

Name _____

Japanese Proverbs



Proverbs survive in the living language of a people because they effectively communicate closely held values and attitudes. Here is a small sampling of of Japanese proverbs. For each proverb, please try to

- Identify social situations where they could be used
- Explain what the proverb reveals about Japanese culture

1. 矯めるなら若木のうち Tameru nara wakagi no uchi. "While young, the tree can be easily bent."	
2. 相手のない喧嘩はできぬ Aite no nai kenka wa dekinu. "One can't quarrel without an opponent." 喧嘩両成敗 Kenka ryôseibai. Both quarrellers are to be punished.	
3. 千里の行も一歩より始まる (老子) Senri no kô mo ippon yori hajimaru. "A thousand li (roughly one-third of a mile) journey begins with a single step."	
4. 二足の草鞋を履く Nisoku no waraji o haku. "To wear two pairs of straw sandals at once"	

<p>5. 生き恥かくより死ぬがまし Ikihaji kaku yori, shinu ga mashi.</p> <p>"Better to die than to live in shame."</p>	
<p>6. 武士は食わねど高楊枝 Bushi no kuwanedo taka-yôji.</p> <p>"Even when he has not eaten, a samurai wields his toothpick (like a lord)."</p>	
<p>7. 水魚の交わり Sui gyo no majiwari.</p> <p>"the friendship of water and fish"</p>	
<p>8. 教えるは学ぶの半ばかり Oshieru wa manabu no nakaba nari.</p> <p>"Teaching is half learning."</p>	
<p>9. 出る杭は打たれう Deru kui wa utareu.</p> <p>"A protruding post is hammered down."</p>	

Which of these proverbs is your favorite? Why?

What American proverbs can you think of that reveal some important aspect of our culture?

Source: These proverbs are all drawn from the 800 included in Takashima Taiji, *Kotowaza no izumi* (Fountain of Japanese Proverbs), Tokyo: The Hokuseido Press, 1981. Some of Takashima translations have been slightly reworked.