

Proverbs and Superstitions

Let's get started...

Talk about a *fairy tale* or story that was your favorite when you were a child. See how many other cultures recognize the same story. Have you read Cinderella?

New words and Idioms:

Proverb, superstition, value, folk song, fairy tale, folk tale, fable, origin, assertive, warning, delight, consent, founded, belief system, "far-fetched," "for ages," "know something inside out," "Live and let live," etc.

Background:

Proverbs (or sayings) are little lessons which older people of a culture pass down to younger people to teach them about life. Many proverbs remind people of the *values* that are important to them. Values teach people how to act, what is right, and what is wrong. Because the values of each culture are different, understanding the values of another culture helps explain how people think and act. *Folk songs, folk tales, fables, and children's fairy tales* can also express the values of a culture.



In pairs for 5 minutes, ask and answer these questions:

Values are shared by many cultures but can be told differently through proverbs. For example, "The squeaky wheel gets the oil" and "He who does not cry does not get fed" teach the lesson that it is important to make people know what you want. That is the value of being *assertive*.

Share one proverb from your native language which reflects a value that is very important to your culture. See if your classmates can guess its meaning before you tell them.

Share your partner's answers with the group.

Discussion Questions:

English proverbs are part of the spoken culture in the United States but are not often used in writing. Some cultures include proverbs in their writings to record and show respect for the traditions and wisdom of the past.

An often quoted proverb among those who like sailing is this one: *Red sky in morning, Sailors take warning. Red sky at night, Sailors' delight.*

What do you think it means?

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Talk about each of the following proverbs. What do you think they mean?

Proverb	Meaning
Where there's a will there's a way.	
When in Rome, do as the Romans do.	
She who is silent consents.	
While young, the tree can be easily bent.	
You can't judge a book by its cover.	
Rome wasn't built in a day.	
Three feet of ice does not result from one day of cold weather.	
Don't cry over spilled milk.	
Birds of a feather flock together.	
An ant may well destroy a whole dam.	
Don't put all of your eggs in one basket.	
Give him an inch, and he'll take a mile.	
When it rains it pours.	
There's no time like the present.	
Don't bite the hand that feeds you.	
Be not afraid of growing slowly; be only afraid of standing still.	
Look before you leap.	

Each culture also has *superstitions*, beliefs that are not founded in fact but live on from generation to generation. Sometimes they are called "old wives tales."

Do you know any superstitions about weddings? For example, some people believe that wearing "something old, something new, something borrowed, something blue" will bring you good luck.

Do you know any superstitions about cats?

What other animals are people superstitious about in your culture?

Do you think that there is any truth behind superstitions? What are some common superstitions in your country?

What are some things that you consider unlucky? Would you walk under a ladder?

A four-leaf clover is often considered lucky. What are some things that are considered lucky in your culture?

What numbers are considered to be lucky and unlucky in your country?