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Résumé de l'article

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NARRATIVE WORKS
Issues, Investigations, & Interventions

Memes in the Literature Studies Classroom

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Keywords:
memes, riddles, form, genre, teaching

INTRODUCTION

As a highly condensed form, memes have many affordances. Among these, they can be approached as a type of literary genre that invites ambiguity, irony, humor, and playfulness – features that are often associated with riddles, too. But memes are inherently recursive media. They are riddles that, once told, demand to be retold. This recursive aspect of memes explains, in part, both their ubiquity on digital platforms as well as the speed with which they travel; they are meant to go viral, replicating themselves in the minds of individuals who, in turn, pass the memes along. As this language indicates, memes themselves are largely understood in metaphorical terms as agents for the transmission of information and creative expression (Wiggins and Bowers 1890). The combination of non-literal language and metaphoric framing thus makes memes especially difficult riddles to solve for readers outside their intended audience. At the same time, these features have led to memes becoming a fixture in the classroom, where they might inform students on complex topics while also fostering a communal link between instructor and students, who together share a sense of being in on the joke. This generative or creative aspect of the meme format as applied in the classroom is at the center of our paper, which reflects on using memes both as an evaluation tool and as a subject of literary investigation.[1]

In approaching memes through the conceptual lens of riddles, we want to clarify where we see productive alignments. According to André Jolles, riddles are "simple forms" and, in this sense, similar to myths, fairy tales and jokes. Riddles are considered, on the one hand, entertaining tasks associated with children or young adults (so-called "*Spaßfragen*" or amusing, game-like questions); similarly, memes are typically associated with digital natives and entertainment. On the other hand, riddles have a long tradition as puzzles in folklore narratives where they are imbued with serious consequences. For example, a hero's ability to solve a riddle will decide his or her fate (so-called "*Halsrätsel*", i.e., someone's "throat" is on the line (133)). In this second sense, riddles appear in the context of a trial or examination that tests the worthiness of the hero (131). In solving the riddle, the hero proves himself or herself to be on par with the person who poses the riddle and is thus granted access to an inner

1 This article is based on a course at the Department at the University of Southern Denmark (SDU), which was co-taught by Peter Simonsen, Anita Wohlmann and Bryan Yazell in 2022. Yazell was responsible for and created the thematic section on memes. This article also draws on a report on memes as a non-traditional format for student assessment, which Yazell wrote for the lecturer training program at SDU.

circle (135). Likewise, memes are associated with creating a sense of community among those who create a meme and those who receive and understand it. That is, like riddles, memes create communities of readers based on their shared appreciation and comprehension of the ostensibly light-hearted communication contained in these forms.

This double process of meaning-making, in turn, depends upon one's access to specific types of knowledge and genre conventions. Following Jolles, the creator of a riddle, on the one end, uses strategies of mystification to create an enigma, in which information is hidden. The recipient of a riddle, on the other end, must use strategies of depuzzling or unriddling to access that hidden knowledge. In doing so, both sides must be aware of and use a special type of language ("*Sondersprache*" 142), in which words and signs mean more or something else than in common language. For example, in the famous riddle of the Sphinx,[2] "feet" are used synecdochally, signifying a human being more generally. Riddles thus play with linguistic ambiguity and raise the expectation that there is a solution, one answer, as soon as the semantic ambiguity is identified. In other words, riddles, like memes, require modes of reading and interpretation to uncover an underlying idea or meaning. Unlike riddles, however, memes are not limited to one correct answer or solution.

Memes add another layer of meaning-making, moreover, by inviting the reader – having solved the riddle, so to speak – to add another piece to the puzzle by passing the meme along and creating their own version of it. These features of recursive knowledge creation and creative ambiguity are central to academic accounts of memes. Definitions of the form typically draw on Richard Dawkins, who coined the term in 1976 – a portmanteau of 'mimesis' and 'gene' – when he introduced a cultural angle to the predominantly genetic understanding of evolutionary adaptation in his book, *The Selfish Gene*. Following Noam Gal and colleagues, memes describe "small cultural units of transmission that flow from person to person by copying or imitation" (1700). As these broad terms indicate, essentially anything that can be imitated online can become a meme, so long as it can be imitated or remixed by participants in an online community (Shifman 365). Memes therefore describe everything from videos, flash-mob style performances, and even distinct sounds (Zulli and Zulli 1892). While they may function as inside jokes, these memes address a specific audience or readership while also traveling across the world when shared digitally and going viral. Similar to the processes of creating and understanding a riddle, meme-

2 "What goes on four feet in the morning, two feet at noon, and three feet in the evening?"

making and meme-comprehension require skills and knowledge: of genre rules, implicit norms, specific forms of communication and contexts.

The double processes of meaning-making and knowledge production that are inherent in riddles and memes alike guide our investigation of the forms' affordances as pedagogical tools. In a literary studies course on cultural narratives ranging from canonical to bestselling popular fiction, we critically discussed the narrative potential of the meme genre, which students were encouraged to explore both intellectually and experientially. In addition, we asked students to create memes, in the specific form of the image macro, in their assessment of the course. The results were highly ambivalent, ranging from humor to seriousness, self-critique to critique of the course, panic (regarding the final exam) to playful exaggeration of said panic. This ambivalence, often accentuated by irony and excess, challenges any definitive understanding of the memes' content and meaning: Does a student really feel overwhelmed, or does the meme genre invite her to mock her own stress level? Rather than dismissing memes as a flawed, imprecise tool, we will examine them as riddled forms and hypothesize that, due to their ambivalence, they may actually be closer to a student's "truth" especially in the context of a course that foregrounds semantic ambiguity and an explorative habitus.

This paper progresses in three parts. First, we elaborate on the parallels between riddles and memes as "simple forms" that both communicate veiled knowledge and delineate a community of readers who have solved, as it were, the mystery at the center of these texts. Having elaborated on the value of this form of knowledge building and creative expression, we expand on the usefulness of memes as pedagogical tools by exemplifying our experiences with a teaching exercise that tasked students to use memes to make a claim about one of the literary texts previously discussed in class. In the final part, we relate the results of an experiment in which we asked students to use memes as a course evaluation tool, an activity that (as we planned it) requires an in-depth knowledge of the course itself as well as a comfortable literacy with the meme as a genre.

MEMES AS RIDDLES: IN THEORY AND IN THE CLASSROOM

While research on riddles often takes place in the context of folklore, other approaches have explored the relationship between riddles and works of art more generally, suggesting that both riddles and artworks are obscure and enigmatic, assumed to hide an underlying, deeper meaning that requires "hermeneutic labor" to reveal its secret (Tucker 12). Paraphrasing Theodor W.

Adorno and Martin Heidegger, Brian Tucker argues that art has a "riddle-character" due to its "tendency to conceal and encrypt itself, to resist its own revelation" (12). Artworks thus require a particular "mode of reading," one that reveals what is intentionally made obscure (11-12). Indeed, the language of revealment and discovery is foundational to critical approaches in literary studies where a literary text is often considered "a puzzle to be solved, a hieroglyph to be deciphered" (Felski 53-54). In this sense, the figure of the riddle seems particularly pertinent to a literary studies course.

In this article, we use the concept of the riddle to describe and reflect on a pedagogical experiment with memes. Rather than approaching riddles in terms of "*narrative* riddles and enigmatic *narrative* presentations" (our emphasis), we align riddles and memes with figurative forms of language. Metaphors, for example, are often placed at the boundaries of narrative as mini-narrations or micronarratives (see Eubanks; Biebuyck and Martens) or beyond narrative altogether, and thus more akin to the lyric mode. Juxtaposing memes and riddles with metaphors allows us to stress how riddles, like new metaphors, play with a tension between what "is" and what "is not" (Ricœur, *Rule* 293) and thereby produce confusion, wonder, inconsistency and absurdity – "semantic impertinence" in Ricœur's terms ("Metaphor" 50). Similarly, Tucker argues that a riddle is characterized by a tension "between two extremes: it neither completely suppresses nor completely reveals" knowledge or insight and therefore "both gives and withholds" simultaneously (17). Moreover, when the mystery of a metaphor is solved, we understand suddenly and new insight leaps at us in a flash. We experience what James Wood describes as "a tiny shock of surprise, followed by a feeling of inevitability" (209). Similar experiences occur when the solution to a riddle suddenly reveals itself to us. Riddles, memes and metaphors also share a relation to humor. Ted Cohen argues, for example, that we recognize the meaning of a fresh metaphor in the same, instantaneous ways that a joke reveals itself to us (11). However, "solving" or understanding a metaphor does not necessarily replace uncertainty with certainty, multiple answers with one correct solution. Instead, metaphors produce a "stereoscopic vision" (Ricœur, "Metaphor" 50, 56) in which the initial state of tensions between "is" and "is not" is still upheld and enjoyed. Similar experiences of knowledge production, enjoyment and pleasure have been discussed in the research on memes.

By approaching our study of memes through the form's association with the conventions of the riddle, we are suggesting that the meme makes explicit the riddle's otherwise implicit invocation of an "inner circle" of privileged readers. While scholarly definitions of the meme vary in their precise approach, what they

each stress in broad terms is an account of how the form blurs the line between reader and object in the act of its circulation online. Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford, and Joshua Green describe "spreadable media," digital objects that move and transform with such speed online that one struggles to recognize not only the context attached to any given object but also the distinction between object and author (7). In other words, the spreadable media model calls for increased collaboration between these roles (authors of memes, for instance, must know their intended audience especially well for their image to go viral) but also makes these roles harder to assign. According to Wiggins and Bowers, any analysis of memes must therefore take into account a wider network of actors and motivations, one which ultimately confounds any attempt to reduce these often-humorous forms to simple expressions of quips or punchlines. They write: "The meme, viewed as a genre, is not simply a formula followed by humans to communicate, but is a complex system of social motivations and cultural activity that is both a result of communication and impetus for that communication" (1893). Elsewhere, Shifman explains that this outside impetus can be explained in part by the "signifying regime" of digital communities, where one must constantly "produce new content" in order to establish their inclusion within online communities (355). In short, the invitation to create a meme is indelibly linked to the act of interpreting a meme.

Here, again, memes and riddles overlap to the extent they frustrate any conventional sense of originality of authorship. Both forms are told and re-told to delight those who can decipher them (and just as often frustrate those who cannot). In the case of the meme, however, the riddle is not only repeated but altered in various ways until the original points of reference are occluded or forgotten entirely. This ceaseless act of creation that accompanies the circulation of memes means that, at a minimum, one must be aware of the hyper-specific conventions of the meme, its intended audience, and its rhetorical features to glean its intended message since, with the passage of time, any one of these aspects are likely to fade from view. The fact that memes are inherently prone to spreading and remixing means that meme templates persist for a remarkably long time even while a single image macro might disappear in the blink of an eye.

The concept of remixed or spreadable media as it relates to memes and digital culture more generally has direct implications for the university, where the increasing presence of digital platforms and web-based tools within the classroom has been met with considerable skepticism.[3] Leaving aside the larger

3 The controversy over free-to-use and openly accessible AI technologies, such as OpenAI's ChatGPT bot, is a clear example of the perceived threat these digital tools pose to the traditional classroom and the centrality of the essay-based exam format in particular.

transformation of university teaching in response to online-only education programs and other remote-learning initiatives, we are interested in how the meme form, and the decentered anticipatory model that informs it, might advance creative expression and communication in the classroom. If image macros are by now a familiar presence in teaching slides in every discipline, the nuanced form of creative expression/participation requires more elaboration that this type of lecture-based model can provide. On the one hand, memes as teaching aids provide opportunities for levity and humor in a setting that can produce stress and unease. After all, to share a meme is to announce one's participation in (and contribution to) a specific community. Eline Zenner and Dirk Geeraerts relate this process to the act of telling a joke, since both can create a "social bonding effect" between the sender and receiver (190). On the other hand, this social bond calls for reciprocation in the form of the remix: the meme is not only a form of communication but also an impetus for communication.

IMPLEMENTATION OF MEMES IN THE CLASSROOM

The concept of recursive knowledge-making we associate with the meme form makes it an exciting tool for the classroom, where creativity and social bonding effects are highly desirable if not always readily accessible. To test the form's viability in this context, we were determined not only to teach students in our literature course about memes but, more importantly, to invite them to make memes of their own. First, as we explain below, they were tasked with making memes about novels and other works from the semester. More provocatively, we then asked them to write memes about the course itself in the form of an assessment akin to what the students are requested to complete at the end of every semester. This decision to use memes to assess the course calls for clarification. First and foremost, this project was conceived to supplement rather than replace the standard assessment format. Institutional support for these evaluations meant that the students would be encouraged to complete their assessments both inside and outside the classroom, which increases the likeliness of instructors receiving worthwhile feedback. At the same time, there are plenty of reasons to seek supplements to the standard assessment format. Studies on student assessments of teaching have raised questions about their effectiveness. Research has shown, for example, that these assessments tend to undervalue instructors who are women (e.g., Boring) or people of color (e.g., Chisadza et al.) Elsewhere, scholars argue that administrative pressure to conduct student evaluation of teaching and to include these evaluations in the hiring and promotion of instructors can have adverse effects on teaching, such as an increase in grade inflation (e.g., Johnson). These critiques inform our

approach to implementing memes as a genre for course assessment, which acknowledges in simple terms that there is room to improve or supplement student assessments of teaching.

In addition to these administrative and professional limitations, we are interested in another potential shortcoming of student assessments related to student engagement. As Deborah Merritt puts it, "students' ratings of professors show little, if any, correlation with objective measures of what students learn" (239). In our experience, this subject is handled in the standard assessment of teaching survey with a question that prompts an "agree/disagree" response (e.g., "I have gained a greater understanding of the subject's themes and topics through the teaching"). There is little opportunity (in our experience) for one to evaluate the effectiveness of responses to this question – or even if students can reliably identify what the "subject's themes and topics" of a course were before responding to their perception of the teaching. Our approach to memes in the classroom therefore aimed to develop a *supplemental* assessment form that, by design, required students to engage with and use the methodology developed for our literature course, which (as an introduction to more emergent forms of literary studies) focused on topics related to popular culture, best-selling literature, and video games, among other areas. In this context, asking students to write memes of their own tested their skills as adept readers and creators of specific genre forms (i.e., the meme) and their competencies (i.e., their creative expression through composition and analysis of genre).

As noted above, we encouraged students to apply the skillset they acquired in the course: analyzing distinct media/textual sources, navigating genre norms, and generating compositions that consider the relation of aesthetic form to content. We present memes as a non-conventional literary form that students are thoroughly familiar with, even though they might not to see them as worthwhile for communicating serious or academic content. In contrast to simply inserting memes into lecture slides, our approach incorporated memes as forms for student composition; in this case, as applied to their expected end-of-the-semester course evaluation. In a previous lecture, we introduced a brief teaching module on the subject of internet memes as a literary genre. As part of this module, the students read Wiggins and Bowers's scholarly article explaining digital memes and their features. This unit was the culminating module in the semester, offering memes as a counter-intuitive example of how literary genres, the overarching subject of the lecture, work: they circulate specific norms and recycle templates, they address specific readers who recognize these norms, they create communities through the mutual forms of address between texts and readers who both recognize the norms

that bind them. According to Wiggins and Bowers, "Memes are enacted by agents participating in normalized social practices which recursively reconstitute the structure" (1895-6). In this light, the meme lends itself to student assessment, we argue, because one must understand the terms, concepts, and norms of a given community in order to successfully make a meme that addresses that community.

A discussion of the Wiggins and Bowers article with the students was meant to ensure that they were acquainted with critical vocabulary to be able to think about memes as the object of academic study. Afterwards, we tasked the students with a group-exercise prompt to create a meme (using an online and free-to-use meme generator[4]) that makes a thesis statement or argument about a novel we read from the course. The exercise was meant to encourage students to apply their acquired insights about a piece of literature (such as Mary Shelley's classic *Frankenstein*) in what might appear to be a low-brow medium, the meme. The memes were submitted via our university's online platform and, to conclude the session, we viewed and discussed the memes they created as a way to concretize the connection between content and genre.

At the end of the semester, when we had summarized the course and explained the concluding exam (an independent researcher paper followed by an oral exam), we tasked students with a second, meme-related assignment. In a PowerPoint slide, we asked: "Either in groups or alone, try and make at least one meme that reflects on your experience in the course as a whole." Our decision to make this an assignment that had the option for group participation was based on scholarship, outlined above, that stresses the community-generating effect that underlies memes as a form. Our hope was that the assignment would further facilitate our collective sense of the classroom as a community that, having completed a semester of study together, will have its own terms, norms, and experiences. Moreover, we are well aware that students typically share their concerns or feelings about a given course freely with their peers, and so the group-orientation of this assignment might take advantage of the way they might be discussing the class already: with their friends and with some level of humor. The memes, which were again made via the online meme generator, were then made available anonymously for the entire class to view on the course website on the university's online platform.

4 In the instructions for the exercise, students were directed to use the meme generator located at https://imgflip.com/memegenerator.

READING MEMES

Up to this point, our discussion of the creative affordances of the meme format has been limited to scholarship on the genre in particular and digital communities more generally. According to Dawkins, memes involve "a hijacking of the original idea" such that "mutations are designed . . . with the full knowledge of the person doing the mutating" (qtd. in Wiggins and Bowers 1891). Whatever the source of a meme image might be – a screenshot from a film or a YouTube clip, for example – the creation of an effective meme results in a new idea, to use Dawkins's term, that no longer requires any hermeneutic knowledge of the original source. In other words, one need not have watched *SpongeBob SquarePants* (as in our discussion of Fig.1 below) or, indeed, know anything about the show at all in order to understand memes that use screenshots from this show in order to communicate a specific message.

The memes created over the course of the semester demonstrate the need to adopt the paratextual orientation that Jenkins describes. Figure 1, for example, was created in response to our request for student assessments of our course. Here, a screenshot from the popular animated series, *SpongeBob SquarePants* has become the basis for a specific meme, "Mocking SpongeBob."[5] The meme exemplifies the sense of hijacking that Dawkins associated with form, inasmuch as the contextual features once associated with the scene as it appeared in *SpongeBob SquarePants* have been entirely removed from the image macro as it circulates and communicates information now. The text, presented in alternating caps to denote derision, refers to an in-class discussion during the last day of the semester. In response to study concerns about an upcoming oral examination, we offered the suggestion to consider it less as a test and more as a conversation between the teachers and students. The meme presented here thus communicates a stringent (if indirect) response to this attempt at re-assurance. Without a sense of either the meme's 'mocking' orientation or the classroom conversations, however, the meme would appear more or less illegible. If we take the meme as a reflection on the course as a whole – and if we are equipped with the proper frames of reference to interpret it – we (the instructors) see our words from an entirely different point of view, which can be equally disorienting and enlightening. In other words, the inflection of the meme's mocking tone remains, largely, enigmatic: Does the creator of this meme laugh appreciatingly at the teachers' attempts to lower

5 The brief overview of the meme presented here, including its conventional name, appears on the "Know Your Meme" database. For more on this particular meme, see https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/mocking-spongebob.

anxieties? Or is this a form of ridicule with a derisive tone, critiquing a power imbalance between teachers and students?

Figure 1. "Mocking SpongeBob" meme.

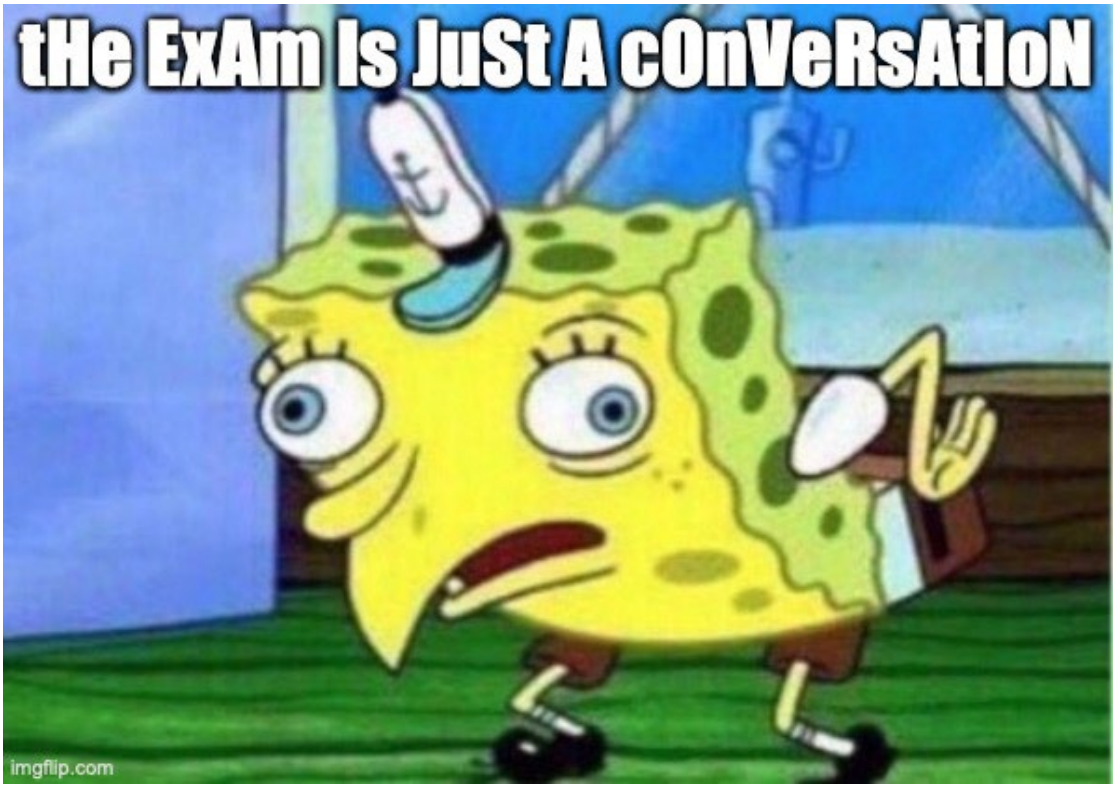


Figure 2 reflects something of the wide range of meaning-making the student memes expressed. Here, a screenshot from a Japanese anime is used to comment on one of the texts we discussed in class: E.L. James' bestseller *Fifty Shades of Grey*, which is commonly considered a (very) low-brow type of popular literature, derisively labeled "mommy porn." To discuss this novel alongside *Frankenstein* and *Neuromancer* in a literature studies classroom is a provocation, to which the meme responds in several ways. The meme's text takes up one of the topics we discussed in class: the social and cultural practices associated with defining and attributing value to literature. With this contextual information, the meme's textual references make sense. However, the image adds a crucial additional layer of information to the hermeneutic endeavor of reading the meme. Titled "Is This a Pigeon," the meme references a quote by the protagonist of the Japanese anime TV series *The Brave Fighter of Sun Fighbird*, who at one point

mistakes a butterfly for a pigeon.[6] Assuming that the recipients of this meme know the original quote, the creator of the meme asks a rhetorical question to which the answer must be "no." The novel is not "good literature" just as much as a butterfly is not a pigeon. This interpretation of the meme, however, is only one out of many other possibilities. For example, "Know Your Meme" explains that the pigeon meme "is widely used to express utter confusion." That is, rather than offering a clear answer to the question about the novel's value, the meme might as well express indecision and bewilderment. That is, the meme's riddle is both solved and remains intact, depending (not only but to a large degree) on the type of knowledge a reader brings to it.

Figure 2. "Is this a pigeon" meme.

6 https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/is-this-a-pigeon

If there is room for ambiguity in the preceding examples, which are concerned with texts or assignments on the syllabus, the rhetorical stakes appear even higher in student assessment memes dealing with feelings of stress and fatigue. Fig. 3 and 4 are two exemplary memes that offer an insight into students' psyches that the standardized course evaluation, which students filled out as well, did not provide. Both memes depict discrepancies and derive their humor (or concern) from the acknowledged incongruity between what is said and what is felt, or between what is desired and what is. Indeed, the *Toy Story* meme in Fig. 3 foregrounds this experiential gap in several ways: between the teachers' confidence about the exam and a student's distress, between the teachers' focus on academic details and a student's more existential wish to survive, between the teachers' focus on the future as opposed to a student's worries in the here and now. While the nature of the distress is unspecified in the *Toy Story* meme, Fig. 4 identifies the students' concern about "mental health," which is a serious issue that often lacks outlets for expression. Even though the figure in Fig. 4 is smiling, the mentioning of "mental health" – rather than stress or worry – gives reason for concern.

Figure 3. The *Toy Story* meme.

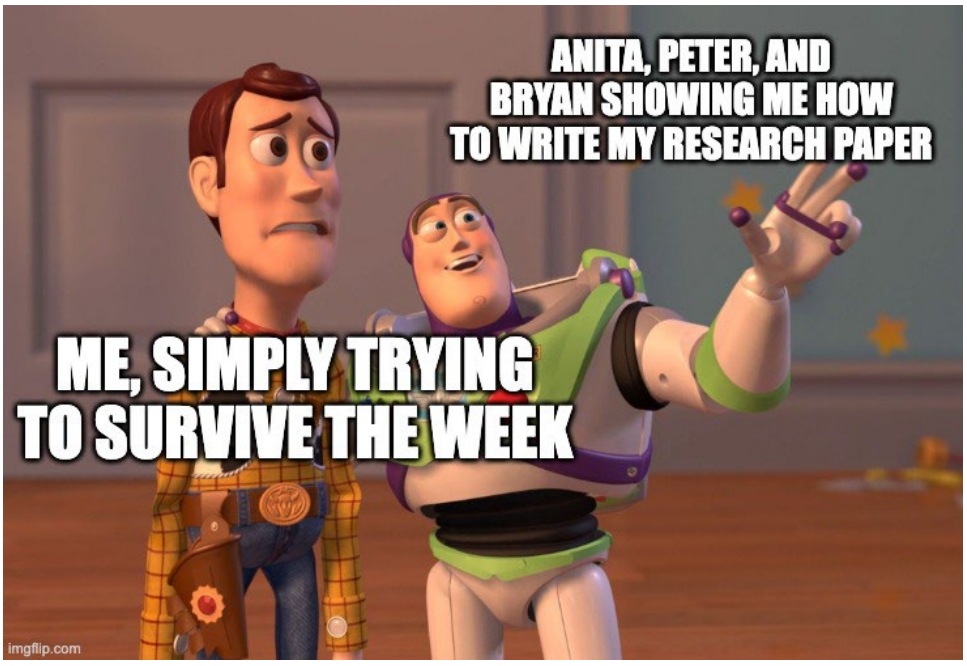
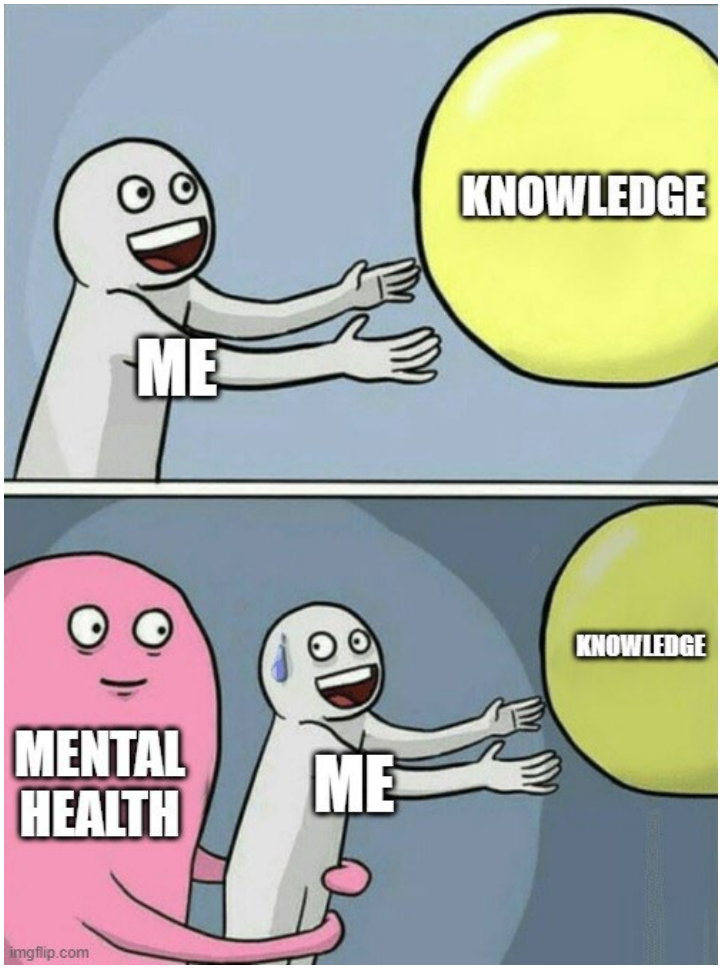


Figure 4. Meme regarding students' mental health concerns.



As far as the content of the memes is concerned, the student authors show an adeptness at recreating – if not resolving – the key debates from our course in an entirely new genre separate from their standard exam materials. On this point alone, the meme exercise shows encouraging results. The anonymous survey responses from students at the end of the course, which asked them to reflect on their perception of the meme assignment's effectiveness, adds more reason for encouragement. For example, one student wrote:

> What I think is needed to create a meme, is a much more thorough understanding of the subject matter (which in this case, means an understanding of one's own opinion, critique, etc.). So,

> to create a meme regarding our relationship with this course demands that we make deep reflections of this - at least this applies if we wish to make a 'good' meme, that follows the unwritten rules regarding them; such as not giving more information than needed, and actually understanding the subject in order to also be funny about it.

While this student's comment is indeed gratifying in its alignment with our learning objectives, we also need to mention that only 18 percent of students responded to this voluntary survey. We can easily speculate that many of the responses from these non-responding students would not be as insightful as the one above. Nonetheless, the reflections concerning form, genre conventions, and creative expression in this example serve as the ideal outcome we intended for the exercise.

As we noted above, this assignment was meant to supplement, rather than replace, the standard student assessment of teaching format. The exercise as posed was open-ended by design to observe what subjects the students might choose to bring up in their memes: their impressions of a specific novel or poem, for instance, or their commitment to showing up on time to class on a Monday. In other words, we wanted to cast a wide net and observe how effectively they would respond to a relatively free-form prompt. Moreover, we turned to memes in view of recent research that shows it promotes critical inquiry in the classroom using a digital format with which students are likely already proficient (e.g., Valdez et al.). There is also evidence that students respond positively to meme composition as a way to improve their critical thinking with respect to important social or political issues (e.g., Wells). Our exercise builds on this prior research by applying the critical thinking associated with meme composition to questions of course evaluation, which would benefit from as much extended consideration from students as possible to improve syllabus construction and course development. The memes themselves, as explained above, do not lend themselves to simple interpretations but instead demonstrate the authors' comprehension of and participation in the shared conventions and references established in our course.

Whatever its flaws, the conventional format for student evaluation of teaching is – and is likely to continue to be – the standard for evaluating teaching effectiveness. Ultimately, our exercise intended to complement the usefulness of these evaluation forms with an alternative format in the spirit of studies that call for greater pluralism in the methods teachers use to measure their effectiveness in the classroom (e.g., Berk). Indeed, our decision to survey students about their impression of the memes reflected our sense that the memes alone might not present

an adequate or legible picture of the students' sense of the course. Taken together with the standard evaluation, however, the memes might prove more insightful than in isolation.

CONCLUSION

As we have tried to show, memes can be productively examined through the conceptual lens of the riddle given that both forms share crucial features, such as their relation to knowledge, critical inquiry, semantic tension, and community-building functions. In deemphasizing narrative dimensions and foregrounding instead the links to figurative language, such as metaphors, we explored the creative potential of memes for critical inquiry and discussed them both as an academic topic and as an assessment tool that provides an important space for students to both offer critical reflections and share subjective experiences. We suggest that memes, when used to inquire about students' comprehension of course materials and their assessment of a course, can be an insightful supplement to standardized forms of assessment. Although the interpretation of memes leads to highly ambivalent and therefore imprecise results, memes work particularly well within a course in literary studies where semantic ambiguity is typically considered not a flaw but a value.

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