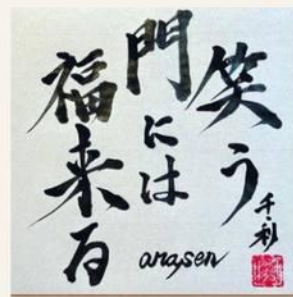
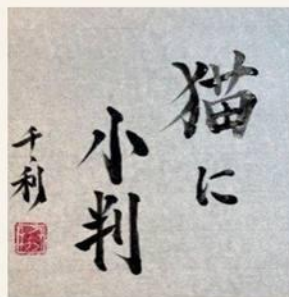


30 Japanese Proverbs

Classroom Worksheets

ことわざプリント



For teachers and learners of Japanese.

Each sheet: calligraphy, reading, meaning, word by word, a short skit, fill in the blank, a quiz and a writing task. Answer key at the end.

Written by Arasen (Arai Ryuichi),
an elementary school principal and calligrapher in Japan.

Free to print and use in class. arasen.net

Name: _____ Date: _____



七転び八起き

ななころびやおき

nana-korobi ya-oki

Literally: Seven falls, eight risings

Meaning: Even if you fail again and again, don't lose heart – get back up and keep going.

1. Word by Word

七	nana – seven
転び	korobi – falling down (from korobu, “to fall”)
八	ya – eight (an old way of reading 八, also heard in yattsu, “eight things”)
起き	oki – getting up (from okiru, “to get up”)

2. Read the Skit

A: もうあかんわ。あのチームに勝つのは無理や・・・。

It's hopeless. There's no way we can beat that team...

B: 誠一、一度や二度負けたからといって、あきらめたらおしまいや。七転び八起きで、もう一度挑戦しよう。

Seiichi, if you give up after losing once or twice, it's over. Nanakorobi yaoki – let's try again!

3. Fill in the Blank

人生は_____。失敗しても、また立ち上がればいい。

_____ Life is “fall seven times, get up eight.” If you fail, just stand up again.

4. Quiz

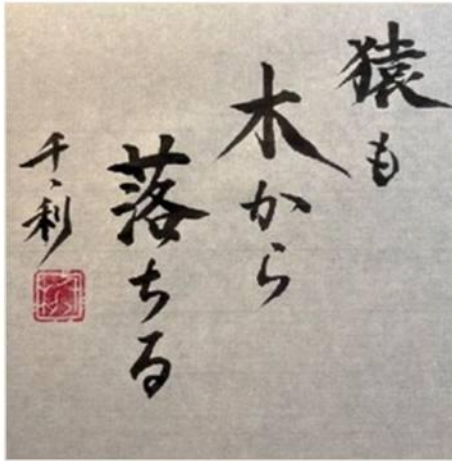
In nanakorobi yaoki, what does oki (起き) mean?

- ☐ A. falling down
- ☐ B. getting up
- ☐ C. eight

5. Your Turn

Write your own sentence with this proverb, or a proverb from your language with the same meaning:

Name: _____ Date: _____



猿も木から落ちる

さるもきからおちる

saru mo ki kara ochiru

Literally: Even monkeys fall from trees

Meaning: However skilled someone is, they can still make a mistake.

1. Word by Word

猿	saru – monkey
も	mo – even
木から	ki kara – from a tree (ki = tree, kara = from)
落ちる	ochiru – to fall

2. Read the Skit

- A:** この問題の式は、こうなります。みんなわかりましたか
So, the answer to this problem is this. Does everyone understand?
- B:** 香川先生、 $1 + 2 = 4$ じゃなくて、3だと思います
Mr. Kagawa... I think $1 + 2$ is 3, not 4.
- A:** のぞみさん、ご指摘ありがとうございます。先生としたことが…。恥ずかしい…。
Thank you, Nozomi. Oh dear – and I'm the teacher... How embarrassing...
- B:** 香川先生、『猿も木から落ちる』っていうじゃないですか。どんまいです。
Mr. Kagawa, you know what they say: saru mo ki kara ochiru. Don't worry about it!

3. Fill in the Blank

水泳が得意な姉がプールでおぼれかけるなんて、_____だね。
My big sister is a great swimmer, but she nearly drowned in the pool. _____!

4. Quiz

Which one does not have a similar meaning to *saru mo ki kara ochiru*?

- ☐ A. Kappa no kawa-nagare (河童の川流れ)
- ☐ B. Kōbō ni mo fude no ayamari (弘法にも筆の誤り)
- ☐ C. Oni ni kanabō (鬼に金棒)

5. Your Turn

Write your own sentence with this proverb, or a proverb from your language with the same meaning:

Name: _____ Date: _____



石の上にも三年

いしのうえにもさんねん

ishi no ue ni mo san-nen

Literally: Even on a stone, three years

Meaning: Even when things are hard, if you keep working patiently, your effort will surely be rewarded.

1. Word by Word

石	ishi – stone
の上にも	no ue ni mo – even on top of
三年	san-nen – three years (here it means “a long time”)

2. Read the Skit

- A:** 今日子、隣のクラスの拓哉くん、弁護士の国家試験に挑戦してるんだって
Kyoko, did you hear? Takuya in the class next door is taking the bar exam to become a lawyer.
- B:** のぞみ、知ってるで。みんなうわさしてるもん。弁護士の試験って難しいんですよ。拓哉くんって、本当にすごいねえ。
Nozomi, I know! Everyone's talking about it. The bar exam is really hard, right? Takuya is amazing.
- A:**ほんと、すごいよね。拓哉くんは『石の上にも三年。辛抱強く頑張るわ』って言ってるんだって。尊敬するわ
He really is. Takuya says, “Ishi no ue ni mo san-nen. I'll keep at it patiently.” I respect him so much.

3. Fill in the Blank

なかなか上達しないピアノも、_____と思って毎日練習を続けた。
My piano playing wasn't getting better, but I practiced every day, thinking _____.

4. Quiz

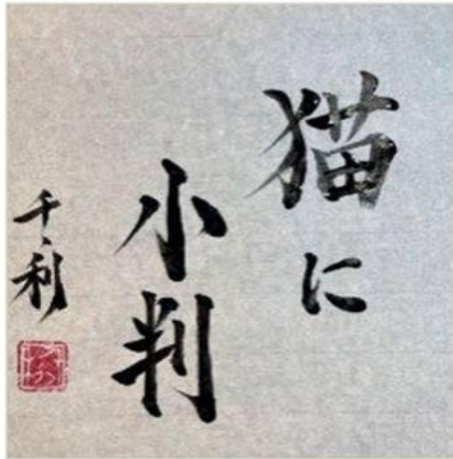
In *ishi no ue ni mo san-nen*, what does “three years” (三年) mean?

- ☐ A. exactly three years
- ☐ B. a long time
- ☐ C. doing something three times

5. Your Turn

Write your own sentence with this proverb, or a proverb from your language with the same meaning:

Name: _____ Date: _____



猫に小判

ねこにこばん

neko ni koban

Literally: Gold coins to a cat

Meaning: However valuable something is, it's of no use to someone who can't understand its value.

1. Word by Word

猫	neko – cat
に	ni – to
小判	koban – an oval gold coin used in the Edo period (1603–1868)

2. Read the Skit

A: お母さん、押し入れの中にある、このツボなあに？

Mom, what's this vase in the closet?

B: のぞみ、昔、お父さんが社長さんからもらった骨董品のツボよ。ものすごく高価なものみたいだけど、お父さんにとっては、いまいち好みじゃないみたいなのよ。結局、使い道がわからず、押し入れにしまっているのよ。

Nozomi, that's an antique vase your dad got from his company president years ago. It seems to be very expensive, but your dad doesn't really like it. He didn't know what to do with it, so it ended up in the closet.

A: まさに猫に小判やなあ

That's totally neko ni koban!

3. Fill in the Blank

最新のゲーム機をもらっても、ゲームに興味のない祖父には_____だ。

Even if you give the latest game console to my grandpa, who has no interest in games, it's _____.

4. Quiz

Which proverb has almost the same meaning as neko ni koban?

- ☐ A. Buta ni shinju (豚に真珠)
- ☐ B. Saru mo ki kara ochiru (猿も木から落ちる)
- ☐ C. Ishi no ue ni mo san-nen (石の上にも三年)

5. Your Turn

Write your own sentence with this proverb, or a proverb from your language with the same meaning:

Name: _____ Date: _____



十人十色

じゅうにんといろ

jū-nin to-iro

Literally: Ten people, ten colors

Meaning: Just as everyone looks different, everyone has their own tastes and ways of thinking.

1. Word by Word

十人

jū-nin – ten people

十色

to-iro – ten colors (十 is read to here, an old reading; iro = color)

2. Read the Skit

A: 美術館で最近始まった展覧会、評価はさまざまみたいやなあ。*The new exhibition at the art museum seems to be getting mixed reviews.***B:** そうらしいなあ。たった一つの作品でも、受け取り方は十人十色やもん。評価が分かれるのは当然やわ。*So I hear. Even a single artwork – how people feel about it is jūnin toiro. Of course opinions are divided!*

3. Fill in the Blank

給食で好きなメニューを聞いたら、_____の答えが返ってきた。

When we asked everyone their favorite school lunch, the answers were _____.

4. Quiz

How do you read 十色 in jūnin toiro?

- ☐ A. to-iro
☐ B. jū-iro
☐ C. too-shoku

5. Your Turn

Write your own sentence with this proverb, or a proverb from your language with the same meaning:

Name: _____ Date: _____



井の中の蛙大海を知らず

いのなかのかわず たいかいをしらず

i no naka no kawazu taikai o shirazu

Literally: The frog in the well does not know the great sea

Meaning: Having a narrow way of seeing and thinking, without knowing how wide the world really is.

1. Word by Word

井の中の	i no naka no – inside the well (i = an old word for well)
蛙	kawazu – frog (an old word; today we usually say kaeru)
大海	taikai – the great ocean
知らず	shirazu – does not know

2. Read the Skit

A: ワハハ！！俺はこの学校で1番の成績だ！！博士って呼びなさい

Ha ha ha! I have the best grades in this whole school! Call me "Professor"!

B: それはすごいけど、井の中の蛙大海を知らず、にならないようにね

That's great – but be careful not to become i no naka no kawazu.

3. Fill in the Blank

町の大会で一番になって安心していましたが、全国大会で負けた。_____だった。

I was satisfied after winning the town tournament, but I lost at the national one. I was _____.

4. Quiz

How is 蛙 (frog) read in this proverb?

- ☐ A. kaeru
- ☐ B. kawazu
- ☐ C. a

5. Your Turn

Write your own sentence with this proverb, or a proverb from your language with the same meaning:

Name: _____ Date: _____



百聞は一見にしかず

ひやくぶんはいっけんにしかず

hyakubun wa ikken ni shikazu

Literally: A hundred hearings are not equal to one seeing

Meaning: Even if you hear or are told about something many times, seeing it for yourself just once helps you understand it much better.

1. Word by Word

百聞	hyakubun – hearing a hundred times (hyaku = 100, bun = hearing)
は	wa – topic marker
一見	ikken – seeing once (ichi = 1, ken = seeing)
にしかず	ni shikazu – is not as good as (an old, literary expression)

2. Read the Skit

A: のぞみちゃん、話題の映画を見たんでしょ。どうやった？

Nozomi, you saw that movie everyone's talking about, right? How was it?

B: 今日、面白かったよ！主人公が『誰も見たことないじゃないか』ってところ、最高やったわ。泣いてしもた。百聞は一見にしかずだから、とにかく観て欲しいな

Kyoko, it was great! The part where the hero says, "No one has ever seen it!" was the best. I cried. Hyakubun wa ikken ni shikazu – you just have to see it!

3. Fill in the Blank

写真で何度も見ていた富士山も、実際に見るとその大きさにおどろいた。_____だ。

I had seen Mt. Fuji in photos many times, but I was amazed by its size when I saw it for real. _____.

4. Quiz

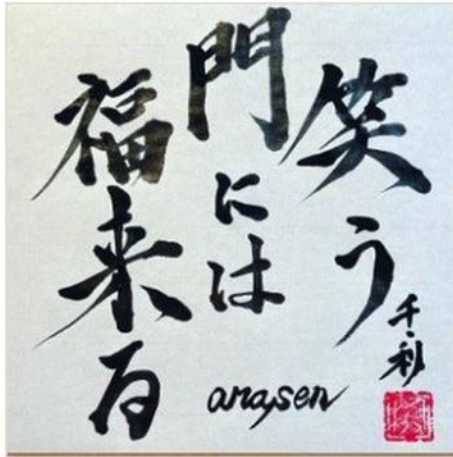
What does shikazu (しかず) mean?

- ☐ A. it can't be helped
- ☐ B. is not as good as
- ☐ C. does not know

5. Your Turn

Write your own sentence with this proverb, or a proverb from your language with the same meaning:

Name: _____ Date: _____



笑う門には福来る

わらうかどには ふくきたる

warau kado ni wa fuku kitaru

Literally: To the gate of laughing people, fortune comes

Meaning: Happiness naturally comes to a home where people live cheerfully and laugh a lot.

1. Word by Word

笑う	warau – to laugh
門	kado – gate; here it means “home” or “family”
には	ni wa – to, at
福	fuku – good fortune, happiness
来る	kitaru – comes (an old way of saying kuru)

2. Read the Skit

A: はあ・・・。つらいわ。*Sigh... this is so hard.***B:** 亮介、つらい時こそ元気を出してニコニコしていこうや。笑う門には福来るっていうから。*Ryosuke, when things are hard is exactly when we should cheer up and smile. You know – warau kado ni wa fuku kitaru!*

3. Fill in the Blank

_____で、いつも明るいとなりの家には、人がたくさん集まってくる。

_____ – the cheerful family next door always has lots of visitors.

4. Quiz

How is 門 (gate) read in this proverb?

- ☐ A. kado
☐ B. mon
☐ C. to

5. Your Turn

Write your own sentence with this proverb, or a proverb from your language with the same meaning:

Name: _____ Date: _____



千里の道も一歩から

せんりのみちもいっぽから

senri no michi mo ippo kara

Literally: Even a road of a thousand ri, from one step

Meaning: However big a project is, it always begins with something small and close at hand.

1. Word by Word

千里	senri – a thousand ri (one ri is about 3.9 km, so about 3,900 km!)
の道	no michi – road, journey
も	mo – even
一歩から	ippo kara – from one step

2. Read the Skit

A: 社長、いよいよ大きなプロジェクトですね。*President, our big project is finally starting.***B:** そうだな。遠大な計画だが、千里の道も一歩から、というから、時間をかけて地道にやっ
ていこう。*Yes. It's a huge plan, but – senri no michi mo ippo kara. Let's take our time and work at it steadily.*

3. Fill in the Blank

漢字検定の合格をめざして、_____で、毎日一ページずつ練習しよう。

To pass the kanji test – _____ – let's practice one page every day.

4. Quiz

Which proverb has a similar meaning to senri no michi mo ippo kara?

- ☐ A. Seite wa koto o shisonjiru (急いてはことを仕損じる)
- ☐ B. Rōma wa ichinichi ni shite narazu (ローマは一日にして成らず)
- ☐ C. Saru mo ki kara ochiru (猿も木から落ちる)

5. Your Turn

Write your own sentence with this proverb, or a proverb from your language with the same meaning:

Name: _____ Date: _____



鬼に金棒

おににかなぼう

oni ni kanabō

Literally: An iron club for an ogre

Meaning: Someone who is already strong gets a good tool or condition and becomes even stronger.

1. Word by Word

鬼	oni – ogre, demon of Japanese folklore
に	ni – to, for
金棒	kanabō – a heavy iron club, often studded with spikes

2. Read the Skit

A: 勇輔くん、知っている。A小学校のエースの松坂くん。小学生で130キロのストレート投げ
って新聞に出てたけど、フォークボールも覚えた見たいよ

Yusuke, have you heard? Matsuzaka, the ace of A Elementary School – the newspaper said he throws a 130 km/h fastball. And now he's learned a forkball, too!

B: えええええ、130キロのストレートに、フォークボールまでの投げんか!!! まさに鬼に金棒やな

Whaaat?! A 130 km/h fastball AND a forkball?! That's totally oni ni kanabō!

3. Fill in the Blank

足の速い兄が新しいスパイクを手に入れて、_____だ。

My brother is already a fast runner, and now he has new spikes. _____!

4. Quiz

Which proverb has a similar meaning to oni ni kanabō?

- ☐ A. Tora ni tsubasa (虎に翼)
- ☐ B. Neko ni koban (猫に小判)
- ☐ C. Tsuki to suppon (月とすっぽん)

5. Your Turn

Write your own sentence with this proverb, or a proverb from your language with the same meaning:

Name: _____ Date: _____



覆水盆に返らず

ふくすいぼんにかえらず

fukusui bon ni kaerazu

Literally: Spilled water does not return to the tray

Meaning: Once something has happened, it can never be undone.

1. Word by Word

覆水	fukusui – spilled water
盆	bon – a tray
に返らず	ni kaerazu – does not return to (an old way of saying kaeranai)

2. Read the Skit

A: わあああああ。白い体操服を赤色のシャツと一緒に洗濯してしまった！！*Aaaah! I washed my white gym clothes together with a red shirt!***B:** うあ。ピンク色になってるわ。覆水盆に返らずやわ。*Oh no... they've turned pink. That's fukusui bon ni kaerazu.*

3. Fill in the Blank

言ってしまった言葉は取り消せない。_____だ。

Words, once spoken, can't be taken back. _____.

4. Quiz

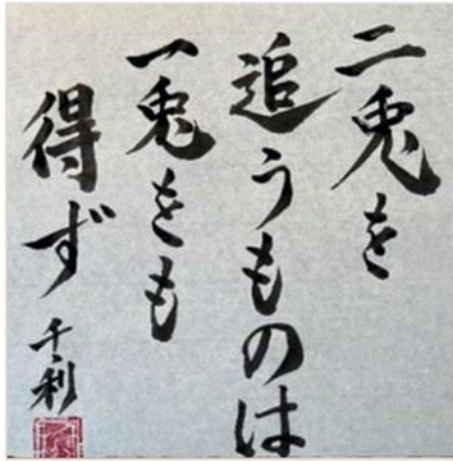
Whose story is fukusui bon ni kaerazu based on?

- ☐ A. Confucius
- ☐ B. Kōbō Daishi
- ☐ C. Taigong Wang

5. Your Turn

Write your own sentence with this proverb, or a proverb from your language with the same meaning:

Name: _____ Date: _____



二兎を追うものは一兎をも得ず

にとをおうものはいっとをもえず

nito o ou mono wa itto o mo ezu

Literally: One who chases two rabbits does not get even one

Meaning: If you greedily try to do two things at once, you will likely fail at both – or finish neither.

1. Word by Word

二兎	nito – two rabbits (ni = two, to = rabbit)
を追うものは	o ou mono wa – a person who chases
一兎をも	itto o mo – not even one rabbit
得ず	ezu – does not get

2. Read the Skit

A: のぞみお姉ちゃん、ちょっと最近やってみようと思っていることがあるんだけど・・・。

Nozomi, there's something I want to try...

B: 勇輔、どうしたの？

What is it, Yusuke?

A: のぞみお姉ちゃん、今度、ギターとサックスを習おうと思っているんだ

I'm going to start learning guitar AND saxophone!

B: えええ！勇輔、同時に二つを一緒に習い始めようとしているの！二兎を追うものは一兎をも得ずって言うでしょ。まずはどちらか一つにきなさいよ

What?! Both at the same time? Nito o ou mono wa itto o mo ezu! Start with just one.

3. Fill in the Blank

サッカーと野球の両方の大会に出ようとして、どちらも練習不足になった。_____だ。

I tried to enter both the soccer and baseball tournaments, and didn't practice enough for either. _____.

4. Quiz

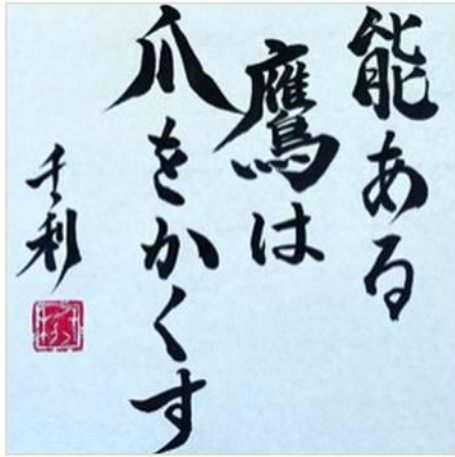
Which four-character idiom has the opposite meaning?

- ☐ A. 一石二鳥 (isseki nichō)
- ☐ B. 自業自得 (jigō jitoku)
- ☐ C. 五里霧中 (gori muchū)

5. Your Turn

Write your own sentence with this proverb, or a proverb from your language with the same meaning: _____

Name: _____ Date: _____



能ある鷹は爪をかくす

のうあるたかはつめをかくす

nō aru taka wa tsume o kakusu

Literally: A capable hawk hides its claws

Meaning: People with real talent don't go around showing it off.

1. Word by Word

能ある	nō aru – skilled, capable
鷹	taka – hawk
は爪を	wa tsume o – its claws, talons
かくす	kakusu – to hide

2. Read the Skit

A: え！！この写真！理恵が撮った写真なの、すごい！プロ級だよ

Wow! Rie took this photo? It's amazing – like a pro!

B: ほんまやすごいなあ。理恵が撮った写真がこんなに上手いとは知らなかったわ。まさに、能あるたかは爪を隠すよね～

It really is. I had no idea Rie was this good. Nō aru taka wa tsume o kakusu!

3. Fill in the Blank

いつもおとなしい彼女が、ピアノコンクールで優勝した。_____だ。

The quiet girl in our class won the piano competition. _____.

4. Quiz

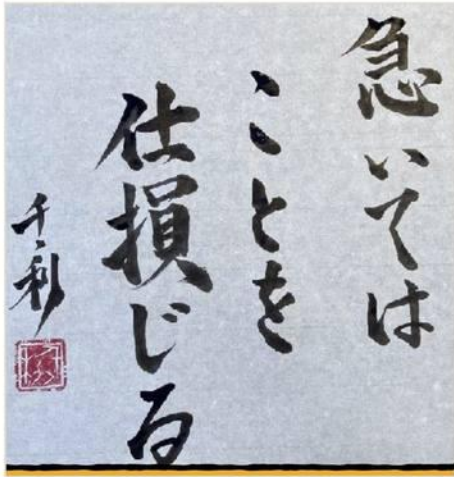
What does *nō aru taka wa tsume o kakusu* mean?

- ☐ A. Hawks take care of their claws
- ☐ B. Talented people don't show off
- ☐ C. Talented people always stand out

5. Your Turn

Write your own sentence with this proverb, or a proverb from your language with the same meaning:

Name: _____ Date: _____



急いてはことを仕損じる

せいてはことをしそんじる

seite wa koto o shisonjiru

Literally: If you hurry, you will botch the job

Meaning: If you try to do something in a hurry, you are likely to fail.

1. Word by Word

急いては	seite wa – if you hurry (from seku, an old word for “to rush”)
ことを	koto o – things, the task
仕損じる	shisonjiru – to botch, to fail at

2. Read the Skit

A: 勇輔、この木の上にめずらしい虫がいるわ。早く取って！*Yusuke, there's a rare bug on this tree! Catch it, quick!***B:** のぞみお姉ちゃん、急いてはことを仕損じるやで。虫取り網を用意するからちょっと待って。その前にトイレも行ってくる。*Nozomi, seite wa koto o shisonjiru. Let me get my bug net. Oh, and I'll go to the bathroom first.***A:** 勇輔、落ち着きすぎやろ*Yusuke, you're TOO calm!*

3. Fill in the Blank

_____ といふから、テストは見直してから出そう。

_____ – check your answers before you hand in the test.

4. Quiz

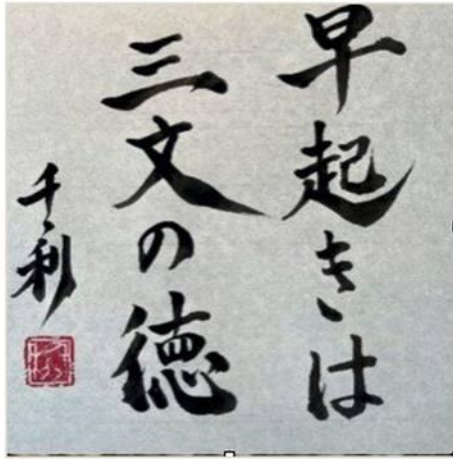
How do you read 急いては in this proverb?

- ☐ A. seite wa
- ☐ B. isoide wa
- ☐ C. kyūite wa

5. Your Turn

Write your own sentence with this proverb, or a proverb from your language with the same meaning:

Name: _____ Date: _____



早起きは三文の徳

はやおきはさんもんのとく

hayaoki wa sanmon no toku

Literally: Early rising is worth three mon

Meaning: If you get up early in the morning, something good will happen.

1. Word by Word

早起き	hayaoki – getting up early
は	wa – topic marker
三文	sanmon – three mon, a tiny amount of old Japanese money
の徳	no toku – a benefit, a gain

2. Read the Skit

A: お父さん、おはよう。朝からどこかに行ってたの？

Good morning, Dad. Did you go somewhere this morning?

B: のぞみ、おはよう。今朝、早く起きて公園を散歩していたら、綺麗な鳥が近くに飛んできてなあ、写真も撮れたんやで。

Morning, Nozomi. I got up early and took a walk in the park. A beautiful bird flew right up to me, and I even got a photo!

A: お父さん、まさに早起きは三文の徳だね

Dad, that's hayaoki wa sanmon no toku!

3. Fill in the Blank

早起きして散歩したら、きれいな朝日が見られた。_____だ。

I got up early for a walk and saw a beautiful sunrise. _____.

4. Quiz

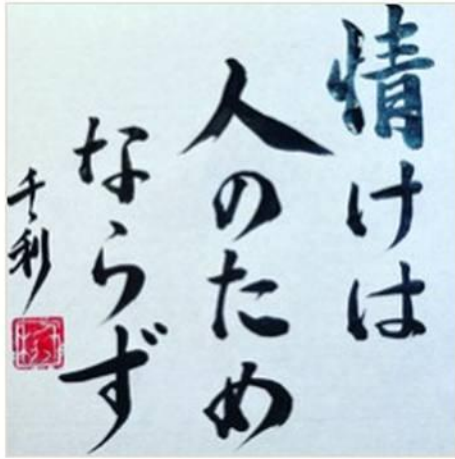
How much money is “three mon” (三文)?

- ☐ A. Just a little
- ☐ B. A lot
- ☐ C. Exactly 30,000 yen

5. Your Turn

Write your own sentence with this proverb, or a proverb from your language with the same meaning:

Name: _____ Date: _____



情けは人のためならず

なさはひとのためならず

nasake wa hito no tame narazu

Literally: Kindness is not for the sake of others (only)

Meaning: If you are kind to others, it will come around and help you, too. So be kind to people.

1. Word by Word

情け	nasake – kindness, compassion
は人の	wa hito no – for other people's
ためならず	tame narazu – is not (only) for the sake of – an old form of tame de wa nai

2. Read the Skit

A: おばあさん、席空いていますよ。どうぞ。*Excuse me, ma'am, please take my seat.***B:** お兄ちゃん、ありがとうね。*Oh, thank you, young man.***A:** (家で) のぞみお姉ちゃん、バスで重そうな荷物を持っていた人に席をゆずったよ。*(At home) Nozomi, I gave my seat on the bus to someone carrying heavy bags.***B:** 勇輔、いいことしたね。情けは人のためならずっていうから、いつかいいことがあるね。*Good for you, Yusuke! Nasake wa hito no tame narazu – something good will come back to you someday.*

3. Fill in the Blank

困っている人を助けたら、あとで自分が助けてもらえた。_____だ。

I helped someone in trouble, and later they helped me. _____.

4. Quiz

What is the correct meaning of nasake wa hito no tame narazu?

- ☐ A. Kindness spoils people
- ☐ B. Kindness to others will come back to you
- ☐ C. Never show kindness

5. Your Turn

Write your own sentence with this proverb, or a proverb from your language with the same meaning:

Name: _____ Date: _____



雨ふって地固まる

あめふってじかたまる

ame futte ji katamaru

Literally: Rain falls, the ground hardens

Meaning: After something bad or a quarrel, things often become even better than before.

1. Word by Word

雨	ame – rain
ふって	futte – falls, and then
地	ji – the ground, the earth
固まる	katamaru – becomes firm, hardens

2. Read the Skit

A: のぞみお姉ちゃん、昨日、お父さんとお母さん、喧嘩してなかったっけ。今、一緒にテレビみて楽しそうに笑ってるよ

Nozomi, weren't Mom and Dad fighting yesterday? Now they're laughing together watching TV.

B: かなえ、雨ふって地固まるっていうでしょ。そういうこと。

Kanae, you know the saying – ame futte ji katamaru. That's what this is.

3. Fill in the Blank

大げんかをした二人が、今では大の仲よし。_____だね。

The two who had a huge fight are now best friends. _____.

4. Quiz

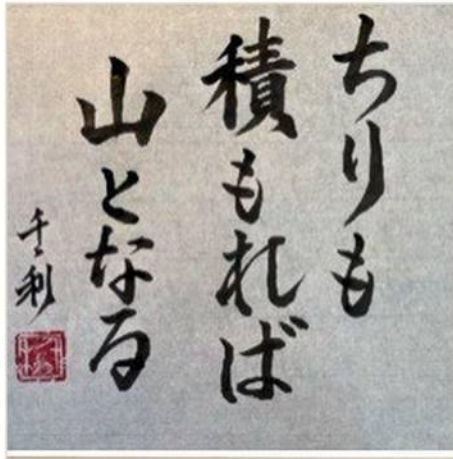
What does ame futte ji katamaru mean?

- ☐ A. Don't play outside on rainy days
- ☐ B. After trouble, things can become better
- ☐ C. The ground is always hard

5. Your Turn

Write your own sentence with this proverb, or a proverb from your language with the same meaning:

Name: _____ Date: _____



ちりも積もれば山となる

ちりもつもればやまとなる

chiri mo tsumoreba yama to naru

Literally: Even dust, if it piles up, becomes a mountain

Meaning: Even the smallest things, when they pile up, can become as big as a mountain.

1. Word by Word

塵	chiri – dust
も積もれば	mo tsumoreba – even, if it piles up
山となる	yama to naru – becomes a mountain

2. Read the Skit

A: わあ、のぞみお姉ちゃん！今、チョコ食べたやろ！ダイエット中じゃなかったっけ？

Nozomi! You just ate chocolate! Aren't you on a diet?

B: 勇介、ダイエット中だから、小さな小さなチョコを食べてるのよ。こんな小さなチョコなら大丈夫なの。

Yusuke, I'm on a diet, so I'm only eating tiny, tiny chocolates. Tiny ones are fine.

A: のぞみお姉ちゃん。小さなチョコでも、結局何個も食べてるやん。ちりも積もれば山となる、やで。

Nozomi, you've eaten lots of them! Chiri mo tsumoreba yama to naru!

3. Fill in the Blank

毎日10円ずつ貯金したら、_____で、一年で3650円になった。

I saved 10 yen every day, and in a year I had 3,650 yen. _____.

4. Quiz

What is chiri (塵) in this proverb?

- ☐ A. Money
- ☐ B. Dust – something very tiny
- ☐ C. Stones

5. Your Turn

Write your own sentence with this proverb, or a proverb from your language with the same meaning:

Name: _____ Date: _____



三人寄れば文殊の知恵

さんにんよればもんじゅのちえ

sannin yoreba monju no chie

Literally: If three people gather, (they have) the wisdom of Monju

Meaning: Even ordinary people can come up with a good idea when three of them talk it over together.

1. Word by Word

三人	sannin – three people
寄れば	yoreba – if they gather
文殊	Monju – Monju Bosatsu (Manjushri), the Buddhist figure of wisdom
の知恵	no chie – the wisdom of

2. Read the Skit

A: のぞみお姉ちゃん、来週にクラスでお楽しみ会をするんだけど、どんな出し物をしたらいいか、全然思い浮かばへんねん。

Nozomi, our class is having a party next week, but I have no idea what we should do for our show.

B: 勇輔、それじゃみんなで考えようか。三人寄れば文殊の知恵って言うしね

Then let's think about it together, Yusuke. Sannin yoreba monju no chie, as they say!

3. Fill in the Blank

一人ではわからなかった問題も、_____で、みんなで考えたら解けた。

A problem I couldn't solve alone, we solved together. _____.

4. Quiz

Who is “Monju” (文殊)?

- ☐ A. A famous scholar
- ☐ B. Three brothers
- ☐ C. A Buddhist figure of wisdom

5. Your Turn

Write your own sentence with this proverb, or a proverb from your language with the same meaning:

Name: _____ Date: _____



良薬は口に苦し

りょうやくはくちににがし

ryōyaku wa kuchi ni nigashi

Literally: Good medicine is bitter in the mouth

Meaning: Advice from others can be painful to hear, but it's for your own good – so listen with an open heart.

1. Word by Word

良薬	ryōyaku – good medicine
は口に	wa kuchi ni – in the mouth
苦し	nigashi – is bitter (an old form of nigai)

2. Read the Skit

A: かなえちゃん、ノートの手が汚いって、先生に注意されてたね。*Kanae, the teacher told you your notebook handwriting was messy, didn't she?***B:** そうやねん。良薬は口に苦しって思って、丁寧に書くように頑張るよ*Yeah. But ryōyaku wa kuchi ni nigashi – I'll try to write neatly.*

3. Fill in the Blank

先生のきびしい注意は、_____で、ぼくのためを思ってたことだった。

My teacher's strict words were _____ – they were for my own good.

4. Quiz

Which proverb has a similar meaning?

- ☐ A. Neko ni koban (猫に小判)
- ☐ B. Oni ni kanabō (鬼に金棒)
- ☐ C. Chūgen mimi ni sakarau (忠言耳に逆らう)

5. Your Turn

Write your own sentence with this proverb, or a proverb from your language with the same meaning:

Name: _____ Date: _____



弘法筆を選ばず

こうぼうふでをえらばず

Kōbō fude o erabazu

Literally: Kōbō does not choose his brush

Meaning: A true master does excellent work no matter how good or bad the tools are.

1. Word by Word

弘法	Kōbō – Kōbō Daishi, also known as Kūkai (774–835), a famous monk and master calligrapher
筆を	fude o – brush
選ばず	erabazu – does not choose

2. Read the Skit

- A:** ママ、運動会で一位をとりたいから、このくつ買って！
Mom, I want to win first place at sports day – buy me these shoes!
- B:** だめ！だめ！弘法筆を選ばずって言うでしょ。のぞみ、くつのせいにしたらだめよ。
No, no! Kōbō fude o erabazu, Nozomi. Don't blame your shoes.
- A:** (次の日) 「いらっしゃい、タイムセールです。このフライパンで料理を作ると魔法のように美味しくなります！」 「わあ、あのフライパンほしいわ。のぞみ、フライパン買ってくるから待っててね」
(Next day) "Time sale! Cook with this frying pan and everything tastes like magic!" – "Ooh, I want that pan! Nozomi, wait here, I'm going to buy it."
- B:** ママ、弘法筆を選ばずでしょ。もう、ママも道具に頼ってんやから
Mom! Kōbō fude o erabazu! Now YOU'RE relying on tools!

3. Fill in the Blank

プロの料理人は_____で、ふつうのフライパンでもおいしい料理を作る。
A professional chef makes delicious food even with an ordinary pan. _____.

4. Quiz

Who is "Kōbō" (弘法)?

- ☐ A. Kūkai
☐ B. Prince Shōtoku
☐ C. Murasaki Shikibu

5. Your Turn

Write your own sentence with this proverb, or a proverb from your language with the same meaning:
 © Arasen (Arai Ryuichi), elementary school principal & calligrapher in Japan – free to print and use in class. Full lesson:
arasen.net/kobo-fude-o-erabazu-meaning/

Name: _____ Date: _____



蛙の子は蛙

かえるのこはかえる

kaeru no ko wa kaeru

Literally: A frog's child is a frog

Meaning: Children end up resembling their parents.

1. Word by Word

蛙	kaeru – frog
の子は	no ko wa – the child of
蛙	kaeru – (is) a frog

2. Read the Skit

A: のぞみ、小学校の教師になってんて。*Nozomi, I heard you became an elementary school teacher!***B:** そうやねん。お父さんもお母さんも教師やから、蛙の子は蛙で、私もやっぱり教師になってしもたわ。*That's right. Mom and Dad are both teachers, so – kaeru no ko wa kaeru – I became one too!*

3. Fill in the Blank

サッカー選手の子どもも、やっぱりサッカーが上手だ。_____だね。

The soccer player's kids are great at soccer too. _____.

4. Quiz

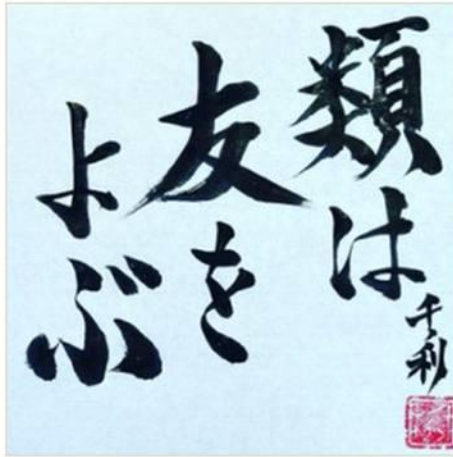
Which proverb has the opposite meaning?

- ☐ A. Tobi ga taka o umu (鷹が鷹を生む)
- ☐ B. Uri no tsuru ni nasubi wa naranu
- ☐ C. Oni ni kanabō

5. Your Turn

Write your own sentence with this proverb, or a proverb from your language with the same meaning:

Name: _____ Date: _____



類は友をよぶ

るいはともをよぶ

rui wa tomo o yobu

Literally: Kind calls friends

Meaning: People who have something in common naturally gather together.

1. Word by Word

類	rui – kind, type, things of the same sort
は友を	wa tomo o – friends
よぶ	yobu – to call, to attract

2. Read the Skit

- A:** のぞみお姉ちゃん、俺の友達って、みんな優しいねん
Nozomi, all my friends are so kind.
- B:** 勇輔、類は友をよぶって言うから、勇輔が優しいんやわ
Yusuke, rui wa tomo o yobu – that means YOU'RE kind.
- A:** のぞみお姉ちゃん、そう言ってくれてありがとう
Thanks for saying that, Nozomi.

3. Fill in the Blank

ゲーム好きの兄の友だちは、みんなゲーム好き。_____だね。
My brother loves games, and all his friends love games too. _____.

4. Quiz

Which English proverb has the same meaning?

- ☐ A. Birds of a feather flock together.
- ☐ B. Time is money.
- ☐ C. Seeing is believing.

5. Your Turn

Write your own sentence with this proverb, or a proverb from your language with the same meaning:

Name: _____ Date: _____



虎穴に入らずんば虎子を得ず

こけつに入らずんばこじをえず

koketsu ni irazunba koji o ezu

Literally: If you don't enter the tiger's den, you won't get the tiger's cub

Meaning: You can't achieve great success without taking some risk.

1. Word by Word

虎穴	koketsu – a tiger's den
に入らずんば	ni irazunba – if you don't go into (old, literary Japanese)
虎子	koji – a tiger's cub
を得ず	o ezu – you won't get

2. Read the Skit

A: 好きな直子ちゃんに話しかけたいねんけど、女の子たちでかたまっていて近寄れへんわ。どうしよう。

I want to talk to Naoko, the girl I like, but she's always with a group of girls. I can't get near her. What should I do?

B: 虎穴に入らずんば虎子を得ず、間をわって入っていきなさい。亮介、勇気を出せ！

Koketsu ni irazunba koji o ezu! Walk right in. Be brave, Ryosuke!

3. Fill in the Blank

思い切って先生に質問したら、よくわかった。_____だ。

I bravely asked the teacher a question, and finally understood. _____.

4. Quiz

Which English proverb has the same meaning?

- ☐ A. Look before you leap.
- ☐ B. Nothing ventured, nothing gained.
- ☐ C. Time is money.

5. Your Turn

Write your own sentence with this proverb, or a proverb from your language with the same meaning:

Name: _____ Date: _____



人間万事塞翁が馬

にんげんばんじさいおうがうま

ningen banji saiō ga uma

Literally: In the human world, everything is (like) the old frontier man's horse

Meaning: In life, unexpected events can bring happiness or misfortune – no one can predict which. So don't get too happy or too sad.

1. Word by Word

人間	ningen / jinkan – the human world, life
万事	banji – everything
塞翁	Saiō – the old man (翁) of the frontier fortress (塞)
が馬	ga uma – 's horse

2. Read the Skit

A: 運動会のリレーのメンバーに入れなかった・・・。がっかりやわ・・・。

I didn't make the relay team for sports day... I'm so disappointed.

B: おかげで、選手はなることができない応援団長に選ばれたやんか。人間万事塞翁が馬やで

But because of that, you were chosen as cheer captain – which runners can't be! Ningen banji saiō ga uma.

3. Fill in the Blank

けがで試合に出られなかったが、そのおかげで別の才能に気づいた。_____だ。

I couldn't play because of an injury – but that's how I found another talent. _____.

4. Quiz

In this proverb, what does 人間 (jinkan) mean?

- ☐ A. The human body
- ☐ B. The world, life
- ☐ C. Important people

5. Your Turn

Write your own sentence with this proverb, or a proverb from your language with the same meaning:

Name: _____ Date: _____



隣の芝生は青い

となりのしばふはあおい

tonari no shibafu wa aoi

Literally: The neighbor's lawn is green

Meaning: Other people's things always look better, and make us envious.

1. Word by Word

隣の	tonari no – next door, the neighbor's
芝生は	shibafu wa – the lawn
青い	aoi – green (literally “blue”)

2. Read the Skit

A: お母さん、たまには外食もいいね。エビフライ定食美味しいわ。

Mom, eating out is nice once in a while. This fried shrimp is delicious.

B: そうね、たまには外食もいいね。

Yes, it's nice once in a while.

A: お母さん、あっちのテーブルのハンバーグ美味しそうね。私、ハンバーグにすればよかったかな。でも、向こうのテーブルの唐揚げ定食も美味しそう。

Mom, that hamburger steak at the other table looks good... maybe I should've ordered that. Oh, but the fried chicken over there looks good too...

B: のぞみ、隣の芝生は青いから、そう見えるだけよ。周りばかり見てないで食べなさい。

Nozomi, tonari no shibafu wa aoi – it just looks that way. Stop looking around and eat!

3. Fill in the Blank

友だちの家のほうが楽しそうに見えるのは、_____ということかもしれない。

My friend's home always looks more fun – maybe that's _____.

4. Quiz

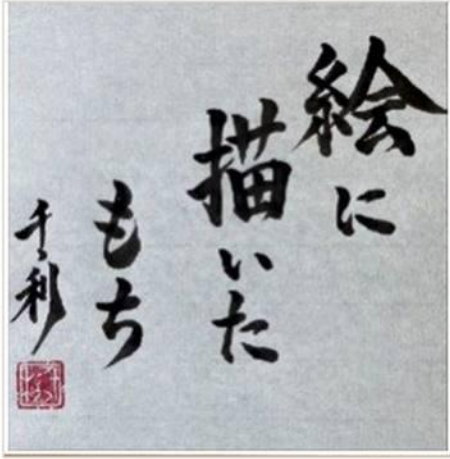
Which proverb has the same meaning?

- ☐ A. Tonari no hana wa akai (隣の花は赤い)
- ☐ B. Tōdai moto kurashi (灯台下暗し)
- ☐ C. Saru mo ki kara ochiru

5. Your Turn

Write your own sentence with this proverb, or a proverb from your language with the same meaning:

Name: _____ Date: _____



絵に描いた餅

えにかいたもち

e ni kaita mochi

Literally: A rice cake drawn in a picture

Meaning: A plan or idea that looks wonderful but is of no use in reality.

1. Word by Word

絵に	e ni – in a picture
描いた	kaita – drawn, painted
餅	mochi – a Japanese rice cake

2. Read the Skit

A: よし、書家になるって決めた！！*Right! I've decided – I'm going to become a calligrapher!***B:** 荒井くん、絵に描いたもちにならないように、頑張ってね*Arai-kun, don't let it become e ni kaita mochi. Good luck!*

3. Fill in the Blank

実行できない計画は、_____だ。

A plan you can't carry out is _____.

4. Quiz

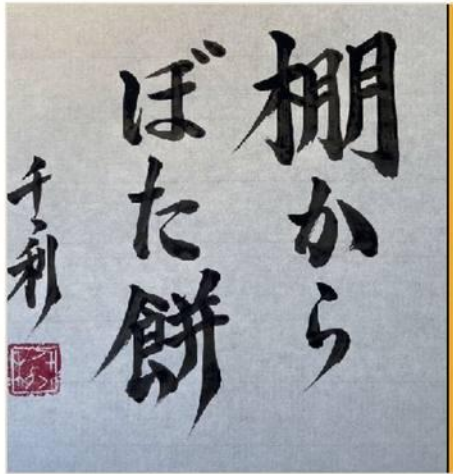
Which four-character idiom has a similar meaning?

- ☐ A. 一石二鳥 (isseki nichō)
- ☐ B. 机上の空論 (kijō no kūron)
- ☐ C. 自業自得 (jigō jitoku)

5. Your Turn

Write your own sentence with this proverb, or a proverb from your language with the same meaning:

Name: _____ Date: _____



棚からぼた餅

たなからぼたもち

tana kara botamochi

Literally: A botamochi from the shelf

Meaning: Unexpected good luck that comes to you without doing anything.

1. Word by Word

棚から

tana kara – from the shelf

牡丹餅

botamochi – a sweet rice cake covered in red bean paste

2. Read the Skit

A: 今日、散歩してたら親戚のおじいさんに偶然に会って、お小遣いをもらってもうたわ！！超ラッキーやわ。

I was out for a walk and bumped into my great-uncle – and he gave me pocket money! So lucky!

B: まさに棚からぼた餅やん。

That's totally tana kara botamochi!

3. Fill in the Blank

くじびきで、たまたま旅行券が当たった。_____だ。

I happened to win a travel voucher in a raffle. _____!

4. Quiz

What is the short form of tana kara botamochi?

- ☐ A. tanabota
- ☐ B. botamochi
- ☐ C. tanamochi

5. Your Turn

Write your own sentence with this proverb, or a proverb from your language with the same meaning:

Name: _____ Date: _____



捕らぬ狸の皮算用

とらぬたぬきのかわざんよう

toranu tanuki no kawazan'yō

Literally: Calculating the fur of a tanuki you haven't caught

Meaning: Counting on something uncertain, and making hopeful plans before you actually have it.

1. Word by Word

捕らぬ	toranu – not yet caught
狸の	tanuki no – of a tanuki (raccoon dog)
皮算用	kawazan'yō – calculating (算用) the price of the fur (皮)

2. Read the Skit

A: 3億円のジャンボ宝くじ。もし当たったら、まず家を購入して、その次に外国旅行に行って
...

A 300-million-yen jumbo lottery! If I win, first I'll buy a house, then I'll travel abroad...

B: おいおい、まだ宝くじを買ってすらないやん。まさに捕らぬ狸の皮算用やで
Hey, hey – you haven't even BOUGHT a ticket yet! That's toranu tanuki no kawazan'yō.

3. Fill in the Blank

まだ優勝していないのに、賞金の使い道を考えるなんて、_____だ。

Thinking about how to spend the prize before you've even won is _____.

4. Quiz

Which English proverb has the same meaning?

- ☐ A. Don't count your chickens before they hatch.
- ☐ B. Time is money.
- ☐ C. Walls have ears.

5. Your Turn

Write your own sentence with this proverb, or a proverb from your language with the same meaning:

Name: _____ Date: _____



鬼の目にも涙

おにのめにもなみだ

oni no me ni mo namida

Literally: Tears even in the eyes of an ogre

Meaning: Even a cold, harsh person sometimes shows a kind heart.

1. Word by Word

鬼の	oni no – of an ogre
目にも	me ni mo – even in the eyes
涙	namida – tears

2. Read the Skit

A: ねえねえ、勇輔くん、あの厳しい香川先生が亮介くんの遅刻の言い訳を聞いたんだって。

Hey Yusuke, guess what – strict Mr. Kagawa listened to Ryosuke's reason for being late.

B: 亮介って今、家族が大変なんやろ。聞いたわ。亮介の遅刻の訳を聞いて、あの香川先生が怒らんかったんか。まさに鬼の目にも涙やなあ

Ryosuke's family is going through a hard time right now. Mr. Kagawa heard why he was late and didn't get angry? That's oni no me ni mo namida.

3. Fill in the Blank

いつもきびしいコーチが、ぼくたちの優勝で泣いていた。_____だ。

Our always-strict coach cried when we won the championship. _____.

4. Quiz

What does oni no me ni mo namida mean?

- ☐ A. Ogres are crybabies
- ☐ B. You got dust in your eye
- ☐ C. Even a scary person can be kind

5. Your Turn

Write your own sentence with this proverb, or a proverb from your language with the same meaning:

Name: _____ Date: _____

Answer Key (1–10)**1. 七転び八起き (nana-korobi ya-oki)**

Fill in the blank: 七転び八起き

Quiz: The answer is B. getting up. Oki comes from okiru, “to get up.” “Falling down” is korobi, and “eight” is ya.

2. 猿も木から落ちる (saru mo ki kara ochiru)

Fill in the blank: 猿も木から落ちる

Quiz: The answer is C. Oni ni kanabō. It means “the strong become even stronger” – not about making mistakes.

3. 石の上にも三年 (ishi no ue ni mo san-nen)

Fill in the blank: 石の上にも三年

Quiz: The answer is B. a long time. “Three years” is a way of saying “a long period.”

4. 猫に小判 (neko ni koban)

Fill in the blank: 猫に小判

Quiz: The answer is A. Buta ni shinju – “pearls to a pig.” Both mean that good things are wasted on those who can’t see their value.

5. 十人十色 (jū-nin to-iro)

Fill in the blank: 十人十色

Quiz: The answer is A. to-iro. Ten people have ten different tastes and ideas.

6. 井の中の蛙大海を知らず (i no naka no kawazu taikai o shirazu)

Fill in the blank: 井の中の蛙大海を知らず

Quiz: The answer is B. kawazu. Kawazu is an old word for “frog.”

7. 百聞は一見にしかず (hyakubun wa ikken ni shikazu)

Fill in the blank: 百聞は一見にしかず

Quiz: The answer is B. is not as good as. Hearing a hundred times is not as good as seeing once.

8. 笑う門には福来る (warau kado ni wa fuku kitaru)

Fill in the blank: 笑う門には福来る

Quiz: The answer is A. kado. Here, kado means a home or family.

9. 千里の道も一歩から (senri no michi mo ippo kara)

Fill in the blank: 千里の道も一歩から

Quiz: The answer is B. Rōma wa ichinichi ni shite narazu – “Rome wasn’t built in a day.” Big things are made by piling up small efforts.

10. 鬼に金棒 (oni ni kanabō)

Fill in the blank: 鬼に金棒

Quiz: The answer is A. Tora ni tsubasa – “wings for a tiger.” Both mean the strong becoming even stronger.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Answer Key (11–20)**11. 覆水盆に返らず (fukusui bon ni kaerazu)**

Fill in the blank: 覆水盆に返らず

Quiz: The answer is C. Taigong Wang, a wise man of ancient China who poured out a tray of water.

12. 二兎を追うものは一兎をも得ず (nito o ou mono wa itto o mo ezu)

Fill in the blank: 二兎を追うものは一兎をも得ず

Quiz: The answer is A. isseki nichō – “one stone, two birds,” getting two benefits from one action.

13. 能ある鷹は爪をかくす (nō aru taka wa tsume o kakusu)

Fill in the blank: 能ある鷹は爪をかくす

Quiz: The answer is B. Truly skilled people don't brag about it.

14. 急いてはことを仕損じる (seite wa koto o shisonjiru)

Fill in the blank: 急いてはことを仕損じる

Quiz: The answer is A. seite wa. Seku is an old word meaning to rush.

15. 早起きは三文の徳 (hayaoki wa sanmon no toku)

Fill in the blank: 早起きは三文の徳

Quiz: The answer is A. Just a little. A small gain – but a gain!

16. 情けは人のためならず (nasake wa hito no tame narazu)

Fill in the blank: 情けは人のためならず

Quiz: The answer is B. “Not for others” means “not only for others” – it helps you, too.

17. 雨ふって地固まる (ame futte ji katamaru)

Fill in the blank: 雨ふって地固まる

Quiz: The answer is B. Just as the ground hardens after rain, a relationship can grow stronger after a quarrel.

18. ちりも積もれば山となる (chiri mo tsumoreba yama to naru)

Fill in the blank: ちりも積もれば山となる

Quiz: The answer is B. Dust. Even the tiniest things become big when they add up.

19. 三人寄れば文殊の知恵 (sannin yoreba monju no chie)

Fill in the blank: 三人寄れば文殊の知恵

Quiz: The answer is C. Monju Bosatsu (Manjushri) is the Buddhist symbol of wisdom.

20. 良薬は口に苦し (ryōyaku wa kuchi ni nigashi)

Fill in the blank: 良薬は口に苦し

Quiz: The answer is C. Sincere advice is hard to hear – the same idea.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Answer Key (21–30)**21. 弘法筆を選ばず (Kōbō fude o erabazu)**

Fill in the blank: 弘法筆を選ばず

Quiz: The answer is A. Kūkai, known as Kōbō Daishi – a master calligrapher.

22. 蛙の子は蛙 (kaeru no ko wa kaeru)

Fill in the blank: 蛙の子は蛙

Quiz: The answer is A. “A kite gives birth to a hawk” – ordinary parents with an outstanding child.

23. 類は友をよぶ (rui wa tomo o yobu)

Fill in the blank: 類は友をよぶ

Quiz: The answer is A. Birds with the same feathers gather together.

24. 虎穴に入らずんば虎子を得ず (koketsu ni irazunba koji o ezu)

Fill in the blank: 虎穴に入らずんば虎子を得ず

Quiz: The answer is B. Without risk, there's no great success.

25. 人間万事塞翁が馬 (ningen banji saiō ga uma)

Fill in the blank: 人間万事塞翁が馬

Quiz: The answer is B. Here, 人間 means the world we live in.

26. 隣の芝生は青い (tonari no shibafu wa aoi)

Fill in the blank: 隣の芝生は青い

Quiz: The answer is A. “The neighbor's flowers are redder” – the same idea.

27. 絵に描いた餅 (e ni kaita mochi)

Fill in the blank: 絵に描いた餅

Quiz: The answer is B. An idea that only works on paper.

28. 棚からぼた餅 (tana kara botamochi)

Fill in the blank: 棚からぼた餅

Quiz: The answer is A. tanabota – used all the time in everyday Japanese.

29. 捕らぬ狸の皮算用 (toranu tanuki no kawazan'yō)

Fill in the blank: 捕らぬ狸の皮算用

Quiz: The answer is A. Don't count on what you don't have yet.

30. 鬼の目にも涙 (oni no me ni mo namida)

Fill in the blank: 鬼の目にも涙

Quiz: The answer is C. Even a cold person can be moved.

Thank you for using these worksheets! Each proverb has a full English lesson (meaning, origin, skit and examples) at [arasen.net/category/japanese-proverbs/](https://www.arasen.net/category/japanese-proverbs/)