

## The man who unwittingly became a meme

### Level 3: Advanced

#### 1 Warmer

- a. Which of these websites do you think has the most visits? Put them in order from 1 (most visits) to 6 (fewest visits).

Wikipedia

YouTube

Twitter

Google

Instagram

Facebook

#### 2 Key words

- a. Fill the gaps in the sentences using these key words from the text.

eureka  
reclaim

heed  
scroll

infamy  
spotlight

meme  
unwittingly

obnoxious  
vaguely

1. If you \_\_\_\_\_, you move content up or down on a computer screen.
2. If you recall something \_\_\_\_\_, you have a slight memory of it.
3. If you pay \_\_\_\_\_ to a piece of news (especially a warning), it means that you give it careful attention.
4. If something is done \_\_\_\_\_, it is done in a way that is not conscious or deliberate.
5. A \_\_\_\_\_ is a humorous image that is copied and spread by internet users.
6. An \_\_\_\_\_ person is extremely rude, offensive, or unpleasant.
7. \_\_\_\_\_ is a reputation that someone has for doing something bad.
8. A \_\_\_\_\_ moment is when you are very pleased because you have suddenly found the answer to a problem.
9. If you \_\_\_\_\_ something that someone has taken from you, you get it back.
10. If you are in the \_\_\_\_\_, you get a lot of public attention.

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#### ***'The worst person you know': the man who unwittingly became a meme***

**Ashifa Kassam**

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- 1 Soon after the pandemic began and Spain went into lockdown, Josep Maria García received a panicked call from his brother-in-law. "He told me not to worry but that I should google the phrase 'the worst person you know'," said García. "I put it in and there I was, everywhere. I scrolled down and it was my face, my face, my face. I thought what is going on?"
- 2 Paranoia washed over him as he tried to piece together what had happened. He had posed for the photo in 2014 as he accompanied his brother-in-law, a professional photographer, on a work trip to Barcelona. As his brother-in-law prepared for a photo session with an American writer, he asked García to stand in so that he could adjust for the light.
- 3 The photo of García turned out so well that they decided to upload it to the Getty Images catalogue.
- 4 García vaguely recalled that, in 2018, his brother had told him that the image had been used to illustrate an article for a US satirical magazine. At the time, he had paid little heed; now he realized he had unwittingly become a global meme. The picture had been used to illustrate a light-hearted piece about an obnoxious colleague, who normally talks rubbish, for once coming out with a killer observation about politics.
- 5 He struggled to reconcile his online fame with his life in a small town near Barcelona. Online, he was super-famous – a quick search of the phrase 'worst person you know' pulls up almost 2bn results – but the fact that it was in English meant that few in his hometown or in the marketing agency where he works knew anything about it.
- 6 His day-to-day life rarely intersected with his online infamy, until a journalist dropped clues on how to find him in a series of social-media posts. Messages came pouring in from across the English-speaking world, prompting his brother-in-law to remove the photo.
- 7 But it had already come to define García online. "I've read comments that say, 'He has the face of a Nazi supremacist' or that 'there is no empathy' in my look," he said. He shrugged off the comments, adding with a laugh: "I've got a lot of photos with that look – that's my look."
- 8 One of the few people in the world with a similar experience is András Arató, a retired Hungarian engineer who, in 2019, went public with what it was like to discover his face was a global meme, in his case "Hide the Pain Harold". "At first, it was a shocking experience," Arató said. "I didn't know what to do."
- 9 Arató's first reaction was to shut it all down by taking back the stock photos. Once he calmed down, he decided to wait and see. "My only hope was that, with so many new things day after day on the internet, people would slowly forget about me," he said. "I must say, I was totally wrong."
- 10 His eureka moment came when he decided to reclaim his image, launching his own Facebook fan page with videos and stories of his travels. Offers to collaborate soon came rolling in, transforming Arató into a celebrity, from a role in a Hungarian TV advert to a part in a video about Manchester City.
- 11 More than two years after finding his meme everywhere, García has come to accept his status. "It's not easy. It's surprising how many millions of hits there are," he said. "But it's true that, with the passing of time, you start to see it differently."
- 12 For years, he refused interview requests, choosing instead to stay out of the spotlight. But in recent months, he has opened up to a handful of media. He has steadfastly refused to be photographed – "lest it go viral again," he told one newspaper.
- 13 He brushed off suggestions that his meme may have been harder to accept than others. Instead, he pointed to a debate online as to whether the photo depicts him as the worst person or whether he is captured looking at such a person.
- 14 Even so, the negative association was reinforced during a recent appearance on Spanish TV, when he was greeted with the line: "You don't have the face of a bad person."

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- 15 The TV hosts then asked him whether he might be the worst person they knew, how much he would charge if supplying face masks during the pandemic, or if he would tidy up after throwing a party at a hotel. "Thank you for your sense of humour," one host said as García proved himself a charming guest.
- 16 He has learned to rely on his sense of humour. "I find it quite funny. It doesn't disturb me or anything," he said. "But that surprises people. There are some who ask me 'Are you seriously okay with all this?'"

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#### 3 Comprehension check

a. Answer the questions using information from the article.

1. Who took the photo of Josep Maria García that became an internet meme?
2. Why was the photo taken?
3. What happened to the photo in 2018?
4. How many results did the phrase 'the worst person you know' produce online?
5. Where does García work?
6. Why was the photo removed from the internet?
7. How did Andrés Arató feel at first when his face became a global meme?
8. What was his 'eureka' moment?
9. What is the 'online debate' about the photo of García?
10. What does García rely on now?

#### 4 Key language

a. Match the verbs in the left-hand column with the definitions in the right-hand column.

- |                  |  |
|------------------|--|
| 1. stand in      | a. arrive in large numbers or amounts                    |
| 2. come out with | b. talk more about your personal feelings                |
| 3. pour in       | c. do someone else's job temporarily                     |
| 4. shrug off     | d. refuse to accept something might be true or important |
| 5. open up       | e. show that something does not upset or worry you       |
| 6. brush off     | f. say something that surprises or shocks people         |

#### 5 Discussion

a. Discuss these statements.

- "There's only one thing worse in life than being talked about and that is not being talked about." (Oscar Wilde)
- "Using memes and emojis is a lazy way to communicate."
- "You should never believe anything you read on the internet."

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### 6 In your own words

- a. Open an internet search engine and type in 'most famous memes' or 'funniest memes'. Find a meme that you think is funny and make up to three new memes with that template.
- b. Show your memes to the class.