

TUNE INTO ENGLISH

Bob Dylan's 'Blowin' in the Wind'

Secondo la rivista *Rolling Stone* è una delle canzoni più belle di tutti i tempi, in cui il cantautore del Minnesota formula una serie di domande retoriche che rispecchiano le inquietudini e le preoccupazioni della maggior parte dei giovani dell'epoca.

LOWER INTERMEDIATE **B1**

ON CD 11

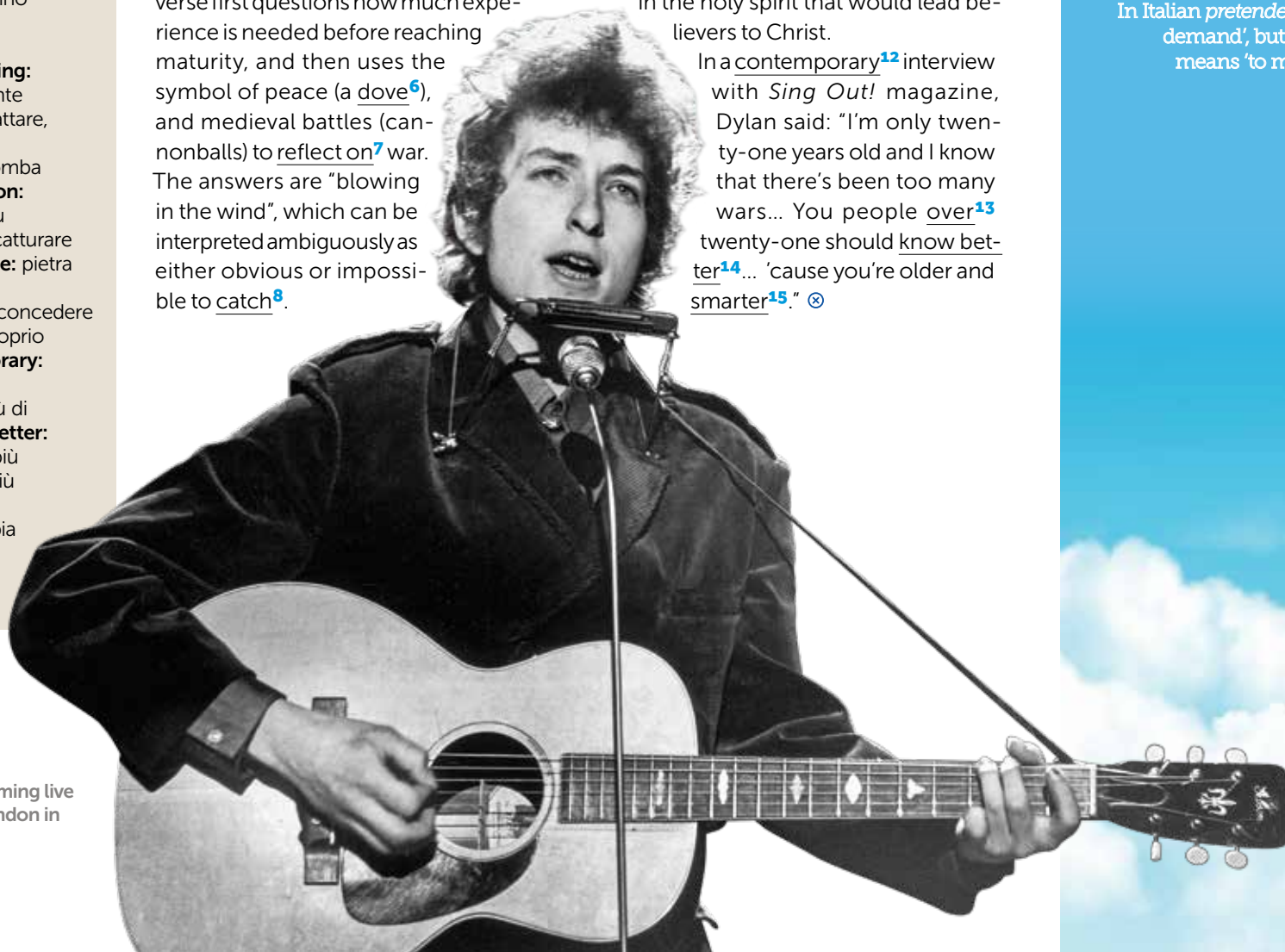
GLOSSARY

- 1 **to blow:** volare
- 2 **anthem:** inno
- 3 **to release:** pubblicare
- 4 **freewheeling:** indipendente
- 5 **to deal:** trattare, affrontare
- 6 **dove:** colomba
- 7 **to reflect on:** riflettere su
- 8 **to catch:** catturare
- 9 **touchstone:** pietra angolare
- 10 **to award:** concedere
- 11 **indeed:** proprio
- 12 **contemporary:** dell'epoca
- 13 **over:** di più di
- 14 **to know better:** sapere di più
- 15 **smarter:** più intelligenti
- 16 **sand:** sabbia
- 17 **to ban:** proibire

Blowin' ¹ in the Wind became the anthem ² of the American civil rights movement when it was released ³ in 1963 on Bob Dylan's second album "The Freewheelin' ⁴ Bob Dylan". Each of the three verses asks a rhetorical question, dealing ⁵ with peace, war and freedom, respectively. The opening verse first questions how much experience is needed before reaching maturity, and then uses the symbol of peace (a dove ⁶), and medieval battles (cannonballs) to reflect on ⁷ war. The answers are "blowing in the wind", which can be interpreted ambiguously as either obvious or impossible to catch ⁸.

The song is a cultural touchstone ⁹. Indeed, in 1975, over forty years before Dylan was awarded ¹⁰ the Nobel Prize in Literature, a high-school in Sri Lanka replaced Shakespeare's poetry in an English textbook with these lyrics, causing a lot of controversy. In 1997 Pope John Paul II told Dylan that the answer was indeed ¹¹ in the wind, in the holy spirit that would lead believers to Christ.

In a contemporary ¹² interview with *Sing Out!* magazine, Dylan said: "I'm only twenty-one years old and I know that there's been too many wars... You people over ¹³ twenty-one should know better ¹⁴... 'cause you're older and smarter ¹⁵." ☒



Bob Dylan performing live for the BBC in London in June 1965.

she: in English we usually refer to animals as 'it' unless we know the gender, but a dove, as a symbol of peace, has many female characteristics. Also, the Bible specifies that Noah's dove was female (Genesis 8:8-12)

'n': this is a reduction, where the final letter of 'and' is not pronounced to reflect natural speech. The 'a' is often dropped too – think of the band Guns 'n' Roses!

washed to sea: when something is 'washed away' it is removed by water (in this case 'submerged'). Geological evolution over millions of years can cause mountains to be submerged. The mountain here is a metaphor for an obstacle to be overcome.

pretend: this is a false friend. In Italian *pretendere* means 'to demand', but in English it means 'to make believe'.

How many roads must a man walk down before you call him a man?

How many seas must a white dove sail before she sleeps in the sand?

Yes, 'n' how many times must the cannonballs fly before they're forever banned?

The answer, my friend, is blowin' in the wind
The answer is blowin' in the wind

Yes, 'n' how many years can a mountain exist before it's washed to the sea?

Yes, 'n' how many years can some people exist before they're allowed to be free?

Yes, 'n' how many times can a man turn his head and pretend that he just doesn't see?

The answer, my friend, is blowin' in the wind
The answer is blowin' in the wind

Yes, 'n' how many times must a man look up before he can see the sky?

Yes, 'n' how many ears must one man have before he can hear people cry?

Yes, 'n' how many deaths will it take till he knows that too many people have died?

The answer, my friend, is blowin' in the wind
The answer is blowin' in the wind

walk down: this is a phrasal verb, meaning to travel on foot along a road.

sail: this refers to the biblical story of Noah's Ark, where they sailed (*navigare* in Italian) for seven months before a dove sent out by Noah found land. The sea is a metaphor for conflict.

blowin': songs often reduce '-ing' words to '-in' which makes them easier to sing.

look up: although 'look up' as a phrasal verb means 'to check something 'in a dictionary or on the internet, here it is literal, meaning 'to see something above you'.

cry: means 'to shout' (*gridare*) but also 'to have tears go down one's face' (*piangere*) whether caused by sadness or deep emotion.

till: is a much-used abbreviation of 'until', and is often written 'til'.



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