

MEMES.

Mememes Everywhere





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MEMES. Memes Everywhere.

Inspired by the impossible task of avoiding Internet memes on a daily basis, Memes. Memes Everywhere is an animated short that highlights the importance of Internet memes in society. In this short Hank, a grumpy senior man, is taken on a journey to learn all about Internet memes and where they came from. The project aims to persuade viewers to value memes and the way they are spread.

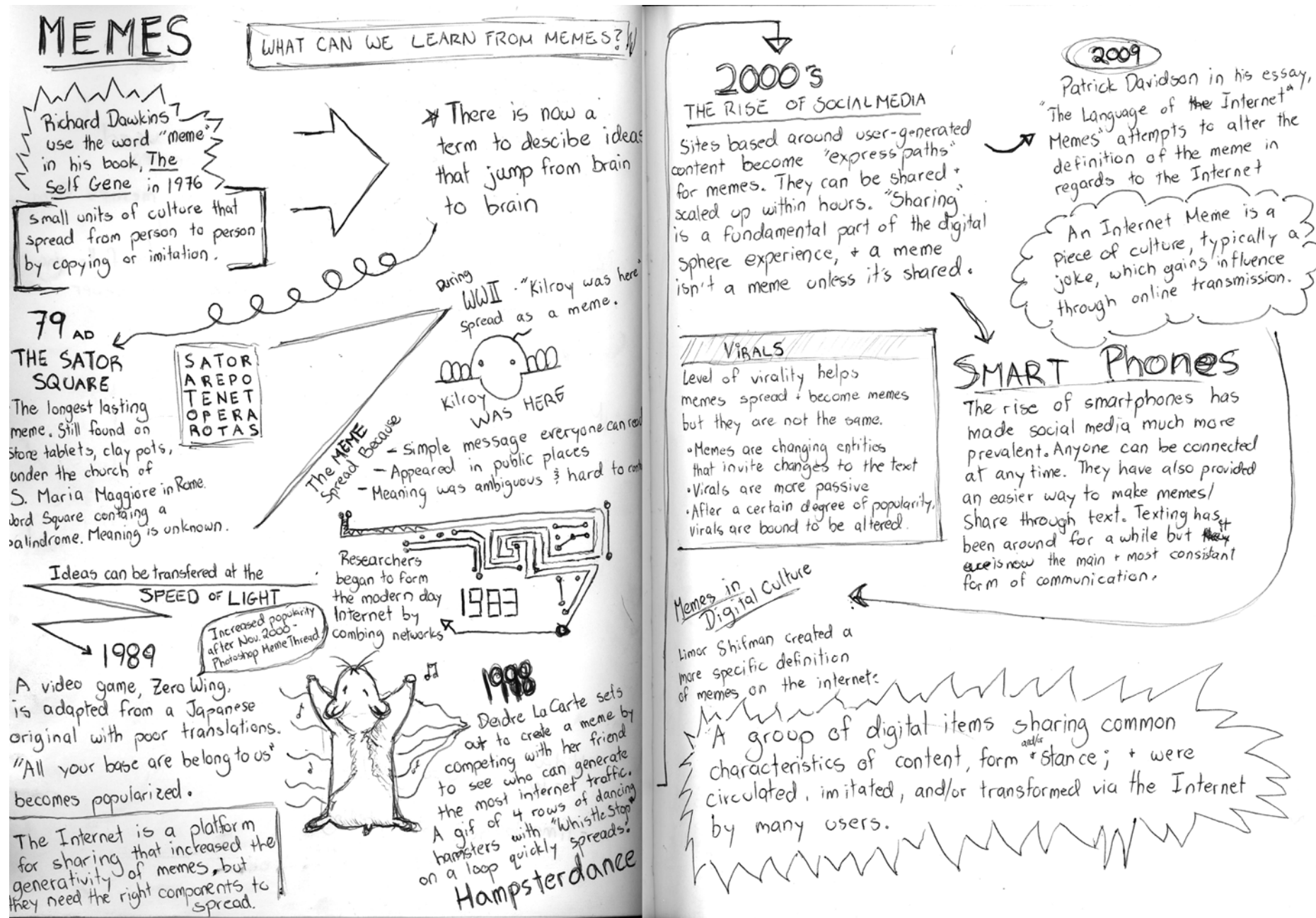
Original Concept

Human communication is a bizarre and fascinating thing, especially the way it's changed in recent years. Technology has reshaped the way we communicate entirely, but we have all adapted so quickly that we didn't even notice the transition. I run into Internet memes every single day, but never think about how important they were in helping humans connect until I came across the book, *Memes in Digital Culture* by Limor Shifman. Shifman describes how memes are used to express ourselves and relate to others through symbols, values and cultural standpoints. Although I hadn't ever thought about memes in this way, I realized that memes are very much like inside jokes where you're either a part of it or not. When you do understand them you're unknowingly forming a connection with everyone else who does too.

Memes are so relevant, but most people don't understand how complex they are. I wanted to explain exactly what they are and how they work in a way that would reach out to more people than *Memes in Digital Culture*. My solution was an animation that would condense the most important information and add a quality of engagement.

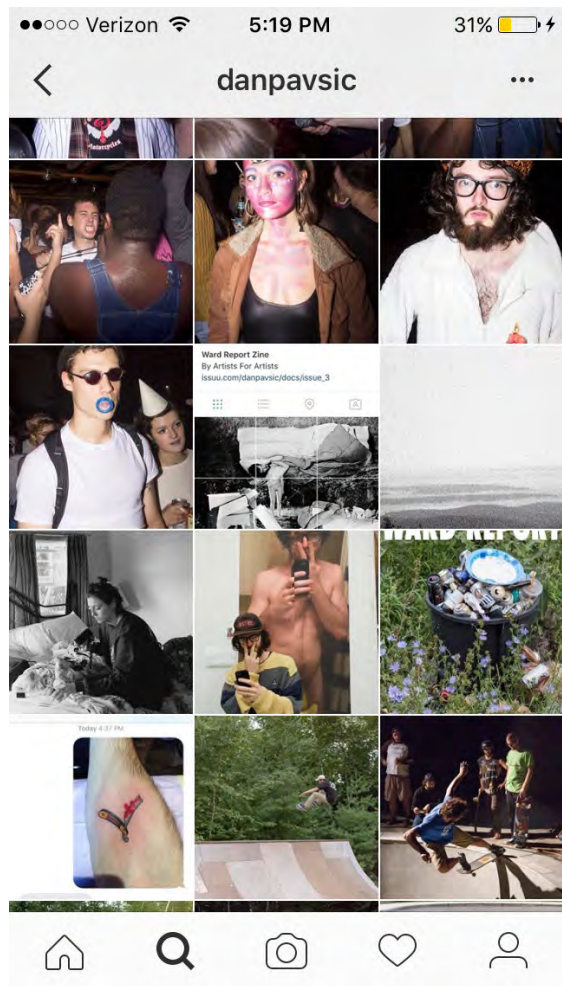
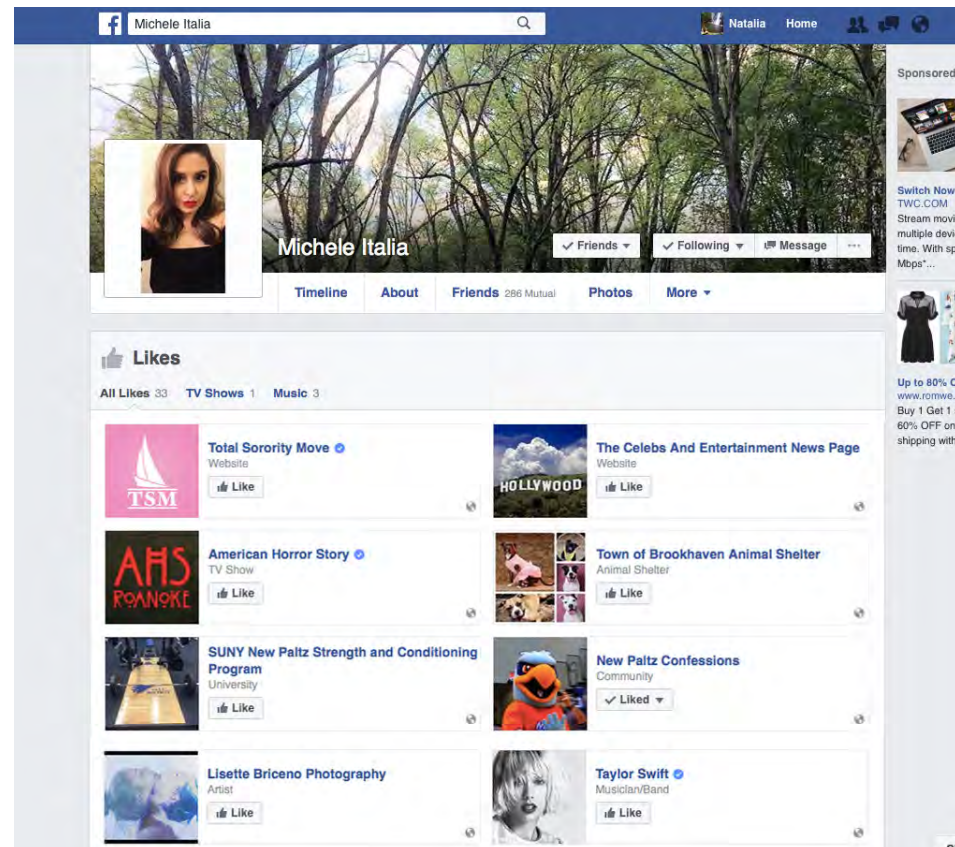


After gathering research from multiple sources, I attempted to organize my information into a time line. Hopefully understanding where memes originated will help viewers understand what they are as well.



Analyzing Social Media

Since the 2000's, social media has helped people express themselves and connect with others. It has always caught my attention how people portray themselves on the Internet. It is expected that your personality and values match what you share on your profile. You will often find that Internet users have profiles similar to their closest friends.



October 2016 sparked the peak of election memes. Depending on what they shared, voters fell into different groups. There were those who supported either Hillary or Trump, those who just preferred one to the other, some who really despised one candidate, and others who didn't like either, along with other sub-groups. But there were also people who just ridiculed the event, and maybe even expressed the same thing you were thinking.

sometimes you can fall into all the groups



Visualizing the Video

Sometimes stepping away from the computer helps you think outside the box. A hands-on activity helped me set the look and feel of the video. Rainbows were prominent because I felt they represented an overload of information. I used Impact as my main typeface because it is the typeface featured on the most famous memes.

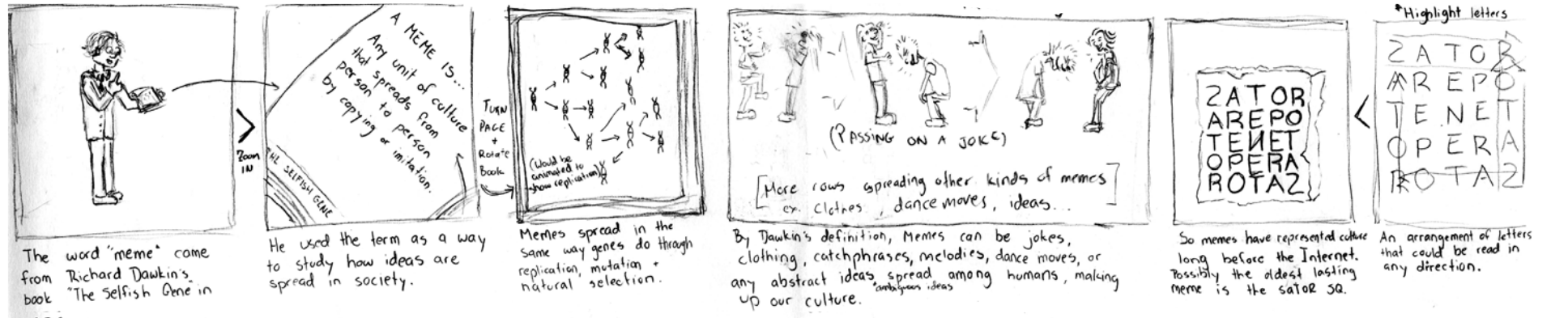
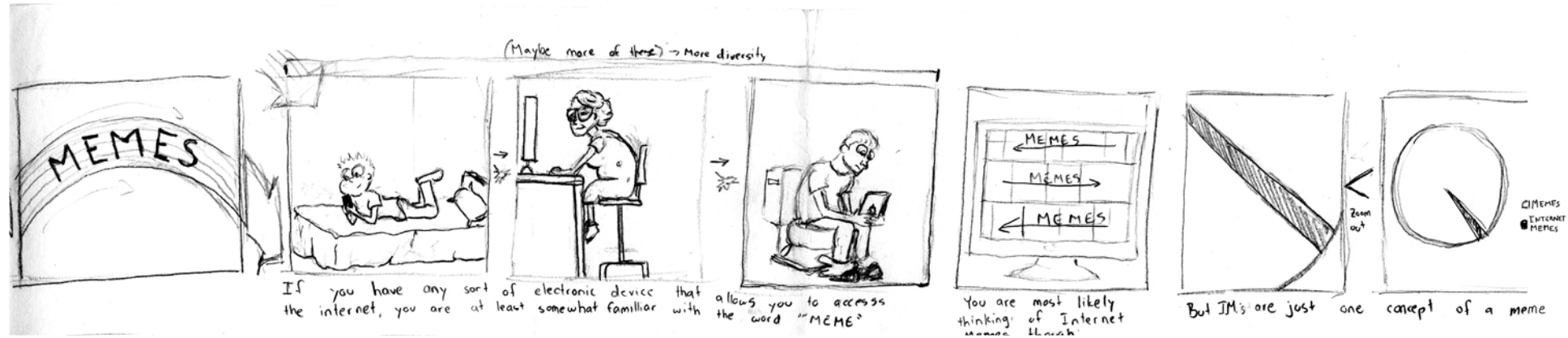


Using the moodboard I put together, I created a potential design for the project cover.



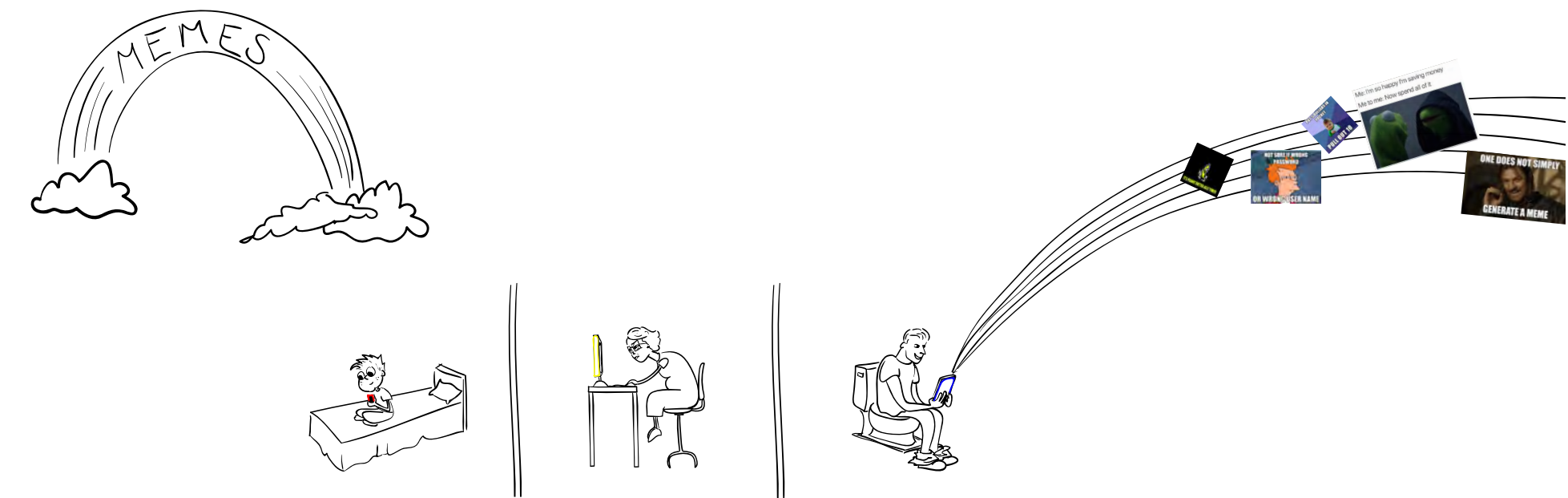
A string of memes with this picture inspired the title of the video. Memes are all around us and impossible to avoid so *Memes. Memes Everywhere* seemed to fit perfectly.

The First Storyboard

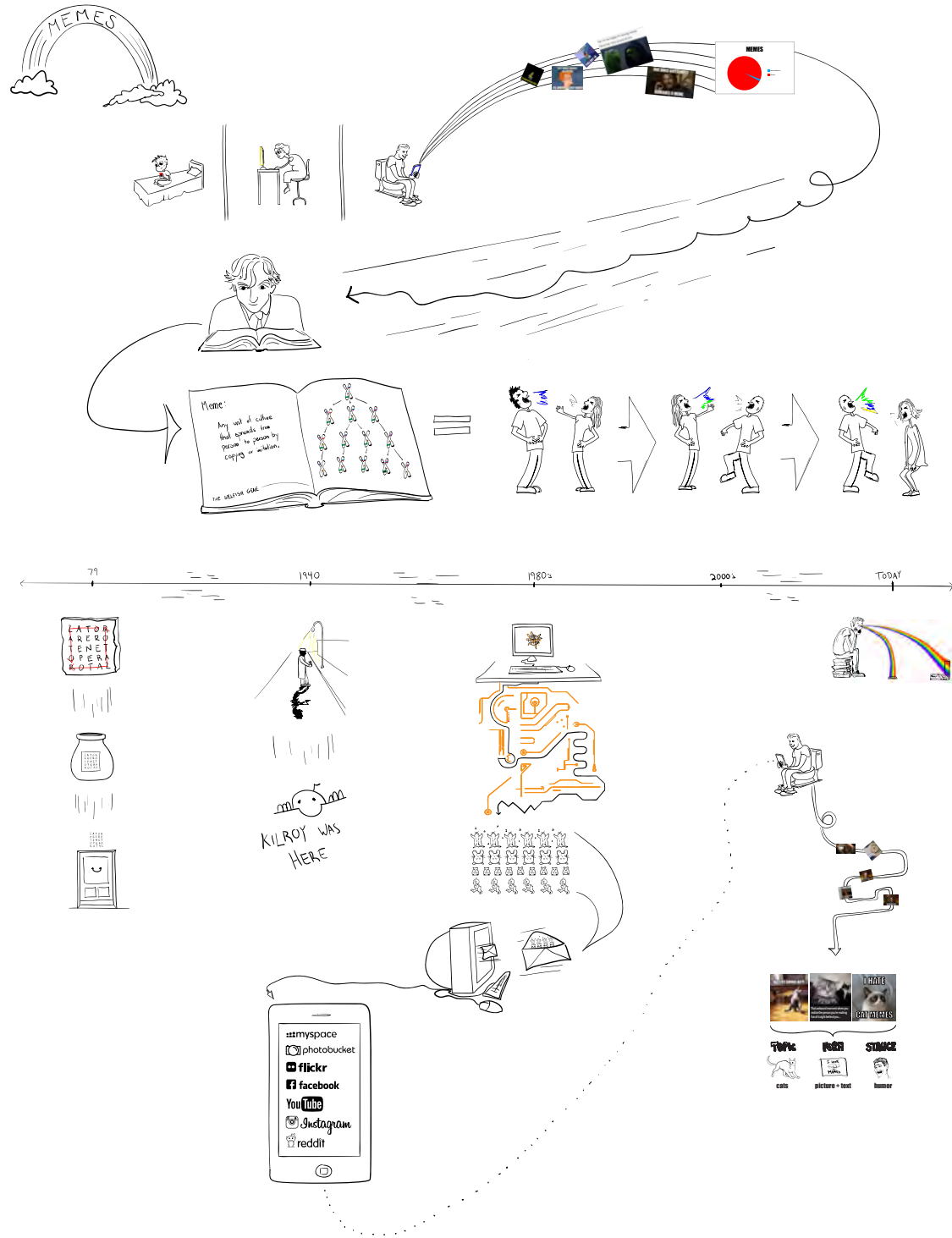


The first storyboard was based directly off of the time line. I imagined the animation similar to a dry erase animation, in which the camera would pan and the video elements would be drawn in. I did not develop a solid script but instead paraphrased the information in the timeline just to have an idea of how pictures would flow.

I needed a mock animation to make sure the information would flow without committing too much. So the next step was creating a digital mock up.



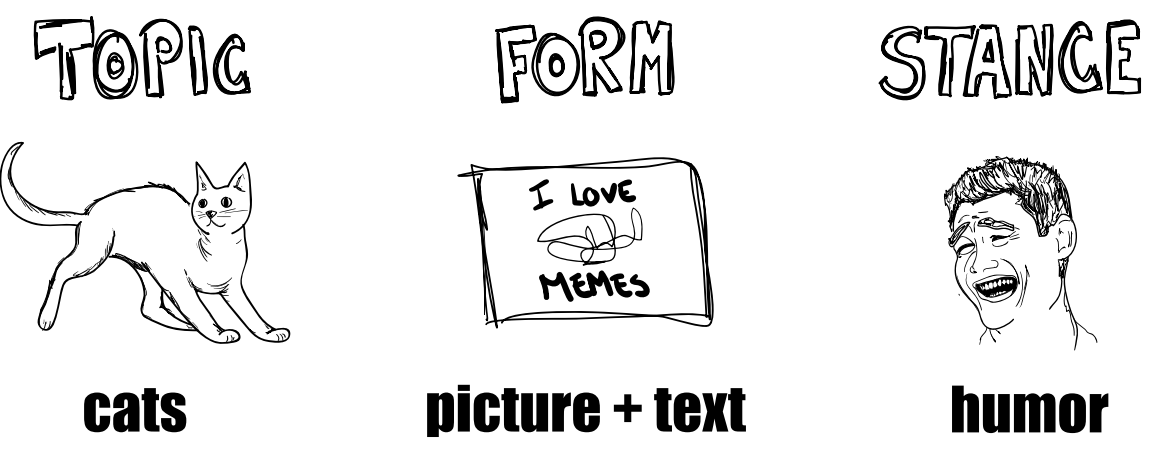
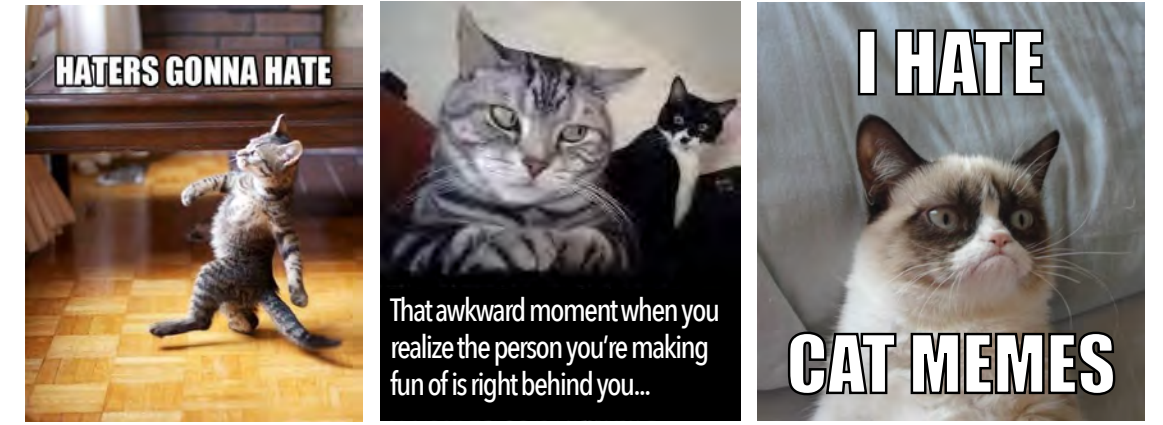
In my mock animation, I used AfterEffects to pan around my digital storyboard with narration. The overall flow was good except for a few awkward transitions. It also felt like there was too much information thrown at you in 2 minutes. In order to fully grasp the concept, viewers needed either less information or a longer video.



Internet Meme?

According to Limor Shifman, an Internet meme is (a) a group of digital items sharing common characteristics of content, form, and/or stance; (b) that were created with awareness of each other; and (c) were circulated, imitated, and transformed via the internet by multiple users.

This is the definition that is the most accurate and the definition the video will use to describe Internet memes.



A New Direction

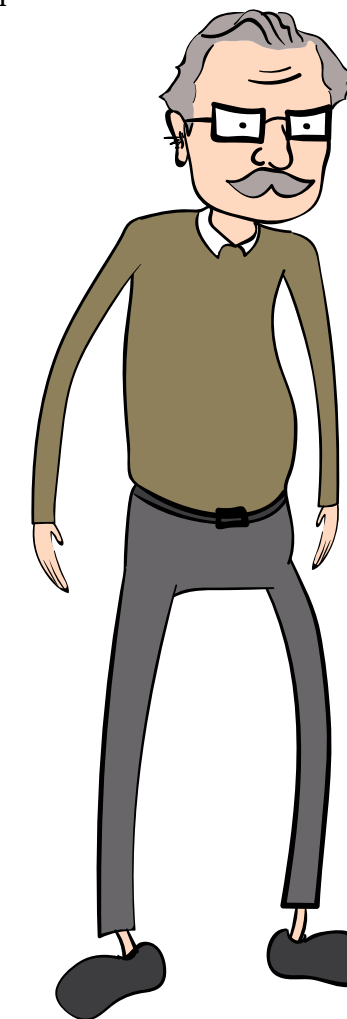
A longer video meant it had to hold people's attentions longer. There had to be a way to hold viewers' interests for 4 to 5 minutes. I realized cartoons are successful because they have character interactions to make it interesting. The model of the video was inspired by the "Krusty Krab Training Episode" of *Spongebob Squarepants*. This was a 12 minute long episode featuring a narrator interacting with a trainee, and it was able to entertain children for the entire time. I wanted my video to be structured similarly: one central character learning all about memes from a narrator with some humor attached.



*inspiration from
woodboard activity*



The original designs for Hank were short and stumpy, but I liked the idea of animating something tall and lanky like myself.



*first digital
rendering of
Hank*

In order to decide what kind of character should be the main character, I considered who would gain the most from learning about this. A senior citizen would be a challenge because it's explaining a concept they may completely be unfamiliar with. So I added to the challenge by making the main character a grumpy stubborn old man.

The Script

Before proceeding further with the video, it needed a solid script. It was much easier to write a script when the narrator was speaking directly to someone. The back and forth banter between the characters made it more enjoyable for me to imagine and I hoped it would be more enjoyable for the viewer as well.

I knew the perfect voices for the roles I was imagining and luckily they both agreed to help. Once the script was set in stone, I recorded Paul Greenberg as the narrator. I later had Kenneth Weisman respond to the audio as Hank.

Memes. Memes Everywhere.

Old man is sleeping in a chair.

Confetti and balloons shoot up, abruptly waking up the old man.

NARRATOR

CONGRATULATIONS! You sir, are the lucky winner of our contest to learn all about the wonderful world of Internet Memes!

HANK

I didn't enter any contest.

NARRATOR

Well somebody did! You now have the unique opportunity to join us on a journey as we teach you all about this piece of modern day culture!

Hank

Do I have a choice?

NARRATOR

No!

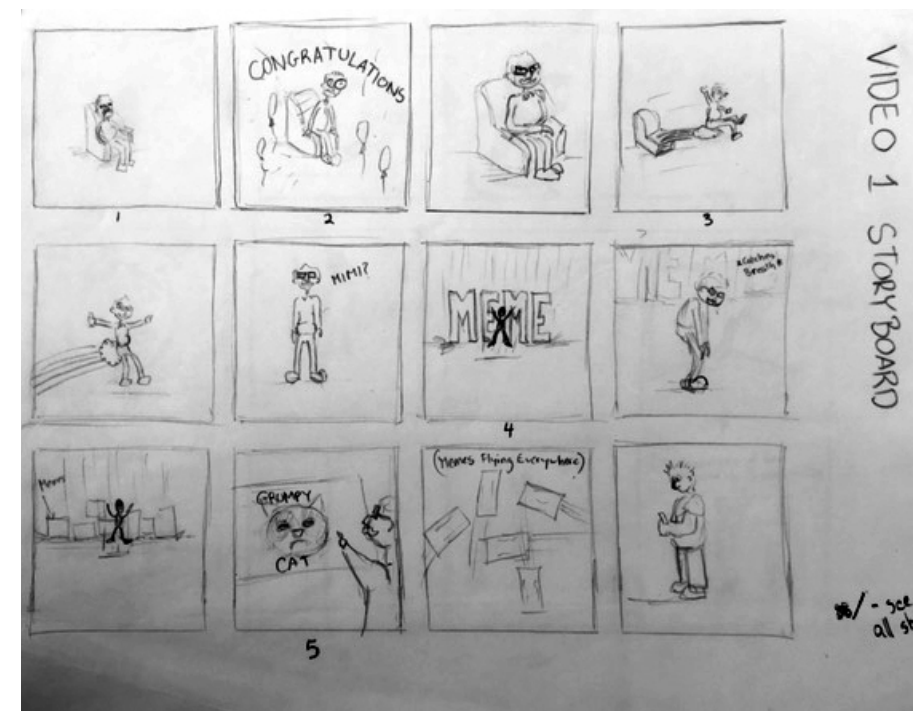
Rainbow picks man up off of his chair and carries him to a different screen. Blank background old man still centered.

NARRATOR

Now sir, have you ever heard of Internet Memes?

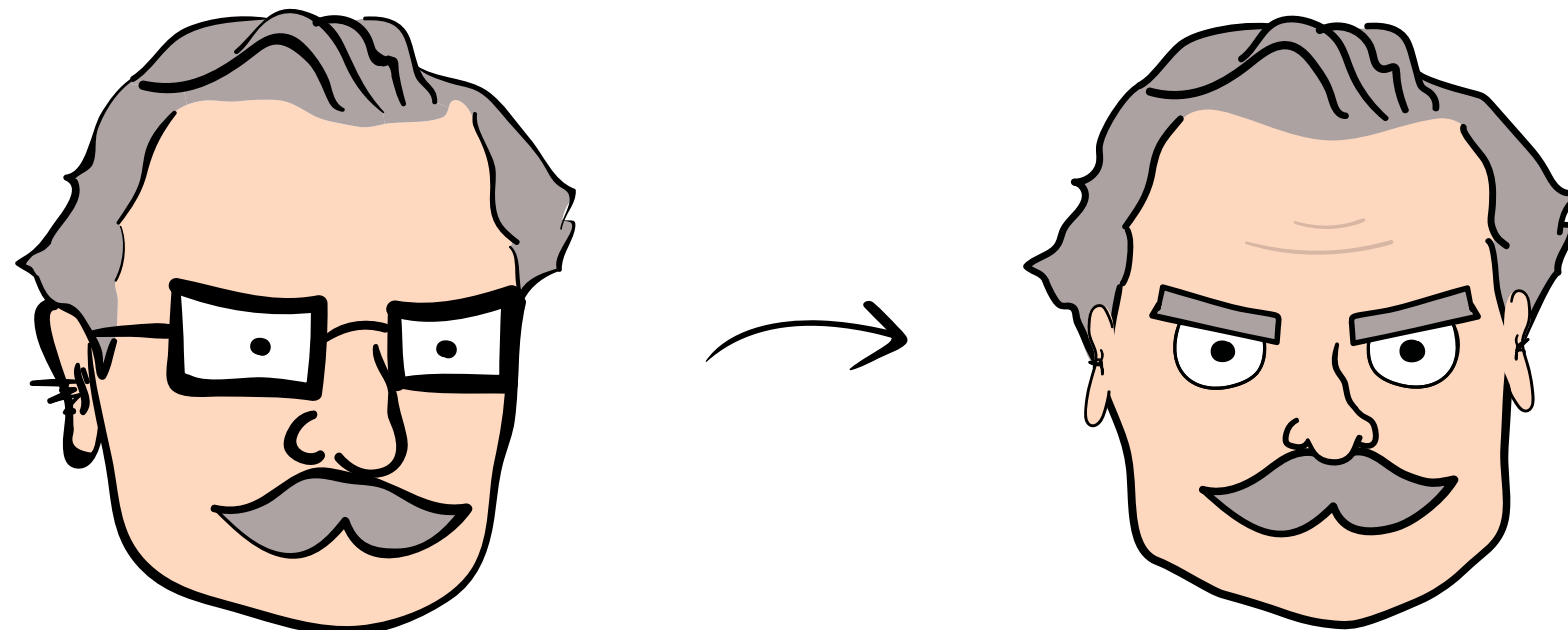
The Last Storyboard

With a new concept, a new storyboard was necessary. Animating a character was going to make this video much more challenging so I had to really plan how all the other elements would move through the screen. I thought of different transitions that would keep the video interesting and not as repetitive as panning a camera.

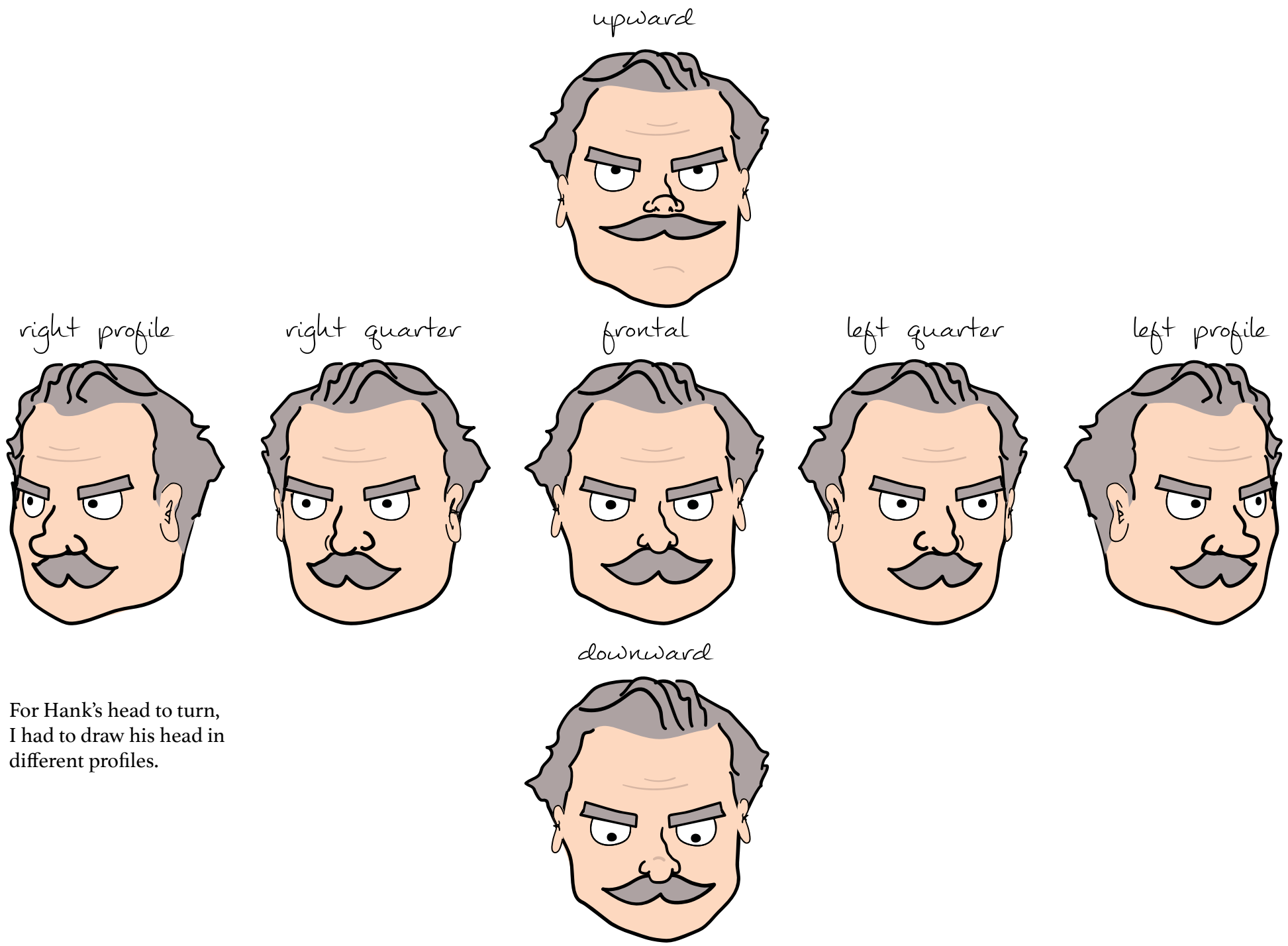


Character Animator

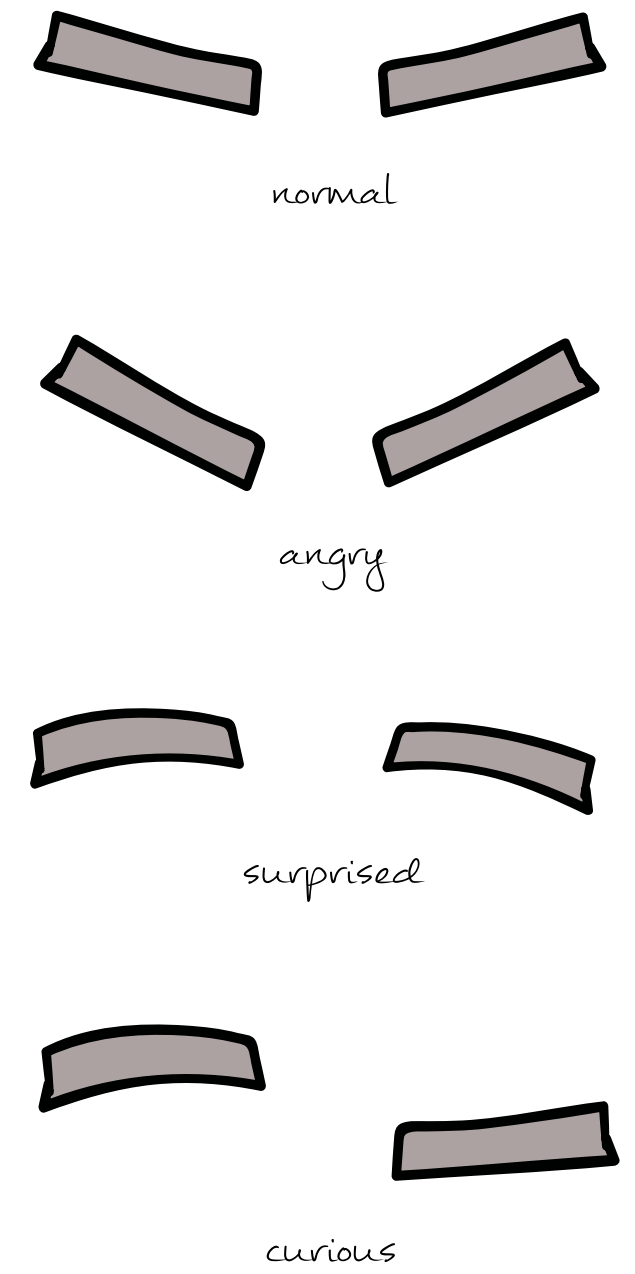
While trying to figure out how to animate a head in AfterEffects, I came across Adobe Character Animator. This is a fairly new program which allows you to animate your character through facial recognition, assuming everything is named and rigged correctly. You can use the camera or keyboard triggers to animate all aspects of the face.



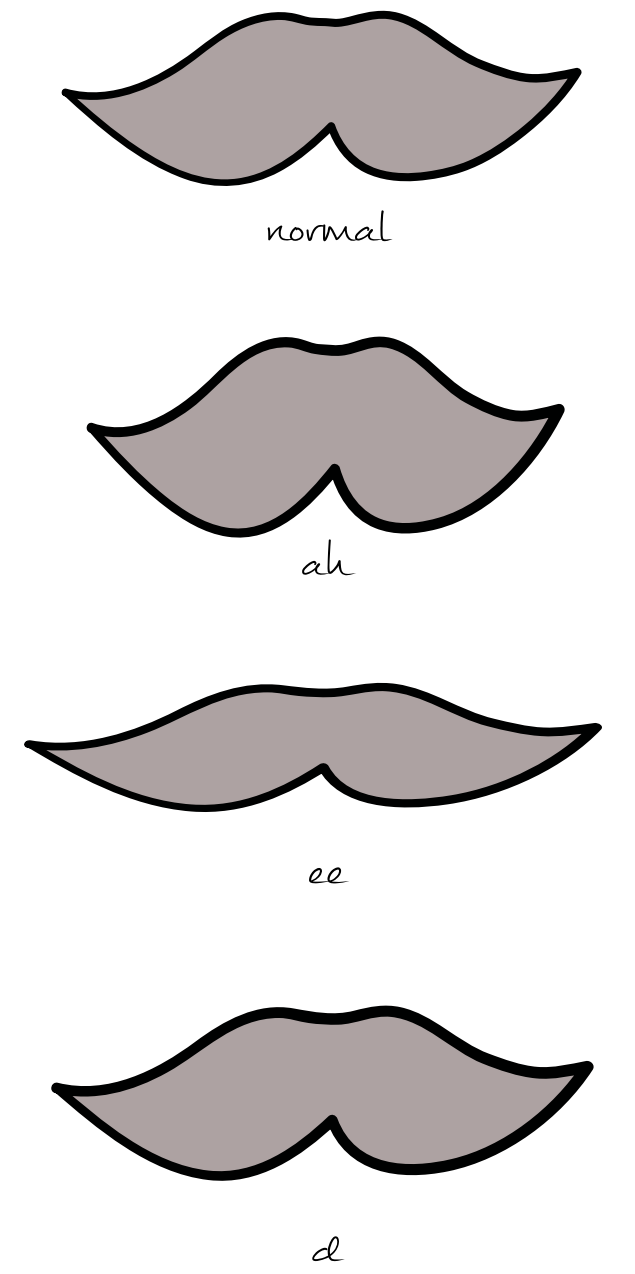
Hank's head evolved from the original design to become more refined. The glasses were removed to exaggerate his expressions further through his eyebrows.



For Hank's head to turn, I had to draw his head in different profiles.



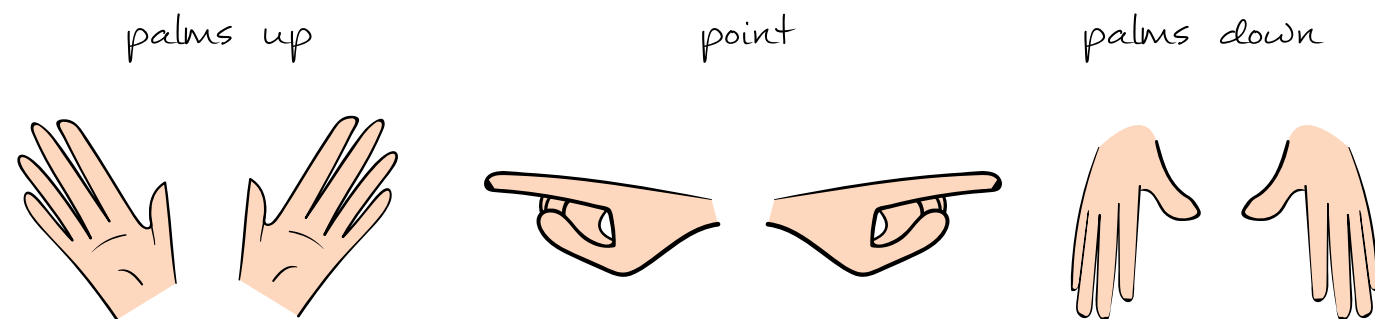
Other features that had to be rigged for the animation were the eyebrows and the mustache/mouth. Different eyebrows added a new level of emotion and the different shaped mustaches as he spoke gave the illusion of a mouth moving.



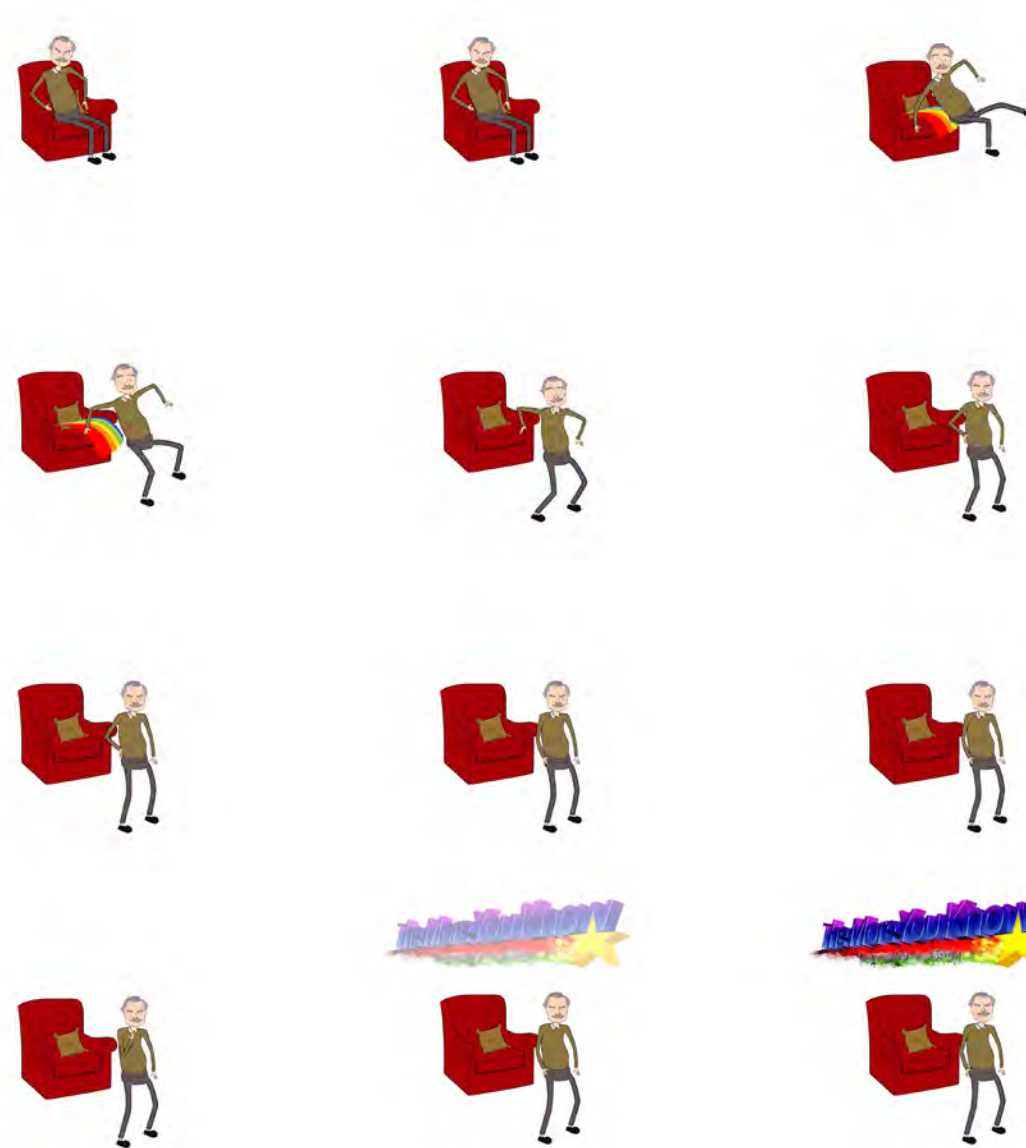
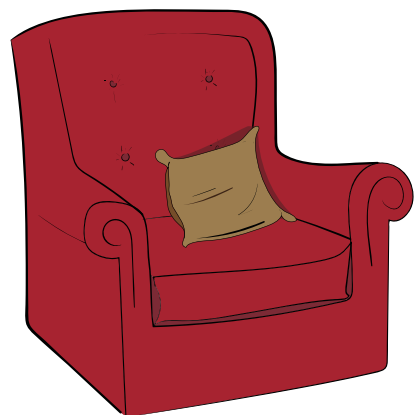
After Effects and Duik

While Character Animator worked great for the head, it wasn't as useful for animating the body. I used a plug-in in After Effects called Duik that allowed me to rig my character through inverse kinematics. By separating the parts of the body into different layers, I was able to create a skeleton for the figure with controllers to move around the parts and key frame them. Controllers were placed on the neck, shoulders, pelvis, and one on each hand and foot.

The only variations that were necessary to make for the body were hand positions.



I began recreating the elements I visualized in Illustrator so that I could have everything drawn out before I started animating.



All that was left to do was animate the video. The rest of my time was spent matching the animation to the audio and figuring out technical road bumps. I animated the body and all the other elements in After Effects and once that was finished I attached the animated head from character animator.

The Thesis Show

With the video finished and out of the way, there needed to be preparations for the show. Using the print services on campus, I was able to print two posters. One as the cover for my project and the other for an interactive activity. The most important quote I have come across is by meme expert An Xiao Mina: "It's that little act of creating, shifting, and putting it in your perspective that makes memes very powerful." This not only stressed the importance of memes but helped people understand the activity I had set up.

I printed 100 stickers with 3 different versions. The idea was to take the visuals and write in whatever you related to the image, thus creating your own meme. I included 2 examples on the board so people would understand what to do, but people started sticking them onto the board, which I loved! It was fascinating to see how different people thought of completely different things when they saw the stickers.



The video was displayed on 3 iPads on adjustable stands. Viewers of all ages gathered around to watch the video and learn all about memes. A lot of people said they had no idea there was so much to learn about memes. The show made me feel my project was a success because I accomplished what I set out to do, which was to help people learn this information in a way that's easier to digest than a book. Now peeeople can learn about the wonderful world of Internet memes alongside Hank!



to watch the video visit
↓
nataliaballester.com/motion/#/memeseverywhere