



Proverbs From Ghana

You might want to ask your students to discuss the proverbs and see if they can find deeper meaning than the ones here.

Example

The crocodile lives in water but he breathes air

Adaptability can make you king of the land and sea

If you over adapt you may never be fully comfortable anywhere

Just because you see someone in a certain environment don't make any assumptions

The way in which the proverb is used and where help to interpret its meaning. There are no hard rules as to their meaning, and indeed playing with them cleverly out of context is considered a sign of intellect.

1. Okoto nwo anoma

Twi spelling: k t nwo anoma

Literally: A crab does not give birth to a bird.

This used to acknowledge the resemblance between a child and his parent. The resemblance could be in physical features or character. It is similar to the English saying "the apple does not fall far from the tree."

2. Woforo dua pa a na yepia wo

Literally: It is when you climb a good tree that we push you.

We the society and the elders in it can only support a good cause, not a bad one. Hence, if you want our support, you should do good things with which all can publicly identify and support.

3. Ti koro nko agyina

Literally: One head (or person) does not hold council.

One person discussing an issue with himself cannot be said to have held a meeting. We need a group of people to hold a meeting. This proverb is similar to the English one that says "two heads are better than one." The Adinkra symbol Kuronti ne Akwamu admonishes the involvement of the various arms of the state in decision-making because "Ti koro nko agyina," to wit, "One person does not constitute a council."

4. Abofra bo nnwa na ommo akyekyedee

Literally: A child breaks a snail, not a tortoise.

A child breaks the shell of a snail and not that of a tortoise. The shell of a snail is easier to break than that of a tortoise. Thus, children should do things that pertain to children and not things that pertain to adults.

In Akan culture, it is a taboo for a child to challenge adults in any endeavour. Hence, children should take care when engaging with adults lest their actions be misunderstood. Especially as this proverb also holds a threat: An adult is strong enough to crush the tortoise, a child is not.

5. Obanyansofoo yebu no be, yennka no asem

Literally: The wise is spoken to in proverbs, not plain language.

There seems to be great reluctance to being direct in Akan culture, especially in speech. It is not clear why this, but after 16 years living in the UK I still find straight yes and no answers very difficult to answer. In Ghana indirect is the preferred mode of address.

This proverb is also used to indicate that one is expected to learn from his circumstances and the experiences of others.

It is also used to mean that we don't need to belabour a point for the wise to understand. A few words of exhortation should be fine. In that sense, it is similar to the English proverb, "A word to the wise is enough."

6. Obi nnim obrempon ahyease

Literally: Nobody knows the beginning of a great man.

The beginnings of greatness are unpredictable. Hence, we should not despise small beginnings or condemn people when they are starting and seem to be struggling.

7. Agoro beso a, efiri anopa

Twi spelling: Agor b s a, efiri an pa

Literally: If the festival (or carnival or party) will be entertaining, it starts from the morning.

Just as we can tell how nice a party will be from its very beginning, we can tell how successful a venture will be from its beginning.

8. Yesoma onyansofoo, enye anamontenten

Twi spelling: Y soma onyansafo , ny anam ntenten

Literally: We send a wise person, not one with long legs.

The person with long legs may be able to reach his destination faster, but because there is more to communicating a message than just sending the words, it is better to send a wise person who might be slower.

9. Biribi annkoka papa a, anka papa annye kyerede

Twi spelling: Biribi annk ka papa a, anka papa annye kyer d

Literally: If something had not touched the papa (dried palm frond?) it wouldn't have made a sound.

There is a cause for every effect. You may complain about the dry frond is making noise but it will also complain that you are troubling it. This is similar to "there is no smoke without fire."

10. Praye, se woyi baako a na ebu: wokabomu a emmu

Twi spelling: Pray , s woyi baako a na ebu; wokabomu a emmu

Literally: When you remove one broomstick it breaks but when you put them together they do not break.

This is similar to the English proverb, "In unity lies strength." This principle is so essential for maintaining a stable society when it is vulnerable to attacks from neighbouring tribes. Perhaps, that is where the understanding that it is important to stick together emanated from.

Extension

What would your proverb be and why?