

# Communication in West African Culture - Proverbs

Name \_\_\_\_\_

A proverb is \_\_\_\_\_

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What does a proverb communicate?

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Here are some West African proverbs. In parentheses ( ) there is an explanation of what each proverb means.

- Don't insult the crocodile until you cross the water.  
(Be careful about criticizing others.)
- Only a knife knows what the inside of a coco-yam looks like.  
(Those who investigate and research something understand the subject.)
- Talking doesn't fill the basket in the farm.  
(Success requires planning and hard work.)
- Rats don't dance in the cat's doorway.  
(Don't invite trouble.)
- A hippopotamus can be made invisible in dark water.  
(Ignorance can lead to potential danger. It is important to be informed and alert.)

**Evaluate: Circle the proverb you think teaches the most important lesson.**

Now it's your turn to decode the proverbs! For each proverb, write what you think it means.

1. It takes a village to raise a child.

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2. Love is like a baby: it needs to be treated tenderly.

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3. He who cannot dance will say: "The drum is bad."

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4. No one tests the depth of a river with both feet

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5. It takes two to make a quarrel.

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**Self-assess:** *After* the discussion, put a check mark by your best explanation.

## Writer's Workshop

Use the following steps and the teacher's example on the board to write your own proverb.

**Step 1:** Brainstorm to come up with three life lessons that are important to you.  
(What are three ideas from which people can learn?)

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

**Step 2:** Circle the one that you like the best.

**Step 3:** In two sentences, explain why you think this lesson is so important.

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**Step 4:** Write a proverb to communicate the lesson you chose. You should use a symbol from your culture in the proverb. Keep it short and sweet!

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Symbolism is \_\_\_\_\_

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Under each symbol, write one word to describe what it communicates.



In West African culture, tiny brass sculptures were used to weigh gold in trading. These gold weights, as they are called, were designed as symbols to communicate a proverb, so when someone saw the sculpture, he or she would be reminded of the proverb and learn a lesson.

Here are a few examples of gold weights and the proverbs each symbolizes.



*bird facing backwards*

Proverb: When it lies behind you, take it. (Use the wisdom of the past.)



*fish*

Proverb: If the fish comes out of the water to say that the crocodile is ill, one should not doubt it. (Nobody will doubt what you close friend says about you.)



*crocodile*

Proverb: The old crocodile swallows a pebble when the year ends.

(Misfortunes come every year, and we must accept them as a part of life.)

**You will now create a symbol to visually communicate your proverb.**

**Step 1:** Rewrite the proverb you created on the line.

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**Step 2:** Now make a list of simple symbols that you could use to visually communicate your proverb. (shapes, animals, colors, signs, natural objects)

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

**Step 3:** Place a check mark next to your favorite symbol to represent your proverb. (You may combine two of the symbols to create a new symbol, but remember to keep it simple!)

**Step 4:** Write at least three sentences to explain what this symbol means to you and why it is the best choice to visually communicate your proverb.

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**On this page you will draw the rough draft of your symbol. Your rough draft must be approved by the teacher before you may begin the final draft.**

**Here are your options for how you will present the final draft of your symbol.**

- You may sculpt the symbol using clay. You may not use more than two colors.
- You may create a 2-D drawing of your symbol. It must be colored.
- You may create an origami (folded paper) version of your symbol.
- If you have another idea, feel free to discuss it with the teacher.

**Put a check next to the artistic medium you will use to craft the final draft of your symbol.**

**Use the rest of this page to draw the rough draft of your symbol.**