

Animal Proverbs Current in the United States

The early bird catches the worm.
A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.
You can wait until the cows come home.
You can't teach an old dog new tricks.
Don't put all your eggs in one basket.
A leopard can't change its spots.
You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink.
That's like locking the barn door after the horse is stolen.
What's good for the goose is good for the gander.
Don't count your chickens before they hatch.
Beware of a wolf in sheep's clothing.
You can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear.
Don't let the cat out of the bag.
The dog's bark is worse than its bite.
Let sleeping dogs lie.

Proverbs Current in the United States

Don't cry over spilt milk.
Look before you leap.
Don't bite off more than you can chew.
Better be safe than sorry.
A stitch in time saves nine.
Don't judge a book by its cover.
Make hay while the sun shines.
Better late than never.
The apple doesn't fall far from the tree.
One rotten apple spoils the barrel.
Don't make a mountain out of a molehill.
Oil and water don't mix.
It's like finding a needle in a haystack.
Silence is golden.
Waste not, want not.

African Proverbs

From the Fante of Burkina Faso -

(English equivalent phrase is indented and in italic below)

Without the head, the snake is nothing but rope.

After the leopard there is no other.

A good spirit always looks after her young.

Like the vine we can conquer any problem.

A snake does not bite a man without cause.

Fish grow fat for the benefit of the crocodile.

If you play push with the porcupine, expect to get sore hands.

If you put corn on the ground, birds will not be a rare sight .

If you challenge us, you can expect a response/

You reap what you sow.

If the viper is too heavy to carry, why take the cobra as a head cushion.

Don't bite off more than you can chew.

When there are no trees left, birds will perch on men's heads.

Look for reasons behind the strange behavior of others.

When the scorpion stings you, you must treat it in the same fashion.

Fight fire with fire.

The monkey leaps only as far as it can reach.

Look before you leap.

We can carry water in a basket using a cactus as a cushion.

We can achieve the impossible.

Although the elephant is stronger, we give the stool to the antelope.

Brains before brawn.

Only a brave man will go under a big tree.

Venture into the unknown.

If you shoot at the leopard and do not kill it, it is better not to have shot at all.

Think before you act/Finish what you begin.

Will you fly or will you vanish?

There is no escape.

If a child wants to pick a ripe pepper, let him do it. When it gets in his eyes, he will stop himself.

Experience is the best teacher.

African Proverbs

From The Art Institute of Chicago *Gold of Africa*, 1990 teacher manual (now out of print). English equivalent phrase is indented and in italics below.

If you beat a lion, it is your own head that aches.

If you are disrespectful to a chief, you will suffer for it.

The egg says, "I am like authority. If you hold me too hard I break; if you let me go I fall and break to pieces on the ground."

A chief should be neither too severe nor too lenient; he must exercise his responsibilities with care and moderation.

One head does not make a council.

There should be consultations when an important decision is made.

The porcupine whose spears cover its back, who is able to conquer it? (A reference to the invincibility of the Asante in battle.)

The brown scorpion: when it stings you the pain goes until nightfall.

If you incur a chief's displeasure, you will feel it for a long time.

African Proverbs

From The Art Institute of Chicago *Arts of Africa*, 1989 teacher manual (now out of print). English equivalent phrase is indented and in italics below.

These proverbs, followed by their region of origin, are examples of the lively visual imagery that is characteristic of African speech. An English equivalent to each has been included to demonstrate the universality of human thought and experience. These are not, of course the only possible English parallels, and you may wish to work with your class on discovering others. Remember, however that the language in each African saying reflects a specific physical and cultural environment; while the ideas conveyed may apply to many cultures and peoples around the world, the images used are unique to their own time and place.

One camel does not make fun of the other camel's hump. (Guinea)

People who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones.

Rain does not fall on one roof alone. (Congo)

We're all in the same boat.

When spider webs unite they can tie up a lion. (Ethiopia)

There is strength in numbers.

When a bee comes to your house, let her have beer; you may want to visit the bee's house someday. Congo (formerly Zaire)

Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

What the child says, he has learned it at home. (Gambia-Senegal)

The apple doesn't fall far from the tree.

Before healing others, heal thyself. (Gambia-Senegal)

Physician, heal thyself.

One must talk little and listen much. (Gambia-Senegal)

Talk is silver, silence is gold/Children should be seen but not heard.

What goes in at one ear goes out by the other. (Gambia-Senegal)

What goes in one ear comes out the other.

He who puts aside his spoon to draw from the pot with his hand, does not do so twice. (Gambia-Senegal)

Once burned, twice shy.

He who rises early finds the way short. (Gambia-Senegal)

The early bird catches the worm.

When a fowl eats your neighbor's corn, drive it away; another time it will eat yours. (Ghana)

Do unto others as you would have others do unto you.

Fire and gunpowder do not lie together. (Ghana)

Oil and water do not mix.

He is a fool whose sheep run away twice. (Ghana)

Experience is the best teacher.

One bad nut spoils all. (Ghana)

A rotten apple spoils the barrel.

The potter eats out of a potsherd. (Ghana)

The shoemaker's children go without shoes.

What is not eaten is not cooked. (Ghana)

Waste not, want not.

Frowning and fierceness prove not manliness. (Nigeria)

A dog's bark is worse than its bite.

When one is carrying water and happens to spill it, if the calabash not be broken, you can get more. (Nigeria)

Don't cry over spilt milk.

Patience is the best of dispositions; he who possesses patience possesses all things. (Nigeria)

Patience is a virtue.

A stream coming down won't let you swim up. (Nigeria)

You can't swim against the current.

A man always breaking off from his work never finishes anything. (Nigeria)

A job worth doing is worth doing well/

Finish what you start.

When a man sees sunshine he dries his tobacco. (Nigeria)

Make hay while the sun shines.

It is not worth talking about a slip of the foot as if it were a fall. (Nigeria)

Don't make a mountain out of a molehill.