 2016). Another election cycle later, in 2020, many were still getting their news from social media, with 65% of those who admitted to getting news from social platforms doing so 7 days per week (Barthel, M., Mitchell, A., Asare-Marfo, D., Kennedy, C., & Worden, K., 2020). Although memes are not the only vehicle of information shared on social media, social media is the main avenue where memes abound. Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that a large portion of college-aged adults were ingesting memes as an information source that they might have found “valuable”. Here are a few examples of memes that were prominent during the 2016 presidential campaign:

***Bernie, Hillary, and Biden:***

**Figure 1**

*Bernie or Hillary*



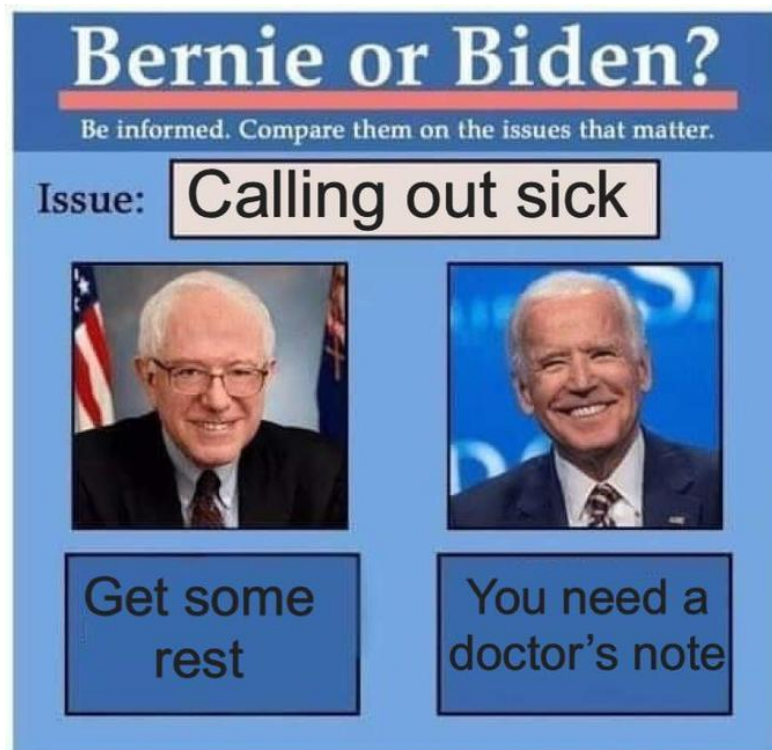
*Note. Bernie or Hillary.* [Image Macro], 2016, Know Your Meme

(<https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/bernie-or-hillary>)

A series of memes that appeared to be images of campaign posters with Bernie Sanders and Hillary Clinton were popular in 2016. They feature side by side images of the two Democratic primary candidates, with an issue outlined at the top, and fake quotes below their pictures. Although at first glance, many of these memes seem outlandish and ridiculous, it is a prime example of how many memes feature quotes next to an image, suggesting they are legitimate quotes, yet providing no context nor source of these alleged quotes. The fake campaign memes originate from Obvious Plant, which is a Tumblr blog by Jeff Wysaski, and were first posted in January 2016 (“Bernie or Hillary,” 2016). These memes were recycled and photoshopped to include Joe Biden for the 2020 campaign:

## Figure 2

*Bernie or Biden*



*Note. Bernie or Biden.* [Image Macro], 2016, Know Your Meme  
(<https://knowyourmeme.com/photos/1755580-bernie-or-hillary>)

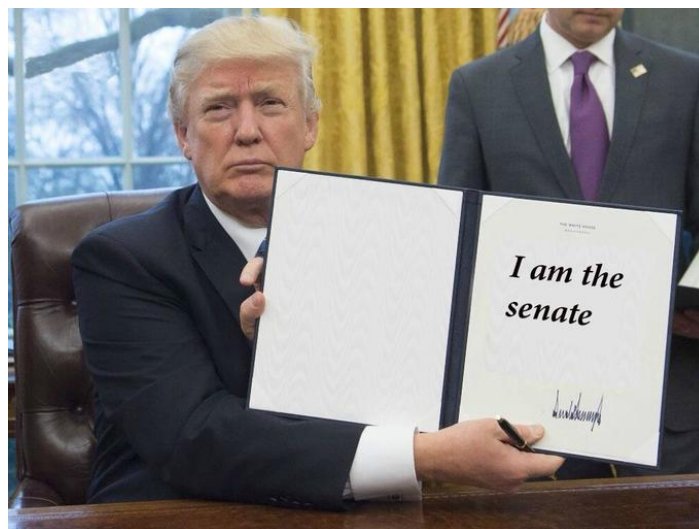
There are countless versions of each of these memes, a testament to the ease with which they can be doctored. The above two memes are both traceable on KnowYourMeme.com, a crowdsourced website dedicated to researching and tracking popular memes from the internet. KnowYourMeme is often cited in Library and Information Science literature as a source for meme research, and although it is not an academic resource, it is generally a well-regarded tool for learning about the origins and meanings of popular memes. Although memes can be submitted by anyone, their origin and meanings are vetted by site editors before being marked as “confirmed” (“About Know Your Meme”, 2022). As the origin of memes are generally nebulous, this resource is valuable in providing some information about the original iterations of well-known memes, which are not always findable via other sources.

### *The Trump Presidency*

Here is another meme that reached peak popularity after Trump’s election in 2016:

#### **Figure 3**

*Trump’s First Order of Business*



*Note. Trump's First Order of Business.* [Image Macro], 2017, Know Your Meme

(<https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/trumps-first-order-of-business>)

This meme is another image macro with a record on KnowYourMeme of countless edited versions, and is generally known as “Trump’s First Order of Business”. This meme reached peak popularity on Google searches in November 2016 (“Trump’s First Order of Business,” 2017). It shows Donald Trump signing executive orders, and although a clear piece of satire in this instance, it is near impossible to track the effect that other versions of this meme may have had on the spread of misinformation.

The author has purposefully highlighted some of the less incendiary political memes, as her aim is to focus solely on the election and campaign memes that have a clear origin to discuss the rise of such objects on social media, and not to analyze the messaging behind them or any role they may or may not have played within the election(s). Rather, the goal of this paper is to underscore the rise of memes as information sources that can appear to be legitimate images at a cursory glance, but which are easily manipulated and spread to misinform millions.

### ***Ben and Jerry***

Memes were also exploding online in relation to the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, most notably throughout 2020. After a statement in support of BLM, a photo of the founders of Ben & Jerry’s ice cream was photoshopped and captioned as a meme to spread disinformation:

**Figure 4**

*We Hate Cops*



*Note. We Hate Cops. [Image Macro], 2016, Snopes*

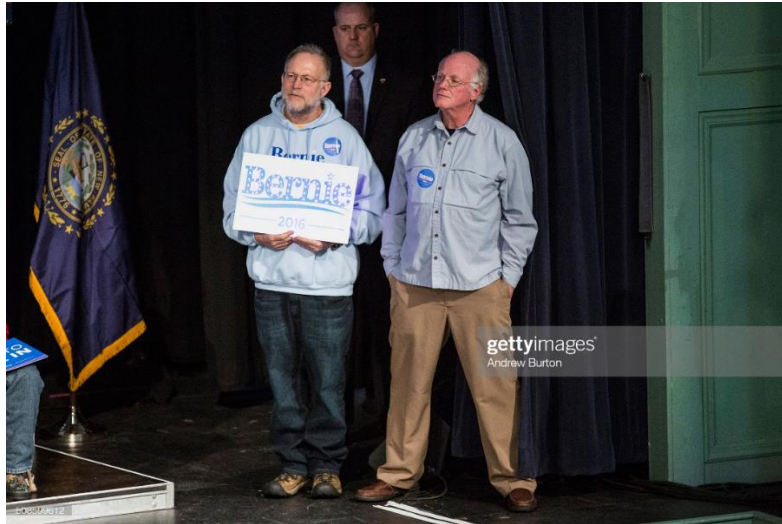
[\(https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/ben-and-jerrys-hate-cops/\)](https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/ben-and-jerrys-hate-cops/)

The above is a doctored version of an original photo of the two holding a Bernie Sanders sign at a political protest:

**Figure 5**

*Ben & Jerry*





*Note. Ben & Jerry [Photograph], by Andrew Burton, 2016, Getty Images.*

[\(https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/ben-and-jerrys-hate-cops/\)](https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/ben-and-jerrys-hate-cops/)

The image was turned into a meme when superimposed text was added onto this photo and the newly altered image was spread to convey a specific message – namely, that the founders of this popular ice cream company hate the police. These examples all demonstrate how simple it is to create a meme and spread disinformation widely without an intuitive or easy way to ascertain the origin or accuracy of the content being shared.

***“Racist” Michael Kors:***

Sometimes, memes are born from an older image which is then recirculated with a new caption attached and is falsely connected to an event or movement. This happened with an image from a satirical website referencing the designer Michael Kors:

**Figure 6**

*Racist Michael Kors*



*Note. Racist Michael Kors* from Angelo Fichera, [Image Macro], 2020,

<https://www.factcheck.org/2020/07/post-falsely-attributes-racist-remarks-to-fashion-designer/>

There is no denying that this satirical post is in terrible taste and is horrifically offensive. The headlined quote was actually said by Michael Kors in relation to the color black within fashion designs (Fichera, 2020). The headline was "resurfaced" during the Black Lives Matter protests in 2020, and attached to a longer fabricated quote (Fichera, 2020). It is difficult to determine if this meme was deliberately created with the intention to push forward false information, or if the person who superimposed the text "MK straight savage" onto this image was completely unaware that it was from a satirical website (which no longer exists) and that Michael Kors did not, in fact, say the extended portion of the quote that was wrongfully



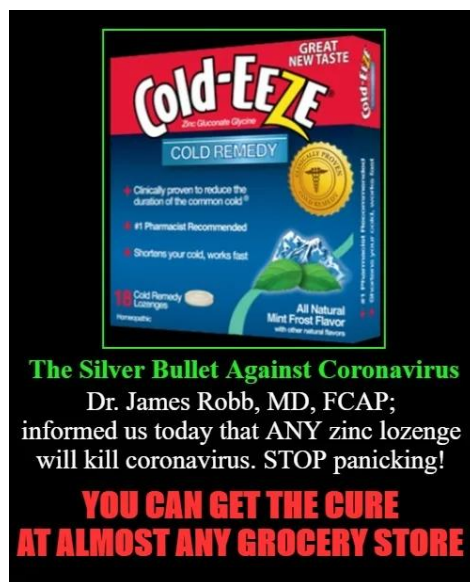
attributed to him. Not only are photos used to spread information that cannot often be traced and have no attribution to the source, but also historic images that are buried within the annals of obscure websites are taken out of context, given new commentary (in this case, a single phrase), and re-shared as a meme to become disinformation rockets.

### *Memes as Super Spreaders....of Misinformation*

When COVID-19 first began to spread in early 2020, it is understandable that it caused anxiety and widespread searches for information on this novel coronavirus, its origin, and its potential threat. Memes on the subject were created and shared at incredibly rapid speeds, often spreading misinformation and contributing to the rising panic as the epidemic became a pandemic. A prime example is when a meme was created from a comment made by a pathologist in a Facebook post designed to be shared only with his friends and family. After encouraging his family to buy zinc lozenges, as zinc is supposedly effective at preventing certain viruses from multiplying, the information was misrepresented in a meme (Kasprack, 2020):

#### **Figure 7**

#### *Zinc Lozenges Coronavirus*



Note. *Zinc Lozenges Coronavirus*. [Image macro], 2020, Snopes (<https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/zinc-lozenges-coronavirus/?collection-id=238774>)

This is one of countless examples of unreliable (to say the least) medical advice memes that were dominating social media throughout the height of the pandemic. As vaccines for COVID-19 began to be produced, similarly unauthoritative, incredibly biased, and misleading memes became disinformation super spreaders, sharing information without citing any sources (or citing them out of context), demonstrating knowledge of the memes’ origins, or displaying any other indicators of accuracy or reliability. One such example uses sarcasm alongside partially correct and partially incorrect information regarding the various vaccines:

**Figure 8**

*Choosing Your Covid-19 Vaccine*



*Note. Choosing Your Covid-19 Vaccine.* [Image macro], 2021, Snopes

(<https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/covid19-vaccine-meme/>)

The information was either taken out of context, wrongfully represented, or was making unsubstantiated claims. Snopes found some of the information to be correct, but this meme was presented in a way that was rather misleading (Lee, 2021). Again, these examples are a miniscule snapshot of the hundreds of thousands of memes that have been circulating on social media throughout all of the aforementioned information seeking events. They represent the type of information that so many of our students are consuming – snippets of information with no author, no clear origin, no reputable citations, and therefore no reliability. In many cases, the images being used to construct these memes are altered and distributed without proper permission or attribution, adding another layer of ethical deviancy to the practice of this type of meme creation. So, not only are memes teaching students to blindly accept visual nuggets of information that are unverifiable, they are also promoting the unethical and inappropriate use of intellectual property by encouraging and normalizing redistribution and derivative versions of content without permissions or attribution. As librarians, our expertise is in great need. It is our responsibility to educate our students on memes, and the numerous and egregious information literacy issues that arise from this type of information sharing and engagement.

### **Memes in the Library Classroom**

As discussed in the above literature review, there are many excellent examples of how educators and librarians have been using memes in their instruction, most often inviting students to create their own. To build upon this, it is the current author's contention that librarians should create memes to use this very format to highlight the essential critical lens that should be applied when digesting information found in image macros. The author agrees with the assertions made

by Johnson (2018), Harvey and Palese (2018) and Ireland (2018), that memes are so prevalent and such common spreaders of mis- and disinformation that they must be a standard covered topic in information literacy instruction. A relatively simple way to do this is to use the very format of discussion to demonstrate and instruct on memes and information literacy. Although Ireland (2018) does conclude that librarians should be creating memes for this purpose, she does not provide guidance on how to do so, or which platforms to use for the meme creation. This paper acts as a bridge for the work done by the above librarians by proposing some methods for creating these memes, covering content, format, and the logistics. This is intended to help encourage librarians to author memes, share them with their students, and to fight fire with fire in the battle against meme misinformation.

### *The Author's Classroom Memes*

At the author's urban academic library, librarians regularly teach a credit-bearing course that focuses on information literacy, specifically for academic research. The author expanded her use of memes in teaching during Fall 2021, when library instruction was fully online at her institution. An example of one of the author's memes that was used in this course will be labelled and discussed throughout this next section, which details how to trace meme images, what platforms to use to create new memes, and how to share them in the classroom.

### **Tracing Meme Origins**

One of the main challenges of dealing with memes is traceability. It is often impossible to tell where the information on a meme has originated when it is encountered on social media. There are a few websites that are helpful when attempting to determine the origin and context of a meme. Of course, due to the countless memes that are rapidly created and shared regularly, there is not always information available on each meme. However, if it is a

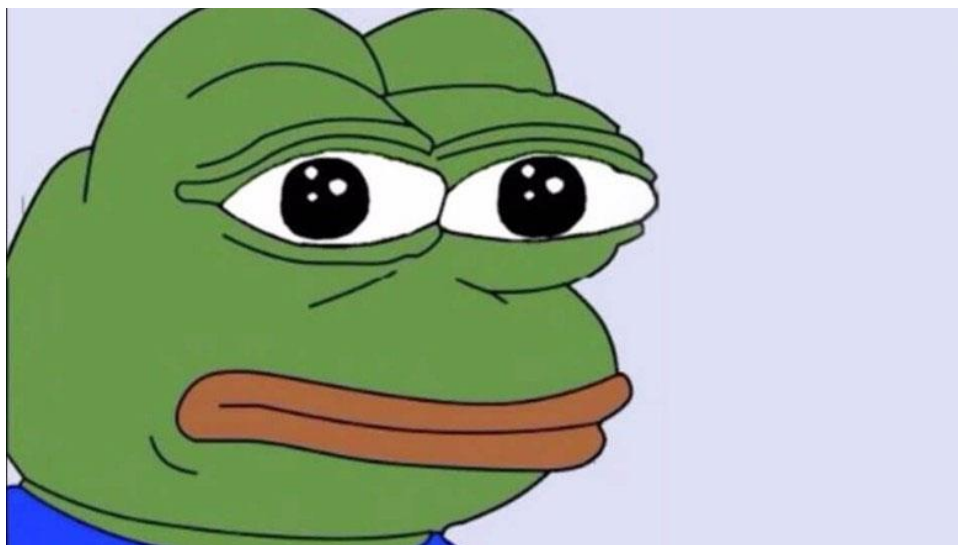
meme that has gone viral, there is a likely chance it will be addressed on at least one of the following sites.

### *Know Your Meme*

KnowYourMeme.com is commonly referenced by meme scholars in their literature, and is regarded as a generally accurate and informative platform for learning the history of individual memes. The About page on this site carefully explains that there is an editorial board who evaluate submitted memes from the community to determine the validity of the information. Much like Wikipedia, anyone can submit information to this site, and then it is reviewed by editors and researchers before it is confirmed or labelled as invalid. References are linked so that users can navigate to the sources to confirm the assessments, which makes them incredibly reliable and useful, another similar trait to Wikipedia. This site is an asset when trying to determine the origins of a meme. A prime example would be a popular object of memes, Pepe the Frog:

### **Figure 9**

*Pepe the Frog*



*Note. Pepe the Frog. [Image macro], 2008, Know Your Meme*

<https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/pepe-the-frog>

This cartoon frog is one that most people who use the internet have probably seen at least once, due to its completely ubiquitous presence online. The star of so many memes, this frog figure was used in many innocuous image macros before it started to be used as the object of racist images that were circulated online. Thankfully, this beloved frog was used more and more for non-nefarious memes, and this eventually shattered any power that racist groups may have had temporarily over this character. It would have been incredibly important to know, as an educator, especially during the time when Pepe the Frog was actively being used as a racist symbol, that this was a possible context in which the meme was found. A search on Know Your Meme gives a clear overview of the history and various connotations connected to this meme, making it an incredibly valuable resource when looking for background information on popular memes. Know Your Meme also allows users to find related sub-entries when on a meme's information page, which can provide clarity on similar memes as well. Overall, this is a useful source when seeking information on the history and origins of a meme, when such information is available.

### *Snopes*

Snopes.com is a website that most librarians know of as a useful fact-checking resource. There is no dedicated section to memes, but there are plenty of examples of misinformation that have been spread via memes which fact checkers at Snopes have evaluated. Much of the false information that is spread through memes can be searched on Snopes, with images of their origin present. The researchers at Snopes provide a verdict for each questionable myth or fact they investigate, by labelling each as either "true," "false," or "misleading," the

latter of which is incredibly important for our students to become accustomed to determining. Memes are often the most dangerous when they present accurate information in a misleading manner. Snopes provides excellent and clear commentary on such memes. This is a useful platform to use when trying to determine the truth behind a meme's message.

### ***FactCheck.Org***

Part of the Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania, FactCheck.org is another site that most librarians will have familiarity with. Similar to Snopes, they often will address information that is being spread via memes, and will identify if it turns out to be false, misleading, or accurate. There is also an entire section dedicated to debunking misinformation from social media, entitled "Viral Spiral." Another valuable resource to consult when trying to pinpoint a meme's origin and accuracy, users will find an explanation of how fact checkers determined the source of information in question as well as the origin (if available) of the information being spread.

### **Creating Memes**

It is very necessary for librarians to encourage users to be skeptical of information found via memes. Of course, we want to instill a healthy skepticism and an instinct to evaluate all sources of information in our students. However, the method that this author is proposing to address this is to create memes specifically for use in our information literacy instruction. This rationale is one that has been touched upon by others, as previously discussed (Harvey & Palese, 2018; Ireland, 2018). To build upon this concept, memes should indeed be used as instructional objects, but also should be created by librarians as unique information literacy instruction tools. To that end, methods of meme creation along with meme generators are discussed below, along with an example of the author's use of memes in her own information literacy course.

There are countless meme creators available on the web, two of which are [Imgflip.com](http://imgflip.com) and [MemeGenerator.net](http://MemeGenerator.net). Both of these sites are incredibly simple to use, provide the images, are easy to share to multiple platforms, and require very little technological skill to use. For complete meme novices, [Imgflip](http://imgflip.com) is the most attractive option as it provides detailed instructions on how to use their site to create a meme. Users can choose from provided images on the site by browsing or searching, or they can upload their own. Of course, as the intended purpose of creating these memes will be to teach by demonstration the best practices for sharing and evaluating information, the image chosen should be one that has a known origin, so that the image source can be credited. Thankfully, tools such as [KnowYourMeme.com](http://KnowYourMeme.com) can be used to trace the origin of the most popular meme images, which can then be used for citation purposes. Using either of these generators is quite simple, as once you have selected a photo (or uploaded one), you can type in the text you wish to be superimposed on the image, and then save and share the new meme. Alternatively, memes can also be made using image editing software, although this requires a slight bit more of technical skill with the software. Rather, it is recommended to use a simple browser-based generator.

The author created an original meme using a template that is already well-known across the internet: “Daily Struggle.” According to [KnowYourMeme.com](http://KnowYourMeme.com), this original image is a comic panel created by animator Jake Clark, who posted it to tumblr in 2014 (“Daily Struggle/Two Buttons,” 2014). As the creator is known, the source can be properly credited, which makes this image a prime choice to use as a demonstration on how to ethically use information. This image is simple to find via a search on [Imgflip](http://imgflip.com), and with some added text, a new meme is born:



**Figure 10***Daily Struggles*

*Note.* *Daily Struggles* [Image macro], 2014, by Jake Clark, edited by Christina Boyle. Altered and shared with permission. Know Your Meme (<https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/daily-struggle>)

It is unclear whether certain images (before they are turned into image macros) are licensed for redistribution or revision, and so we should remind students to be mindful about copyright permissions when altering or sharing images online. This would also be an apt teachable moment to discuss the concept of Fair Use. Since the greater purpose for creating these memes for the classroom is to teach information literacy, and not to publicly share the image

macros, the author has used many of the popular and recognizable meme templates under Fair Use. These are more likely to arrest the attention of our students and leverage their familiarity with these images as an engagement strategy. Students seem to enjoy using memes and gifs (super short animations) to communicate with their classmates in online social spaces (Martínez-Cardama & Caridad-Sebastián, 2019). It is ideal to meet students where they are by using formats they are familiar with. The use of the above meme in the author's information literacy instruction served as an ice breaker, a demonstration of how to properly attribute information, and a lesson on the importance of fact-checking any information found from memes.

### **Conclusion**

Mememes have rapidly become a common source of misleading information that our students are regularly interacting with online. It is our duty as librarians to educate on as many diverse forms of information as are relevant to our patrons, and including mememes in our information literacy instruction is certainly a relevant topic. Not only is this important in the great war on misinformation, but it is also necessary to encourage our students to think more deeply about information and to be critical of the information sources that they use, avoiding blind acceptance of information as factual without checking for original outside sources. Using mememes and encouraging students to engage with them is a step in the right direction, but librarians should take the initiative to create their own mememes as instructional tools. In doing so, we can instruct by example, and leverage this format that our students are regularly viewing to do what is our most crucial responsibility: teaching users how to be information literate.

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