

# Two activities based on aphorisms

**Level: A1-B1**

Christine Röhl



<https://www.teaching-english-and-spanish.de>



## Introduction

An aphorism is "a concise statement of a principle or truth, usually an observation about life; a maxim. Aphorisms can be both witty and insightful."<sup>1</sup> These characteristics make them an interesting genre for language learning and, because of their brevity, suitable for lower levels. Below are two examples of how aphorisms can be used in the classroom.

The first activity is based on aphorisms about books. In the pre-reading phase, students fill in the questionnaire about their reading habits and discuss them with a partner. After a short round of feedback, the teacher tells the students that the drawings relate to aphorisms and that an aphorism is a short statement that expresses an idea in a concise and coherent way. The students then match the drawings to the aphorisms.

The second activity is about aphorisms about cats and dogs. During the pre-reading activity, students discuss the questions. Useful animals are guard dogs, guide dogs, rescue dogs, therapy dogs and cats. After a short round of feedback, the teacher tells the students that the drawings relate to aphorisms and that an aphorism is a short statement that expresses an idea in a concise and coherent way. The students then match the drawings to the aphorisms.

There is no aphorism for picture b. The teacher asks the students to think of an aphorism that fits the picture.

---

<sup>1</sup> Morner, K. and Rausch, R. (1992). *NTC's Dictionary of Literary Terms*. Chicago: NTC  
2 – Christine Röhl

## Aphorisms about books

### Pre-reading activities

#### Questionnaire

How many books do you read in a year?

What kind of books do you like - novels, poetry, biographies, detective stories, fantasy books, comics, science fiction, popular science...?

How many books do you own?

What is your favourite book?

Who is your favourite author?

Where do you usually read?

Do you have an e-book reader?

What language(s) do you read in?

On a scale of one to ten, how important is reading in your life?

Which author would you like to meet?

Which fictional character would you like to have a chat with?

Do you know of a book that has been made into a good film?

#### Match the aphorisms with the pictures.

A book is like a garden carried in the pocket. - Arabian proverb

My books are friends that never fail me. - Thomas Carlyle

To travel far, there is no better ship than a book. - Emily Dickinson

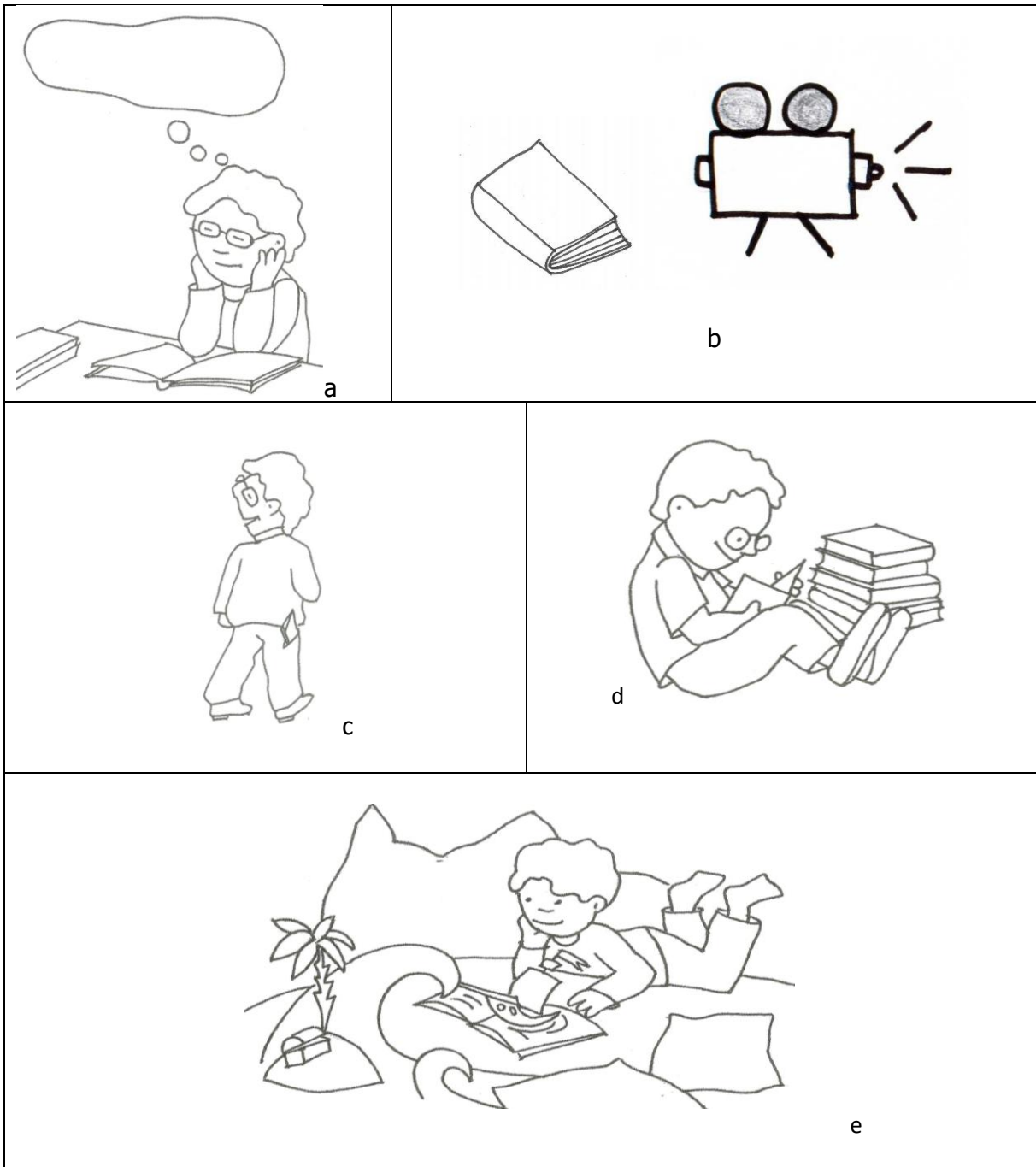
Never judge a book by its movie. - J.W. Eagan

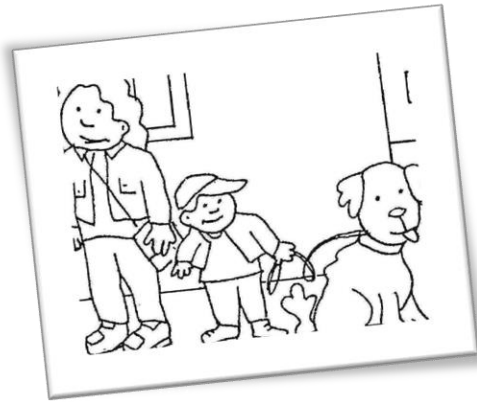
A book is a device to ignite the imagination. — Alan Bennett

#### Post-reading activity

Write a phrase about books and reading.

# Aphorisms





## **Aphorisms about cats and dogs**

### **Pre-reading activities**

#### **Some facts about pets in Britain**

In Britain live approximately 8.5 million dogs and 8 million cats. About 1 in 2 households own a pet with around 20 million pets owned (excluding fish).

Source: rspca

Over 90 percent of pet owners in the UK say that owning a pet makes them feel happy and 88 percent feel that pet ownership improves their overall quality of life.

Source: statistica.com

#### **Discuss the following questions:**

Have you got a pet?

Do you prefer cats or dogs?

Can cats and dogs be useful?

Why do people have pets?

What pet do you like best?

**Match the aphorisms with the pictures.**

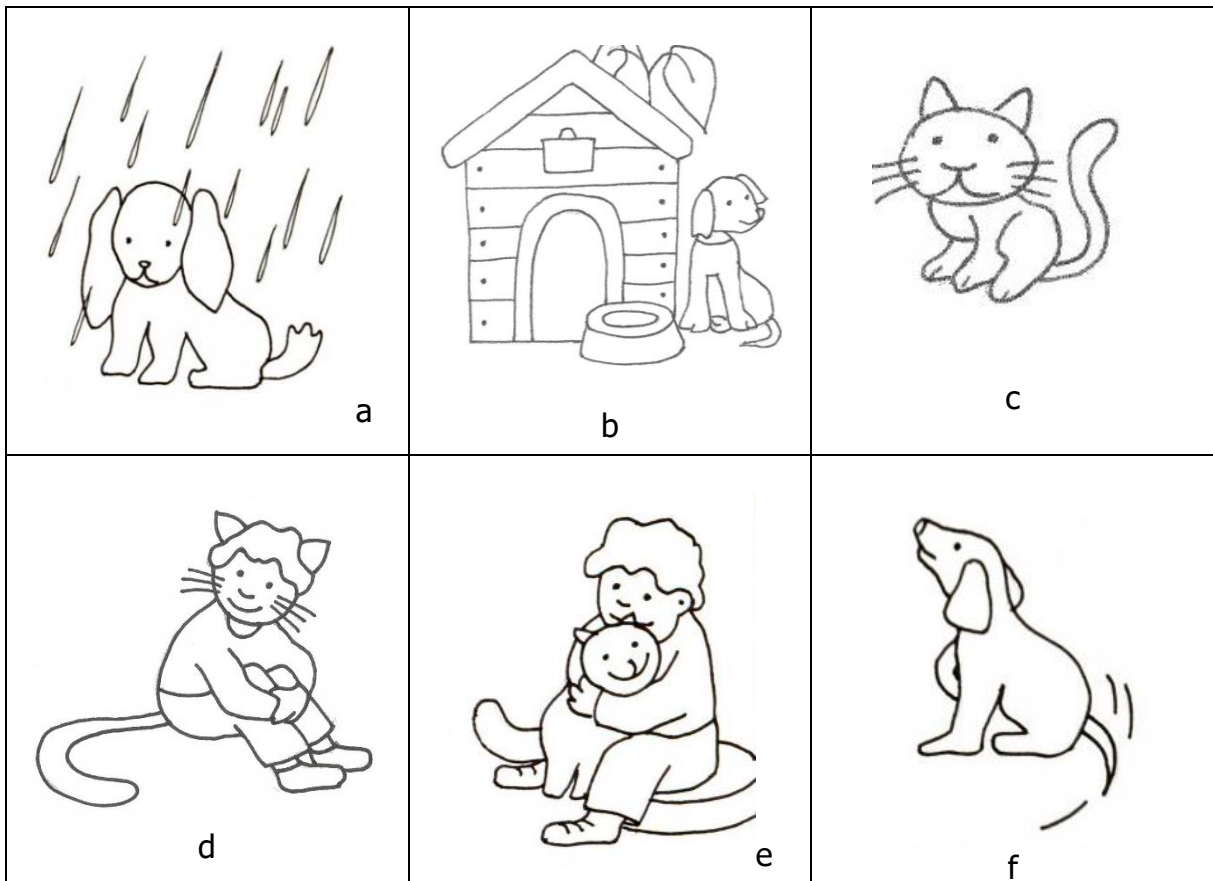
If man could be crossed with the cat it would improve man, but deteriorate the cat.- Mark Twain

The ideal of calm exists in a sitting cat." - Jules Renard

However tight I shut my eyes, there will always be a stray dog somewhere in the world who'll stop me being happy. - Jean Anouilh

The reason a dog has so many friends is that he wags his tail instead of his tongue.

God made the cat to give man the pleasure of stroking a tiger." — Joseph Méry



**Post-reading activity**

There is one picture left. Can you think of an aphorism to describe it?