Nā ʻŌlelo Noʻeau

ʻŌlelo noʻeau are proverbs or poetical sayings that are commonly used when speaking Hawaiian. Most ʻōlelo noʻeau can be found in the book, “ʻŌlelo Noʻeau – Hawaiian Proverbs and Poetical Sayings,” by Mary Kawena Pukui. It is a valuable resource for ʻōlelo Hawaiʻi and moʻomeheu Hawaiʻi (culture). There are ʻōlelo noʻeau for all types of scenarios. ʻŌlelo noʻeau can also be used as a motto for an organization, a classroom, or even as a personal motto.

Hana (working/task)

E kaupē aku nō i ka hoe a kō mai.
*Put forward the paddle and draw it back.*
Go on with the task that is started and finish it.

Hoʻokahi nō lā o ka malihini.
*A stranger only for a day.*
After the first day as a guest, one must help with the work.

Komo mai kāu māpuna hoe.
*Put in your dip of the paddle.*
Pitch in.

Kūlia i ka nuʻu.
*Strive to reach the highest.*
Motto of Queen Kapiʻolani.
-Strive to do your best.

Ma ka hana ka ʻike.
*In working one learns.*
-Knowledge can be acquired by doing.

Mai makaʻu i ka hana, makaʻu i ka moloā.
*Donʻt fear work, fear laziness.*
-Donʻt be lazy.

Na ka ʻeleu miki.
*(The prize) goes to the quick one.*
-Similar to the saying, “The early bird gets the worm.”
Unite in order to progress.

When one wants to dance the hula, bashfulness should be left at home.

-Don’t be shy. Participate! This does not just pertain to hula. This can be used in all situations when one is apprehensive in participating in an activity.

No deed lacks a reward.

Every deed, good or bad, receives its just reward.

-Always be kūpono because there are consequences for our actions. Can also be said when karma hits.

No task is too big when done together by all.

-If everyone contributes to the task, it lightens the load.

No cliff is so tall that it cannot be scaled.

No problem is too great when one tries hard to solve it.

-Try something even though it seems difficult.

No breadfruit can be reached when the picking stick is too short.

There is no success without preparation.

Hold the breath.

Be patient. Don't give up too easily.

You reap what you sow. If you give only a little, do not expect a large return.
Lawena (behavior)
Aia nō ka pono - ‘o ka ho‘ohuli i ka lima i lalo, ‘a‘ole ‘o ka ho‘ohuli i luna. (Huli ka lima i lalo.)
That is what it should be - to turn the hands palms down, not palms up.
No one can work with the palms of his hands turned up. When a person is always busy, he is said to keep his palms down.
-Said as a compliment to someone that is not afraid of work. “Huli ka lima i lalo,” can be used to encourage someone to work (help out).

Aloha kekahi i kekahi.
Love one another.

He ali‘i ka ʻāina, he kauā ke kanaka.
The land is a chief; man is its servant.
Land has no need for man, but man needs the land and works it for a livelihood.
-We have to take care of the land.

Hoʻokahi wale nō leo, ua lawa.
One voice is enough.
-When one speaks, everyone should be listening. It can also mean that only one reminder is necessary.

Mahalo i ka mea i loa‘a.
Be thankful for what you have.

Nānā ka maka, hoʻolohe ka pepeiao, paʻa ka wahā.
Observe with the eyes; listen with the ears; shut the mouth.
Thus one learns.

ʻAʻohe mālama, pau i ka ʻiole.
No one who takes care of his possessions has ever found them eaten by rats.
When one takes care of his goods he will not suffer losses.
-Take care of your things.
ʻAʻohe uʻi hele wale o Kohala.

No youth of Kohala goes empty-handed.

Said in praise of people who do not go anywhere without a gift or a helping hand. The saying originated at Honomakaʻu in Kohala. The young people of that locality, when on a journey, often went as far as Kapua before resting. Here, they made _lei_ to adorn themselves and carry along with them. Another version is that no Kohala person goes unprepared for any emergency.

-We should never go somewhere empty handed. If you are visiting a friend, or staying at someone’s house, you should always bring something (gift, food…).

ʻIke (knowledge)

ʻAʻohe pau ka ʻike i ka hālau hoʻokahi.

_All knowledge is not taught in the same school._

One can learn from many sources.

-We shouldn’t be hoʻokano (act superior) when it comes to knowledge. There is waiwai (value) from all resources, and not all knowledge is the same.

ʻO ke kahua ma mua, ma hope ke kūkulu.

_The site first, and then the building._

Learn all you can, then practice.

Inā ‘aʻole nō paʻa ke kahua, e pilikia ana no ka mea, ‘o ia ka hoʻomaka.

Nā mea ʻē aʻe (other)

I ka ʻōlelo nō ke ola, i ka ʻōlelo nō ka make.

_Life is in speech; death is in speech._

Words can heal; words can destroy.

-Be careful with what you say. It can lead to good and bad consequences.

I maikaʻi ke kalo i ka ʻohā.

_The goodness of the taro is judged by the young plant it produces._

Parents are often judged by the behavior of their children.

Ua hala ʻē ka Puʻulena.

_The Puʻulena wind of Puna has passed._

-Too late! Your chance has passed. Be quick next time.
Pau Pele, pau manō.

[May I be] devoured by Pele, [may I be] devoured by a shark.

An oath, meaning “If I fail . . .” It was believed that if such an oath were not kept, the one who uttered it would indeed die by fire or be eaten by a shark.

-Similar to the saying “Cross my heart, hope to die.”

Pūʻali ʻo Kahaunui iā Kahauiki. (Pūʻali ka hau nui i ka hau iki.)

Big-hau-tree has a groove worn into it by Little-hau-tree.

Said when a child nearly wears out the patience of the adult in charge of him, or of a large company of warriors discomfited by a small one. Kahaunui and Kahauiki are places just east of Moanalua, Oʻahu.

-Don’t underestimate the powers of the small guy. Can also be used in a situation where the small guy is victorious over the big buy.

ʻIke i ke au nui me ke au iki.

Knows the big currents and the little currents.

Is very well versed.
Watch as the kumu act out four different scenarios. Write the corresponding number of each scenario on the line next to the ‘ōlelo no‘eau that best fits the scenario.

____ ʻAʻohe mālama, pau i ka ʻiole.

*No one who takes care of his possessions has ever found them eaten by rats.*

When one takes care of his goods he will not suffer losses.

-Word of caution to take care of your things.

____ Hoʻokahi wale nō leo, ua lawa.

*One voice is enough.*

-When one is speaking, everyone should be listening. Can also mean that one reminder is all that is necessary.

____ ʻAʻa i ka hula, waiho i ka hilahila i ka hale.

*When one wants to dance the hula, bashfulness should be left at home.*

-Don’t be shy. Participate! This does not just pertain to hula. This can be used in all situations when one is apprehensive in participating in an activity.

____ ʻAʻohe hana nui ke alu ʻia.

*No task is too big when done together by all.*

-Usually said when there is a big task to be done. If everyone contributes to the task, it lightens the load.