

Handout

How to Deconstruct a Meme

Some of the initial steps below have been adapted from Hendrik-Zoltan and Boris Zizek's chapter "Reconstructing a Meme" in [Antisemitism on Social Media](#), edited by Monika Hübscher and Sabine von Mering (Routledge, 2022).

1. Initial Observations *(try to refrain from interpreting/analyzing here)*

- Landscape or portrait?
- What images or parts of images are accentuated within the frame?
- What is the layout of the images and text?

2. Narrow the Focus

If the meme has a lot of detail, segment images (see the Facing History [Crop It](#) teaching strategy) within a smaller frame and describe each segment. Consider details, proportions, allusions, facial expressions, gestures, iconography.

3. Contextualize

- How would you describe the type of images here? Does the image remind you of something else you've seen or know about (e.g., an advertising poster, movie, political cartoon, realism, caricature, photo, drawing, collage)? Is there an artist signature? If so, what can you find out about the artist?
- What questions do you have about this picture or text that you would need to have answered (through research or by asking your teacher) before interpreting it?

4. Close Read

- Is the text formatted so that we engage with it in a certain order? How is that hierarchy or order recognized (e.g., font size, boldfacing, italics, placement within the frame)?
- Look closely at word choice. What are the connotations (emotions we associate

with the words)? Are there allusions (historical or popular references)? Slang? Racist or bigoted code words or phrases?

- Is anyone quoted? Who? Is the attribution accurate, or is it a misquote?

5. Antisemitic Tropes and/or Conspiracy Theories

- What antisemitic tropes and/or conspiracy narratives are being referenced in this meme? What do people have to gain by perpetuating this trope or conspiracy narrative?
- Who does the trope or conspiracy narrative target? And how might the trope or narrative impact the targeted group?
- What is the group being blamed for? How might this trope or conspiracy narrative be used to justify harm toward members of that group?
- In what other ways is the trope or narrative harmful?

6. Overall Message

- What are the messages being expressed in the text or image?
- Who is the intended audience?
- Why would the message be appealing to this audience?
- Who is being portrayed negatively?

7. Disproving the Meme

- What lies or misrepresentations are at the center of the meme?
- What steps would you need to take to disprove this meme?
- Why is it dangerous for memes like this to persist?