Proverbs & Quotables:
Using Very Short Texts for Language Learning

Kevin McCaughey
Regional English Language Officer
Office of English Language Programs
Washington, DC

http://americanenglish.state.gov
Do you have some favorite proverbs?
What’s your definition of a proverb?
Why proverbs?

very short texts in language learning
Why proverbs?

* Have stood the test of time
* Wise or witty, or both
* Often universal; sometimes reveal specifics of culture
* Adjustable: we can change the language
Why proverbs?

* All over the internet!
* They are searchable
* Great for comparisons or focus: grammar, vocabulary, or theme
* Metaphoric: train critical thinking and interpretative skills

very short texts in language learning
* Make great writing frames
Why proverbs?

Short complete texts!

Applause please

very short texts in language learning
very short texts in language learning

What's the big deal?
What’s the big deal?

* Complete. Need nothing more
* Little or no prep time
* Little risk in time investment
* Easy fit in class hour
* Easy fit in lesson/syllabus
* Easy to extended

very short texts in language learning
Fun Stuff & Surprises

very short texts in language learning
Surprises!

1. At some point you’ll see this smiley face:
At some point, you’ll hear the call to our Brain Break...
Activities

very short texts in language learning
You can’t judge a book by its cover.
The stomach has no windows.
A frog’s mucus has a healing effect on the sea.
Dictation

very short texts in language learning
Activities

Loop Dictation

Listen to the audio called “Your Head”

very short texts in language learning
Matching

very short texts in language learning
Scramble

very short texts in language learning
very short texts in language learning

Scramble

by
little
grow
Little
the
bananas.
If soup, it would have forks. only to rain were the poor If
 Gap Fills

very short texts in language learning
“A _____ is a _______ you notice; a ________ is a woman who ________ you.”
“A **beauty** is a **woman** you **notice**; a **charmer** is a woman who **notices** you.”

Adlai Stevenson
“A ______ (noun) is animal you ______ (verb); a ______ is a animal who ______ (verb) you.”
Agree or Disagree

very short texts in language learning
Arrange by Theme
Grammar
Country of Origin
Source (person)
A chicken that ____*(hatch)* a crocodile’s egg _____*(look)* for trouble.
If you _____ (escape) the jaws of the crocodile while bathing in the river, you _____ (meet) a leopard on the way home.
“Could” or “Should”

1. He who takes a light to find a snake ______ start at his own feet.

2. If a child washes his hands he ______ eat with kings.
“Could” or “Should”

1. He who takes a light to find a snake should start at his own feet.

2. If a child washes his hands he could eat with kings.
Give a man a fish and you feed him for day.

Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.

Except if...
But what if...
Not necessarily...

very short texts in language learning
Challenge the Proverb
Yogi Berra
American Baseball Player
Born 1925

Photo: wikipedia commons
“Baseball is 90 percent mental. The other half is physical.”
“When you come to a fork in the road, take it.”
[Speaking about a restaurant]

“Nobody goes there anymore because it’s too crowded.”
Writing Frames

very short texts in language learning
“My students can’t write.”
A writing frame is a model or pattern.
Brothers love each other when they are equally rich.
Brothers love each other when...
Mice love each other when....
Brothers love each other except when...
Children get jealous of each other when...
Woman love men who....
Activities

Partial Proverbs

1. Students get the first half of proverbs.
2. They complete them in pairs or groups. They should be creative. There’s not a correct answer.
3. They receive the actual complete proverb.
4. They compare and discuss.
Finish the proverb

A bird doesn’t sing because he’s got the answer.

A bird sings because...
A bird doesn’t sing because he’s got the answer.

A bird sings because he’s got a song
“Give me six hours to chop down a tree and I will spend the first four...”
“Give me six hours to chop down a tree and I will spend the first four sharpening the ax.”
Don’t buy a house, buy…
Don’t buy a house, buy a neighbor.
Cause 1: The ______ one wouldn’t...

Cause 2: The ____ one wouldn’t….

Effect: And …
Gradual Release of Responsibility INSTRUCTIONAL MODEL

TEACHER RESPONSIBILITY

Focus Lesson

Guided Instruction

Collaborative

Independent

STUDENT RESPONSIBILITY

“I do it”

“We do it”

“You do it together”

“You do it alone”
The Lion in Love

There was once a lion who fell in a love with a girl in the village. The lion was desperately in love, so in love that he went to her home, and asked the girl’s parents permission to marry her. That was a frightening idea to the parents, but they did not want to offend the King of the Beasts.

“Well,” the mother said, “first off let me say how very honored we are. But because you are so strong, we are afraid that in showing affection you might accidentally hurt our daughter. If you agree to have your teeth and claws removed, we will give your proposal of marriage very serious consideration.”

The lovesick lion was overjoyed, and rushed off to have his teeth and claws removed. When he returned to claim his bride, the girl’s parents only laughed at him.
Activities

Wise Likenings

with a semicolon

very short texts in language learning
Scandal is like an egg; when it is hatched, it has wings.
Opinions are like nails; the more often you hit them the deeper they penetrate.
Love
Money
Time
Your health
The future
Greed

shark
lake
basket of eggs
dragon
candle
a broken chair
Dice Alternatives

- Make from paper
- Use a number 2 pencil
- Use coins
- Have students devise a method
Extending

very short texts in language learning
When God made time, He made plenty of it.
When God made time, he made plenty of it. He left it lying around, a little more in the country than in the town.
Remember...

Short Complete Texts are super useful.

Writing frames help students writing: both language and ideas.

very short texts in language learning
Proverbs & Quotables: Using Very Short Texts for Language Learning

http://americanenglish.state.gov

AE American English

http://americanenglish.state.gov