African Proverbs – Culture and Civilization

History through Oral Tradition

**Essential Standards:** 6.H.2, 6.C.1 , 6.G.1

**Introduction**

Proverbs are an important source of information from ancient Africa. There is no written language and literature where we can look to gain an understanding of the culture, traditions, beliefs and values of this eastern culture of the past. Storytellers (griots) were important and valued as they often knew the genealogy of many generations of families.

For African civilizations, especially the Ashante, learning through proverbs was said to be more powerful than simply stating the virtue or belief. Popular belief was that the learning would be more easily assimilated in proverb form.

It was said that proverbs were for the wise and only the wise would be able to comprehend them.

**African Proverbs**

*Why study proverbs? We can gain an understanding of what is important.*

What is this saying about African society and children? *African cultures held citizens of strong moral character in high esteem.*

Does everyone think that life passes by quickly?

*When you understand what is important you can learn the lesson.*

Do societies learn from their mistakes? Is there evidence?

How has the African nation stood up for their beliefs?

*A lie is not a sign of a person with a good character.* What evidence did we see of this society having good character?

*This is a direct reflection on the strength the African people see in working towards goals.*

*There’s value in the elders and there’s value in the past. There’s no substitute for experience.*

*This is another example of the value of action. This one is like: Walk the Talk.*

*This shows the importance of taking action.*

*Learn from others*

*Marriage takes being virtuous. Looks alone are not enough.*

What are these saying about what values are important?

1. It takes a whole village to raise a child.
2. Life is like a shadow and a mist; it passes quickly by, and is no more.
3. A wise man who knows proverbs, reconciles difficulties. (Yoruba – Southwest Nigeria)
4. Do not look where you fell, but where you slipped.
5. If you don’t stand for something, you will fall for something.
6. One falsehood spoils a thousand truths (Ashanti – Ghana)
7. The moon moves slowly, but it crosses the town. (Ashanti)
8. It’s a bad child that does not take advice. (Ashanti)
9. A roaring lion kills no game.
10. The best way to eat an elephant is one bite at a time.
11. When a king has good counselors, his reign is peaceful. (Ashanti)
12. Having beauty doesn’t mean understanding the perseverance of marriage.

**What are some values inherent in these proverbs? Summarize what you learned about the values of this culture.**