

# CHANGING CLOUDS, FIGURATIVELY SPEAKING

By Shoba Nair

Clouds – they are image shifters, literally as well as figuratively.  
Clouds as metaphors and idioms are a dime a dozen in the English language.

**Have a poor impression  
of someone?**



**He is under a cloud.**

**How about your friend who is  
too idealistic?**



**She has her head in the clouds.**

**What about something to  
show your happiness?**



**You must be on cloud nine.**

The list could go on. The cloud metaphor is just such a perfect fit.

Clouds also change. They have different shapes, often triggering our imagination, with a cloud at one time looking like a gentle swan and then a little later, morphing into a ferocious tiger. Clouds seem to have ‘moods’ too, with their different shades, from cheery snow white to grumpy dull grey to furious dark grey. They move as well, swayed by the direction of the wind, often leaving us to chase the clouds.

Let us look at an example of the use of the cloud as a metaphor in the song, ‘Both Sides, Now’, by Joni Mitchell, a Canadian singer-songwriter. You can listen to the song here:



Joni Mitchell - Both Sides Now (Live, 1970)

A video player window showing a live performance of Joni Mitchell singing into a microphone and playing an acoustic guitar on stage. The video player has a play button, volume control, and progress bar at the bottom. To the right of the video is a QR code and a URL: qrs.ly/pubtnj7.

Let's take a closer look at the first part of the lyrics. The cloud is used as a metaphor to describe love. This is one way we could interpret the song.

Lyrics of Song	Clouds	Love
Rows and flows of angel hair And ice cream castles in the air And feather canyons everywhere  I've looked at clouds that way	Shape of clouds: Clouds representing beautiful and gentle things	How love represents all things beautiful and gentle, as in a child's imagination
But now they only block the sun They rain and snow on everyone So many things I would have done  But clouds got in my way	Clouds as obstacles that cause displeasure	Love as an obstacle to happiness
I've looked at clouds from both sides now	Clouds as changeable	The realisation that love can be viewed from different perspectives
From up and down, and still somehow It's cloud illusions I recall I really don't know clouds at all	Clouds as an illusion	Love is more like a fantasy, not a reality
Moons and Junes and Ferris wheels The dizzy dancing way you feel As ev'ry fairy tale comes real I've looked at love that way	Clouds move with the wind, and look like they are dancing – happy and jovial	Love can make you feel that you would have a fairy tale life, with happy endings
But now it's just another show You leave 'em laughing when you go And if you care, don't let them know Don't give yourself away	The movement of clouds as a mere short-lived performance – only for one's frivolous entertainment	The realisation that love is short-lived, not meant to last forever

#### Your Task:

Try creating a short song or poem that uses cloud as a metaphor. Think about the following:

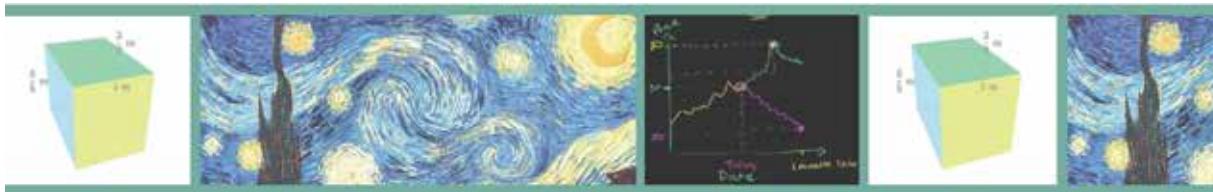
- What is the theme of your song or poem? (eg, love, trust, change)
- What would you like the cloud to represent in your piece? (eg, clouds as change; clouds as moods)
- Which aspect(s) of the cloud would you like to focus on in the verses? (eg, shape, movement, height, etc)

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