



FLEMISH PROVERBS AND COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Teacher's Guide to the Exhibition

Introduction

In this lesson, students work with proverbs from home and from around the world. How proverbs are used to comment, advise, teach, and inform; often they have dual meanings, saying more than one thing at a time. Many cultures are full of proverbs. It is thought to be a sign of intelligence to have the ability to use proverbs appropriately in various situations. Proverbs are important; they are often represented in art.

Working with proverbs in the classroom can improve students' learning experiences, their language skills, and their understanding of themselves and the world. This happens because:

- Proverbs provide an opportunity for students to be knowledgeable experts as well as learners.
- Proverbs provide an opportunity for students to learn about each other and their shared values.
- Proverbs provide an opportunity for students to gain insight as they discuss their experiences and work out their understanding of proverb meanings.
- Proverbs provide an opportunity for students to use their home culture as a stepping stone into school culture.
- Proverbs provide an opportunity to improve thinking and writing as students both provide and receive information.

Proverb Definitions

Proverbs are popular sayings which contain advice or state a generally accepted truth. Because most proverbs have their origins in oral tradition, they are generally worded in such a way as to be remembered easily and tend to change little from generation to generation, so much so that sometimes their specific meaning is no longer relevant.

For instance, the proverb "penny wise, pound foolish" is a holdover from when America was a British colony and used the pound as currency.

Proverbs function as "folk wisdom," general advice about how to act and live. And because they are folk wisdom, they are often strongly reflected in the cultural values and physical environment from which they arise.

Some Common Features of Proverbs

- Proverbs are passed down through time with little change in form.
- Proverbs are often used metaphorically and it is in understanding their metaphorical nature that we can unravel their meaning. While “a stitch in time saves nine,” “don’t count your chickens before they’ve hatched,” and “don’t throw the baby out with the bathwater” are common proverbs, few of us stitch clothes, count chickens, or throw out bathwater.
- Proverbs often make use of grammatical and rhetorical devices that help make them memorable, including alliteration, rhyme, parallel structure, repetition of key words or phrases, and strong imagery.

For instance, island cultures such as Hawaii have proverbs about the sea, Eastern cultures have proverbs about elephants, and American proverbs, many collected and published by Benjamin Franklin, are about hard work bringing success. Proverbs are used to support arguments, to provide lessons and instruction, and to stress shared values.

Proverbs are not clichés

Clichés are widely used, even overused, phrases that are often metaphorical in nature. Clichés often have their origins in literature, television, or movies rather than in folk tradition.

Some Common Proverbs

- Look before you leap.
- Don’t throw out the baby with the bathwater.
- Where there’s a will, there’s a way.
- All’s well that ends well.
- Don’t count your chickens before they’ve hatched.
- If it looks like a duck, walks like a duck, and quacks like a duck, it is a duck.
- A stitch in time saves nine.

Some Common Clichés

She was white as a sheet.

The tension was so thick you could cut it like butter.

He stood as still as a deer in the headlights.

I'm as fit as a fiddle.

You could read her like an open book.

Learning Objectives

- Analyze the form, origin, and function of a Flemish work of art.
- Gain an introduction to proverbs and appreciate their similarities in various cultures and languages.
- Represent a proverb in a three-dimensional work of art.



Materials

- Print out of the Painting, • chalkboard, • paper. • pencils, • round-edge scissors, • toothpicks, newspaper, • gold and black paint and colours, • brushes: medium and small, • glue/ fevicol

Methodology

- Look at the painting carefully.
- Define proverb for students and provide an example. Have students think of as many proverbs as they can and write them on the board.

Teaching your students proverbs and idioms.

Proverb: 'a short saying in general use, held to embody a general truth'

Idiom: 'a group of words established by usage and having a meaning not deducible from those of the individual words'.

(Definitions from the Oxford Concise Dictionary)

Tips for using proverbs and idioms in class

Deal with proverbs and idioms as and when they crop up in their contexts, such as in reading and listening tasks or when you use one naturally in class.

Group the sayings by topic and introduce in conjunction with other activities around the topic. For example, teach several 'body idioms' together.

E.g. to be head and shoulders above the rest, to be long in the tooth, to shoot yourself in the foot etc. It will be easier for students to remember some of them if they're in groups.

Use visuals and pictures to help learners remember them. For example, draw a bird in the hand and two in the bush.

Do some matching activities. For example, give students five proverbs that have been cut in half and get them to match them up.

Ask students if any of the proverbs translate directly into their own language. Most of the time students will know a similar expression in their language and it can help them to remember them if they compare the differences between English and their regional language.

Put them into context. Try to use situations when people actually use the expressions and get students to create dialogues or role-play and to use a few of the proverbs to reinforce the meaning.

Netherlandish Proverbs also called Flemish Proverbs, The Blue Cloak or The Topsy Turvy World) is a 1559 oil-on-oak-panel painting by the Flemish artist Pieter Bruegel the Elder that depicts a scene in which humans and, to a lesser extent, animals and objects, offer literal illustrations of Dutch language proverbs and idioms.

Running themes in Bruegel's paintings are the absurdity, wickedness and foolishness of humans, and this is no exception. The painting's original title, The Blue Cloak or The Folly of the World, indicates that Bruegel's intent was not just to illustrate proverbs, but rather to catalog human folly. Many of the people depicted show the characteristic blank features that Bruegel used to portray fools.

His son, Pieter Brueghel the Younger, specialised in making copies of his father's work and painted at least 16 copies of Netherlandish Proverbs. Not all versions of the painting, by father or son, show exactly the same proverbs and they also differ in other minor details.

Our current exhibition at CSMVS has paintings of Pieter Brueghel the younger.

- Tell students that Flemish proverbs generally refer to animals, plants, social structures, or experiences common in Netherland.

Have students guess what this might be then tell them the proverb it is intended to illustrate.

- Introduce students to other proverbs and their regional equivalents.

Discuss what each means and brainstorm clever ways to visualize them.

The Artist at work

THE MAKING OF A MASTERPIECE

Netherlandish Proverbs

Proverbs and figures of speech were popular subjects for illustration in Bruegel's time, and a constant theme in his own work. Nowhere are they treated in such an obvious or encyclopedic way as in this painting, where a whole village acts out over 100 different adages and expressions (which are translated in the key below). These fall into two groups – those which show the absurdity of human behaviour, such as the figure carrying baskets of light into the sunshine (5), and those which demonstrate sinfulness, such as the woman wrapping a blue cloak around her husband, symbolizing her adultery. Bruegel may have modelled the painting on a contemporary engraving by Frans Hogenberg, which bears the inscription 'This is generally called the Blue Cloak, but it would be better named The World's Follies'. This alternative title could equally well be applied to Bruegel's work, which is essentially an instructive commentary on the ridiculous spectacle of human life.



1 The sow removes the spigot
To make a pig of oneself

2 He butts his head against the wall
To bang one's head against a brick wall




3 Don't count your chickens before they hatch

4 He speaks out of two mouths
To be two-faced


5 He carries baskets of light into the sunshine
To take coals to Newcastle

6 One holds the distaff while the other spins
It takes two to gossip



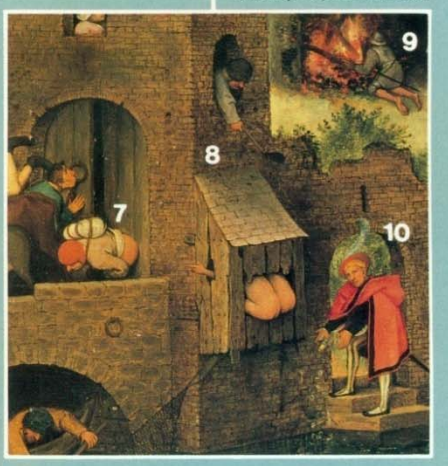



Staatliche Museen, Berlin-Dahlem



Bibliothèque Royale Albert, Brussels

The Blue Cloak
(above) This engraving by Frans Hogenberg was probably the immediate source for Bruegel's painting, which was known by the same name for many years. Bruegel replaced the abstract landscape with a realistic village setting and increased the number of proverbs from 40 to over a hundred.





7 He opens the door with his bottom
He doesn't know whether he's coming or going

8 He kills two flies with one blow
To kill two birds with one stone

9 He doesn't care whose house is burning as long as he can warm himself from the coals
I'm all right Jack

10 He throws money into the water
To throw money down the drain

11 To poke a stick into the wheel
To put a spoke in the wheel

12 He who spills his gruel can't pick it all up
It's no use crying over spilt milk

13 He cannot reach from one loaf to the other
He cannot make ends meet

14 They pull for the long piece
To draw straws/pull the wishbone

Activity

- Tell students that they will make a collage illustrating proverbs. Have them choose a proverb that they can picture in their mind. Ask them to draw one or more sketches of it on paper. Encourage them to create a design that is simple and can be reduced to a few basic forms.
- Have students paint the entire picture. Encourage them to add abstract shapes to their collage with black paint. The Proverb can be written with Golden Paint.

Evaluation

Base students' evaluations on their understanding of proverbs as expressed through participation in class and collage decorations. Have them explain their designs in front of the class and provide an example of a situation when the proverb they have represented might be meaningful.

Internet links for reference :

<http://www.ucpress.edu/content/chapters/11236.ch01.pdf>

<http://creativeproverbs.com/>

This site has a huge collection of proverbs from around the world.

http://www.eltnews.com/features/thinktank/028_pv.shtml

Views on why teaching proverbs to your students may not always be a good idea.

<http://www.manythings.org/proverbs>

This site has so many proverbs; there are lots of proverb crosswords too.

http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/radio/specials/1728_uptodate/