

Aphoristically Speaking

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“Complete the Aphorism” - gap-fill thinking activity

aphorism = a tersely phrased statement of a truth or opinion; an adage, or saying. Aphorisms are a fun way to examine language.

And incomplete aphorisms make us examine language even more carefully. So I’ve provided ten aphorisms for the Polish writer Stanislaw Lec (1909-1969). Each sentence is missing a verb.

Directions:

You, or your students, supply the missing verb. (The verb “to be” and its forms are not acceptable).

First give students only PART A.

They will have a good idea what verb is missing. But it’s not important if they find the exact word Lec used. This gap-fill activity is open-ended. That means there is more than one correct answer. Students can supply any word that makes sense. Discuss the answers.

Next, do PART B.

Here the aphorisms are less clear, and the choice of verb will COMPLETELY affect the meaning. Students should then explain what their version means.

Finally, give students the original aphorisms from Stanislaw Lec. Ask them to compare their version with Lec’s. Perhaps they will like theirs better.

Part A

1. The weakest link in a chain is the strongest, because it can _____ the chain.
2. No snowflake in the avalanche ever _____ responsible.
3. All is in the hands of man. Therefore _____ them often.
4. Is it progress if a cannibal _____ a knife and fork?
5. Thoughts, like fleas, jump from man to man. But they don’t _____ everybody.

Part B

6. He who _____ still walks.
7. To _____ a man, you have to know his pleasures.
8. Even the longest snake must _____.
9. The window to the world can be _____ by a newspaper.
10. Don’t _____ the heart, it _____ your blood.

Write Your Own Famous Sayings

Write your own famous sayings. You can use the Stanislaw Lec aphorisms as examples.

Directions:

Brainstorm with the class first to see if they know any witty or famous sayings. Like this: "The only thing worse than being talked about is NOT being talked about" (Oscar Wilde). Or "It's such a fine line between clever and stupid." (Nigel Tufnel and David St. Hubbins in the film *Spinal Tap*).

If you are not wise or witty, just pretend that you are.

Students be share their own famous sayings, make a book of them, or decorate the walls of the room.

Answers to "Complete the Aphorism"

Answers Part A 1. break 2. feels 3. wash 4. uses 5. bite

Answers Part B 6. limps 7. torture 8. end 9. covered 10. trust, wants