

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

# African Proverbs

## Primary Source Reading

Learn more about this topic! Each section gives more detail on one of the lyrics from the song. Read each section, and then respond by answering the question or taking notes on key ideas.

1. Most African history, stories and knowledge weren't passed down through books, but via family members, singers and storytellers. Virtually all of Africa's many cultures, as well as cultures around the world, share a rich tradition of proverbs—little sayings that contain big wisdom. The proverbs from this song are just a few of the thousands and thousands of proverbs from Africa's history.

Notes

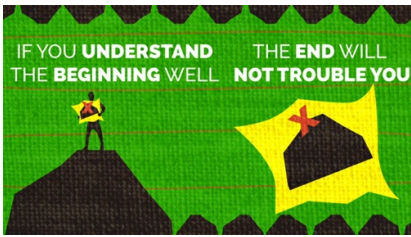
2.  For hundreds of years, the camel was the car of the desert, and in many places it still is. Able to travel long stretches without water, it was the perfect animal for transporting people, food and goods across the seemingly endless sands of the Sahara. In Libya, the camels have long necks that are curved sharply. Locals, who think the camel's neck is unattractive, believe that a camel cannot see its own "ugliness." But look how the camels in the graphic above are looking at each other's necks.

Notes

3.  "Patience can cook a stone" is a Fula proverb. The Fula (or Fulbe) people live in many countries in West and Central Africa. Many Fula groups are nomadic, herding cattle and sheep across the African plains and live in grass houses that are easy to set up and take down. The Fula people eat all kinds of food, but they don't eat stones. This proverb takes something that seems impossible (cooking a stone) and says it can be achieved with patience.

Notes

4.

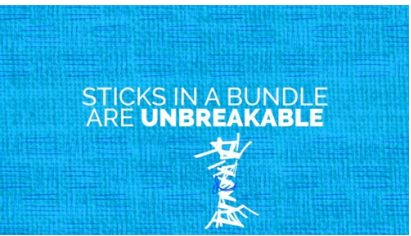


“If you understand the beginning well, the end will not trouble you” is a proverb from the Ashanti people. The Ashanti people are a major ethnic group who live in central Ghana. They have a long, rich history that includes

the Ashanti Kingdom, which ruled the land around present-day Ghana in the 17th century. The Ashanti are a very proud people who believe that they have been chosen by God to do good in the world. They place a strong value on doing things well and not rushing or being lazy, and they value knowledge. Stories from ancestors are passed down every evening after dinner.

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5.

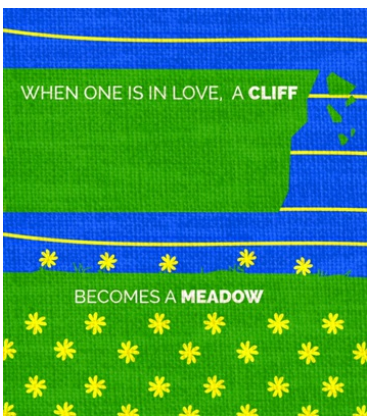


“Sticks in a bundle are unbreakable” is a proverb from Tanzania. Tanzania is a country on the east coast of Africa that borders the Indian Ocean. The people there are a mix of original Bantu speakers and Arab traders who

built settlements in the first century. They speak Swahili, but come from many different ethnic groups. Despite their varying cultures, the people of Tanzania know that sticking together is important, and that there is strength in unity.

Notes

6.



Ethiopia is one of the oldest countries in the world. Fossilized bones from some of the earliest human ancestors have been found there, and powerful civilizations have called Ethiopia home since around 1000 BCE. The famous Greek historian Herodotus thought Ethiopians were the tallest and most beautiful people in the world. They were fierce fighters, and they created powerful empires and successfully

repelled European invasions until the 20th century. But Ethiopians were also peace-loving people with a strong appreciation for stories and art.

Many African proverbs, such as the Ethiopian one in this song, speak of love as a powerful force that can make rational people do irrational things.

Notes

7.



This proverb comes from the Ewe: “Until the lion has his or her own storyteller, the hunter will always have the best part of the story.” The Ewe are one of the major ethnic groups in Benin, Ghana and Togo. They mostly form farming communities but also hunt and fish. Hunters are revered in the communities that rely on hunted prey for food, so a hunter who returns with a lion or steer will have an

audience who wants to hear all about the kill. People listen to the story, but they also realize that the hunter might be exaggerating to make himself look better. They’re only getting one side of the story—the lion, after all, is dead.

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