Proverbs Through Pictures: Undertaking Proverbs in Context

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Students explore the meaning of proverbs by answering the teacher’s question on the illustrated proverbs shown on a PowerPoint presentation.

Levels

Advanced

Aims

Understand the meaning of selected proverbs and use them appropriately in context

Class Time

10–15 minutes

Preparation Time

Minimal

Explanations of proverbs in ESOL classes too often start from an explanation of the literal meaning together with a visual that focuses on illustrating the words literally. This can confuse learners and prevent them from understanding the metaphorical meaning and the application of the proverb in other contexts, especially when the words are obscure and the context culturally specific. If students are introduced to the concept first, then the idea of the proverb can be conveyed and appropriate contexts explored.

PROCEDURE

1. Display the picture of the proverb.

2. Elicit information from the class about the content of the picture. For example:
   - What are the people in the picture doing? (Working, picking apples.)
   - Why is more than one person doing this work? (Work gets done more quickly, work is easier.)
   - They are all helping each other. What is another expression for offering to help someone? (Lend a hand.)
   - So we can say lots of people helping makes the work easier. There’s a proverb to express this idea: Many hands make light work.
3. Have students think of a different example or story from experience to illustrate the proverb and discuss these examples in pairs.

CAVEATS AND OPTIONS

1. Students may enjoy making comparisons with proverbs of similar meaning in their own language, for example to “kill two birds with one stone” is to “hit two flies with one swipe” in German.

2. Students should be encouraged to write out their example stories without using the proverb. The stories can be distributed around the class for students to read and identify the proverbs they illustrate.

3. The drawings can be passed around the class for students to discuss and identify the proverbs they illustrate.