

Make hay while the sun shines: English proverbs

Work with a partner. Take turns explaining the following proverbs to each other, or giving an example from everyday life which illustrates the saying.

1. Make hay while the sun shines.
2. Don't put all your eggs in one basket.
3. Don't make a mountain out of a molehill.
4. Nothing ventured, nothing gained.
5. A fool and his money are soon parted.
6. Cast (one's) pearls before swine.
7. Practise what you preach.
8. One man's meat is another man's poison.
9. A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.
10. Money talks.
11. You can lead a horse to water but you can't make it drink.
12. Easy come, easy go.
13. Don't look a gift horse in the mouth.
14. Too many cooks spoil the broth.
15. Give him an inch and he'll take a mile.
16. One swallow doesn't make a summer.
17. Out of sight, out of mind.
18. A friend in need is a friend indeed.
19. No news is good news.
20. You can't teach an old dog new tricks.
21. A rolling stone gathers no moss.
22. All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy.
23. A stitch in time saves nine.
24. No smoke without fire.
25. All that glitters is not gold.
26. Beauty is only skin deep.
27. Carpe diem!
28. There are plenty more fish in the sea.
29. He who pays the piper calls the tune.
30. Absence makes the heart grow fonder.
31. The proof of the pudding is in the eating.
32. The pen is mightier than the sword.
33. When the cat's away the mice will play.
34. Practise makes perfect.
35. Pride goes before a fall.
36. Look before you leap.
37. To make a silk purse out of a sow's ear.
38. Early to bed, early to rise (makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise).
39. A leopard can't change its spots.
40. When in Rome, do as the Romans do.
41. Rome wasn't built in a day.
42. Least said soonest mended.
43. First come, first served.
44. Every cloud has a silver lining.
45. Let sleeping dogs lie.
46. Actions speak louder than words.
47. Variety is the spice of life.
48. Once bitten, twice shy.
49. Strike while the iron is hot.
50. There's no accounting for taste.
51. There's more than one way to skin a cat.
52. Where there's a will there's a way.
53. Don't count your chickens before they are hatched.
54. Birds of a feather flock together.
55. It takes one to know one.
56. An eye for an eye (and a tooth for a tooth).
57. One good turn deserves another.
58. Two's company, three's a crowd.
59. Empty vessels make the most noise.
60. Lightning never strikes twice (in the same place).
61. Waste not, want not.
62. Still waters run deep.
63. That's the way the cookie crumbles.
64. All's well that ends well.
65. He who laughs last laughs longest.
66. Many hands make light work.
67. The world is your oyster.
68. His bark is worse than his bite.
69. Beggars can't be choosers.
70. Charity begins at home.
71. The boot is on the other foot.
72. Let bygones be bygones.
73. Curiosity killed the cat.
74. A little knowledge is a dangerous thing.
75. Every dog has its day.
76. Crime doesn't pay.
77. The early bird catches the worm.
78. The exception proves the rule.
79. You shouldn't judge a book by its cover.
80. A bad workman always blames his tools.

Explain these comments and retorts to your partner.

81. His Christmas bonus was burning a hole in his pocket.
82. Put your money where your mouth is.
83. (He was) saved by the bell.
84. You can say that again.
85. Keep your shirt on.
86. So far, so good.
87. A little bird told me.
88. Speak of the devil.
89. Perish the thought.
90. Cat got your tongue?
91. He has a one-track mind.
92. Wild horses couldn't drag me (there).
93. The cards are stacked against me.
94. Why are you always on my case about my homework?
95. Give me a break!
96. That's the straw that broke the camel's back.
97. The coast is clear.
98. What's eating you?
99. The fat is in the fire.
100. Your guess is as good as mine.

Proverbs explained

1. When the conditions are right, get around to what needs to be done.
2. Don't depend on just one thing in order to be successful.
3. Don't make too big a fuss of something that isn't so important.
4. If you never risk anything, don't expect big rewards.
5. Don't be too easily taken in when it comes to spending your money. The world is full of unscrupulous types who prey on the naive.
6. To offer something special to someone who will not appreciate it or recognise its value.
7. Do what you advise other people to do.
8. One person's preference may be disliked by another person.
9. Something you already have is better than something you might get.
10. Money gives you the power and influence to help you get things done or get your own way.
11. You can't really force people to do what they don't want to do.
12. Don't worry about the loss of something that required only a small amount of effort in the first place.
13. You should accept a present even if it isn't exactly what you want.
14. Too many people trying to manage something simply spoil it.
15. If you let someone do one small thing you do not approve of, they will try to do it all the more.
16. Don't be too hopeful just because one good thing has happened.
17. If you don't see something (or someone), you won't think about it.
18. A true friend is a person who will help you when you really need someone.
19. It is usually good when you haven't received any news from someone because it probably means that nothing bad has happened.
20. It is often difficult to make people try new ways of doing things.
21. A person who moves from place to place all the time avoids having any responsibilities.
22. You should have fun as well as work.
23. If you spend a little time tackling a problem when it first appears, you will stop it from developing into a much bigger problem which will require a lot more effort to solve.
24. Some evidence of a problem probably indicates that there really is a problem.
25. Many attractive or alluring things have no value.
26. Looks are only superficial, and don't necessarily indicate that a person is beautiful through and through.
27. Seize the day! Live your life to the full and do it now!
28. Don't be upset about a broken relationship, you will soon find somebody else.
29. The person who is paying for something should have some control over how the money is used.
30. Being away from someone makes you love them more because you miss them so much.
31. You can only find out how good a plan or idea is by seeing how it works in practice.
32. You can achieve more through communication than you can through violence.
33. When someone in authority is away, people will do what they want.
34. If you practise doing something often enough, you will eventually be able to do it well.
35. Someone who behaves in an arrogant or vain way is likely to suffer misfortune.
36. Think about the results of your actions before you do anything too hasty.
37. To create something of value out of something of no value.
38. Going to bed and getting up early is good for you.
39. It isn't easy for people, organisations etc to change their bad habits.
40. Wherever you are, behave in the way that the local people behave.
41. Important things don't happen overnight.
42. The less you say, the less harm you do.
43. The first people to arrive will be served first.
44. There's something good in every bad situation.
45. You shouldn't go looking for trouble.
46. What you actually do is more important than what you say.
47. Differences and changes make life interesting.
48. If you have been hurt once, you will be very careful next time.
49. Do something at the best possible time.
50. There is no explanation for some people's preferences.
51. There is more than one way to do something.
52. You can do something if you really want to.
53. Don't plan how to make use of the good results of something before those results have occurred.
54. People of the same type seem to get together.
55. In order to be able to recognise a quality in someone you supposedly have to have that quality yourself. Usually used as a response to an insult.
56. A punishment that is of the same degree as the crime or the offence committed.
57. A good deed should be repaid with another good deed.
58. Two people would often want to be alone and a third person would be in the way.

59. It is usually the least intelligent and the least well-formed people who are quick to state their opinion.
60. Someone is not likely to have the same good or bad luck twice.
61. If you never waste anything, you will never be short of anything.
62. A quiet person is probably thinking deep or important thoughts.
63. Those things happen. That's life.
64. An event which has a good ending is good even if some things went wrong along the way.
65. Whoever succeeds in making the last move or playing the last trick has the most enjoyment or success.
66. The more people that are involved in the job, the quicker the job will get done.
67. All the chances and opportunities in life are available to you.
68. Someone might threaten you, but not do much harm.
69. In a bad situation in which you are limited to only one or two choices, you have to accept that you can't have what you would like the most.
70. You should be kind to your own family, friends, or fellow citizens before trying to help others.
71. The situation has been reversed; the opposite of what was formerly the case has happened.
72. You should forget the problems of the past.
73. It is dangerous or unwise to be overly curious.
74. Incomplete knowledge can embarrass or harm someone or something.
75. Everyone will get a chance.
76. Crime will not benefit a person.
77. If you do something early or before other people, you will gain the advantage.
78. The fact that something is not true or does not exist in one situation emphasizes the fact that it is true or exists in general. (Based on the old meaning of the verb 'to prove' = to test.)
79. Appearances can be deceiving.
80. If someone is habitually unprofessional in doing their work, they are likely to say that it was the fault of the equipment or machinery they were using.

Comments and retorts explained.

81. He was keen to spend the money as soon as possible!
82. Stop talking and provide money for something which you claim to support.
83. To be rescued from a dangerous or difficult situation just in time by something which brings the situation to a sudden end.
84. You are absolutely correct!
85. Wait a minute! Don't get angry!
86. All is going well so far.
87. Something was learnt from a mysterious or secret source. An evasive answer to someone who asks how you learnt something.
88. Someone whose name has just been mentioned appears or is heard from.
89. Do not even consider thinking of something.
90. Why don't you speak? Speak up and answer my question!
91. To have a mind which thinks entirely or almost entirely about one subject, often sex.
92. Nothing could force someone to go somewhere.
93. Too many difficulties will prevent success..
94. To keep nagging about something.
95. To give someone a chance. To leave someone in peace.
96. The last in a series of problems which finally makes the situation impossible to handle.
97. There is no visible danger.
98. What is bothering you?
99. Serious trouble has broken out.
100. Your opinion is likely to be as correct as mine.