

## Author unhappy with use of the word 'meme'

24th May, 2017



Memes are becoming a growing part of our everyday life and popular culture, especially online. Many of us know memes as the pictures and photographs that go viral on social

media sites. People use them to make jokes or social and political observations. However, biologist and author Richard Dawkins, the originator of the word 'meme', is unhappy with how the Internet has defined a meme as a "picture with words". Mr Dawkins coined the term 'meme' in his 1976 book 'The Selfish Gene'. He said memes are ideas that spread from brain to brain and are replicated many times, much like genes. He told the BBC: "I'm not going to use the term Internet meme to refer to a picture with writing on it."

Memes have infused our culture to the extent that universities now offer degree courses on them. America's Northwestern University unveiled its Meme Studies course back in 2011. Britain's Sky News says memes have helped to make politics more accessible to young people. One Twitter user told a Sky journalist that: "Memes helped people understand more complex ideas, and that having politics framed in a different way makes it more digestible." This was obvious with how memes became a key part of how people expressed their views during the 2016 U.S. presidential election. The vice.com website said: "Memes now have as much power, influence and reach as the propaganda posters of yesteryear."

Sources: [bbc.com](http://bbc.com) / [sky.com](http://sky.com) / [vice.com](http://vice.com)

## Writing

Memes are the next great art form. They will be as important as movies. Discuss.

## Chat

Talk about these words from the article.

growing / popular culture / online / make jokes / biologist / term / genes / writing / degree courses / Meme Studies / politics / complex ideas / views / election / posters

## True / False

- a) The article says memes are now an important part of popular culture. T / F
- b) The word 'meme' originated over 500 years ago. T / F
- c) The book 'The Selfish Gene' was written in 1967. T / F
- d) An author said memes spread pretty much like genes. T / F
- e) Northwestern Uni. will start teaching Meme Studies for the first time. T / F
- f) Sky News said memes make politics more difficult to understand. T / F
- g) Memes were an important way to express views in the 2016 US election. T / F
- h) Memes are as important now as propaganda posters were in the past. T / F

## Synonym Match

(The words in **bold** are from the news article.)

- |                        |                   |
|------------------------|-------------------|
| 1. <b>especially</b>   | a. created        |
| 2. <b>observations</b> | b. filled         |
| 3. <b>originator</b>   | c. copied         |
| 4. <b>coined</b>       | d. notices        |
| 5. <b>replicated</b>   | e. particularly   |
| 6. <b>infused</b>      | f. understandable |
| 7. <b>unveiled</b>     | g. clear          |
| 8. <b>accessible</b>   | h. remarks        |
| 9. <b>obvious</b>      | i. revealed       |
| 10. <b>posters</b>     | j. inventor       |

## Discussion – Student A

- a) What do you know about memes?
- b) What part do memes play in your culture?
- c) What is popular culture?
- d) How important is being online to you?
- e) What do you think of things going viral on the Internet?
- f) What social media sites do you like?
- g) Would you like to read the book, 'The Selfish Gene'?
- h) Will memes become a new art form?

# BreakingNewsEnglish - The Mini Lesson

## Phrase Match

- |                                       |                       |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. a growing part of our              | a. more accessible    |
| 2. popular                            | b. the term 'meme'    |
| 3. go                                 | c. part               |
| 4. Dawkins coined                     | d. courses            |
| 5. ideas that spread from             | e. culture            |
| 6. universities now offer degree      | f. more complex ideas |
| 7. memes have helped to make politics | g. everyday life      |
| 8. Memes helped people understand     | h. posters            |
| 9. a key                              | i. viral              |
| 10. propaganda                        | j. brain to brain     |

## Discussion – Student B

- What do you think about what you read?
- What would a degree course in Meme Studies be like?
- What would make politics easier to understand?
- How has the Internet changed politics?
- Is the Internet used in a good way during elections?
- Should memes have so much power and influence?
- What more would you like to know about memes?
- What questions would you like to ask Richard Dawkins?

## Spelling

- seceapilyl online
- make jokes or social and political ebasvsnoiotr
- sgooilbit and author
- the oniragorit of the word
- edenfid a meme as a "picture with words"
- ldcpiertea many times
- Memes have efudnis our culture
- neejudvl its Meme Studies course
- make politics more ssbcieale
- makes it more setlbgdeii
- how people psdrsxeee their views
- panaparogd posters

### Answers – Synonym Match

1. e	2. h	3. j	4. a	5. c
6. b	7. i	8. f	9. g	10. d

## Role Play

### Role A – Memes

You think memes are the best way to spread ideas. Tell the others three reasons why. Tell them what is wrong with their ways. Also, tell the others which is the worst of these (and why): word of mouth, TV or newspapers.

### Role B – Word of Mouth

You think word of mouth is the best way to spread ideas. Tell the others three reasons why. Tell them what is wrong with their ways. Also, tell the others which is the worst of these (and why): memes, TV or newspapers.

### Role C – TV

You think TV is the best way to spread ideas. Tell the others three reasons why. Tell them what is wrong with their ways. Also, tell the others which is the worst of these (and why): word of mouth, memes or newspapers.

### Role D – Newspapers

You think newspapers are the best way to spread ideas. Tell the others three reasons why. Tell them what is wrong with their ways. Also, tell the others which is the worst of these (and why): word of mouth, TV or memes.

## Speaking – Ideas

Rank these with your partner. Put the best way to spread ideas at the top. Change partners often and share your rankings.

- |           |                      |
|-----------|----------------------|
| • TV      | • public speeches    |
| • books   | • word of mouth      |
| • schools | • newspapers         |
| • memes   | • propaganda posters |

### Answers – True False

a	T	b	F	c	F	d	T	e	F	f	F	g	T	h	T
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Answers to Phrase Match and Spelling are in the text.