

Adage

Definition of Adage

An adage is a short, pointed, and memorable saying that is based on facts, and which is considered a veritable truth by the majority of people. Famous adages become popular due to their usage over a long period of time. In fact, an adage expresses a general fact or truth about life, which becomes more and more popular before it is accepted as a universal truth. For instance, “God helps those who help themselves” is now considered a universal truth because of its usage throughout human history. Often repeated sayings and quotes become adages that pass on to many generations. However, some adages are metaphoric, having hidden meanings, and embody common observations. Sometimes proverbs are referred as adages, but there is a slight difference.

Adage vs. Proverb

Both of these terms represent sayings that convey a deeper meaning. However, there are some differences between them. A [proverb](#) has a practical aspect, but it is a common belief that an adage is true to have been tested in various ages. The adage is a more general term than a proverb; therefore, proverbs could be adages, in the manner that Merriam Webster defines proverbs as adages. Adages are general truths with universal applications, reflecting wisdom; whereas proverbs are more traditional and are often used in everyday speeches.

Examples of Adage from Literature

Many authors have employed adages in their works, such as C.S Lewis, Geoffrey Chaucer, William Shakespeare, Benjamin Franklin, J.K. Rowling, Aesop, George Bernard Shaw, Friedrich Nietzsche, and many others.

Example #1: *In Memoriam* (by Alfred Lord Tennyson)

Tis better to have loved and lost
Than never to have loved at all.

In these lines, Tennyson is giving advice about having love in one's life, which is a truth used in literary texts even today.

Example #2: *As You Like It* (by William Shakespeare)

All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players.
They have their exits and their entrances,
And one man in his time plays many parts,
His acts being seven ages.

This is the most frequently quoted adage by Shakespeare. Here he has made a [comparison](#) between the world and the stage, as well as between life and play. He also refers to seven stages in the lives of humans as seven ages of humans.

Example #3: *The Tortoise and the Hare* (by Aesop)

“Things are not always what they seem.”

(From *The Bee-Keeper and the Bees*)

“Appearances often are deceiving.”

(From *The Wolf in Sheep's Clothing*)

“Slow and steady wins the race.”

(From *The Tortoise and the Hare*)

The following lines are very popular in literature as well as in everyday use. People use these adages in their common speeches as witty sayings.

Example #4: *Adagia*(by Desiderius Erasmus)

“God helps those who help themselves.”

“Put the cart before the horse.”

“Call a spade a spade.”

Erasmus is famous for using adages in his works. The given lines are commonly used sayings in daily conversation. These are now accepted as a universal truths.

Example #5: The Holy *Bible*(by Multiple Authors)

“Don’t cast your pearls before swine.” – Matthew 7:6

“More blessed to give than to receive.” – Acts 20:35

“Pride goes before a fall.” – Proverbs 16:18

“To everything there is a season.” – Ecclesiastes 3:1

The Bible has also employed adages with deeper, [moral](#) meanings. The purpose of these sayings is to educate, and increase the readers’ awareness.

Example #6: *Poor Richard’s Almanack* (by Benjamin Franklin)

“Early to bed and early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise.”

“Eat to live, and not live to eat.”

“To err is human, to repent divine; to persist devilish.”

“Well done is better than well said.”

“A penny saved is a penny earned.”

Franklin published this book on a yearly basis from 1732–1758, which became popular due to extensive use of witty adages and wordplay. These are some popular adages used to this day.

Function of Adage

Adages are not only found in literature, but also in advertising and scripts of films. The first major function of adage is to give awareness to the readers about some facts of life. Secondly, adages are applicable in any circumstance or situation, as they convey deeper meanings of wisdom. Most of these sayings are witty and suggest a moral lesson, having long lasting impacts of universal application of the truths contained in them. They become imprinted on the minds of the users. Moreover, they sum up the moral lesson of a story such as in *Aesop's Fables*. The authors use this device to make their works effective, compact and rich.