Metaphors

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In this class, I hope you get excited about metaphors. Metaphors are amazing—for lots of reasons!

First, let’s talk about what metaphors are. You may have heard of definitions of metaphors that worry about whether they use the words *is* or *like* or *as*. In this class, we’re not going to get that technical. Instead, we’re going to approach metaphors like linguists do (linguists are people who study language—we’ll hear from linguists several times this semester). For now, here’s a definition of metaphor from two famous linguists:

**A metaphor is a comparison between two unlike things.**

George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, in their book *Metaphors We Live By*, define metaphor thus: “The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another” (5).

In this class and in this definition, we aren’t worrying about whether or not a metaphor uses *like* or *as*; instead, we’re using the commonly accepted linguistic definition of metaphor (rather than the literary critics’ definition). Linguists are people who study language, such as how people talk in everyday situations.
Metaphors are everywhere! Our language and thoughts are based on metaphors, even though we’re often not aware of them. Lakoff and Johnson argue, “human thought processes are largely metaphorical (6). So even our thinking is based on metaphors. After this presentation, you’ll start seeing metaphors everywhere.
Metaphors

One place that metaphors are everywhere is in music lyrics.

For example, listen to this song: Firework (I put the lyrics on the next few screens). If you want to hear it again, here’s the official video: Firework
Metaphors

Firework
Katy Perry

Do you ever feel like a plastic bag
Drifting through 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 screams 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 4th of July

'Cause baby, you're a firework
Come on, show 'em what you're worth
Make 'em go, oh
As you shoot across the sky

Baby, you're a firework
Come on, let your colors burst
Make 'em go, oh
You're gonna leave 'em falling down
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Firework  (continued)

Katy Perry

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 you’re the reason why all the doors are closed
So you could open one that leads you to the perfect road
Like a lightning bolt, your heart will blow
And when it’s time, you’ll know

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
Isn’t this a cool song, especially for young people like the singers, school kids from a public school in New York? Isn’t it cool how in the other video, young people find confidence and believe in themselves? Doesn’t this song have a great message for kids? And for all of us? And what’s also cool is that this song illustrates what I’m saying about metaphors—they’re everywhere, and you’re already totally used to interpreting them.

Let’s start with the title—the main idea of the song. What does Katy Perry mean when she says, “You’re a firework.” Does it mean they’re going to blow up soon? Turn into sparklers? ;-)) Does Perry mean that we all should have fireworks shooting out of us? Of course not. Perry actually tells us part of what it means when she says, “You don’t have to feel like a waste of space / You’re original, cannot be replaced.” But I think there’s more to it—and that’s what’s cool about metaphors. They pack so much meaning into just a few words.

There’s other metaphors in this song, and there’s lots ways to interpret them. We’ll continue discussing this song in the metaphors forum.
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Here’s another example of how metaphors are everywhere in music lyrics:

Listen to this song: *I Am a Rock, Simon & Garfunkel*. What is this song really about (he says it at the beginning)?
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When Simon & Garfunkel sing, “I am a rock; I am an island,” of course they don’t mean they have turned into stone and are surrounded by water. Instead, they are talking about loneliness, about being numb, not letting themselves feel love or pain.

This is a metaphor: the rock and island are metaphors for a person. Simon and Garfunkel also use the metaphor of walls and a fortress to represent a person who has locked up his emotions inside. So the rock and island and walls and fortress are metaphors for his loneliness and inability to feel anything. At the end of the song, he explains this: “I am a rock / I am an island / And the rock feels no pain / And an island never cries.”
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Another example is the classic, Queen’s “We Will Rock You” (lyrics on the next slide).

So what’s this song about? Is it about a mother or father rocking a child? Is it kind of like a lullaby? You’re laughing at me, right now, I bet ;-)

So if that’s not it, if it’s not a lullaby, what’s this about? What are some of the meanings of “We will rock you?”
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We Will Rock You
Queen

Buddy you're a boy make a big noise
Playin' in the street gonna be a big man some day
You got mud on yo' face
You big disgrace
Kickin' your can all over the place

Singin'
We will we will rock you
We will we will rock you

Buddy you're a young man hard man
Shoutin' in the street gonna take on the world some day

You got blood on yo' face
You big disgrace
Wavin' your banner all over the place

Buddy you're an old man poor man
Pleadin' with your eyes gonna make you some peace some day
You got mud on your face
You big disgrace
Somebody better put you back into your place
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Another example:

When the Beatles sing, “Here Comes the Sun,” (Glee version with Demi Lovato and Naya Rivera) what could the sun be a metaphor for? (doesn’t that sound weird? try saying “sun be a metaphor for” five times fast;-).

And what could ice and winter be metaphors for?
Similarly, when Johnny Nash (or the Angry Blue Sock or Alvin & the Chipmunks) sing “I Can See Clearly Now,” the song contains many metaphors:

I can see clearly now the rain is gone  
I can see all obstacles in my way  
Gone are the dark clouds that had me blind  
It's gonna be a bright, bright, bright sunshiny day.  
I think I can make it now the pain is gone  
All of the bad feelings have disappeared  
Here is that rainbow I've been praying for  
It's gonna be a bright, bright, bright sunshiny day.  
Look all around, there's nothing but blue skies  
Look straight ahead--nothing but blue skies.
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In both “Here Comes the Sun” and “I Can See Clearly Now,” the winter, ice, rain, obstacles, and dark clouds could be metaphors for difficulties or things in life that cause us pain or bad feelings.

The sun, rainbow, and blue skies could be metaphors for happiness.
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Now listen to this song:

**Breathe (2 A.M.), Anna Nalick**

2 Am and she calls me cause I'm still awake
Can you help me unravel my latest mistake
I don't love him and winter just wasn't my season.
Yea we walk through the doors so accusing
their eyes
Like they have any right at all to criticize
Hypocrites you're all here for the very same reason.

Cause you can't jump the track
We're like cars on a cable and life's like an hourglass glued to the table,
No one can find the rewind button girl
So just cradle your head in your hands.
And breathe, just breathe, whoa breathe just breathe

May he turned 21 on the base of Fort Bliss
Just today he sat down to the flask in his fist
Ain't been sober since maybe October of last year
Here in town you can tell he's been down for while
But my God it's so beautiful when the boy smiles
Wanna hold him but maybe I'll just sing about it

Cause you can't jump the track
We're like cars on a cable
And life's like an hourglass glued to the table,
No one can find the rewind button boys so cradle your head in your hands
And breathe, just breathe, whoa breath just breathe
There's a light at the end of this tunnel you shout
cause you're just as far in as you'll ever be out
And these mistakes you've made
You'll just make them again if you'll only try turnin' around

2 a.m. and I'm still awake writing this song
If i get it all down on paper it's no longer inside of me threaten' the life it belongs to.
And I feel like I'm naked in front of the crowd
Cause these words are my diary screamin' out aloud
And I know that you'll use them however you want to.

But you can't jump the track
We're like cars on a cable
And life's like an hourglass glued to the table,
No one can find the rewind button now
Sing it if you understand...yeah breath
Just breathe, ohho breathe
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What does she mean when she says, “We're like cars on a cable”? 

![Cable Car](image-url)
Metaphors

What does she mean when she says, “We're . . . like an hourglass glued to the table”?

Together, these metaphors show what the song’s main idea is....
Metaphors

My last metaphor song uses common phrases that are metaphors. It’s a great illustration of how widespread metaphors are in our language. I think some aspects of the video might even be metaphorical, like the hands clapping and the baritone in the background?

In the lyrics, I’ve put little pieces of clip art next to the metaphors.
Keep drinking coffee, stare me down across the table
While I look outside
So many things I’d say if only I were able
But I just keep quiet and count the cars that pass by

You’ve got opinions, man
We’re all entitled to ‘em, but I never asked
So let me thank you for your time, and try not to waste anymore of mine
And get out of here fast

I hate to break it to you babe, but I’m not drowning
There’s no one here to save

Who cares if you disagree?
You are not me
Who made you king of anything?
So you dare tell me who to be?
Who died and made you king of anything?
You sound so innocent, all full of good intent
Swear you know best
But you expect me to jump up on board with you
And ride off into your delusional sunset

I’m not the one who’s lost with no direction
But you’ll never see
You’re so busy making maps with my name on them in all caps
You got the talking down, just not the listening

And who cares if you disagree?
You are not me
Who made you king of anything?
So you dare tell me who to be?
Who died and made you king of anything?

All my life I’ve tried to make everybody happy
While I just hurt and hide
Waiting for someone to tell me it’s my turn to decide

Let me hold your crown, babe.
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So what does Bareilles mean when she says, “Who made you king of anything?” Does she really think whoever she’s talking to is a king? If not, what does she really mean, talking about kings?

Then when she says, “I’m not drowning,” what is really saying? What’s she mean about jumping on board or being lost or maps? Is she really drowning or jumping on a surfboard or lost? What does she mean with the great line, “ride off into your delusional sunset”? That’s a pretty complex and sarcastic metaphor (that’s probably why I like it). Is she really going to ride off somewhere?

To learn more about metaphors, go to the forum discussion.