

# Dream Big

## Figurative Language through Music

Many people listen to music to help themselves fall asleep. Well, the song you'll be learning about is not a particularly relaxing one, but it is all about working hard to meet your goals and achieve your *dreams*! It's called "**First in Flight**" by the rap duo **Blackalicious**. This song will not only introduce you to new vocabulary and grammatical structures, but you'll also develop an understanding of how figurative language is used to express complex emotions and ideas. Plus, music is fun!

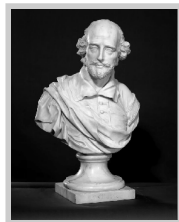
This song is easily found online, but even if you don't have access to the internet, you'll still enjoy the poetic lyrics and creative rhymes. This song is a true *treasure trove* of figurative language, specifically **metaphor** and **simile**.



If you describe something as a "**treasure trove of**" a specific thing, you are saying there is a lot of that thing in it.

**Example:** *The library is a treasure trove of information.*

**Metaphor:** Metaphors are a figure of speech that directly compare one thing to another. One of the most famous examples of metaphor in the English language comes from William Shakespear's play *As You Like It*.



**"All the world's a stage,  
And all the men and women merely players."**

Shakespeare is comparing these two things: a stage and the world. Of course he does not think that the world is literally a stage. He is using this language in an artistic way. He wants his readers to think about how the two things are similar.

**Simile:** Similes, like metaphors, also create a comparison. But unlike metaphors, similes use the words “like” and “as” to show the relationship between the two things. Here is an example of a simile using the word “like” from the book *Red Badge of Courage* by Stephen Crane:

**“In the eastern sky there was a yellow patch  
like a rug laid for the feet of the coming sun . . .”**



In this case, the reader can easily see that two things are being compared because of the clue word “like.” The “yellow patch” of sky is being compared to a “rug.” This comparison is written as a simile for artistic effect. And you have to admit, it’s a lot more beautiful than simply saying “The sky had a yellow patch in it.”

Now here is an example of a simile using the word “as” from the book *The Handmaid’s Tale* by Margaret Atwood:



**“Time has not stood still. It has washed over me,  
washed me away, as if I’m nothing more than a woman  
of sand, left by a careless child too near the water.”**

Again, you can easily see that two things are being compared: A woman and a woman made of sand too near the water. You are able to easily identify this as a simile because of the clue word “as.” This simile is an artistic choice. Again, it’s much more beautiful than simply saying, “I feel sad, helpless, and afraid.”

Now it’s time for you to practice finding similes and metaphors in the lyrics of a song. You’ll also be asked to interpret (explain the meaning of) certain similes and metaphors within the context of the song.

Have fun!

## “First in Flight” by Blackalicious

**“First in Flight”** is a song from American rap duo Blackalicious with frontman rapper Gift of Gab. It was released on the highly acclaimed album *Blazing Arrow* (2002). Steve Huey of AllMusic reviewed the album saying, “All the pieces add up to not just one of the best rap albums of 2002, but one of the richest, most **captivating** albums to emerge from hip-hop’s artsy new underground.”



First in flight (x 4)

Cause all we got is rhythm and timing'  
We go beyond the edge of the sky

FREE!

Like a bird out in the wind in the night  
Like a 747 to LA that's in flight  
FREE! Like a garden flourishing in the wind  
Like a student about to do it

When he's graduating

FREE! From any of the energy **perception**  
Can never be defined create the definition  
within

FREE!

Just lovin life itself and never pretend to be  
Anything other than the man  
I was meant to be, travel through time  
And get a glimpse of the centuries  
To come a better day is promised remember  
FREE! Like my nephew in a few months  
About to be out the penitentiary -  
meditation (x9)

I never hesitate about a **reluctant** mind  
Put the **pedal to the metal** see what ya find  
You back there slouching over  
Won't you pick up your spine?  
Let's make it really really happen  
Live up this time, you can choose to say  
Good morning God or Good God, morning  
With black clouds storming  
I walk without umbrellas into these woods  
Don't need them because the mighty trees  
Above will shelter me good  
I'm eating berries from the bushes  
Of the heavenly good  
From the stakes the power came to us  
Whenever we stood  
Reverberating out we're reaching  
Each and every hood, whenever we could

the spiritual anatomy fool  
But never take the credit for it  
Because that'd be rude  
It's just the way in life we searching for  
That had to be new  
You gotta work it though because  
Everyday ain't Saturday, fool  
**Evolve** into a better life and be happy  
With you and me

The first to fly, the first to strive  
The first to fight to stay alive  
The first to win, the first to strike  
The first to live, the first in flight

RISE!

Like the sun up at the crack of the dawn  
Like a waking child in the morning  
stretching and yawning  
RISE! Like an infant being held in the light  
Like the smoke from an incense when it's  
ignited  
RISE! If you're sleeping  
Won't you open your eyes again?  
The greatest high be that natural high within  
No need to force the progression  
Just ride the wind  
You'll know the answer to the  
Where and why and when  
If you keep working for your search,  
You will find the end, though at the end  
You find it only begins again  
At the end, you'll see it only begins again  
And everything you learn you're only  
Remembering

It's me, let your mind and your soul be free  
Work to shine, meet your goal, believe  
Spread that kind of L-O-V-E  
Take some time off the lonely

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## Comprehension & Critical Thinking

You read the lyrics to the rap song "First in Flight" by Blackalicious. Answer the following figurative language questions. Read the text again if necessary. Take your time. Do not check the answers until you have done your best work.



★Answer Key is at the end of the packet★

1. What significance does the number 2002 have to this song?
  - a. It was the year the album including Gift of Gab's hit song was released.
  - b. It was the year "First in Flight" reached number one on the Rap Songs chart.
2. Read the following excerpts (short pieces) from the song. Which one contains the *best* example of figurative language?
  - a. You'll know the answer to the / Where and why and when
  - b. It was released on the highly acclaimed album *Blazing Arrow*
  - c. I walk without umbrellas into these woods



A songwriter may employ (use) more than one kind of figurative language to express their ideas and emotions. For example: A song lyric may contain a simile that is also a metaphor. Consider each choice carefully and decide what form of figurative language it is the **best** example of.

3. Read the following excerpt from the song.  
Decide what it *best* exemplifies. In other words, what is it the best example of?


**Rise! Like the sun up at the crack of the dawn / Like a waking child in the morning / stretching and yawning**

- a. simile
- b. metaphor

4. Read the following excerpt from the song.  
Decide what it *best* exemplifies. In other words, what is it the best example of?

**If you're sleeping, won't you open your eyes again?**

- a. simile
- b. metaphor



Figurative language is an artistic expression, so there is not usually one correct interpretation. However, you can use your reading skills to make inferences about what the writer *really* means. Consider each choice carefully and choose the *most likely* interpretation.

5. Read the following excerpt from the song. It contains figurative language. Make an inference (a good guess) about its meaning. Choose the best interpretation (explanation) of its meaning.



**You back there slouching over / Won't you pick up your spine?**

- a. Stand up straight. Slouching over is bad for your spine.
  - b. You are sad and feeling sorry for yourself. Think positively and work hard.
  - c. You look sick and your friends are worried. You should go to the doctor.
6. Read the following excerpt from the song. It contains figurative language. Make an inference (a good guess) about its meaning. Choose the best interpretation (explanation) of its meaning.

**I never hesitate about a reluctant mind / Just put the pedal to the metal  
see what you find**

- a. I never stop to think before I make decisions. Therefore, I often make mistakes.
- b. I never doubt my own abilities to be successful. I encourage you to just work hard and see what happens.
- c. I never stop to think while I am driving. I drive to find interesting things in my city.

7. Read the following excerpt from the song. It contains figurative language. Make an inference (a good guess) about its meaning. Choose the best interpretation (explanation) of its meaning.

**FREE! / Like a bird out in the wind in the night / Like a 747 to LA that's in flight / FREE!  
Like a garden flourishing in the wind / Like a student about to do it / When he's  
graduating**

- a. It feels wonderful to be free. If you try hard enough, you can go anywhere, do anything, and be successful.
- b. It feels very good to free an animal from a cage or to take a trip on an airplane. Gardening is good for your health, and education is important.
- c. Flying at night is like a free trip to sunny California. You should go to school and study how to grow your own food.

## Written Analysis

*You may write in English or another language.*

8. What exactly do you think this song means? Can you write the message of the song in your own words? Provide examples of figurative language found in the text. Use evidence from the text to support your answer.

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Share this song with someone else.  
See if they agree with your interpretation.

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