

## UNA RACCOLTA DI PROVERBI INGLESI

I proverbi hanno varie funzioni: accennerò ad alcune di esse per chiarire per quali motivi può essere importante conoscerli. Anzitutto sono un serbatoio di metafore e di usi lessicali di ogni genere. Chi non conosce “A rolling stone gathers no moss” non può capire il vero significato del nome della celeberrima *rock band*. Un altro proverbio spiega perché un satellite radiotelevisivo si chiami “Early bird” - e gli esempi possono moltiplicarsi.

Spesso i proverbi sono scorciatoie comunicative: potremmo dilungarci nel descrivere come una persona esageri sistematicamente nel descrivere sé stessa e le sue cose – invece diciamo “All his geese are swans” ed è fatta.

Alcuni proverbi ci ricordano differenze di vario genere. Ad esempio quelle meteorologiche: “One swallow doesn't make a summer” perché da loro, più a nord, arrivano più tardi; “Happy is the bride that the sun shines on” vale dove le giornate di sole sono molto più rare di quelle di pioggia (da noi vale il contrario e quindi “Sposa bagnata...”).

Altri proverbi ricorrono a metafore diverse per esprimere concetti sostanzialmente identici: noi parliamo di un elefante in un negozio di cristalleria, in inglese troviamo un toro in un negozio di porcellane.

I proverbi sono anche “la saggezza dei popoli”? Ne dubito: molti si contraddicono, anche nella stessa lingua e ancor più nei confronti con le altre lingue. Alcuni sembrano espressioni di normale buonsenso. Appunto: da persone che non vogliono consigli perché si richiamano al loro “buon senso” ho visto fare di tutto e il suo contrario, nella vita quotidiana ma anche nella mia professione. Con quale gioia per chi si è occupato di metodi didattici, potete immaginare.

1. A bad excuse is better than none at all
2. A bad penny always turns up
3. A bad workman always blames his tools
4. A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush
5. A burnt child dreads the fire
6. A cat has nine lives
7. A cat may look at a king
8. A cheerful wife is the joy of life
9. A constant guest is never welcome
10. A contented mind is a perpetual feast
11. A drowning man will catch a straw
12. A fool and his money are soon parted
13. A fool may sometimes give a wise man counsel
14. A friend in need is a friend indeed
15. A friend is easier lost than found
16. A good beginning is half the battle
17. A good conscience is a soft pillow
18. A good husband makes a good wife
19. A good name is sooner lost than won
20. A good wife is a good prize
21. A house divided against itself cannot stand
22. A little is better than none
23. A living dog is better than a dead lion
24. A man can only die once
25. A man is known by his friends
26. A man is as old as he feels (himself to be)
27. A merry heart goes all the way
28. A miss is as good as a mile
29. A ragged coat may cover an honest man

30. A red sky at night is the shepherd's delight
31. A red sky in the morning is the shepherd's warning
32. A rolling stone gathers no moss
33. A rose by any other name would smell as sweet
34. A soft answer turneth away wrath
35. A stitch in time saves nine
36. A straw will show which way the wind blows
37. A tale never loses in the telling
38. A thing of beauty is a joy for ever
39. A thing you don't want is dear at any price
40. A useful trade is a mine of gold
41. A white wall is a fool's paper
42. A wilful man must have his way
43. A woman's work is never done
44. A woman, a dog and a walnut tree / The more you beat them, the better they be
45. A wonder lasts but nine days
46. A word to the wise is enough
47. Absence makes the heart grow fonder
48. Actions speak louder than words
49. Adam's ale is the best brew
50. Adversity makes a man wise, not rich
51. Adversity makes strange bedfellows
52. After a storm comes a calm
53. All his geese are swans
54. All is fish that comes to the net
55. All lay loads on a willing horse
56. All roads lead to Rome
57. All that glitters is not gold
58. All truth is not always to be told
59. All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy
60. All's fair in love and war
61. All's well that ends well
62. Among the blind the one-eyed man is king
63. An apple a day keeps the doctor away
64. An army marches on its stomach
65. An Englishman's home is his castle
66. An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth
67. An ounce of luck is better than a pound of wisdom
68. As a man makes his bed so he must lie
69. As well be hanged for a sheep as for a lamb
70. At night all cats are grey
  
71. Bad excuses are worse than none
72. Barking dogs seldom bite
73. Be just before you are generous
74. Be sure before you marry of a house wherein to tarry
75. Beauty and folly are often companions
76. Beauty is but skin-deep
77. Beggars' bags are bottomless
78. Best is cheapest
79. Better be a fool than a knave
80. Better be bom lucky than wise

81. Better be alone than in ill company
82. Better bend than break
83. Better buy than borrow
84. Better go to heaven in rags than to hell in embroidery
85. Better late than never (But better, never late)
86. Better lose the saddle than the horse
87. Better to ask the way than go astray
88. Better to wear out than rust out
89. Between two stools you fall to the ground
90. Beware of no man more than thyself
91. Birds of a feather flock together
92. Blessed is he that expects nothing, for he shall never be disappointed
93. Blood is thicker than water
94. Books and friends should be few but good
95. Boys will be boys
96. Brevity is the soul of wit
  
97. Call a spade a spade
98. Care killed the cat
99. Cast not a clout ere May be out
100. Catch the bear before you sell its skin
101. Charity begins at home
102. Cheats never prosper
103. Children and fools tell the truth
104. Children should be seen but not heard
105. Choose a wife by your ear rather than by your eye
106. Circumstances alter cases
107. Cleanliness is next to godliness
108. Cloudy mornings turn to clear evenings
109. Comfort is better than pride
110. Coming events cast their shadows before
111. Content is better than riches
112. Courtesy costs nothing
113. Cowards die many times before their deaths
114. Custom rules the law
115. Cut your coat according to your cloth
  
116. Dead men tell no tales
117. Death is the great leveller
118. Death pays all debts
119. Delays are dangerous
120. Despise not your enemy
121. Discretion is the better part of valour
122. Do as I say, not as I do
123. Do it now
124. Do not count your chickens before they are hatched
125. Do not cry for the moon
126. Do not cry out before you are hurt
127. Do not cut off your nose to spite your face
128. Do not halloo till you are out of the wood
129. Do not keep a dog and bark, yourself
130. Do not keep all your eggs in one basket

131. Do not play with edged tools
132. Do not quarrel with your bread and butter
133. Do not rob Peter to pay Paul
134. Do not spur a willing horse
135. Do not tell tales out of school
136. Do not try to teach your grandmother to suck eggs
137. Do not wear out your welcome
138. Do what is right, come what may
139. Dog does not eat dog
140. Doing nothing is doing ill
141. Dreams go by contraries
142. Dumb dogs are dangerous
143. Dying is as natural as living
  
144. Each day brings its own bread
145. Early to bed and early to rise, / Makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise
146. Empty vessels make the most noise
147. Enough is as good as a feast
148. Envy never enriched any man
149. Even a worm will turn
150. Even the weariest river winds somewhere safe to sea
151. Evening red and morning grey, are the signs of a fine day
152. Every ass likes to hear himself bray
153. Every cloud has a silver lining
154. Every dog has his day
155. Every law has a loophole
156. Every little helps
157. Every man has his price
158. Every man is his own enemy
159. Every man must carry his own cross
160. Every woman would rather be beautiful than good
161. Everybody's business is nobody's business
162. Everything comes to him who waits
163. Example is better than precept
164. Exchange is no robbery
165. Experience is the best teacher
166. Experience must be bought
167. Extremes are dangerous
  
168. Faint heart ne'er won fair lady
169. False friends are worse than bitter enemies
170. Familiarity breeds contempt
171. Findings are keepings
172. Fine feathers make fine birds
173. Fingers were made before forks
174. Fire is a good servant but a bad master
175. First come, first served
176. First impressions are the most lasting
177. Flies are easier caught with honey than with vinegar
178. Fools build houses and wise men live in them
179. Fools rush in where angels fear to tread
180. Forbidden fruit is sweetest

181. Fortune favours fools
182. Fortune favours the brave
183. Fortune favours those who use their judgement
184. Fortune knocks once at everyone's door
185. Friendship should not be all on one side
  
186. Give a dog a bad name and hang him
187. Give a fool enough rope and he will hang himself
188. Give him an inch and he will take a yard
189. Give the devil his due
190. Go to bed with the lamb and rise with the lark
191. Go while the going is good
192. God helps those who help themselves
193. God made the country; man made the town
194. God never sends mouths but he sends meat
195. God sends meat: the devil sends cooks
196. God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb
197. Gold will not buy everything
198. Good wine needs no bush
199. Good words are worth much and cost little
200. Grasp all, lose all
201. Great minds think alike
202. Grin and bear it
  
203. Habit is second nature
204. Half a loaf is better than no bread
205. Handsome is as handsome does
206. Happy is he that is happy in his children
207. Happy is the bride that the sun shines on
208. Happy is the nation that has no history
209. Haste is of the devil
210. Hasty climbers have sudden falls
211. Have two strings to your bow
212. He daren't say "Boo" to a goose
213. He gives twice who gives quickly
214. He has a bee in his bonnet
215. He is like a fish out of water
216. He is rich that has few wants
217. He knows most who speaks least
218. He laughs best who laughs last
219. He preaches best who lives best
220. He runs with the hare and hunts with the hounds
221. He that fears death lives not
222. He that fights and runs away / Lives to fight another day
223. He that goes a-borrowing goes a-sorrowing
224. He that has a tongue in his head may find his way anywhere
225. He that is bom to be hanged will never be drowned
226. He that is down need fear no fall
227. He that pays the piper call the tune
228. He that would command must serve
229. He who hesitates is lost
230. He who rides on a tiger can never dismount

231. He who would hang his dog gives out first that it is mad  
232. Health is better than wealth  
233. Health is not valued till sickness comes  
234. His bark is worse than his bite  
235. Home is where the heart is  
236. Honesty is the best policy  
237. Hope springs eternal in the human breast  
238. Hunger is the best sauce
239. I know on which side my bread is buttered  
240. If at first you don't succeed, try, try again  
241. If it were not for hope the heart would break  
242. If the cap fits, wear it  
243. If the mountain will not go to Muhammed, then Muhammed must go to the mountain  
244. If wishes were horses, beggars would ride  
245. If you cannot bite never show your teeth  
246. If you run after two hares at once you will catch neither  
247. Ill news comes apace  
248. It is a dirty bird that fouls its own nest  
249. It is a long road that has no turning  
250. It is a poor heart that never rejoices  
251. It is all in the day's work  
252. It is an ill wind that blows nobody any good  
253. It is better to travel hopefully than to arrive  
254. It is easier to get money than to keep it  
255. It is easy to bear the misfortunes of others  
256. It is good fishing in troubled waters  
257. It is never too late to mend  
258. It is no use crying over spilt milk  
259. It is the first step that is troublesome  
260. It is too late to shut the stable door after the horse has been stolen  
261. It never rains but it pours  
262. It takes all sorts to make a world  
263. It was the last straw that broke the camel's back  
264. It will all be the same a thousand years hence
265. Jack of all trades, master of none
266. Keep your mouth shut and your ears open  
267. Kill not the goose that lays the golden eggs  
268. Kill two birds with one stone  
269. Kiss and be friends  
270. Knowledge is power
271. Laugh and grow fat  
272. Laugh, and the world laughs with you; / Weep, and you weep alone  
273. Least said, sooner mended  
274. Leave well alone  
275. Let bygones be bygones  
276. Let sleeping dogs lie  
277. Let the cobbler stick to his last  
278. Life is not all beer and skittles

279. Like draws to like the whole world over
280. Listeners seldom hear good of themselves
281. Little pitchers have big ears
282. Little things please little minds
283. Live and learn
284. Live and let live
285. Live not to eat but eat to live
286. London streets are paved with gold
287. Long absent, soon forgotten
288. Look after number one
289. Look at the bright side
290. Look before you leap
291. Lookers-on see most of the game
292. Love is blind
293. Love me little, love me long
294. Love me, love my dog
295. Lovers' quarrels are soon mended
  
296. Maidens should be meek till they are married
297. Make haste slowly
298. Make hay while the sun shines
299. Man proposes; God disposes
300. Manners make the man
301. Many hands make light work
302. March comes in like a lion and goes out like a lamb
303. March winds and April showers bring forth May flowers
304. Marriages are made in heaven
305. Marry in haste; repent at leisure
306. Men make houses; women make homes
307. Misfortunes never come singly
308. Moderation in all things
309. Money breeds money
310. Money is the root of all evil
311. Money is the sinews of war
312. Money talks
313. More haste, less speed
314. Murder will out
315. Music has charms to soothe the savage breast
  
316. Nature abhors a vacuum
317. Necessity is the mother of invention
318. Necessity knows no law
319. Needs must go when the devil drives
320. Neither a borrower nor a lender be
321. Never buy a pig in a poke
322. Never cross a bridge till you come to it
323. Never do things by halves
324. Never give advice unasked
325. Never hit a man when he's down
326. Never look a gift horse in the mouth
327. Never meet trouble half way
328. Never put off till tomorrow what you can do today.

329. Never refuse a good offer  
330. Never say “die”; up, man, and try  
331. Never spoil a ship for a ha’porth of tar  
332. Never swap horses in midstream  
333. Never trouble trouble till trouble troubles you  
334. No bees, no honey; no work, no money  
335. No fool like an old fool  
336. No man cries “stinking fish”  
337. No man is a hero to his valet  
338. No man is indispensable  
339. No news is good news  
340. No offence taken when none is meant  
341. Nobody’s enemy but his own  
342. None but the brave deserves the fair  
343. None so blind as those that will not see  
344. None so deaf as those that will not hear  
345. Nothing is certain but death — and taxes  
346. Nothing is cheap if you don’t want it  
347. Nothing succeeds like success  
348. Nothing venture, nothing have
349. Of two evils choose the less  
350. Old birds are not caught with chaff  
351. Old customs are best  
352. Old shoes are easiest  
353. Once a thief, always a thief  
354. One good turn deserves another  
355. One half of the world does not know how the other half lives  
356. One man’s meat is another man’s poison  
357. One may lead a horse to the water, but twenty cannot make it drink  
358. One swallow does not make a summer  
359. Other times, other manners  
360. Out of sight, out of mind
361. Penny wise, pound foolish  
362. Pity is akin to love  
363. Possession is nine-tenths (points) of the law  
364. Practice makes perfect  
365. Prevention is better than cure (An ounce of prevention is better than a pound of cure)  
366. Pride goes before a fall  
367. Punctuality is the politeness of kings  
368. Put your foot down where you mean to stand  
369. Put your shoulder to the wheel  
370. Rain before seven, fine before eleven  
371. Remove an old tree and it will wither to death  
372. Rome was not built in a day  
373. Rumour is a lying jade
374. Satan always finds work for idle hands  
375. Save me from my friends  
376. Say nothing but think the more  
377. Scratch my back and I’ll scratch yours



378. See Naples and die
379. Self praise is no recommendation
380. Set a beggar on horseback and he will ride to the devil
381. Set a thief to catch a thief
382. Share and share alike
383. Silence gives consent
384. Sleep over it
385. Slow and steady wins the race
386. Spare the rod and spoil the child
387. Speak of a man as you find him
388. Speak when you are spoken to; come when you are called
389. Speech is silver, silence is golden
390. Still waters run deep
391. Stolen fruit is sweetest
392. Strike while the iron is hot
393. Sweet are the uses of adversity
  
394. Take care of the pence and the pounds will take care of themselves
395. Take no thought for the morrow
396. Tell a lie and stick to it
397. The best things are hard to come by
398. The better the day, the better the deed
399. The cat would eat fish but is loth to wet her feet
400. The child is father of the man
401. The day must have an end
402. The devil is not so black as he is painted
403. The devil looks after his own
404. The early bird catches the worm
405. The end justifies the means
406. The exception proves the rule
407. The grapes are sour, as the fox said when he could not reach them
408. The higher up, the greater the fall
409. The King can do no wrong
410. The King is dead: long live the King
411. The last drop makes the cup run over
412. The leopard cannot change its spots
413. The mills of God grind slowly, but they grind exceedingly small
414. The more the merrier
415. The more you have, the more you want
416. The old cow thinks she was never a calf
417. The pot calls the kettle black
418. The proof of the pudding is in the eating
419. The road to hell is paved with good intentions
420. The watched pot never boils
421. The wish is father to the thought
422. There is a skeleton in the cupboard
423. There is a snake in the grass
424. There is a time for all things
425. There is life in the old dog yet
426. There is many a slip between cup and lip
427. There is many a true word spoken in jest
428. There is no royal road to learning

429. There is no rule without an exception  
430. There is no smoke without fire  
431. There is no time like the present  
432. There's a good time coming  
433. There's no place like home  
434. There's safety in numbers  
435. They that live longest see most  
436. Those who live in glass houses should not throw stones  
437. Those whom the gods love die young  
438. Though I say it that shouldn't  
439. Thoughts are free  
440. Time and tide wait for no man  
441. Time flies  
442. Time is money  
443. Tit for tat is fair play  
444. To be forewarned is to be forearmed  
445. To know the disease is half the cure  
446. Tomorrow is another day  
447. Tomorrow never comes  
448. Too many cooks spoil the broth  
449. Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from  
it  
450. Trouble runs off him like water off a duck's back  
451. True love never grows old  
452. Trust in God and keep your powders dry  
453. Truth is stranger than fiction  
454. Truth lies at the bottom of a well  
455. Truth will conquer  
456. Turn over a new leaf  
457. Two blacks do not make a white  
458. Two heads are better than one  
459. Two is company; three is none  
460. Two wrongs do not make a right  
  
461. Union is strength  
  
462. Virtue is its own reward  
  
463. Walls have ears  
464. Wash your dirty linen at home  
465. Waste not; want not  
466. Well begun is half done  
467. What is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander  
468. What is worth doing at all is worth doing well  
469. What's learnt in the cradle lasts till the tomb  
470. When a man is going down-hill, everyone will give him a push  
471. When in Rome do as the Romans do  
472. When poverty comes in at the door, love flies out at the window  
473. When rogues fall out, then honest men come by their own  
474. When the cat is away the mice will Play  
475. When the wind is in the east I It's neither good for man nor beast  
476. Where (while) there's life there's hope

477. Where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise  
478. Where there's a will, there's a way Who will bell the cat?  
479. Whom God will destroy he first makes mad  
480. Why keep a cow when you can buy milk?  
481. Wink at small faults  
482. Words are but wind, but seeing's believing  
483. Work won't kill but worry will
484. You are never too old to learn  
485. You can't eat your cake and have it  
486. You can't get blood out of a stone  
487. You can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear  
488. You can't make an omelette without breaking eggs  
489. You can't teach an old dog new tricks  
490. You cannot see the wood for the trees  
491. You dig your grave with your teeth  
492. You drive a coach and four through an act of Parliament  
493. You may have too much of a good thing  
494. You must not expect old heads on young shoulders  
495. You never know till you have tried  
496. You never know your luck  
497. Youth and age will never agree  
498. Youth must have its fling