

Creating a Learning Community and the First Day of Class

As this semester draws to a close, many professors will reflect on what went well in their classes this fall and what didn't go as planned. Perhaps this reflection might be aided by considering how you conducted your first class of the semester as that is the most important class of the semester. Many professors use the first class to distribute and review the syllabus and then send the students off to the bookstore with the feeling that they need to have their books and tools before they could begin to think about class. However, the literature shows that the first class is too important to leave simply to syllabus review since it is during this class time that the tone for the rest of the semester (McKeachie and Svinicki, 2014; Davis, 2009; Nilson, 2003; Provitera, 2001). Because of this, faculty should ensure that their first class is given as much time and thought as subsequent classes. The below practices help your students get involved in their education from the start. If you employ these practices, you will begin the semester by creating a classroom of learners and developing some community among and between the students and yourself.

As you are aware, the course syllabus is a critical document that outlines your student learning goals and how you will achieve them, and sets the tone for the learning experiences happening during the course of the semester. Consider sending your syllabus to your students before your first class so they can review it and begin thinking about the material and assigned readings. Because your students have the syllabus in advance, you can devote your class time to community building and learning. One technique is to employ some kind of icebreaker that forces the students to interact with others in the classroom. Other strategies might be to have students work through an active learning assignment in Microsoft Teams, have them move about the room to stations marked agree or disagree in reaction to some topically relevant questions, or have them individually write a response to some prompt and then pair- share their answers to this prompt. By getting the students involved in the class from the beginning you are reinforcing the idea that they are responsible for their learning and that they have to be active in order for this learning to occur. Also know that if you want class discussions, this must begin on that important first day.

Toward the end of the first class spend some time discussing the subject area related to the class and explaining why this subject is important and significant to their future. You can give a short overview of the course explaining your course philosophy, which subjects are involved in the course, and how the course will contribute to their knowledge.

Finally, discuss what expectations you have for the course. Tell them how much time and effort they will need to spend in order to be successful. Explain the methods you will use in teaching the course and the expectations you have for their behavior in the classroom.

In each of these activities, you will begin to build a rapport with your students. Rapport is essential in building a good student/teacher relationship and it sets the climate for the class.

If you want to give and take between yourself and your students it is best to begin the semester with activities and behaviors that will establish the sort of climate you desire, whether this climate is relaxed, formal, personal, or serious.

Whatever else you do during the semester try to make sure that you use your first meeting with your students as a means of getting to know them and allowing them to get to know you. If you do so, you will start off on the right foot toward creating a community of learners.

References:

Davis, B. (2009). Tools for teaching (Second ed., Jossey-Bass higher and adult education series). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

McKeachie, W. and Svinicki, M. (Eds.) (2014). McKeachie's Teaching Tips. Belmont, CA. : Wadsworth Cengage Learning.

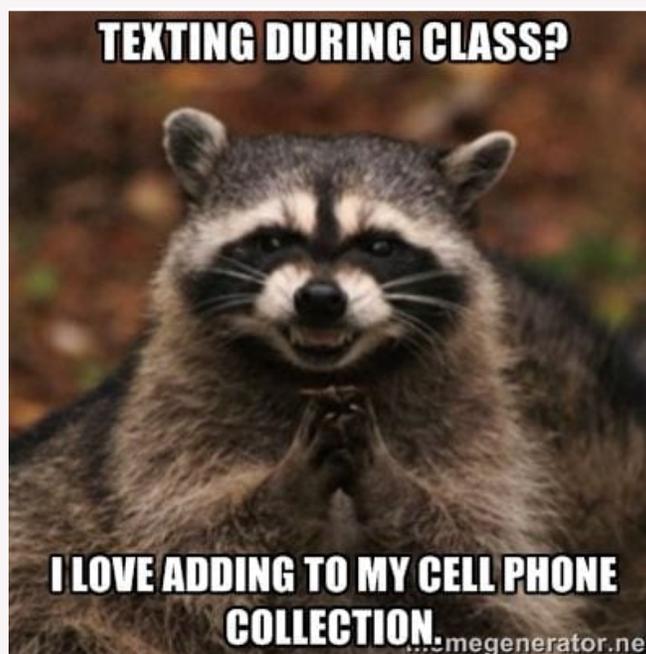
Nilson, L. (2003). Teaching at its best: A research-based resource for college instructors (2nd ed.). Bolton, MA: Anker Publishing.

Provitera McClynn, A. (2001.) Successful beginnings for college teaching: Engaging students from the first day. Madison, WI: Atwood Publishing.

Humor in the Classroom and Memes

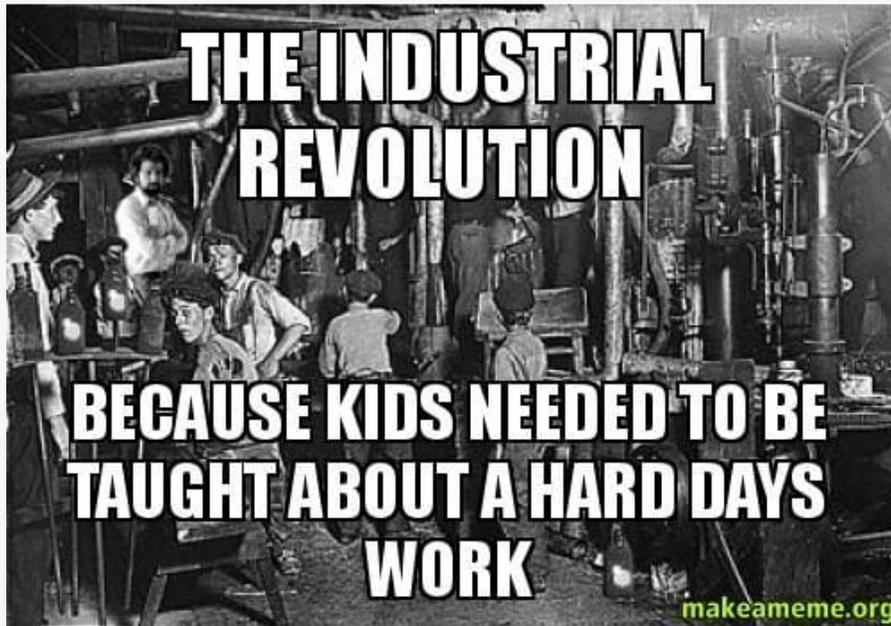
The past year and a half have been quite unsettling for college students. Such students face multiple stressors, some being financial, some being social, and/or some could be developmental (learning to get up without the assistance of mom). To pile on, add the COVID-19 pandemic to the mix with the mask-wearing and social distancing to make unsettling even more complicated. Last month's newsletter discussed Ludic Pedagogy or the use of humor in the college classroom. One way to leverage humor is to use memes. Memes are mostly found on the internet and they express a concept or idea using pictures, symbols, words, or anything that the creator wants to express. The following are some ways that Quality Matters (2018, January 22) believes that memes might be beneficial

1. Memes can be used to communicate class rules and expectations:

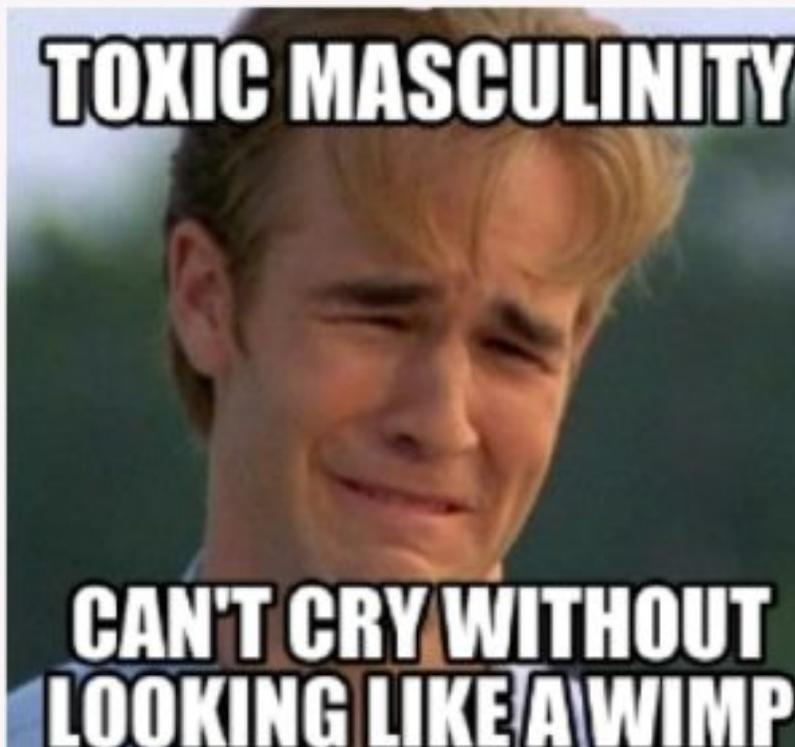


Humor in the Classroom and Memes (Continued)

2. Another good way to reinforce what you are teaching is to use memes and, in this example, they can help create student engagement with the material. For example, if you are teaching about the Industrial Revolution you could employ this meme:

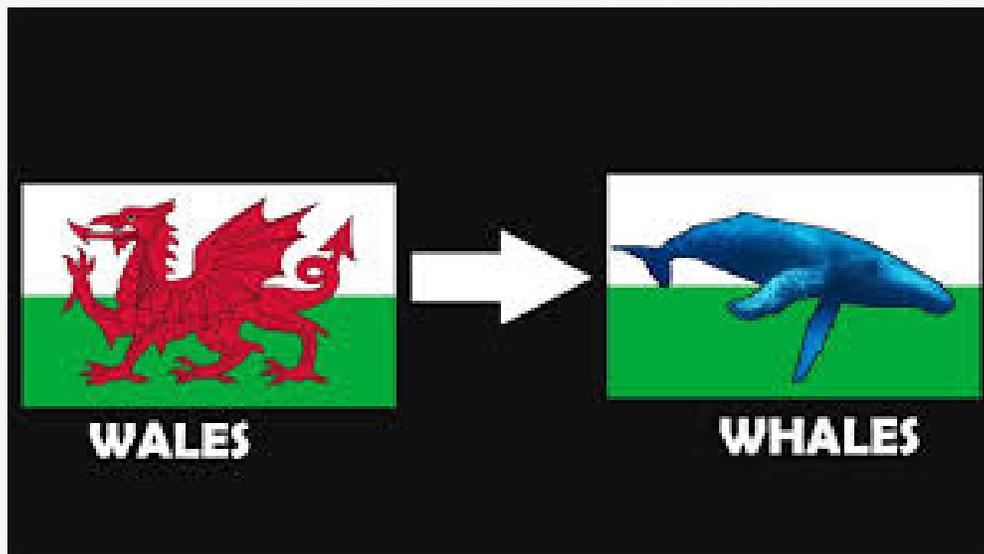


Alternatively, you could have your students create their own meme to show their understanding of the material being studied. The following meme was created by a student to represent the idea of toxic masculinity:

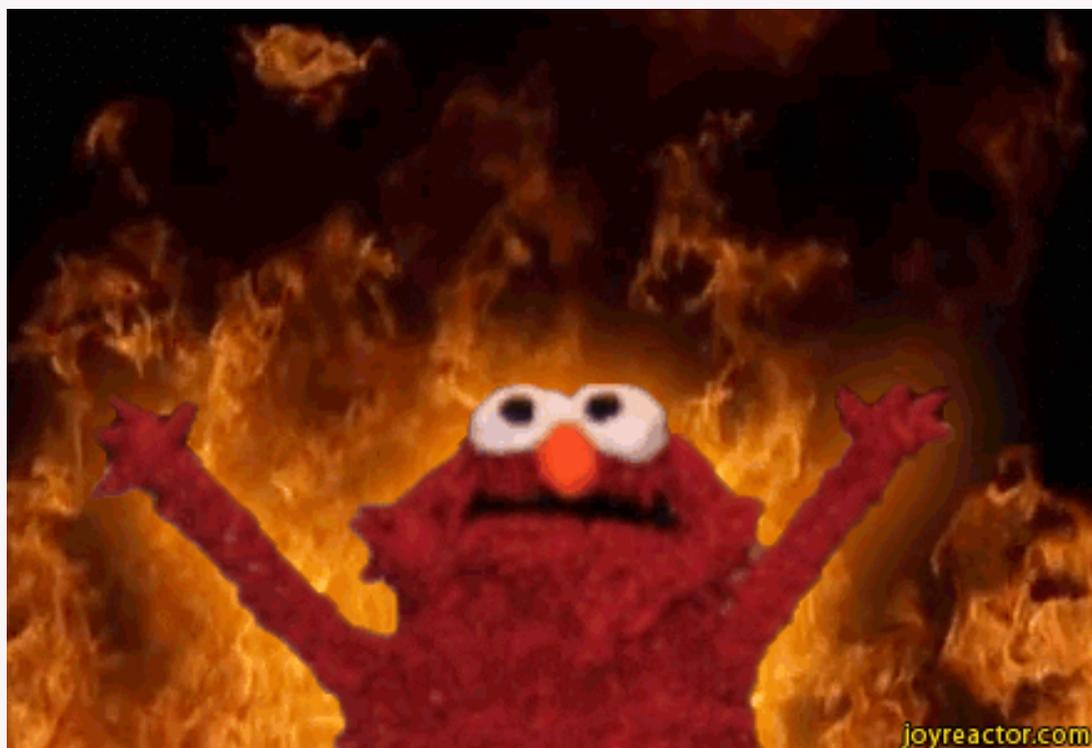


Humor in the Classroom and Memes (Continued)

3. Increasing vocabulary or conceptual understanding is another way to employ memes. One faculty member mentioned that students in one of her history courses didn't know the difference between Wales and whales so she created a meme like this:

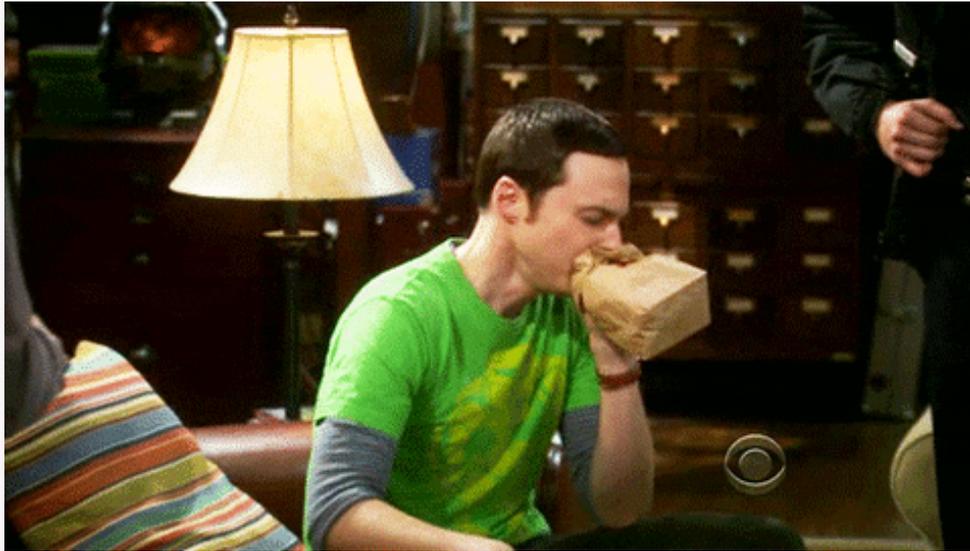


4. Finally, you can use memes at the beginning of a semester as an ice-breaker that will introduce them to you and the other students in the class. One faculty member asks her students to submit a meme that reflects their personality or mood. For instance, one student used this as a way of expressing how he felt about taking classes during a summer session:



Humor in the Classroom and Memes (Continued)

Another used this meme to express how the first day of class is so awkward and stressful that they tend to hyperventilate:



The use of memes is just one tool you can use to engage your students. Try it during one lesson or to make a point and see if it goes well. If so, try to use them more often!

Reference:

Quality Matters. (2018, January 22). Use Humor to Improve Student Learning.

<https://www.qualitymatters.org/qa-resources/resource-center/articles-resources/use-memes-for-learning>

Academic Calendar

December 13th - December 18th

Final Exams

December 17th & 18th

Commencement

December 18th, 2021 11:59 PM – January 2, 2022

SVSU Closed

December 21, 2021

Grades Due to Registrar by Noon

January 10th, 2022

First Day of Winter 22 Semester

Important Canvas Conferences (Big Blue Button) Information

Don't forget that the premium edition of Canvas Big Blue Button will revert to the free version on 12/31/21. As of then, all recordings will automatically be removed and will not be recoverable. Any recordings you would like to save must be downloaded before December 31st. Next semester the free version of Big Blue Button will be available but videos can not be downloaded and will only be available for 7 days. Click [here](#) for more information.

Happy Holidays!