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meme



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# meme

[noun](#)

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## Definition of *meme*

1 : an idea, behavior, style, or usage that spreads from person to person within a culture Memes (discrete units of knowledge, gossip, jokes and so on) are to culture what genes are to life. Just as biological evolution is driven by the survival of the fittest genes in the gene pool, cultural evolution may be driven by the most successful memes.— Richard Dawkins

2 : an amusing or interesting item (such as a captioned picture or video) or genre of items that is spread widely online especially through social media ... the band encouraged fans to make memes to advertise the U.S. release of their EP ...— William Gruger The grumpy cat meme frowned its way onto the Internet in September 2012 and never turned its dissatisfied head back. Since then, the image of the cranky cat has grown more and more popular in direct proportion to appearing less and less impressed by fame.— Anastasia Thrift

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## Other Words from *meme*

memetic \ mē-'me-tik , mə- \ adjective

... the exhibition seeks to give a sense not only of Holmes's origins but of the real-world milieu in which Conan Doyle set him and of his memetic spread through the culture. — Sam Leith

## Did You Know?

In his 1976 book *The Selfish Gene*, British scientist Richard Dawkins defended his newly coined word *meme*, which he defined as "a unit of cultural transmission." Having first considered, then rejected, "mimeme," he wrote: "'Mimeme' comes from a suitable Greek root, but I want a monosyllable that sounds a bit like 'gene.' I hope my classicist friends will forgive me if I abbreviate 'mimeme' to 'meme.'" (The suitable Greek root was *mim-*, meaning "mime" or "mimic." The English suffix *-eme* indicates a distinctive unit of language structure, as in "grapheme," "lexeme," and "phoneme.") "Meme" itself, like any good meme, caught on fairly quickly, spreading from person to person as it established itself in the language.

## Examples of *meme* in a Sentence

Recent Examples on the Web Replies called the tweet disrespectful, and pointed out that Taylor's death was not a *meme*. — [NBC News, "Twitter memeified justice for Breonna Taylor. But can a joke make change?," 19 June 2020](#) Trump sourced the video from a popular pro-Trump *meme* creator who goes by the name CarpeDonktum. — [SFChronicle.com, "Warning on Trump tweet; updates on AMC mask policy, IRS hardship rules," 19 June 2020](#)

These example sentences are selected automatically from various online news sources to reflect current usage of the word 'meme.' Views expressed in the examples do not represent the opinion of Merriam-Webster or its editors. [Send us feedback.](#)

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## First Known Use of *meme*

1976, in the meaning defined at [sense 1](#)

## History and Etymology for *meme*

alteration of *mimeme*, from *mim-* (as in *mimesis*) + *-eme*

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Time Traveler for *meme*



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meme

[noun](#)



## English Language Learners Definition of *meme*

: an idea, behavior, style, or usage that spreads from one person to another in a culture  
: an amusing or interesting picture, video, etc., that is spread widely through the Internet

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squib

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