

## OLD SAWS REPAIRED

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The roots of mangled proverbs as wordplay are historically distant. In Cervantes' classic *Don Quixote*, one humorous hallmark of Sancho Panchez was his abuse of proverbs; Sancho piled proverb on proverb, using garbled and inflated language, often citing them where inapplicable. The long-running radio show *Easy Aces* brought the form to modern mass entertainment as early as 1931. "You've got the cards before the horse," "the laugh's on the other foot," and "familiarity breeds attempt" were a few of comedienne Jane Ace's insights on the show.

Cubes are an easy way to mix and match proverbs to comic effect. To construct cubes from the accompanying illustrations, I suggest obtaining a few children's alphabet blocks or the calendars printed on unfolding cubes. Alternatively, I have constructed cubes by cutting and folding pieces of stiff cardboard. I prefer cubes that are about 1½ to 2 inches on each side. Then reproduce the illustrations on a copier. Many copiers have an enlargement setting that can be set to adapt the size of the accompanying illustration to the size of your cubes. Cut out and paste the illustrated cube faces onto your cubes. Each set of two strips is numbered, and each such pair goes on the same cube. To further orient the strips, each strip contains a large dot. Position the strips so that the dots are adjacent to each other.

Now you are set to create new proverbs. Pick any three cubes. Choose a beginning from the first cube, a verb from the second cube, and an ending from the third cube. Put the cubes in a row to read the mangled proverb. They might read "One Rotten Apple / Is Worth / Two In the Bush." With the same face upwards, rotate the set 180 degrees, and a second proverb will appear. Turn the set over, so the original sides are face down, and more mangled proverbs will appear on the newly visible face.

As an extra puzzle, the nine cubes can be arranged to form a unique three-by-three square. The front and back faces of the square will contain only original, unjumbled proverbs in each row. Similarly, the left and right sides of the three-by-three squares will consist of unjumbled proverbs. A solution is given at the end of this issue.

Interested readers will notice several features of the cubes:

- Only proverbs of the form THIRD PERSON SINGULAR SUBJECT + SINGULAR VERB (or VERB PHRASE) + OBJECT were chosen. This insures that any subject line could be paired with any verb line, with no chance of single-with-plural discrepancy. This eliminated many proverbs with plural subjects ("birds of a feather"), others with no subject ("don't count..."), or no object ("easy come, easy go"). Also, briefer proverbs were preferred, so as to fit smaller cubes.
- Every side of a cube contains two word sets, one right side up, the other upside down. If the top set is a subject, then the bottom set will be an object; on the reverse side of the cube, the top side will be an object and the bottom a subject. This will ensure that every row of three cubes that forms one recast proverb actually forms four proverbs.

- Every cube contains two opposite sides that contain only verb forms. This ensures that every set of three cubes will form fractured proverbs. In the illustrations, I have shaded the faces with verb forms so they can be rapidly distinguished.
- These cubes certainly do not exhaust the possibilities. I have created a similar set using plural subjects (“loose lips”) or imperative verb auxiliaries (“never” or “don’t”) in place of the singular subjects of the present cubes. Also, any additional twelve proverbs of the form described above can be used to make three new cubes that augment the set shown.

In the November 1988 *Word Ways*, Jan Ackerson introduced a two-dimensional predecessor of these cubes. Attributing the idea to her father, she described a set of tiles with parts of proverbs inscribed on them. Using mixing and matching, amusing results could be formed. The cubes described in the present article add several refinements to her concept. The discipline of SUBJECT / VERB / OBJECT phases on each cube, as well as the pairing of two phrases on each face, the symmetry of opposite faces of each cube, and the natural use of cubes as dice, all combine to create a new game.

I hope you will enjoy these cubes and derive new insights from them. As these oracular devices remind us, “Happiness / Is In / Idle Hands,” and “All Work And No Play / Is Worse Than / The Devil..”

Love     Another	<i>Is Thicker Than</i> ● <i>Makes</i>	Curiosity     Company
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A Thousand Words     Every Dog	<i>Is Father To</i>     <i>Is Mightier Than</i>	One Hand    ● The Barrel
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All Work And No Play	None
Never Won	Is
The Eye Of The Beholder	Familiarity

A Thing Of Beauty	Two In The Bush
Finds Work For	Has
The Whole World	The Savage Rerast

Every Dark Cloud	Idle Hands
Necessity	Gold
The Man	The Pen

Is Worth	Is
An Island	A Stitch In Time
Has Charms To Soothe	Loves

1

2

One Rotten Apple	The Other
Is Not	Is The Mother Of
Love And War	Drink

A Joy Forever	A Bird In The Hand
Saves	Is
Music	A Lover

The Squeaky Wheel	Happiness
Strange Bedfellows	Blood
The Worm	A Rolling Stone

Is Fair In	Is The Curse Of
Another's Poison	Faint Heart
Breeds	Is In

3

4

One Picture =====	Its Day =====
<i>Gathers</i> =====●	<i>Catches</i> =====
All That Glitters =====	Invention =====

5

All Evil =====●	Time =====
<i>Gets</i> =====	<i>Cannot Buy</i> =====
No Man =====	Nine =====

<i>Spoils</i> =====	<i>Washes</i> =====
Fair Maiden =====	One Man's Meat =====
<i>Has</i> =====●	<i>Is Worth</i> =====

The Grease =====	Money =====
Water =====●	Politics =====
No Moss =====	The Early Bird =====

9

One Good Turn =====	All =====
<i>Is The Root Of</i> =====●	<i>Heals</i> =====
Misery =====	The Cat =====

7

The Working Class =====●	All =====
<i>Makes Jack</i> =====	<i>Is Better Than</i> =====
Beauty =====	Contempt =====

<i>Killed</i> =====	<i>Loves</i> =====
The Love Of Money =====	All Wounds =====●
<i>Conquers</i> =====	<i>Deserves</i> =====

8

The Child =====●	The Sword =====
A Dull Boy =====	Half A Loaf =====
A Silver Lining =====	The Devil =====