

# SAMPLE SPEECH 3A

FORM: An "Oral Essay"

TOPIC: The "Wisdom" of Proverbs



We can read or hear *proverbs, sayings, and quotations* everywhere—on posters and in pamphlets, magazines, and books, in people's speeches, online, and in everyday talk. There's even a quotation on U.S. money: each bill or coin has the phrase "In God We Trust." (I wonder if that means that God will protect the country from inflation, bankruptcy, or a stock market crash.)

Every culture has its share of "folk wisdom" from the past, and some of these ideas appear to be universal. For example, here are some Mexican proverbs that seem to correspond to sayings in the United States:

- "He who is a parrot is green wherever he is." (Doesn't that mean the same as "A leopard can't change its spots?")
- "In the matter of pigs, everything is money, and in the matter of money, everyone is a pig." (To me, that sounds like "Money is the root of all evil.")
- "To win a dispute is to gain a chicken and lose a cow." (In other words, as we say in the U.S., "You can't win.")
- "An ant that is moving does more than an ox that is taking a nap." (Is that like our proverb "Slow and steady wins the race?")

Proverbs are cultural treasures, handed down from one generation to another. They seem to contain tremendous wisdom about human nature. But are these "truisms" always true? Sometimes...maybe.

For example, it's true (isn't it?) that "Absence makes the heart grow fonder." I mean—if someone you love goes away, you miss him... don't you? Although... on the other hand, if you really weren't suited for each other in the first place, his absence might be... a welcome relief? You never know... I guess it depends...

On the other hand, how about the folk wisdom that "Familiarity breeds contempt?" This well-known proverb is *supposed* to mean that detailed knowledge of a thing—or a person—makes us hate it (or him/her).

But then... psychologists have done studies that show the *opposite* is true. After seeing photos of strangers several times, participants in these experiments began saying they thought they would like those people. And how about the items in our homes—the paintings or objects that we see again and again—day after day? We grow to "love" those things, don't we—and to miss them if they break or if we move to another place? Familiarity breeds contempt? Oh, well.

Some well-known proverbs seem to mean exactly the opposite as other proverbs. For instance, how can it be true that "Birds of a feather flock together" (that is, people make friends most easily with people of similar personalities) while—on the other hand—"Opposites attract?" Hmm...

And then there's the saying "You can't teach an old dog new tricks" versus the belief that "You're never too old to learn." How can both "truisms" be true at the same time?

I guess people are most interested in sayings that they can quote in their own speech—especially if they're funny. How else can we explain the popularity of books like *The Wit and Wisdom of Forrest Gump*, by Winston Gunn, *Life's Little Instruction Book* (or *Life's Little Destruction Book*, a parody by Charles Dane), *Live and Learn and Pass It On*, by H. Jackson Brown, Jr. and others?



(Continued on page 23)

(Continued from page 22)

Here are some well-known bits of wisdom from the popular movie *Forrest Gump*:

- "If you don't know where you are going, you will probably not wind up there."
- "Do not make excuses— unless you have to."
- "If you've got to cry, do it by yourself— and be quick about it."
- "Most people don't look dumb until they start talking."
- "Life is like a box of chocolates— you never know what you're going to get."
- "Always say 'thank you,' even if you don't mean it."

Well... we can all agree with *these* modern proverbs. *Can't* we?

Children seem to know intuitively that some old proverbs are really nonsense—at least in their worlds in modern times. When some 11-year-olds in Baltimore, Maryland, were asked to finish some very famous proverbs, here's what they came up with:

- "Don't put all your eggs... in your pocket" (instead of "in one basket").
- "Don't bite the hand... that has your allowance in it." (The proverb used to end with the words "that feeds you.")

- "All is fair in love and... fighting with your brother." (I guess that's better than the old ending "war," isn't it?)
- "If at first you don't succeed... blame it on the teacher." (Well, that's easier than "try, try again," I suppose.)
- "A bird in the hand is... dead." (Of course! How can a dead bird be "worth two in the bush," anyway?)

Proverbs and other quotes are all around us—even on our car bumpers and coffee mugs—and T-shirts. Every day, we can read again and again that "The best man for the job is usually... a woman," "Whoever says money can't buy happiness... doesn't know where to shop," "Experience is what you get when you didn't get what you wanted," and "It's not whether you win or lose, it's how you place the blame." O.K. so these pieces of wisdom are a *little* different from the time-honored originals, but after all:

- "Here today, gone tomorrow."
- "Tomorrow never comes."
- "All's well that ends well."
- "Last but not least..."
- "And they all lived happily ever after."



**COMPREHENSION CHECK:** Did you get the main points of *Sample Speech 3-A*? Then answer these questions:

1. What is the topic of the speech?
2. What are the most important *general* ideas? Give one or two examples for each idea.
3. What do the proverbs mean to you? In your own words, tell the meanings of some of them.
4. Which of the sayings or quotes do you like the best? Which do you agree with (find true)? Disagree with? Why?

# INSTRUCTIONS:

Are you an observant, creative thinker? Can you speak "off the cuff" (or with little preparation) on any everyday subject?

## MINI-SPEECH 3A

**FORM:** An "Oral Essay"

**TOPICS:** Everyday Truths & Observations



To "try your tongue" at an Oral Essay, follow these steps:

1. Choose an idea that you've just thought of or have been thinking about for a while. Or begin with an interesting or funny saying, quote, or piece of information that you've heard or read somewhere. Prepare a beginning for your mini-speech, perhaps by finishing one of these sentence beginnings:

- A proverb that I find relevant to my everyday life is.....
- Do you know the saying ".....?"
- A famous person named ..... once said, "....."
- The other day, I saw this saying on a bumper sticker (or mug or T-shirt or.....).
- One of the best pieces of advice I've ever received is .....
- My mother (or my father) always used to tell me that .....
- Something I've been wondering about for a long time is .....
- Have you ever noticed .....

2. Draw an Idea Map about your topic. It will probably look something like this. ➡

3. Choose the best (the most interesting or amusing) thoughts from your idea map. (Circle them or write them on a note card.) Plan what to leave out and what to include or add to a one or two-minute Mini-Speech.

4. When it's your turn, give your speech to the class or whole group. If there's time, ask for questions, comments, and other feedback. Encourage your audience to add their ideas to yours.

5. When other people are speaking, relax and listen with an open mind. During their talks, you can jot down any thoughts that come into your mind in relation to their topics. If there's time after each speech, contribute your comments and questions.

