

### **In a nutshell**

We have made a Medieval Meme Generator on [www.medievalmemes.org](http://www.medievalmemes.org). It's a quick and easy way of creating your own memes with Medieval handwriting, *and* it teaches you a bit about the history of illuminated manuscripts in the Middle Ages. The various examples of manuscripts come from the collections of the KB, National Library of the Netherlands and Huis van het Boek (*House of Books*), the oldest book museum in the world.

### **Memes?**

A meme, which is pronounced 'meem', is a humorous image, usually with a funny caption, which is spread via the Internet. The plural of meme is memes. The longer term 'internet meme' is sometimes used.

### **Erm... memes...?**

You probably know 'Grumpy Cat', he has become one of the most famous meme characters around:



Nobody knows how many memes are in circulation, but it would probably be safe to say [hundreds of thousands of meme formats exist](#) and over a billion memes were created.

In March 2021 for example, searching for 'meme' resulted in 1,860,000,000 (in other words, almost two billion) hits in Google. The website <https://knowyourmeme.com/about> tries to describe the most popular memes and their background.

### **Still or moving?**

Most memes show a stationary picture, although some GIFs (moving images) can also be memes. It's generally much more difficult to make a moving meme than to make one with a stationary picture (which is why you don't see them as often).

### **History**

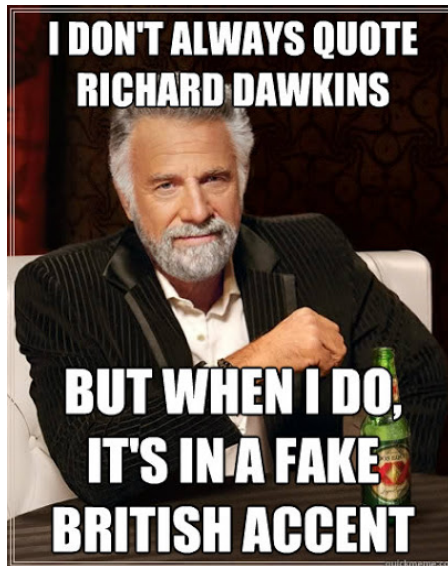
The term 'meme' was thought up by [the British evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins](#) in 1976. It comes from the Greek word *mimema*, which means imitated. But the concept has been around [for longer](#), and Dawkins adapted the term himself a few times after the initial definition of something that "conveys the idea of a unit of cultural transmission, or a unit of imitation".

The Internet hijacked the term 'meme' to describe the forms of communication that we see nowadays. Dawkins had the following to say about this:

***How do you feel about your word meme being reappropriated by the internet?***

*The meaning is not that far away from the original. It's anything that goes viral. In the original introduction to the word meme in the last chapter of *The Selfish Gene*, I did actually use the metaphor of a virus. So when anybody talks about something going viral on the internet, that is exactly what a meme is and it looks as though the word has been appropriated for a subset of that.*

Source: <https://www.wired.co.uk/article/richard-dawkins-memes>



So although we now associate memes with the Internet (the first Internet memes appeared in 1996), the concept of memes is actually much older. [Images created as early as AD 79 have been identified as memes.](#)

**Categories**

The meme culture has a vast collection of sub-genres. As well as general memes, you also have specific memes referring to series, politics, history and, for example, the Middle Ages.

**How do you make a meme?**

Easy - with a touch of creativity and a tool to add a caption to your picture.

Theoretically, you can do this using [Paint](#) or Photoshop, but most people tend to use an app such as [Mematic](#), or online meme generators such as [Imgflip](#) or [Kapwing](#).

Online meme generators are websites where people can choose a regular meme format , add a caption and then save or share their meme. You can make a meme literally in a minute.

**Why is KB National Library working on a meme generator?**

Entertainment and information via context. All intended to reach a target group of 15-35-year-olds, who are not usually on the KB National Library's radar.

If you think about it, it's not such a strange combination: some of the pictures from 'our' Medieval works are already regular features in so-called 'Medieval memes'.

# When the violin solo is so damn lit you just become a bagel



The original of the popular meme shown above comes straight from our own collection. See for yourself: [https://manuscripts.kb.nl/search/simple/BYVANCKB%3Amimi\\_78d40%3A108r\\_randfig\\_r](https://manuscripts.kb.nl/search/simple/BYVANCKB%3Amimi_78d40%3A108r_randfig_r)

So what we are now doing is sharing high-quality pictures (not the crappy, pixelated ones) from our collection, so that they can be directly memefied. We add words and images to each picture, to explain where they come from. In fact, we are adding context.

And this helps us to make people a bit smarter and more creative, which is precisely what KB National Library is all about.

## **Can I use the meme generator to make a meme of any of KB National Library's miniatures?**

No. You'll find about 11.250 images on <https://manuscripts.kb.nl/>, but not all of them are potential memes.

We have hand-picked a selection of 15 suitable pictures. Ten of these pictures come from the National Library collection, the other five come from the collection of the [Huis van het Boek \(House of Books\)](#).

We explain the context of every picture in Dutch and English, and a specialist has made a video for each one too.

## **So... 15 meme templates. Is that it?**

No, it's not. We will review the selection of images every three months and add some new ones (including an explanation).

### Why choose the Middle Ages and not books from other periods?

Medieval manuscripts dates back to the era before printing was invented, a time when monks, nuns and artisans used to copy and decorate manuscripts by hand, day in, day out. Much of this Medieval handwriting is beautifully embellished, both in the text and in the margins. In addition, the Middle Ages were marked by symbolism, which makes the drawings even more remarkable.



You must remember that these images from the Middle Ages were drawn in an era when very few people could read. This made them extraordinarily popular in places such as the church, where people could look at them in manuscripts, on walls or sculpture and even touch them to make them feel closer to their favourite figures.

Some of the faces of biblical figures on the miniatures were touched so often that their features and bodies were gradually erased. You could say that the images of these popular characters were the memes of their era.

### Is it just the tool?

Alongside [www.medievalmemes.org](http://www.medievalmemes.org), we also have accounts on the most popular social media where we share memes and fun facts about the Middle Ages. It's not a disguised RSS feed, so we do actually respond to comments, like the memes made with our meme generator, listen to requests *and* we will soon have stickers for you to share.

### English?

We are a Dutch heritage institution, but we are aware that most memes are in English. This is why we are providing our Meme Generator not only in Dutch, but also, and mainly, in English. Memes are a huge cross-cultural hit.

And we're taking things a step further on social media; we are posting messages on Facebook, YouTube, Vimeo and Instagram in English + Dutch, but we'll be appearing exclusively in English on Twitter, TikTok, Reddit and Pinterest (due to the nature of these social media).

### New news

Memes are a favourite feature among online (and printed) news editors. Here's a small selection of articles about memes published in the past 12 months:

Title	Medium
For Instagram's 10th Birthday, Experts Predict The Future Of Meme Culture <a href="https://www.forbes.com/sites/heatherleighton/2020/10/07/for-instagrams-10th-birthday-experts-predict-the-future-of-meme-culture">https://www.forbes.com/sites/heatherleighton/2020/10/07/for-instagrams-10th-birthday-experts-predict-the-future-of-meme-culture</a>	Forbes
Yorkshire snail man mount was 'medieval meme' <a href="https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-leeds-56489787">https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-leeds-56489787</a>	BBC
People Have Turned Bernie Sanders' Inauguration Fashion Into So Much More Than Your Standard Meme <a href="https://time.com/5932101/bernie-memes-mittens/">https://time.com/5932101/bernie-memes-mittens/</a>	Time Magazine
Coronaviral: the best memes, tweets and cartoons to get you through <a href="https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2020/mar/18/coronaviral-the-best-memes-tweets-and-cartoons-to-get-you-through-open-thread">https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2020/mar/18/coronaviral-the-best-memes-tweets-and-cartoons-to-get-you-through-open-thread</a>	The Guardian
'Memes should be archived in a museum' <a href="https://www.bbc.com/news/av/entertainment-arts-52021890">https://www.bbc.com/news/av/entertainment-arts-52021890</a>	BBC
Dancing pallbearers have a chat <a href="https://memeinsider.com/releases/dancing-pallbearers-have-a-chat">https://memeinsider.com/releases/dancing-pallbearers-have-a-chat</a>	Meme Insider