



AFRICAN PROVERBS

Proverbs are short, memorable phrases that give advice about life. Almost all languages have them. From ancient times people have argued about how to define a proverb. Here are some possible definitions.

- Proverbs contains wisdom that has been handed down from one generation to the next.
- A proverb is a short sentence or phrase that contains a general piece of wisdom.
- Proverbs express knowledge about life that are universally familiar to mankind.
- A Proverb is a saying that is easily memorized, and contains traditional beliefs about life.

Part 1 – Understanding Proverbs

1. Write your own definition of a proverb. Use some combination of the bulleted definitions above, prior knowledge, or some other approach, but do not copy another definition. Use your own words.

2. If you had to choose one of the definitions listed by the bullet points, which one would you choose? Number _____.

3. Why did you choose that one? _____

4. The word “proverb” comes from the Latin word *proverbium*, which was a combination of *pro* (put forth) and *verbum* (word). How does your definition of proverb connect to the Latin meaning?

Part 2 – Proverbs and Social Structure – *reading and thinking about proverbs can help us understand what people value. Read the African Proverbs below and answer the questions that follow.*

- If you want to walk fast, walk alone. If you want to walk far, walk with others.
- You must judge a man by the work of his hands.
- A large chair does not make a king.
- It is better to be a lion for a day than a sheep all your life.
- When you educate a man, you educate an individual. When you educate a woman, you educate a generation.
- He who refuses to obey cannot command.
- If you think you are too small to make a difference, you haven't spent a night with a mosquito.
- Wealth if you use it, comes to an end; learning, if you use it, increases.
- In the moment of crisis, the wise build bridges and the foolish build walls.
- A flea can trouble a lion more than a lion can trouble a flea.
- Money can't talk, yet it can make lies look true.

Questions on back.

List two proverbs (just the letters) that most likely came from a society that valued **equality**. _____ and _____

Explain why you chose those two. Be specific. _____

List two proverbs (just the letters) that most likely came from a society that valued **power**. _____ and _____

Explain why you chose those two. Be specific. _____

List two proverbs (just the letters) that most likely came from a society that valued **cooperation**. _____ and _____

Explain why you chose those two. Be specific. _____

List two proverbs (just the letters) that most likely came from a society that valued **education**. _____ and _____

Explain why you chose those two. Be specific. _____

Explain how reading proverbs might allow you to predict what a society's hierarchy might look like. For example, could you predict where soldiers would be on a society that believed in proverb "i", or where farmers might be on a society that believed in proverb "b"? _____

Choose a proverb and relate/connect it to another society (not from Africa) that we have studied. For example:

Proverb "C" reminds me of the people from _____, because _____.

Based on your "connection" from the previous question, do you see a link to that society's hierarchy? _____

Explain the link _____
