

PROVERBS FROM STUDENTS (as of March 2006)

This is a list of proverbs collected from the author's classes over the past few years. Whether these are appropriate or good translations has not yet been verified. However, we provide them in hopes that they prompt discussion or provide useful for expansion activities.

The numbers refer to the list of American proverbs on pages 196-201 of *Eureka! : Discovering American English and Culture Through Proverbs, Fables, Myths, and Legends*.

If you know of other translations for these or other proverbs not listed and would like to contribute it to this site, please email esladmin@umich.edu.

#1 Absence makes the heart grow fonder. (similar to #26)

The fish you can't catch, that is the biggest: Vietnamese

Nobody knows what they have until they lose it: Spanish

Temporary separated is better than newly married. Chinese

#2 Actions speak louder than words.

Actions are the most practical. Chinese

Going to do something is better than just sitting down and talking about it. Chinese

#3 All that glitters is not gold. (similar to You can't tell a book by its cover, and, Beauty is only skin deep)

Not everything that shines is gold. Spanish

The pillow that is wrapped with silk is usually stuffed with straw. Chinese

A rotten interior can be found beneath a fine exterior. Chinese

#6 All's fair in love and war.

In love and war everything is valid: Spanish

#7 Beggars can't be choosers

A beggar carries a heavy stick. Spanish

Deer cannot choose to die under the shade. Chinese

#8 Better late than never.

Better late than never. Spanish

Coming late is better than not showing at all. Chinese

#10 The bigger they are the harder they fall. (similar to #56)

The higher you climb, the harder you fall. Chinese

#11 A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush

Better to catch a bird that is sitting than to catch a bird that is flying. Vietnamese

It is better a bird in the hand than a hundred flying. Spanish

A titmouse in the hand is better than a crane in the sky. Russian

A bird in the hand is better than a hundred in the forest. Chinese

#13 Curiosity killed the cat.

Curiosity killed the cat. Spanish

#14 Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. (called the Golden Rule)

With the stick that you measure, you will be measured. Spanish

#15 Don't bite off more than you can chew. (similar to: Don't put too much on your plate, Your eyes are bigger than your stomach)

Who very much wants to do it, a little bit does (If you want to do too much, you will do very little) Spanish

Don't wear a hat that is bigger than your head. Cantonese

#16 Don't burn your bridges until they are crossed.

Don't cut the branch if you are sitting on it/ and don't spit in the well....maybe you will want to drink that water. Russian

#18 Don't cry over spilt milk.

We can't gather the spilt water on the ground: Korea

#20 Don't look a gift horse in the mouth.

Don't look for defects in what is given as a gift. Spanish

Don't look a gift horse in the mouth. Russian

If you have a horse as a present, don't look at his teeth: Russia

#21 The early bird catches the worm. (similar to First come, first served)

God helps those who get up early. Spanish

The buffaloes who come late will drink the bad water: Vietnamese

If you get up early, you'll get fresh air. Indonesian

#22 A fool and his money are soon parted

You don't need to study to become a fool. Spanish

Water doesn't run under a stone lying in the water. Russian

He who is not a sage will make mistakes. Chinese

#24 Forewarned is forearmed.

A wary man is worth two. Spanish

#25 A friend in need is a friend indeed.

You know a true friend when you are suffering. Mandarin

#26 The grass is always greener on the other side.

Happiness is here where we are absent. Russian

The grass is always greener in your neighbor's yard. Russian

I'm good in your eyes and you're good in mine. Chinese

Don't look at another mountain when you are standing on this mountain: Vietnam.

There is always a higher mountain than this mountain: Cambodia

The (sowing) plantings of a neighbor is better than your own. Spanish

The apples on the other side of the wall are the sweetest. (China)

#28 Haste makes waste (similar idea to #59)

He who tries to carry too much loses most. Spanish

It's better to walk more slowly than to step faster and get tired. Spanish

When you want to be fast you won't get there. Chinese

Too quickly will not succeed: Vietnam

Your unnecessary hurry will be the cause of laughter from others: Russia

Dress me slowly, I'm in a hurry. Spanish

#30 Honesty's the best policy

Take care of your honor from your youth. Russian

God loves the honest person. Indonesian

#31 Hope springs eternal in the human breast. (similar to #62)

Hope dies last. Spanish, Russian

There is always a light at the end of the road. Spanish

#32 If at first you don't succeed, try, try again.

To want is to get. Spanish

Don't give up easily Spanish

Don't faint, continue ahead. Spanish

You can find the road only if you walk on it. Russian

Failure is the mother of success. Chinese

Even if you fall seven times, you should get up eight time: Korea

Keep on doing something, at the end that means success. China

#33 If wishes were horses, beggars would ride.

If wishes could come true, beggars would become rich. Chinese

#35 If you play with fire, you will get burnt.

Who plays with fire gets burnt. Spanish, Chinese, Cambodian

If you play with a knife, you will cut yourself: Vietnamese, Cambodian

#36 It is more blessed to give than to receive.

When you eat an apple always remember the people who planted the tree. Vietnamese

It is better for you to give than to only receive. Chinese

#38 It was the straw that broke the camel's back.

The last drop of water makes the whole glass of water spill over: Vietnamese

Too much water will break the dam. Vietnamese

If a person is pushed too far, he may want to hang himself; if a dog is pushed too far, it may jump over the wall. Chinese

The last drop spills the water: Spanish

39 Leave well enough alone

If the wound doesn't hurt, don't use a stick to hit it. Cambodian

If you scratch your skin, you will get a boil. Korean

#41 Look before you leap.

Think thrice before you act. Chinese

Before you walk over the stepping stones, you must beat them. Korean

#43 Make hay while the sun shines.

Strike while the iron is hot. Russian, English

Don't leave for tomorrow what you can do today. Spanish

Take advantage of the occasion and don't waste time. Chinese

#50 Nothing hurts like the truth.

The truth doesn't sin but makes you feel uncomfortable. Spanish

Good advice jars on the ears. Chinese

The truth is cruel. Chinese

#51 Nothing ventured, nothing gained

He who doesn't take the risk, gains nothing and loses nothing. Spanish

If you don't take a chance, you will not win/Nothing ventured, nothing have, A risk is a good act/If you are afraid of the wolves, you can't walk in the forest/If you don't take a chance, you will not drink champagne Russian

Not going into the tiger's cave. how can you get a tiger? Chinese

#53 Out of sight, out of mind

What the eyes don't see, the heart doesn't feel. Spanish

#54 Out of the frying pan into the fire/or Between a rock and a hard place/ or between Scylla and Charybdis

Between the sword and the wall: Spanish

Both moving forward and backward are difficult. Chinese

There is no place you can go further and the enemy is chasing you from behind. Cantonese

#55 Patience is a virtue

When we say patience, patience, patience three times we can prevent killing someone. Korean

#56 Pride goes before the fall.

The higher you are, the harder you will fall. Spanish

The arrogant army will lose the battle for sure. Chinese

Don't sit on the chair that you carry yourself Cambodian

#57 Seeing is Believing

What you see is the truth. Mandarin

#58 Silence is golden

Silence wins over sound. Chinese

The fish dies by its mouth Spanish

When your mouth is closed, you won't catch flies. Spanish

Talking a lot is good for your health: Ladino

Talking doesn't work; quiet pays: Thai

Silence gives consent (Cambodian

#59 Slow and steady wins the race (similar to #28)

The last one would be always the first Spanish

Slow but sure. Spanish

If you go slowly you will go more: Armenia

#61 There's a time for work and a time for play.

Do useful work and then have free time without feeling guilty. Russian

Work in working time, play in playing time. Chinese

Don't mix business with pleasure: Spanish

#62 There's always a light at the end of the tunnel. (similar to #31)

After the rain the sky is clear: Cambodia

After the storm comes the calm: Spanish

After the rain, there's a rainbow. Indonesian

The mountains and rivers are gone; you cannot find any roads; but there is a village in front of you full of bright flowers and dense willow trees. Cantonese

#63 There's no place like home.

Our house is heaven: Thai

Silver houses or gold houses are the same as a dog house to a dog. Chinese

There might be golden rain in another country, but a stone rain in our country is better. Indonesian.

#64 Three can keep a secret if two of them are dead.

Between two is a secret, among three is gossip. Spanish

At night, mice can hear everything someone says. Birds can hear everything someone speaks in the day. Korean

#65 Truth is stranger than fiction.

#67 In unity there is strength.

Two achieve more than one. Spanish

Unity makes force. Spanish

Connected is power: Chinese

In unity we are strong, separated we are ruined. Indonesian

#69 When it rains it pours.

Disgraces never come alone. Spanish

When you are having bad (or good) luck, it usually becomes a road full of bad (or good luck). Cantonese

#70 Where there's smoke there's fire.

If you hear sound from the river, there's water running. Spanish

When the river makes noise, there are rocks below: Spanish

Where there's water, there's fish: Cambodia

Where there is a woman there is a man: Cambodia

If there is not a fire, how come there is smoke? Korea

If there isn't any wind, where does the wave come from? Chinese

#71. You can't have your cake and eat it too.

You can't whistle and eat pinole at the same time. Spanish

You can't cook fried eggs if you don't break them. Russian

You can't be rich and be innocent. Russian.

If you want your horse to look good you cannot want it to not eat grass. Chinese

Don't catch two fish in one hand: Cambodia

#72 You reap what you sow.

Plant melons, you get melons, sow beans, you get beans, Chinese

He who sows storms reaps hurricanes. Spanish

#74 The apple doesn't fall far from the tree

The leaf doesn't fall far from the stump. Cambodia

#77 Don't close the barn door after the horse is stolen.

The saliva that you have already spit, you cannot swallow: Cambodian

Don't repair the barn after the sheep has died. Chinese

#85 It's like looking for a needle in a haystack. (same in Spanish)

It's like looking for a needle in the ocean: Cambodian

#90 The apple doesn't fall far from the tree

What kind of father is the kind of son. Chinese

The father of a tiger doesn't have the son of a dog. Chinese

#92 Man does not live by bread alone.

Fish cannot live without water: Cambodian

If you're not happy with a small thing, you will not be happy from a big thing: Armenia

#95 Money doesn't grow on trees

Money doesn't fall from the sky Chinese, Indonesia