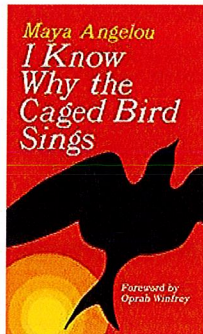


I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings (Angelou)

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I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings

Maya Angelou, 1969

Random House

289 pp.

ISBN-13: 9780345514400

Summary

Sent by their mother to live with their devout, self-sufficient grandmother in a small Southern town, Maya and her brother, Bailey, endure the ache of abandonment and the prejudice of the local "powhitetrash." At eight years old and back at her mother's side in St. Louis, Maya is attacked by a man many times her age—and has to live with the consequences for a lifetime.

Years later, in San Francisco, Maya learns about love for herself and the kindness of others, her own strong spirit, and the ideas of great authors ("I met and fell in love with William Shakespeare") will allow her to be free instead of imprisoned.

Poetic and powerful, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* is a modern American classic that will touch hearts and change minds for as long as people read. (*From the publisher.*)

Author Bio

- Aka— Margeurite Johnson
- Birth—April 04, 1928
- Where—St. Louis, Missouri, USA
- Education—High school in Atlanta and San Francisco
- Awards—Langston Hughes Award 1991; Grammy Award for Spoken Word Recording, 1993 and 1995; Quill Award, 2006
- Currently—Winston-Salem, North Carolina

An author whose series of autobiographies is as admired for its lyricism as its politics, Maya Angelou is a writer who's done it all. Angelou's poetry and prose—and her refusal to shy away from writing about the difficult times in her past—have made her an inspiration to her readers. (*From the publisher.*)

More

As a chronicler of her own story and the larger civil rights movement in which she took part, Maya Angelou is remarkable in equal measure for her lyrical gifts as well as her distinct sense of justice, both politically and personally.

Angelou was among the first, if not the first, to create a literary franchise based on autobiographical writings. In the series' six titles—beginning with the classic *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* and followed by *Gather Together in My Name*, *Singin' and Swingin' and Gettin' Merry Like Christmas*, *Heart of a Woman*, *All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes*, *A Song Flung Up to Heaven*, and *Mom and Me and Mom*—Angelou tells her story in language both no-nonsense and intensely spiritual.

Angelou's facility with language, both on paper and as a suede-voiced speaker, have made her a populist poet. Her 1995 poem "Phenomenal Woman" is still passed along the Web among women as inspiration:

*It's in the reach of my arms
The span of my hips
The stride of my steps
The curl of my lips.
I'm a woman
Phenomenally
Phenomenal woman
That's me.*

Her 1993 poem "On the Pulse of the Morning," written for Bill Clinton's presidential inauguration, was later released as a Grammy-winning album.

Angelou often cites other writers (from Kenzaburo Oe to James Baldwin) both in text and name. But as often as not, her major mentors were not writers—she had been set to work with Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr. before each was assassinated, stories she recounts in *A Song Flung Up to Heaven*.

Given her rollercoaster existence—from poverty in Arkansas to journalism in Egypt and Ghana and ultimately, to her destiny as a successful writer and professor in the States—it's no surprise that Angelou hasn't limited herself to one or two genres. Angelou has also written for stage and screen, acted, and directed. She is the rare author from whom inspiration can be derived both from her approach to life as from her talent in writing about it. Reading her books is like taking counsel from your wisest, favorite aunt.

Extras

- Angelou was nominated for an Emmy for her performance as Nyo Boto in the 1977 miniseries *Roots*. She has also appeared in films such as *How to Make an American*

Quilt and Poetic Justice, and she directed 1998's *Down in the Delta*.

- Angelou speaks six languages, including West African Fanti.
 - She taught modern dance at the Rome Opera House and the Hambina Theatre in Tel Aviv.
 - Before she became famous as a writer, Maya Angelou was a singer. *Miss Calypso* is a CD of her singing calypso songs. (*From Barnes and Noble.*)
-

Book Reviews

The wisdom, rue and humor of her storytelling are borne on a lilting rhythm completely her own, the product of a born writer's senses nourished on black church singing and preaching, soft mother talk and salty street talk, and on literature: James Weldon Johnson, Langston Hughes, Richard Wright, Shakespeare and Gorki.

New York Times Book Review

Maya Angelou's autobiography was the first book I ever read that made me feel my life as a colored girl growing up in Mississippi deserved validation. I loved it from the opening lines.

Oprah Winfrey - Oprah Magazine

This testimony from a black sister marks the beginning of a new error in the minds and hearts of all black men and women...*I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* liberates the reader into life simply because Maya Angelou confronts her own life with such a moving wonder, such a luminous dignity. I have no words for this achievement, but I know that not since the days of my childhood when the people in books were more real than the people one saw everyday, had I found myself so moved...Her portrait is a biblical study of life in the midst of death.

James Baldwin (author)

I know why the caged bird sings: this statement as much as any other defines the uniquely expansive and knowing vision of Maya Angelou. In her works of poetry, drama, and memoir, she describes the imperfections and perversions of humanity—men, women, black, white—with an unrelenting and sometimes jarring candor. But that candor is leavened by an unusually strong desire to comprehend the worst acts of the people around her and find a way for hope and love to survive in spite of it all. *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* is the beautifully written and brutally honest chronicle of Angelou's life from her arrival in Stamp, Arkansas, at age three to the birth of her only child in San Francisco, at age sixteen. In between those two events, Angelou provides an unforgettable memoir of growing up black in the 1930s and 1940s in a tiny southern town in Arkansas.

Angelou vividly describes the everyday indignities pressed on blacks in her small town, whether by the condescending white women who shortened her name to Mary because her real name, Marguerite, took too long to say, or by the cruel white

dentist who refused to treat her because my policy is I'd rather stick my hand in a dog's mouth than a nigger's. She also faced horror and brutality at the hands of her own people_she was raped by her mother's boyfriend when she was eight years old and later witnessed his murder at the hands of her uncles, a trauma that sent her into a shell of silence for years. Nevertheless, she emphasizes the positive things she learned from the "rainbows" in the black community of her youth that helped her survive and keep her hopes alive: her grandmother, Momma, who owned a general store and remained a pillar despite the struggles of being a black woman in a segregated and racist southern town; the Holy Rollers of the revivalist black church, who used coded language to attack the racist system they lived under; and Mrs. Bertha Flowers, the aristocratic black woman who brought her back from her shell of silence by introducing her to a love of literature, language, and recitation.

Her mastery of language and storytelling allows Angelou to record the incidents that shaped and troubled her, while also giving insight into the larger social and political tensions of the 1930s. She explains both the worst aspects of her youth and the frequent moments of exhilaration with drama and vigor; it's in the carefully described details and minor incidents that her childhood world is brought to life. *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* was nominated for the National Book Award in 1970 and remains an immensely popular book among people worldwide to this day for its honest and hopeful portrait of a woman finding the strength to overcome any adversity, of a caged bird who found the means to fly. Angelou has written four follow-up autobiographical works: *Gather Together in My Name*, *Singin' Swingin' and Gettin' Merry Like Christmas*, *All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes*, and *Heart of a Woman*.

Sacred Fire

Discussion Questions

1. The memoir opens with a provocative refrain: "What you looking at me for? I didn't come to stay" What do you think this passage says about Ritie's sense of herself? How does she feel about her place in the world? How does she keep her identity intact?
2. Upon seeing her mother for the first time after years of separation, Ritie describes her as "a hurricane in its perfect power." What do you think about Ritie's relationship with her mother? How does it compare to her relationship with her grandmother, "Momma"?
3. The author writes, "If growing up is painful for the Southern Black girl, being aware of her displacement is the rust on the razor that threatens the throat." What do you make of the author's portrayal of race? How do Ritie and her family cope with the racial tension that permeates their lives?
4. Throughout the book, Ritie struggles with feelings that she is "bad" and "sinful," as her thoughts echo the admonitions of her strict religious upbringing. What does she learn at the end of the memoir about right and wrong?

5. What is the significance of the title as it relates to Ritie's self-imposed muteness?
(Questions issued by publisher.)

top of page (summary)

Maya Angelou

Contemporary Black Biography. 1997.

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Updated: Dec. 21, 2017

Born: April 04, 1928 in St. Louis, Missouri, United States

Died: May 28, 2014 in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, United States

Other Names: Johnson, Marguerite; Johnson, Marguerite Ann; Johnson, Marguerite Annie

Nationality: American

Occupation: Writer

Updated: Dec. 21, 2017

The life experiences of Maya Angelou--author, poet, actress, singer, dancer, playwright, director, producer--became the cornerstone of her most acclaimed work, a multivolume autobiography that traces the foundations of her identity as a twentieth-century American black woman. Beginning with the best-selling *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, Angelou's autobiographical books chart her beginnings in rural segregated Arkansas and urban St. Louis, her turbulent adolescence in California through her adult triumphs as a performing artist and writer, her work in the civil rights movement, her travels to Africa, and her return to the United States. "One of the geniuses of Afro-American serial autobiography," according to Houston A. Baker in the *New York Times Book Review*, Angelou has been praised for the rich and insightful prose of her narratives and for offering what many observers feel is an indispensable record of black experience. Author James Baldwin wrote on the publication of *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*: "This testimony from a Black sister marks the beginning of a new era in the minds and hearts and lives of all Black men and women." In 2013 she published her last book, *Mom & Me & Mom*, which tells the story of her relationship with her mother. Angelou died at her home on May 28, 2014.

Early Life

Born in St. Louis, Missouri, Angelou was sent at the age of three to live with her paternal grandmother in Stamps, Arkansas, an event that served as the starting point for *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. The book depicts Angelou's early years in Stamps, where her grandmother ran the town's only African American-owned general store, and is a revealing portrait of the customs and harsh circumstances of black life in the segregated South. Economic hardship, murderous hate, and ingrained denigration were part of daily life in Stamps, and Angelou translates their impact on her early years. "If growing up is painful for the Southern Black girl, being aware of her displacement is the rust on the razor that threatens the throat," she wrote in the book. "It is an unnecessary insult."

Angelou also spent part of her youth in St. Louis, Missouri, with her mother--a glamorous and dynamic figure who occasionally worked as a nightclub performer. The book concludes with Angelou's early adolescent years in California and the birth of her illegitimate son, Guy. Much of *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* is grim--particularly Angelou's rape at the age of eight--yet it marks her distinct ability to recollect personal truth through insightful and powerful images, sights, and language. Angelou earned high marks from critics who praised her narrative skills and eloquent prose. Christopher Lehmann-Haupt in the *New York Times* called *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* "a carefully wrought, simultaneously touching and comic memoir ... [the] beauty [of which] is not in the story but in the telling."

Angelou's next volume of autobiography, *Gather Together in My Name*, begins with Angelou leaving her mother's home in California at the age of seventeen to forge an independent life with her infant son. The book describes the chaotic years that follow, during which Angelou worked a variety of jobs--cook, waitress, brothel madam--and also suffered a brief drug addiction. Selwyn R. Cudjoe in *Black Women Writers (1950-1980)* noted that the book describes how "rural dignity gives way to the alienation and destruction of urban life.... The violation which began in *Caged Bird* takes on a much sharper focus in *Gather Together*.... The author is still concerned with the question of what it means to be Black and female in America, but her development is ... subjected to certain social forces which assault the black woman with unusual intensity."

In the 1950s Angelou embarked upon a career as a stage performer, working as an actress, singer, and dancer. *Singin' and Swingin' and Gettin' Merry Like Christmas* recounts Angelou's transition from late adolescence to early adulthood, when she began to define herself as a performing artist. She toured Europe with a U.S. State Department production of the black opera *Porgy and Bess* in the mid-1950s, a period that became a turning point in her life. While with the theater company, Angelou began to link the turmoil of her past with her identity as a black adult, and as Cudjoe commented, the book documents the "personal triumph of [a] remarkable black woman." Cudjoe wrote: "The pride which she takes in her company's professionalism, their discipline onstage, and the wellspring of spirituality that the opera emoted, all seem to conduce toward an organic harmony of her personal history as it intertwined with the social history of her people."

Civil Rights Era

In *The Heart of a Woman*, Angelou covers the late 1950s and early 1960s, a period in which black artists in the United States were increasingly addressing racial abuse and black liberation. In the book, Angelou herself makes a decision to move away from show business in order to, as she describes it, "take on the responsibility of making [people] think. [It] was the time to demonstrate my own seriousness." She joined a group called the Harlem Writers Guild and in 1960 cowrote the musical revue *Cabaret for Freedom*, which opened in New York City. Later that year, she was asked by Martin Luther King Jr. to become northern coordinator for the then fledgling civil rights organization he had helped found, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. *The Heart of a Woman* concludes with Angelou and her son, Guy, moving to Africa, where she first worked for an English-language newsweekly in Cairo, and then at the University of Ghana. *Dictionary of Literary Biography* contributor Lynn Z. Bloom called *The Heart of a Woman* a particularly inspired book. Angelou's "enlarged focus and clear vision transcend the particulars," Bloom wrote, and like *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, the book presents "a fascinating universality of perspective and psychological depth."

Angelou more fully explored her Africa experience in her fifth book, *All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes*, of which a reviewer in *Time* noted that the author "meditates on the search for historical and spiritual roots." According to Baker in the *New York Times Book Review*, one of the interesting aspects that Angelou explores is her realization that Africa is "a homeland that refuses to become 'home.' Though independence and prosperity make Ghana a festival in black, there is no point of connection between Miss Angelou and what she calls the 'soul' of Africa." Barbara T. Christian likewise observed in the *Chicago Tribune Book World* that Angelou's "sojourn in Africa strengthens her bonds to her ancestral home even as she concretely experiences her distinctiveness as an Afro-American."

In her sixth autobiographical book, *A Song Flung Up to Heaven*, Angelou covered events after she left Ghana in late 1964. She returned to the United States with the intent of working with Malcolm X. While visiting her mother and brother in San Francisco, she learned that the civil rights leader had been assassinated. Angelou was lost for a time, and her brother helped her by finding her a singing gig in Hawaii. Lacking success in the venture, she returned to California and found a job working in Watts, which soon broke out in riots in 1965. Again overwhelmed by the riots' scope as well as the press's reaction to them, Angelou's family helped her through another personal crisis. She began working with

Martin Luther King Jr. on a project, which was interrupted by his assassination. The event left her desolate, but the support of friends in the aftermath indirectly helped her launch her writing career. *A Song Flung Up to Heaven* ended with Angelou beginning to write *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. Elsie B. Washington in *Black Issues Book Review* wrote that the book "offers a glimpse into the life of a literary icon in the making profoundly influenced by historical events and history makers."

Poetry and Honors

In addition to her books of autobiography, Angelou wrote several volumes of poetry that further explore the South, racial confrontation, and the triumph of black people against overwhelming odds. According to Tate, Angelou's poems "are characterized by a spontaneous joyfulness and an indomitable spirit to survive." Among her many accomplishments, Angelou wrote the screenplay and score for the 1972 film *Georgia, Georgia*, and in 1979 penned the screen adaptation of *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. She made numerous television appearances, including her 1977 role in the landmark television movie *Roots*, and was a guest on many talk shows.

Maya Angelou's writings and speeches, which stress the hopeful innocence of children, earned her wide acclaim and many fans. Such devoted enthusiasts included Oprah Winfrey and President Bill Clinton, who invited Angelou to deliver a poem at his inauguration in 1993. Angelou became the first African American to read a poem at a presidential inauguration. The poem, "On the Pulse of Morning," electrified the audience and was published in a hardcover edition of Angelou's poetry. Because of her moving literary works and devotion to the power of expression, Maya Angelou was awarded the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People's (NAACP's) Spingarn Medal in 1993 and the first Medal of Distinction from the University of Hawaii Board of Regents in 1994.

Angelou, with her booming laughter and deep rhythmic voice, was a symbol of strength and leadership for the plight of women and the underprivileged. She was named keynote speaker for the Chicago Foundation for Women in 1994. In September 1996, Angelou and Camille Cosby joined to help African American women chart new directions in their lives with a \$30 million dollar fund-raising campaign for the National Council of Negro Women.

In 1995, Angelou starred in the film *How to Make an American Quilt* with Winona Ryder and Ellen Burstyn. She also delivered her poem "A Brave and Startling Truth" at the United Nations fiftieth birthday bash in San Francisco. Angelou contributed short stories to the HBO program *America's Dream*, which aired during Black History Month in 1996 and collaborated with musicians Nick Ashford and Valerie Simpson on their 1996 release *Been Found*. In 1998, she directed a motion picture entitled *Down in the Delta*. The film focused on a woman from Chicago who traveled to Mississippi to locate her African American roots.

Continued Works

Angelou continued to publish new works and to remain in the public eye in the early 2000s. In 2004, she published *Hallelujah! The Welcome Table: A Lifetime of Memories and Recipes*, a cookbook that included many autobiographical anecdotes related to food in her life. A year later, Angelou composed an anti-war poem, "Amazing Peace," for the White House Christmas tree lighting ceremony. Like "On the Pulse of Morning," "Amazing Peace" was published in book form and became a best seller. In 2006, Angelou launched a career in a new medium when she began hosting an inspirational show on the "Oprah and Friends" channel for XM Satellite Radio.

In 2008, Angelou published *Letter to My Daughter*, which, according to the author's Web site, is "dedicated to the daughter she never had but sees all around her." A contributor to *Publishers Weekly* noted that the insights in the slim volume, which Angelou draws from personal experiences throughout her life, are "earnest and offered with warmth." Angelou also added to her film credits in 2008, narrating and providing poetry for the documentary film *The Black Candle: A Kwanzaa Celebration*.

Directed by M.K. Asante Jr., the film focuses on the African American experience and the seven principles at the core of the Kwanzaa holiday.

Angelou published another cookbook in 2010. *Great Food, All Day Long: Cook Splendidly, Eat Smart, like Hallelujah! The Welcome Table*, includes autobiographical sketches about the recipes' place in Angelou's life but also focuses on the importance of portion control.

In 2011, President Barack Obama awarded Angelou the Presidential Medal of Freedom--the nation's highest civilian honor. The president quoted Angelou, saying, "History, despite its wrenching pain, cannot be unlived, but if faced with courage, need not be lived again," before he presented her with the medal.

In 2013, Angelou published *Mom & Me & Mom*, which reflects on her relationship with her mother, Vivian Baxter. Angelou dedicated the deeply personal and moving memoir to her son. Angelou died on May 28, 2014, at her home in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. She was 86 years old. In 2015, the United States Postal Service issued a forever stamp featuring Angelou's image. After revealing the stamp, the USPS was criticized for including a quote attributed to Angelou that the author did not write. Despite this error, the USPS did not retract the more than eighty million stamps it had produced featuring Angelou.

PERSONAL INFORMATION:

Born Marguerite Johnson, April 4, 1928, in St. Louis, Missouri; died May 28, 2014, in Winston-Salem, North Carolina; daughter of Bailey and Vivian (Baxter) Johnson; married Tosh Angelos (divorced c. 1952); married Paul Du Feu, December 1973 (divorced); children: Guy Johnson. **Education:** Attended public schools in Arkansas and California. **Memberships:** American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (AFTRA), Directors Guild of America, Actors Equity, Harlem Writers Guild, American Film Institute, Women's Prison Association. **Addresses:** Web site--mayaangelou.com.

CAREER:

Author, poet, playwright, professional stage and screen producer, director, performer, and singer. Taught modern dance at Habima Theatre, Tel Aviv, Israel, and the Rome Opera House, Rome, Italy. Appeared in *Porgy and Bess* on twenty-two-nation tour sponsored by the U.S. Department of State, 1954-55; appeared in Off-Broadway plays *Calypso Heatwave*, 1957, and *The Blacks*, 1960; produced and performed in *Cabaret for Freedom*, with Godfrey Cambridge, Off-Broadway, 1960; University of Ghana, Institute of African Studies, Legon-Accra, Ghana, assistant administrator of School of Music and Drama, 1963-66; appeared in *Mother Courage* at University of Ghana, 1964, and in *Meda* in Hollywood, 1966; made Broadway debut in *Look Away*, 1973; directed film *All Day Long*, 1974, and *Down in the Delta*, Miramax, 1998; directed her play *And Still I Rise in California*, 1976; directed Errol John's *Moon on a Rainbow Shawl* in London, England, 1988; appeared in film *Roots*, 1977. Television narrator, interviewer, and host for Afro-American specials and theatre series, 1972; radio-show host for XM Satellite Radio, 2006. Lecturer at University of California, Los Angeles, 1966; writer in residence at University of Kansas, 1970; distinguished visiting professor at Wake Forest University, 1974, Wichita State University, 1974, and California State University, Sacramento, 1974; professor at Wake Forest University, 1981-2014; northern coordinator of Southern Christian Leadership Conference, 1959-60; appointed member of American Revolution Bicentennial Council by President Gerald R. Ford, 1975-76; member of National Commission on the Observance of International Women's Year.

AWARDS:

Nominated for National Book Award, 1970, for *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*; Yale University fellowship, 1970; Pulitzer Prize nomination, 1972, for *Just Give Me a Cool Drink of Water 'Fore I Diiie*; Antoinette Perry ("Tony") Award nomination from League of New York Theatres and Producers, 1973, for performance in *Look Away*; Rockefeller Foundation scholar in Italy, 1975; honorary degrees from Smith College, 1975, Mills College, 1975, Lawrence University, 1976, and Wake Forest University, 1977; named Woman of the Year in Communications by *Ladies' Home Journal*, 1976; Tony Award nomination for best supporting actress, 1977, for *Roots*; named one of the top one hundred most influential women by *Ladies' Home Journal*, 1983; North Carolina Award in Literature, 1987; named Woman of the Year by *Essence* magazine, 1992; named Distinguished Woman of North Carolina, 1992; recipient, Horatio Alger Award, 1992; Grammy Award for Best Spoken Word or Non-Traditional Album, 1993, for recording of "On The Pulse of the Morning"; Coretta Scott King Award for Illustration, 1994, for *Soul Looks Back in Wonder*; Grammy Award for Best Spoken Word or Non-Traditional Album, 1995, for recording of "Phenomenal Woman"; Presidential Medal of Arts, 2000; Grammy Award for Best Spoken Word Album, 2002, for recording of *A Song Flung Up to Heaven*; Quills Award for Poetry, 2006, for *Amazing Peace*; Lincoln Medal, 2008; named one of *Glamour's* Women of the Year, 2009; Presidential Medal of Freedom from President Barack Obama, 2011.

WORKS:

Writings

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings, Random House, 1970.

Just Give Me a Cool Drink of Water 'fore I Diiie, Random House, 1971.

Gather Together in My Name, Random House, 1974.

O Pray My Wings Are Gonna Fit Me Well, Random House, 1975.

Singin' and Swingin' and Gettin' Merry Like Christmas, Random House, 1976.

And Still I Rise New York, Random House, 1978.

The Heart of a Woman, Random House, 1981.

Shaker, Why Don't You Sing? Random House, 1983.

All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes, Random House, 1986.

Now Sheba Sings the Song, Dutton/Dial, 1987.

I Shall Not Be Moved, Random House, 1990.

Wouldn't Take Nothing for My Journey Now, Random House, 1993.

Kofi and His Magic, Crown Publishing Group, 1996.

Even the Stars Look Lonesome (essays), Random House, 1997.

A Song Flung Up to Heaven, Random House, 2002.

Angelina of Italy (children's book), Random House, 2004.

Hallelujah! The Welcome Table: A Lifetime of Memories and Recipes (memoir/cookbook), Random House, 2004.

Amazing Peace (single poem), Random House, 2006.

Mother: A Cradle to Hold Me, Random House, 2006.

Letter to My Daughter, Random House, 2008.

Great Food, All Day Long: Cook Splendidly, Eat Smart (memoir/cookbook), Random House, 2010.

Mom & Me & Mom, Random House, 2013.

Plays

(With Godfrey Cambridge) *Cabaret for Freedom* (musical revue), produced at Village Gate, New York City, 1960.

The Least of These, produced in Los Angeles, 1966.

Ajax (adaptation of Sophocles's *Ajax*), produced at the Mark Taper Forum, Los Angeles, 1974.

And Still I Rise, produced in Oakland, California, 1976.

Film and Television Scripts

Blacks, Blues, Black (ten television programs), National Educational Television, 1968.

Georgia, Georgia (film), Cinerama, 1972.

All Day Long, American Film Institute, 1974.

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings (film), 1979.

Sister, Sister, NBC-TV, 1982.

Three-Way Choice, CBS-TV.

How to Make an American Quilt (film), 1995.

The Black Candle: A Kwanzaa Celebration (film), 2008.

Also the author of the fictional work *Mrs. Flowers: A Moment of Friendship*, Redpath Press, 1986. Contributor of articles, short stories, and poems to periodicals, and of material to books.

FURTHER READINGS:

Periodicals

Black Issues Book Review, March-April 2002.

Black Scholar, Summer 1982.

Book Seller, July 29, 2005.

Boston Globe, January 20, 1997.

Chicago Tribune, February 11, 1996; January 12, 1997.

Chicago Tribune Book World, March 23, 1986.

Entertainment Weekly, January 13, 2006.

Harper's Bazaar, November 1972.

Sympathy

BY PAUL LAURENCE DUNBAR

I know what the caged bird feels, alas!

When the sun is bright on the upland slopes;
When the wind stirs soft through the springing grass,
And the river flows like a stream of glass;

When the first bird sings and the first bud opes,
And the faint perfume from its chalice steals—
I know what the caged bird feels!

I know why the caged bird beats his wing

Till its blood is red on the cruel bars;
For he must fly back to his perch and cling
When he fain would be on the bough a-swing;
And a pain still throbs in the old, old scars
And they pulse again with a keener sting—
I know why he beats his wing!

I know why the caged bird sings, ah me,

When his wing is bruised and his bosom sore,—
When he beats his bars and he would be free;
It is not a carol of joy or glee,
But a prayer that he sends from his heart's deep core,
But a plea, that upward to Heaven he flings—
I know why the caged bird sings!

Paul Laurence. Dunbar, "“Sympathy.”" from The Complete Poems of Paul Laurence Dunbar. (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company,)



Caged Bird

BY MAYA ANGELOU

A free bird leaps
on the back of the wind
and floats downstream
till the current ends
and dips his wing
in the orange sun rays
and dares to claim the sky.

But a bird that stalks
down his narrow cage
can seldom see through
his bars of rage
his wings are clipped and
his feet are tied
so he opens his throat to sing.

The caged bird sings
with a fearful trill
of things unknown
but longed for still
and his tune is heard
on the distant hill
for the caged bird
sings of freedom.

The free bird thinks of another breeze
and the trade winds soft through the sighing trees
and the fat worms waiting on a dawn bright lawn
and he names the sky his own

But a caged bird stands on the grave of dreams
his shadow shouts on a nightmare scream
his wings are clipped and his feet are tied

so he opens his throat to sing.

The caged bird sings
with a fearful trill
of things unknown
but longed for still
and his tune is heard
on the distant hill
for the caged bird
sings of freedom.

Maya Angelou, "Caged Bird" from *Shaker, Why Don't You Sing?* Copyright © 1983 by Maya Angelou. Used by permission of Random House, an imprint and division of Penguin Random House LLC. All rights reserved.

Source: *The Complete Collected Poems of Maya Angelou* (Random House Inc., 1994)

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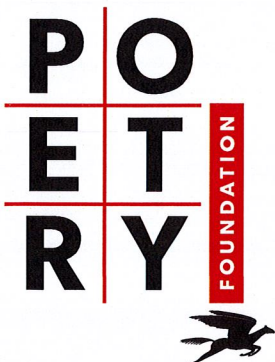
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Maya Angelou

(Marguerite Johnson)

(1928 - 2014)

Genres: Literary Fiction

Omnibus

Maya Angelou Collection: 6 Books (2014)

Collections

Just Give Me a Cool Drink of Water 'Fore I Diiie (poems) (1971)

Oh Pray My Wings Are Gonna Fit Me Well (poems) (1975)

And Still I Rise (poems) (1978)

Now Sheba Sings the Song (poems) (1987)

Poems (poems) (1989)

I Shall Not Be Moved (poems) (1990)

On the Pulse of Morning (poems) (1993)

Quartet of Stories (1993) (with Lorna Goodison, Olive Senior and Alice Walker)

Complete Collected Poems of Maya Angelou (poems) (1994)

The Collected Poems of Maya Angelou (poems) (1994)

Phenomenal Woman (poems) (1995)

Black Pearls (poems) (1998)

Celebrations (poems) (2006)

Amazing Peace (poems) (2010)

Soul Feathers (poems) (2011) (with Leonard Cohen, Carol Ann Duffy, Bob Dylan, Seamus Heaney, Sharon Olds and Benjamin Zephaniah)

Love's Exquisite Freedom (poems) (2011)

Poetry for Young People (poems) (2013)

The Complete Poetry (poems) (2015)

Picture Books

Mrs. Flowers (1986)

My Painted House, My Friendly Chicken, and Me (1994)

Life Doesn't Frighten Me at All (1996)

Kofi and His Magic (1996)

Angelina of Italy (2004)

Izak of Lapland (2004)

Mikale of Hawaii (2004)

Renee Marie of France (2004)

Non fiction series

Autobiographies of Maya Angelou

1. I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings (1969)

2. Gather Together in My Name (1974)

3. Singin' and Swingin' and Gettin' Merry Like Christmas (1976)

4. The Heart of a Woman (1981)

5. All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes (1986)

Collected Autobiographies of Maya Angelou (2004)

Non fiction

Shaker, Why Don't You Sing? (1983)

Graduation (1990)

Omnibus: I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings, Gather Together in My Name, Singin' and Swingin' and Gettin' Merry Like Christmas v. 1 (1991)

Wouldn't Take Nothing for My Journey Now (1992)

Lessons in Living (1993)

Mother (1996) (with Mary Higgins Clark and Amy Tan)

Angelou on Burns (1996)

The Heart of a Woman / On the Pulse (1997)

Even the Stars Look Lonesome (1997)

Voyage of the Amistad (1997)

Making Magic in the World (1998)

Amistad: Give Us Free : a Celebration of the Film by Steven

Spielberg (1999)
Mary Ellen Mark: American Odyssey (1999)
A Song Flung Up to Heaven (2002)
Hallelujah! the Welcome Table (2004)
Letter to My Daughter (2008)
Great Food, All Day Long (2010)
Mom & Me & Mom (2013)
His Day Is Done (2014)
Rainbow in the Cloud (2014)
Performance Enhancing Drugs and its effects (2014)
Strategies Of Abundance (2014)
Understanding Aspergers (2014)
Life Doesn't Frighten Me (2018) (with Jean-Michel Basquiat and
Sara Jane Boyers)

Awards

Oprah's Book Club Best Book nominee (1997) : The Heart of a Woman

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