

# Proverb

## Definition of Proverb

A proverb is a brief, simple, and popular saying, or a phrase that gives advice and effectively embodies a commonplace truth based on practical experience or common sense. A proverb may have an allegorical message behind its odd appearance. The reason of popularity is due to its usage in spoken language, as well as in folk literature.

Some authors twist and bend proverbs, and create anti-proverbs to add literary effect to their works. However, in poetry, poets use proverbs strategically by employing some parts of them in poems' titles, such as Lord Kennet has done in his poem, *A Bird in the Bush*, which is a popular proverb. Some poems contain multiple proverbs, like Paul Muldoon's poem *Symposium*.

## Use of Popular Proverbs in Everyday Speech

Early to bed and early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise.  
Laugh and the world laughs with you, weep and you weep alone.  
Absence makes the heart grow fonder.  
All that glitters is not gold.  
An army of sheep led by a lion would defeat an army of lions led by a sheep.  
The old horse in the stable still yearns to run .

## Examples of Proverb in Literature

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Example #1: *Things Fall Apart* (By Chinua Achebe)

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“If a child washes his hands he could eat with kings.”

Meaning: If you remove the dirt of your ancestors, you can have a better future. Everyone can build his or her own fame.

“A toad does not run in the daytime for nothing.”

Meaning: Everything happens for a reason, and for something, not for nothingness.

“A child’s fingers are not scalded by a piece of hot yam which its mother puts into its palm.”

Meaning: Children who obey their mothers are not punished.

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### **Example #2: *Romeo and Juliet* (By William Shakespeare)**

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“The weakest goes to the wall.”

Meaning: Weak people are never favored.

“He that is stricken blind cannot forget  
The precious treasure of his eyesight lost.”

Meaning: A man who loses his eyesight can never forget the importance of lost eyesight.

“One fire burns out another’s burning,  
One pain is lessen’d by another’s anguish.”

Meaning: You can burn new fire from lighting another fire, similarly a new pain could mitigate your old pain.

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### **Example #3: *Book of Proverbs* (from The Bible)**

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“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools

Meaning: Wise men always fear the Lord, while fools do not like wisdom and guidance.

“Every word of God is flawless; He is a shield to those who take refuge in him.” (Proverbs 30:5)

Meaning: The things God says are never flawed. He protects the people who [ask](#) for His help, and who follow His path.

“Commit to the LORD whatever you do, and he will establish your plans.” (Proverbs 16:3)

Meaning: Do whatever you do for the Lord, putting faith in Him, and he will guide your plans and actions.

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#### **Example #4: *The Power and the Glory* (By Graham Greene)**

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“And when we love our sin then we are damned indeed.”

Meaning: When we do not repent of our sins, rather loving them, then we are damned.

“Nothing in life was as ugly as death.”

Meaning: Death is the most horrible experience in life.

“There is always one moment in childhood when the door opens and lets the future in ...We should be thankful we cannot see the horrors and degradations lying around our childhood, in cupboards and bookshelves, everywhere.”

Meaning: Childhood is a blessing for us, as we do not face horrible experiences like humiliation and degradation from people.

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Fortune Teller:

“We should make sure that our own house is in order before we give advice to others.”

Meaning: We should act upon our own words, before advising others to do the same.

### **Function of Proverb**

Proverbs play very important roles in different types of literary works. The most important function of proverbs is to teach and educate the [audience](#). They often contain expert advice, with a role for educating the readers on what they may face if they do something. Hence, proverbs play a didactic role, as they play a universal role in teaching wisdom and sagacity to the common people. Since proverbs are usually metaphorical and indirect, they allow writers to express their messages in a less harsh way.

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