

## Baby, You're a Firework: Making Meaning through Metaphor (and Simile) in Songwriting

Writing the Community Lesson Plan

Teaching Artist: Lisa O'Neill

**Theme:** Breaking down metaphor and simile as tools for meaning-making in poetry and song lyrics

### Pedagogical Goals:

- Students look at songs they already know as a way to locate metaphors
- Learn about metaphor and simile
- Create their own metaphors and similes and work their way toward a song chorus or verse.

**Description:** Some of the most effective literary devices used in song lyrics are metaphors and similes. Songs are hotbeds of comparison. That's how we make sense of complicated emotional experiences like those outlined in songs.

Main Idea	Notes	Time
Introduce Concept	For this lesson, I played one of my songs that use metaphors of cages and walls to talk about someone who is emotionally shut off or unable to engage honestly. Talked about why I did that and what I was trying to get at. I also passed out copies of lyrics and invited them to ask questions	10
Discuss Metaphors/ Similes	Look at definitions and examples from songs and talk together about why the writer chose that comparison (handout: posted below)	10
Example	<p>I passed out copies of Katy Perry's "Firework" (a song I thought they would likely be familiar with)</p> <p>After listening to the song, we broke down some of the metaphors in it and talked about what she was trying to say. For example: What does she mean when she says "there's still a spark in you?" What do we think of when we think of sparks (enthusiasm, light, energy, etc.)? What about this being paired with the word "still"? Maybe its been a hard time but she's trying to say you still have light inside you.</p> <p>I also used this as an opportunity to talk about song structure: Verse, Pre-Chorus, Chorus, Bridge and after we talked about the characteristics of each part of a song, I asked them to identify these pieces in "Firework"</p> <p>We also identified the rhyme scheme in sections of the song.</p>	10

<p>Write</p>	<p>I used another prompt I've used for poetry classes to get students started with metaphors and similes</p> <p>My heart is like (3 lines)</p> <p>My eyes are like (3 lines)</p> <p>My soul is like (3 lines)</p> <p>In pairs, see if you can write a chorus</p>	<p>10-15</p>
<p>Putting it together: Collaborative writing</p>	<p><i>I actually ended up doing this in the next class because of time constraints.</i></p> <p>Although students had some metaphors and similes from the last class, some were having a hard time coming up with ideas so I did an exercise called: 5 "Things" Song Prompts (in notes below)</p> <p>I had them list, without thinking too hard, five things in a bunch of categories.</p> <p>Once students had some metaphors down, I had us experiment with turning them into choruses and verses on the board.</p> <p>I gave them this form My heart is like a _____ Always My heart is like a _____ Always</p> <p>Here is one we came up with:</p> <p>My heart is like a broken vase Always spinning water on the ground My heart is a hurricane Always spinning me around</p>	<p>20</p>

Putting all the pieces together	<p>After we wrote this together, I played some chords on my guitar and put it to a melody as an example and students were really impressed with how quickly you can shift lines to lyrics to a melody.</p> <p>We also made up a silly song about missing socks. And one that was less silly where the socks really represented missing a person (this was when we were exploring personification as well).</p>	5 mins

### Handout 1:

**Metaphor:** compare two dissimilar things for effect without using “like” or “as”

**Simile:** compare two dissimilar things for effect using “like” or “as”

### Examples:

“Wind Beneath My Wings” sung by Bette Midler

“I can fly higher than an eagle.”

“You are the wind beneath my wings.”

“Love is a battlefield,” by Pat Benatar

“You ain’t nothin’ but a hound dog,” by Jerry Leiber and Mike Stolle

“Can’t Stop The Feelin’” by Justin R. Timberlake / Martin Karl Sandberg / Johan Karl Schuster

“I’ve got that sunshine in my pocket”

“How Far I’ll Go,” Moana

“The line where the sky meets the sea? It calls me

And no one knows, how far it goes

If the wind in my sail on the sea stays behind me

One day I’ll know, how far I’ll go”

“Waterfalls” by TLC

“Don’t go chasing waterfalls

Please stick to the rivers and the lakes that you’re used to

I know that you're gonna have it your way or nothing at all  
But I think you're moving too fast”

“Every Rose has Its Thorn,” by Poison

Every rose has its thorn,  
Just like every night has it’s dawn,  
Just like every cowboy sings his sad, sad song,  
Every rose has its thorn

Notorious BIG

“Climb the Ladder to Success, Escalator Style”

“Firework” Katy Perry

“You just gotta ignite the light  
And let it shine  
Just own the night  
Like the Fourth of July  
'Cause baby you're a firework  
Come on show 'em what your worth  
Make 'em go "Oh, oh, oh!"  
As you shoot across the sky”

**Personification:** giving human characteristics to something nonhuman, or the representation of an abstract quality in human form.

**Examples:**

from “Careless Whisper,” George Michael:

“I’m never gonna dance again  
Guilty feet have got no rhythm”

from “Concrete Jungle” by Bob Marley:

“No sun will shine in my day today  
The high yellow moon won’t come out to play  
I said darkness has covered my light,  
And has changed my day into night, yeah.”

from “New York, New York,” Frank Sinatra

“These vagabond shoes  
Are longing to stray  
Right through the very heart of it  
New York, New York  
I want to wake up in a city

That doesn't sleep,"

## **Handout 2:**

### **Firework**

Katy Perry

Do you ever feel like a plastic bag  
Drifting thought the wind  
Wanting to start again

Do you ever feel, feel so paper thin  
Like a house of cards  
One blow from caving in

Do you ever feel already buried deep  
Six feet under scream  
But no one seems to hear a thing

Do you know that there's still a chance for you  
'Cause there's a spark in you

You just gotta ignite the light  
And let it shine  
Just own the night  
Like the Fourth of July

'Cause baby you're a firework  
Come on show 'em what your worth  
Make 'em go "Oh, oh, oh!"  
As you shoot across the sky-y-y

Baby you're a firework  
Come on let your colors burst  
Make 'em go "Oh, oh, oh!"  
You're gonna leave 'em fallin' down down down

You don't have to feel like a waste of space  
You're original, cannot be replaced  
If you only knew what the future holds  
After a hurricane comes a rainbow

Maybe a reason why all the doors are closed  
So you can open one that leads you to the perfect road  
Like a lightning bolt, your heart will glow  
And when it's time, you'll know

You just gotta ignite the light  
And let it shine  
Just own the night  
Like the Fourth of July

'Cause baby you're a firework  
Come on show 'em what your worth  
Make 'em go "Oh, oh, oh!"  
As you shoot across the sky-y-y

Baby you're a firework  
Come on let your colors burst  
Make 'em go "Oh, oh, oh!"  
You're gonna leave 'em fallin' down down down

Boom, boom, boom  
Even brighter than the moon, moon, moon  
It's always been inside of you, you, you  
And now it's time to let it through

'Cause baby you're a firework  
Come on show 'em what your worth  
Make 'em go "Oh, oh, oh!"  
As you shoot across the sky-y-y

Baby you're a firework  
Come on let your colors burst  
Make 'em go "Oh, oh, oh!"  
You're gonna leave 'em fallin' down down down

Boom, boom, boom  
Even brighter than the moon, moon, moon  
Boom, boom, boom  
Even brighter than the moon, moon, moon

## 5 “Things” Song Prompts

This list of “things” is a great way to start getting your brain working not only for songs, but poems as well.

**Step 1:** Simply list, without thinking too hard, five things in each of these categories. If you get stuck on one category, go to another. We don’t have to have every answer for every list but we are trying to get ideas to work with.

<b>5 Things In Your Closet</b>  1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 4. _____ 5. _____	<b>5 Things No One Uses Anymore</b>  1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 4. _____ 5. _____
<b>5 Things You See Every Day</b>  1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 4. _____ 5. _____	<b>5 Things Your Mom/Dad/Sibling/ Grandma/Grandpa/Auntie Said to You</b>  1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 4. _____ 5. _____
<b>5 Things/Objects That Have Special Meaning For You</b>  1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 4. _____ 5. _____	<b>5 Things You’ve Lost</b>  1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 4. _____ 5. _____
<b>5 Movies That Have Stuck With You</b>  1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 4. _____ 5. _____	<b>5 Things That Are Green</b>  1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 4. _____ 5. _____

**Step 2:** Circle the one item from each list that stands out to you.

**Step 3:** Write a verse or chorus to a song in which you talk about that thing and why it matters. You could use metaphor/simile or not. You could make it rhyme. You can use repetition

**Examples:**

<p>Mama said there'll be days like this There'll be days like this, mama said (Mama said, mama said) Mama said there'll be days like this There'll be days like this, my mama said (Mama said, mama said)</p> <p>(5 things a family member told you) Luther Dixon, Willie Denson</p>	<p>Some days are diamonds Some days are rocks Some doors are open Some roads are blocked</p> <p>Sundowns are golden Then fade away And if I never do nothing I'm comin' back some day</p> <p>(5 things you see every day: door/sun/sunset/rocks/roads) Tom Petty</p>
<p>Look at the stars Look how they shine for you And everything you do Yeah they were all yellow</p> <p>(5 things that are yellow)</p> <p>Coldplay</p>	<p>I'm off to see the wizard in his castle on the hill And I never once have known him and I do not know him still Because his face it is magnificent but you'll never see his hands And the way he throws his voice around I don't know where he stands</p> <p>(5 movies that stick with you) Kris Delmhorst</p>