

Mandinka Proverbs and Sayings

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1. If you go to a village and find your hosts screaming like hyenas, you must do the same. If instead you scream like a goat, the hyenas will eat you.
2. If you are in the bush and see a frog at the top of a tree, you should climb up to join it, because it is not safe to stay on the ground.
3. If the rooster follows those fetching water, it is because it can no longer find those pounding grains.
4. When night falls, all the birds return to their nests.
5. A hyena without a weapon is preferable to a goat with a rifle.
6. All the cutters are looking for knives.

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7. Regardless of the length of the monkey's tail, when you pinch it, it hurts.
8. If no one sees an old person hiding in the dark, they can see themselves.
9. The rooster also sweats, but because of its feathers, nobody knows it.
10. You can't look at the bottom of a bottle with both eyes.
11. If a mouse climbs up your canary and you hit the mouse, the mouse will die but so will your canary.
12. If a tree breaks up there, it will fall to the ground.
13. The dwarf does not bother chasing after the one who annoys him. He will just sit and wait for them at the bend [in the road].

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14. Wash a loincloth in the evening and it will be clean, but it will not be dry [by the morning].
15. Even the ram with a bent spine knows the hour of the afternoon prayer.
16. It is better to talk about ten topics than to talk about one topic ten times.
17. Even if your ripped pants allow you to stand, avoid sitting down with them.

18. If a child has nine nannies and all the nannies have flaws, the child will also be flawed.
19. If you see that an old man has his mouth full of flour, you can be sure that he has enough saliva in his mouth to swallow it.
20. If you see a cow with a ripped tail near a stream, it is not necessarily driving away a fly but looking for a place to drink.

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21. It is two smart people who can throw an egg at each other without the eggs breaking.
22. If we hear that a particular village was pleasant in the past but that now there is nothing left, it is because those living there have become enemies.
23. If you sometimes hear someone say, "God is great," it is not necessarily for prayer. He must have seen something extraordinary.
24. If you spend all night making arrangements for someone, and in the morning they ask you why you have red eyes, anger will take hold of you.
25. If a child says he is going to clear this part of the field next year, he has learned it from the adults.
26. If you hear that a wild cassava is big, it is because the tree that supported its growth was solid.
27. A large amount of meat gives a tasty sauce.
28. Better to shell the peanuts all together. If we take it in turns, there will be more husks than peanuts

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29. Whoever goes to hunt the lion should expect to howl in fear.
30. If a person does not want to walk in front or behind, it is because they prefer to walk alone.
31. If you call on a traitor in hell and he doesn't answer, he's ashamed but he's still there.
32. The frog likes water, but not hot water.
33. If you don't have a lot of tears, then start crying early on.
34. If a child refuses to follow others, it is because his mother did not go to the rice paddies.

- 35. Laying an egg on a stone is no easy task.
- 36. The bush fire is often accompanied by the wind.

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- 37. A shallow water fisherman cannot avoid water.
- 38. Sometimes a field worker comes home late at night, but the field does not move.
- 39. If a child is very good at running, you should take him to sandy ground [and see how he does].
- 40. One cannot dream without being asleep.
- 41. If you regard only white goats to be fleshy, know that black goats can also be fleshy.
- 42. If the hyena becomes the imam of the goats, none of them will come out alive at the end of the prayer.
- 43. The cotton tree is bigger than an ax, but it is the ax that makes it fall.
- 44. If you go hunting in a place in the bush that you know, even if you don't take any game, at least you don't get lost.

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- 45. If you can't be a perfume to those around you, then don't be a thorn to them instead.
- 46. The hands that have tied the lion are the ones that will untie it.
- 47. We know that corn will give a good harvest from the germination period.
- 48. If the bird does not leave its nest, then its nest has not caught fire.
- 49. If you don't set the turtle's tail on fire, it won't pop its head out of the shell.
- 50. Not all black sheep are rams.
- 51. A hen never puts dangerous things under her chicks.
- 52. A toothless person does not have to interfere in the fight of the person looking for a toothbrush.

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- 53. The strength of the crocodile is [in the] water.

54. On the day of crossing the river, no one should be thirsty.
55. A student does not know the experiences of his master, but his master has had the experience of being a student.
56. Preparing the entertainment space announces the party.
57. He who is laughing cannot fan the fire [by blowing on it] at the same.
58. The best way to escape meanness is to distance yourself from the person.
59. Not all ways of running allow you to catch the squirrel before it enters its hole.
60. If you see an old man planting a stick in front of and behind himself, it is because he does not want to fall.
61. If the stick says it can no longer stand or lie on the ground, then it's time to get rid of it.

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62. If you don't own a goat, don't hurt the hyena.
63. We always blame the weakest.
64. To shout well, you must have a strong voice.
65. Silver jewelry around the foot becomes more beautiful when worn by someone with deafening footsteps.
66. The one who dispenses medicine to the king is the same one who fetches the medicinal plants for the king.
67. Everyone for themselves.
68. If you walk past a lighted room and come into a dark room to look for something, it's because you care about it.
69. If you ask someone who already has a load on their head to help lower the one on yours, it is because there is no one else without a load available.

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70. If you are friends with a monkey, one day he will be able to bring down for you what you forgot at the top of the cotton tree.
71. The red monkey is not afraid of the dog but rather of its barking.
72. The monkey is not afraid of its mother's aggression.
73. Mistaking rain droplets for nails and then saying "I didn't know " is nonsense.
74. The chameleon takes on the color of the plant that it is holding.
75. A goat must not venture into the territory of hyenas.
76. The monkey whose tail has been bitten by a dog runs in a different way than the solitary monkey.
77. The hyena's legs are faster than the time it takes to smoke a pipe.

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78. Even though the field work is finished, the borders of the fields remain.
79. Two adjacent rivers are fed by the same water.
80. The word of an old man is as strong as the meat of an old ox.
81. Water runoff lasts longer than rain.
82. A hidden stone can spoil the edge of an ax.
83. For as long as there are diseases, there will be remedies.
84. To say that they (people) are fighting, is not the way to stop a fight.
85. If the race does not last long enough, we will not know who comes in last place.

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86. It is the squirrel that goes into the hole, but it is not the hole that goes around the squirrel.
87. Unclear.
88. If a giraffe jumps in the prairie, its calf will not crawl after it.
89. Nothing under the hair is unknown to the louse.

90. It is a small reward [amount of money] which will make the griot's voice sound beautiful.
91. A tasty sauce makes one sit.
92. If your hands are in pain and you shake your in-laws' hands out of respect, you shouldn't be ashamed to cry out in front of them.
93. If you want to annoy an intelligent person, put them together with a stupid person.

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94. You cannot be defeated in a fight, and then go out beating your chest and bragging.
95. We feel in the morning that the day will be pleasant.
96. If the cobra does not move, it is because there is no bush fire behind it.
97. If a dead man's corpse hides his secrets from those washing him, he will certainly bring his impurities with him to Judgment Day.¹
98. Throwing small stones at each other can end up hurting both people.
99. Only the mother of a one-legged baby knows how to put it on her back.
100. If you go to a party where you are not invited and you break a calabash there, it's your fault.

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101. Don't let go of the fish you hold in your hand for the one under your foot.
102. No matter how fast the horse is, we hit it to run even faster.
103. In a friendship between three people, two are certainly closer.
104. If someone makes you drink pus, you will also drink blood.
105. Having a goat on the other side of the river doesn't make you a goat owner.
106. Nice pants being worn by ugly buttocks.²

¹ This proverb refers to people who hide their faults to the point that they cannot be helped to get rid of them. Thus, they will hold onto them forever.

² This is said about careless people who are given important responsibilities they will certainly not fulfill.

107. All the people traveling together in a pirogue are often in agreement [for the sake of safe passage].

108. He has washed his head with holy water ³

109. The messenger of God is better than the messenger of a mere mortal.

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110. A roundabout path does not cross a river.

111. The wild dog knows which plants to wipe its excrements on. ⁴

112. The badger uses the hog-and-woodpecker's means of defense.

113. If you're cutting a long stick, cut it to your size, not someone else's.

114. You can go so far as to hide in a hole because of diarrhea.

115. An old man does not wear ripped pants for fun.

116. If there is no compassion in the dead, there is divine mercy.

117. What is a hiding place for the visitor is a domain known to the host.

118. If you hear that today we are returning to the place where we wash the clothes, if it is because we had a great time there. It must be said frankly.

[Page 16 (proverb 119 to 125) is missing]

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126. If you urinate on the mat, it will sink under your feet.

127. Everyone knows where to find the food that makes their stomach happy.

128. If you once carried a bag of sugar and a bag of salt on your head, you certainly know which one was heavier.

³ A phrase meaning: "What a lucky person!"

⁴ The author uses the metaphor of the *Sunkajo* (a wild dog), to imply that "Everyone knows who not to mess with."

129. Even if you cannot leave someone all the nourishing paste, wisdom commands you to leave them a small taste anyways.

130. If you want kids to laugh at you, pretend you're crazy.

131. Getting the hen into the chicken coop is the owner's responsibility, but life in the coop is the hen's responsibility.

132. No matter how long a palm wine jar lasts, it will always smell bad.

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133. The first foot that enters the clear water will be the cleanest.

134. The cow that mooed is not the only thirsty cow.

135. Rather than glorifying the time of your father and mother, it is better to speak of your own time.

136. The palm tree's shade is not for its own benefit.

137. If you see a pregnant woman making fun of a woman at childbirth, she is not ignorant of what awaits her.

138. Bringing together a pack of dogs in an open place is not easy.

139. If you climb on the leaves of a tree, it is because you want to show that you can fall well.

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140. To escape an argument, you must go to your room.

141. Don't kiss me with couscous-covered hands.⁵

142. Let's run, let's hide, all this means only one thing: to save ourselves.

143. If a child follows his mother crying, it is because he wants her to pick him up.

144. The beauty of salt water does not encourage you to drink it.

145. He who is used to telling stories will always add more salt to the stories.

⁵ Here it is a question of not involving someone in your troubles.

146. Foot on the ground, snake on the ground.

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147. The millet is washed with both hands.

148. If a red cow killed your mother, every time you see a laterite [red] termite mound, you will run away from it.

149. You cannot be a guardian of hell and sleep in the cold.

150. In matters concerning running, the hyena is the best.

151. The turtle likes to run, but it does not have a flexible waist.

152. A fence without stakes cannot stand upright.

153. If you need peanuts, do not go to the squirrel.⁶

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154. The knife cannot cut its own handle.

155. Burping doesn't mean being full, but it doesn't mean starving to death, either.

156. A shallow water crocodile only attacks a person based on their weakness.

157. Quick movements do not break the snake's back.

158. The hornless sheep do not fight with the horned sheep.

159. No matter how long a tree trunk remains in the water, it will never turn into a crocodile.

160. If you plug my nostrils and cover my mouth, how do you want me to breathe?

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161. If I give you my snot and saliva, you can't swallow either.

162. When the panther dies, the cheerful dog owners will play with its tail.

163. The calabash breaks between two simple spirits.

⁶ Here, peanuts are a metaphor for solutions to one's problems.

164. To a pregnant goat, we bring a feeding tray.
165. If we do not visit each other's homes, we must meet in the bush when we need to meet.
166. If we wash you, it's up to you to rinse your body.
167. As soon as someone calls you, answer them. If you don't, when you decide to answer him, he's the one who won't answer you.

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168. What is ragged for one is new clothes for another.
169. In certain circumstances, the hare becomes as important as a large ram.
170. You cannot sit on a termite mound and insult the earth.
171. What you did not say when you were attached, do not say when you are detached.
172. Better to plan ahead than to rely on the blink of an eye.
173. Acting wisely is better than achieving great things carelessly.
174. If you find the monitor lizard eating sand, don't blame it. Know it's very angry.

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175. If you are asked to choose between a person and your friend, you will choose your friend. But if you are asked to choose between yourself and your friend, you will choose yourself.
176. If a tree falls on someone, it's up to you to save them. But if a tree falls on you, someone else will save you.
177. If one hare runs faster than another, it is because it received some support.
178. No need to show off your strength after you have been beaten in a fight.
179. Trying to overtake another [person] can result in a race.
180. Good evening, good morning are all ways of starting a conversation.

(212) The old man may not know the dishes intended for him, but he knows the words intended for him.

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181. If you don't knock on the hole, you won't know where the bat sleeps.
182. Before using the ax to clear your field, try the hoe first.
183. No matter how long the fruit picker stays in the tree, he will never turn into a leaf.
184. When you build a house on the ruins of an old house, it will last longer.
185. Bad is the grandmother who rejects her grandchild.
186. Going to find embers in the kitchen does not give you the right to lift the lid of the pot.
187. Instead of telling the hungry person to wash their hands, tell them to come and eat.

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188. The game whose skin you want intact is precisely the one that will be hit on the back.
189. The birdwatcher usually sees birds in other people's farms, but not when they are destroying his own farm.⁷
190. If you see a weaverbird at the cotton tree, it has been attracted by the millet.
191. The egret which watches over the cow gains neither tallow nor butter.
192. An appetizer helps one to wait for the meal.
193. The way the cat catches the mouse is different from the way it [typically] walks.
194. The staff that you have in your hands will be the one that serves you when the serpent emerges.

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195. What the eyes see, the heart feels.
196. It is not the eyes that carry the load, but they can judge what the head is able to carry.
197. If you see the dog with prey, you will see the squirrel at home.
198. We must not burn our hands when a ladle is next to the pot.

⁷ This is about people who see flaws only in others.

199. There is no greater fool than someone who tries to collect feces with urine.
200. The rope to tie an elephant is certainly more significant than the one to tie a goat.
201. He who is hungry is jealous of the one who is full.

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202. If the words spoken are interesting, the eyes will not look away.
203. If being on horseback causes the rider to carry an excessive load, he will be eager to reach his destination.
204. It is the one who has no knowledge of the donkey who grabs him by the rear leg.
205. If a scorpion stings you on a scar, the wound becomes infected even faster.
206. If you make a good choice, it will satisfy you for longer.
207. If you see a puppy chasing its mom, it's because it's playing.
208. Everyone mourns the dead, but deep inside, we deplore the void they leave.
209. Just as one person can endure very severe headaches and survive, another person may die from much less pain.
210. If someone doesn't offer you honey, they won't tell you things sweeter than honey.
211. If the coward watching the back of the line suddenly feels a single baboon's hand on him, the dogs won't run as fast as he does.

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212. When you don't protect your back, you must keep turning around.
213. It's the turtle hunter who forgets, but the one he refused to give turtle meat to never forgets.
214. The cheese maker that was planted [where he stands] is different from the one that grew all alone in nature.
215. Bird, if you want to hear that you are beautiful, only pass by your admirers once.

216. My hand sank into the ashes.⁸
217. A restless little bird will destroy its nest.
218. Your physical acts cannot be contained in a Fula straw hut.
219. If you hear someone saying, "I will do it for the sake of Allah," the intended person is certainly not around.
220. In one path, you can find two different paths.
221. How can a dog make fun of the shortness of the goat's horns?
222. The dog owner does not eat his dog when the goat's owner eats his goat.
223. If a small bird joins a party of large birds, it risks losing many feathers.

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224. We hunt the game of the day with the dog that is available.
225. Any puppy becomes aggressive when he is near his home.
226. If the mud house has no cracks, the lizard will not enter.
227. They have arrived, and arrived well.⁹
228. If you want to hit your enemy with a stick, be aware that it can also hit your friend.
229. A worrying hen is one whose chicks survive longer.
230. Unclear.
231. Even if a big concern has disappeared, we will continue to talk about it.
232. Rather than lighting the lamp in the blind man's room, better to help him salt his sauce.
233. The frog does not know that there are two kinds of water in the world until the day it is sprinkled with hot water.
234. The passer-by can repeat the words he hears without understanding their meaning.

⁸ Here it is a question of being in dirty sheets.

⁹ Here the expression is used when a traveler arrives at his destination without any trouble during the trip.